Milestones

April 1, 2000

Tribute

Dick Pabich
1955–2000

Twenty-four years ago, Dick literally walked through a door and into the wacky world of San Francisco politics. In March 1976, a scruffy bunch of us were toiling away in the back of Harvey Milk's camera store, working on his State Assembly campaign. Dick towered over everyone, especially with his big poof of permed, bleached-blond hair. He was 20 years old and couldn't have weighed more than 120 pounds. It was as if a snowy egret had landed among us sparrows.

The magic of those days was that while we were dead serious about making history, we never took ourselves too seriously. Late at night we often felt as if we were pulling off one huge, delicious prank. Harvey gave us all nicknames; Dick's was The Polish Princess. Harvey didn't win that June. Dick went to art school, I started law school, and a handful of us, including Harvey and Dick, met in December to start what is now the Harvey Milk Lesbian/Gay/ Bisexual/Transgender Democratic Club. Since Dick was the only one who thought to bring a pen, he was elected the club's first secretary.

The next big step was Harvey's 1977 campaign for a seat on the city's Board of Supervisors. None of Harvey's supporters wore a tie. Everyone needed a haircut, and many needed a bath. Dick's effete, imperious demeanor might have seemed out of place, but it was soon understood that he had the instincts of a bare-knuckle fighter for the disenfranchised.

Harvey won this time and took Dick to City Hall as one of his aides. Dick was at the center of the campaign to defeat State Senator John Briggs' Proposition 6 later that year, which would have banned gay teachers from California's public schools. (Dick would later be a powerful force in '80s ballot initiatives as well, stopping the statewide LaRouche and Dannemeyer measures that would have quarantined people with HIV.)

When Harvey was assassinated on November 27, 1978, Dick's tears had to wait. In the swirl of a crisis, with emotions out of control and the eyes of the world on us, young Dick Pabich, the former glitter queen who had never organized anything bigger than a campaign celebration, was a solid rock of strength and competence.

Dick and I started the first gay political consulting firm, Rivaldo Pabich & Friends, and while there and even after its 1982 close, we collaborated on many projects: Harry Britt's campaigns for supervisor and Congress. Carole Migden's for supervisor and Assembly. Domestic partner initiatives. Willie Brown for mayor.

When AIDS caused Dick's health to fail, his powerful sense of duty wouldn't let him step aside completely. He organized Brown's Summit on AIDS and established the Mayor's Office of HIV/AIDS Policy in 1998 as an unpaid volunteer. As his final act of community service, he poured his waning energy into ensuring that Harvey's long-delayed dream of a gay community center would be realized.

I want to give thanks to Dick's family. With their unconditional love and support, he was able to accomplish so much good and change the course of history for the benefit of us all. Dickie was my teacher in the meaning of life, my loyal friend and my clever co-conspirator.

—Jim Rivaldo

Careers
Former Congress member **Ron Dellums** (D-Calif.), best known for his "Marshall Plan" to combat AIDS in Africa, was nominated to head the **Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/ AIDS**. Dellums was elected to the House in 1970 as a young Berkeley radical and served 27 years. After serving as chair of the Armed Services Committee for 12 years and then leaving the House, he became president of the Healthcare International Management Company. Along with 12 other new members to the council, he was expected to be confirmed in March.

Trials
Since his July 1997 POZ cover story, HIV positive former boxer **Tommy Morrison** has been in and out of jail. In December, he went back in for—among other charges—cocaine possession and simultaneous possession of drugs and firearms. He's serving two years of a 10-year sentence (the rest was suspended) at a minimum security Arkansas prison. Morrison, once an outspoken antimeds champion, had been on AIDS drugs in the past year, according to his lawyer, but recently stopped. While awaiting trial, he was twice transferred to a hospital because of dehydration and other undisclosed illnesses.

Deaths
Derek Anson Jones, director of the Pulitzer Prize–winning play Wit, died January 17 of AIDS. Jones, 39, was born and raised in Washington, DC, where he attended Sidwell Friends School with Wit playwright Margaret Edson. "Our friendship began decades before Wit, and I trusted it would continue for decades beyond," she said. The New York City off-Broadway production of the play won the 1999 Lucille Lortel Award and received a Drama Desk nomination. "Derek was a sweet man with immense creative energy and an unstoppable hunger for doing more projects," said Judith Light, who is in the national tour. Jones, survived by his partner, Denis O'Hare, directed productions of Much Ado About Nothing and An American Daughter at Long Wharf Theater in New Haven, Connecticut.

Michael McDowell, a writer, died December 27 of AIDS. His gothic horror novel series, Blackwaters, was critically acclaimed and developed a cult following, enhanced no doubt by the open secret that he and Dennis Schuetz had authored a number of gay detective novels under the joint pseudonym Nathan Aldyne. McDowell, 49, who is survived by his partner, Laurence Senelick, scripted two Tim Burton movies, Beetlejuice and The Nightmare Before Christmas. “It seems meretricious to me to have a novel about horror with a happy ending,” he said, early in his career. “In life, the good people die young and the mean ones hang on till the bitter end. I don’t mind the hero dying because that’s what life is
all about.”

Robert Wagenhoffer, a professional figure skater and two-time World Champion, died December 13 of AIDS. As an amateur, he bested Scott Hamilton and Brian Boitano in national competitions before turning pro in the ’80s. Wagenhoffer, 39, toured with the Ice Capades and choreographed Gershwin on Ice. He is survived by his partner, Sylvain Beauregard.

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