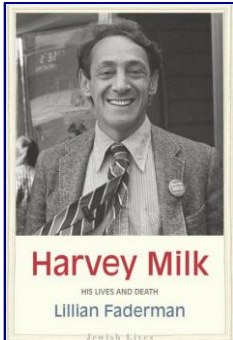


book review – Faderman: ‘Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death’



Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death by Lillian Faderman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018

Harvey Milk was born May 22, 1930, and was assassinated November 27, 1978.

p. 2 – In his speeches, Harvey Milk emphasized that coming out as openly gay was “the most effective way to break down the toxic lies about homosexuals that characterized them as criminals, crazies, sinners, and subversives....” Partly as a result of his example and his martyrdom, a steady stream of LGBTQ people came out. “These days a majority of Americans—75 percent—say they have relatives or friends who are gay or lesbian. As Harvey prophesied, the demolition of closet doors has been the single most important factor in changing America’s hearts and minds and laws about gay people.”

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p. 14 – Young Harvey had a thorny relationship with his father, whose bad temper led him to become stubborn and determined. His father seemed never to approve of his younger son. “It left an indelible mark on Harvey, who as an adult—up until his last days—kept re-creating the father-son relationship in his intimate life, trying to make it right.”

p. 18 – The established order was “abhorrent to Harvey, who had been ordered around and disciplined by [his father] Bill and who would always relish the vision of himself as a warrior against authority, a rebel.”

p. 20 – When Harvey was 14, his mother cautioned him to be careful when he went alone into New York City, telling him that there were homosexuals who liked to prey on young boys. He loved opera, and he went to the New York Metropolitan Opera to be admitted to the cheapest standing-room only section at the rear.

p. 21 – “He had made the discovery by sheer chance: among the opera enthusiasts who were packed four deep in the corridor along the back of the darkened auditorium were many gay men—opera queens, they called themselves in campy self-mockery. They sometimes turned their attention from the stage to one another. They cruised, and, if the object of their gaze responded, they sometimes grouped. Harvey was quick to see what was happening and knew right away that he wanted to be

part of it. He had his first sexual experiences in the standing-room section of the Met. Harvey always maintained about those early sexual contacts that he had not been molested, because they were exactly what he had been anxiously looking and hoping for. He had had homosexual feelings ever since he could remember, long before he found his way to the Met.”

p. 22 – “The 14-year-old Harvey already understood that to everyone—even his offbeat mother—homosexuals were criminals, loonies, and a danger to society.” But from his own homosexual contacts Harvey learned that these “experiences were marvelous revelations.”

p. 25 – Before he turned 17, Harvey was going to Central Park as often as possible, searching for gay men to have sex with. One day he was arrested by vice squad police, along with many other gay men. “Years later, when Harvey became political, he would wage energetic campaigns against such harassment of gay men, whose alleged crimes were victimless.”

p. 38 – When Harvey was age 26 he became a high school math and history teacher in New York. At a gay bar he met a high school drop-out named Joe Campbell, age 19, who had worked as a gay hustler. “His father had died when he was only a year old.... Joe looked for older lovers who would be a father to him.”

p. 39 – “Before he met Harvey Joe had been the kept boy of a well-off bar owner. Harvey was eager for the relationship.... He fell right into the role Joe required of him: the mature one, paternal, loving and demonstrative as Bill, his own stern father, had never been to him. Consciously or not, he strove to heal his boyhood wounds by being himself everything he had sorely missed in his father. In every one of his serious relationships, for as long as he lived, the dynamic that Harvey tried to establish with Joe Campbell became the pattern he was destined to repeat. He would be the caretaker of a troubled youth who desperately needed taking care of. He would be his protector. He would be there for him 100 percent. He would educate the young man too. They would go to operas, museums, do all the cultural things Harvey was able to afford.”

p. 40 – Harvey was adored by students in his job as a high school teacher, and as an individual tutor to troubled boys. “Harvey was gifted with young people, there was no doubt.”

p. 45 – When Joe moved to Tennessee in 1961, Harvey was genuinely crushed at the loss of their relationship. But he soon met another young man, Craig Rodwell, about ten years younger than Harvey.

p. 47 – “As an adolescent, Craig Rodwell had been despondent after police caught him with an adult male, who was sentenced to five years in prison because of him. Craig was given two years’ probation and ordered to see a psychiatrist. He tried to commit suicide by downing a handful of aspirins.” Later, Craig was arrested by police at Riis Park Beach because he got into a fight with police officers who were harassing gays who wore skimpy bikinis. The judge sentenced him to three days in jail. Harvey was dismayed at Craig’s militancy, and Harvey cut off their relationship. But Craig never stopped being a gay radical. “In 1967 Craig opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in Greenwich Village, the first bookstore in America to stock exclusively lesbian and gay literature. He also coined the term ‘gay power,’” and was active in the Stonewall riots in 1969.

p. 48 – “Harvey could not tolerate Craig’s gay activism when they were lovers. But in San Francisco in the 1970s he adopted Craig’s views—the importance of coming out, of promoting gay power, of being militant.”

TACTICS

p. 51 – In the presidential election of 1964, Harvey supported the small government ideas of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. Harvey was “excited about some of Goldwater’s tenets— ideas that would later come to be called libertarian. As a homosexual, Harvey believed that government had no right to butt into people’s private lives; and that’s what Goldwater believed too. [Later in life, Goldwater spoke out publically and explicitly in support for gay rights, to the irritation of other Republicans] The Democrats certainly were not saying anything like that. Under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson government employees were investigated. If found to be homosexual they were kicked out of their jobs.”

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p. 52 – In 1964 Harvey met Jack Galen, who had just turned seventeen. Galen was “gifted but barely educated; and in dire need of a father figure. He had been born into a big working-class Christian fundamentalist family that took for granted that all homosexuals were doomed to hell. In 1963 he dropped out of high school in Hagerstown, Maryland, and hopped [p. 53] a bus to New York—to Greenwich Village, where young homosexuals had been heading for at least half a century. He knocked around the Village for a year or so, hustling, sleeping wherever he could. . . . To Harvey it was obvious that after rough months of hustling to get by in New York, Galen was a jaded kid; yet he seemed hungry to learn everything Harvey could teach him. Harvey . . . took him to museums, operas and ballets, and made him feel like he was the only person in the world who mattered.”

p. 56 – Galen suffered from “the depression he’d had from the time he was a kid growing up in a Bible-thumping family, [and] the manic behavior that Harvey initially mistook for a sparkling spirit—all got worse with the pot, LSD, speed, and alcohol that Galen could not stop abusing.” As a result of Galen’s self-destructive behavior, Harvey tried to help him get away from drugs by relocating them to conservative Dallas. But Galen hated Texas and soon moved back to New York alone. Ironically, Galen got a job from a former lover and became successful as stage manager for the rock musical *Hair!* The director asked Galen to follow him when he took the production from New York to San Francisco. Galen now begged Harvey to join them, and that’s how Harvey ended up in San Francisco in 1969.

p. 62 – Harvey loved San Francisco, but he was still having problems with Galen. “Galen tried to kill himself yet again. This time he had jumped off a pier at Fisherman’s Wharf, landing in water that was just four feet deep. He came home dripping with mud, furious, and screaming at Harvey that he wanted to die. . . . Though Galen now had a solid reputation for his backstage talents, he was just as emotionally unstable as he had been when Harvey tried to rescue him by carrying him off to Dallas. But he was no longer the kid that Harvey had once hoped to save; and Harvey finally had to admit that it was foolish to keep trying. They would never stop being friends, and they would continue to work on theater productions, but their life together was over. Harvey was deeply upset that there had been so many suicide attempts by people he loved.”

p. 63 – “He wondered if a lot of gays thought about killing themselves because homosexuals were so universally despised that it was hard for them to imagine a future when things might be better. One of the chief messages of his political career would become that young gay people must be given reasons to hope.”

p. 65 – In 1971 Harvey went back to New York to work as the assistant for a Broadway director, and he met 23-year-old Scott Smith. Scott was an aspiring actor who had left Mississippi to get to Broadway. When Harvey invited him to a backstage party at a major theater, Scott was attracted to “Harvey’s amusing quips and lively energy and his knack for making anyone he was interested in feel that they were fascinating and the most important person he knew. In this case, that would be true; the night of the backstage party was the start of the major love relationship of Harvey’s life.”

p. 66 – In 1972, when Harvey was age 41, he decided to return to San Francisco, where he had been happiest in his life. He begged Scott to join him, and the Mississippi young man decided to follow Harvey. They went camping around California for three months, and when they returned to San Francisco they rented an apartment at 577 Castro Street. This area was already becoming a gay mecca. Harvey was an amateur photographer, and after a homophobic photography store returned his film of photos of Scott, they decided to open a photo store catering to gays. He opened Castro Camera, and used the small store as the locus for his political organizing. Harvey was politicized by the 1973 Watergate hearings, and he loathed Richard Nixon. He decided to run as an openly gay man, for San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

p. 73 – “Scott was perplexed. He had no particular interest in politics.... but when it was clear that Harvey’s new passion was not going away, he pledged his help. They would run a campaign together”

p. 80 – “Scott missed their old laid-back life, but there was no going back. When he was not making campaign flyers or posters or writing press releases he faithfully minded the store while Harvey threw himself into campaigning.”

TACTICS

p. 84 – Harvey lost that election in November 1973, but still came in tenth in a field of 32 candidates. Seventeen thousand people voted for him. “Scott, ever solicitous of Harvey, suggested they needed a little vacation to regroup.” They spent three days at the beach at Pacific Grove.

Following that, Harvey worked to build a strong gay community, by convincing them to work together to support each other, and to gain non-gay allies. His methods offer a model for other groups working to end discrimination against them, when they are called criminals, sinful, and sick, condemned by the law, the churches, the media, and the psychological establishment.

p. 87 – Harvey built a base by organizing and becoming the first president of the Castro Village Association, primarily of gay-owned businesses. He persuaded Hibernia Bank and Bank of America local branches to join, which gave the group credibility. His major achievement was to establish the Castro Street Fair, which became a popular gay annual event. At the second street fair, Harvey booked a performance by his friend, the androgynous African-American singer Sylvester as “The Queen of Disco.” 25,000 people attended the fair, and within a few years it attracted over 100,000 to become the city’s largest street fair. He set up a voter registration booth in front of his Castro Camera shop, and persuaded thousands of gays to register to vote.

pp. 88-89 – Harvey paid little attention to his business, and left it to Scott. “Scott was beginning to feel overwhelmed and a bit resentful; nevertheless, he picked up the slack at the store while Harvey engaged in what did interest him: being the unofficial mayor of Castro Street. Castro Camera soon became less a business enterprise for Harvey than a community center where people knew they

could go to ask about the best place to look for an apartment or a job or what agency to turn to if they had complaints about city government.”

p. 89 – Harvey posted sample ballots in the store window to recommend how people should vote on candidates and propositions. Harvey wrote letters to city government that he made public, denouncing police harassment of gays. “He argued that police brutality against gays was being ignored in San Francisco, just like Nazi brutality against Jews had been ignored in Germany.”

p. 90 – Harvey warned heterosexuals that if they did not speak up against police harassment of gays, very soon they themselves would become “victims of a police state.” When police arrested 14 gay men who were eating donuts outside a gay-owned late night donut shop, Harvey jumped to their defense. He established a Castro 14 Defense Fund, and though the charges against them “disturbing the peace, obstructing traffic” were dropped, he hired a lawyer to sue the city for one million dollars in damages. He became a master at getting media attention.

p. 91 – Harvey was elected to the board of “Friends of San Francisco Deputies and Inmates, a nonprofit oversight group” that previously did nothing except support police, and from that office he pressed for the Police Department to make a training film that would reduce police prejudice against gays.

Harvey started writing a weekly column in the San Francisco gay newspaper *Sentinel*. He wrote gays could not be free until they could “join the police force or any government agency as an open homosexual. It’s as simple as that.”

p. 92 – He preached against laws that made homosexuality and marijuana illegal, saying “When you allow the government to get too powerful there are always encroachments.” Instead of funding big law enforcement, Harvey wrote in his column that government should concentrate on building good schools, hospitals, and housing for the poor.

p. 93 – In a column he wrote titled “Gay Economic Power,” he argued that gays should do their shopping at gay-owned businesses, and in turn those business owners had a responsibility to donate money to support gay activist organizations. In another column “Buy Gay,” he pointed to the success of the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, by black people. He urged gays to unite in the same way that African Americans had and to use their economic clout to fight for gay rights.

p. 94 – He argued that gays must make coalitions with African Americans and other minorities, as well as with working class people. He stressed that they all had common enemies: those in power “who wanted to keep the powerless in their place.” He teamed up with the local Teamsters Union, which was protesting low wages offered by Coors Beer Company. Harvey jumped at the chance, because Coors was owned by an arch-conservative family who were very anti-gay. He agreed to organize a boycott of Coors beer at all gay bars, in exchange for which he asked the Teamsters to agree to hire openly gay truck drivers. To everyone’s astonishment the ultra-macho Teamsters agreed, and a gay activist was the first openly gay driver in the city.

p. 95 – The boycott Harvey organized was extremely effective, as he personally convinced gay bar owners to stop buying beer from Coors and other anti-union breweries. Harvey wrote in his column, “If we in the gay community want others to help us in our fight to end discrimination, then we must help others in their fights.”

p. 96 – Due to the boycott, which spread to other cities, over the next four years sales of Coors beer in California fell by one-third. Soon, Coors and the other boycotted beer companies agreed to hire

union drivers, as well as gay drivers. Harvey built a strong alliance between the gay community and labor unions in the city.

p. 96 – Harvey decided to run again for the city Board of Supervisors in 1975. This time he cut off his long ponytail and shaved his mustache. He dropped his preferred jeans and T-shirt clothing, to dress in conservative suits.

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Scott abhorred the new look, but remained supportive. [p. 99] Harvey begged for Scott's help. "Scott resigned himself to the realization that, though his love for Harvey was unchanged, their old life together was gone forever."

p. 105 – "He and Scott had agreed to an 'open marriage,' as gay male couples often did, and Harvey frequented the gay bathhouses south of Market, such as the Club Baths, where lithe young men were abundant.... He also used to take a toke or two or three of pot. Those were peccadilloes that could lead to a bust, or at least a scandal, which a serious politician could not afford, he decided."

TACTICS

p. 106 – In appealing to non-gay voters Harvey wrote, "I've tried to build bridges between 'us' and 'them' because I believe that contact with the [p. 107] straight community is ... the only way we can gain all we want: equality and acceptance." He was trying to break down stereotypes, which was crucial if gays hoped to win first-class citizenship. He sat down with labor leaders, impressing them that he was "a man who had guts." He raised issues of inequitable taxes for the working class, and poor city services offered to the masses. He stressed ecological issues, and got strong support from environmentalists. He emphasized discrimination against all minorities, and got an endorsement from the San Francisco Black Political Caucus. He impressed the mainstream media when he got the endorsement of the Building and Construction Trades Union, and surprised everyone when the San Francisco Firefighters Union endorsed him. They did so because he had researched firefighters' grievances, and when he spoke to them he promised that if he were elected he would get the Board of Supervisors to address their issues. He stressed that the current board members were "do-nothings" and appealed to the laboring person's interests.

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p. 108 – For Harvey, this progress "was exhilarating. But all of the campaigning took a toll on his personal life. Scott was getting worn out. He wanted their old life back. Why couldn't they just quit the campaign, he asked ... But Harvey was addicted to the heady rush of it all. And he ardently believed it was time for an openly gay man to win political office. [p.109] Scott stuck by Harvey, but he later said that "a life in politics—for which Harvey had to wear a suit and tie and act bourgeois and stop smoking pot—was not what he had signed on for and was never what he wanted for them. In the end, it destroyed their relationship."

TACTICS

p. 109 – On November 4, 1975 the election results came in. Harvey received 53,000 votes, and he took the Castro district and the hippie Haight-Ashbury district in a landslide. He also got lots of Jewish and environmental votes. and did well in working class and poor neighborhoods. But the conservative neighborhoods he got practically no votes. In total, he came in seventh in competition for the six seats on the Board of Supervisors. This loss, with such closeness to victory, was hard on Scott, but Harvey promised to win the next time he ran in two years. At the headquarters, he made a special plea for Scott, saying “When people thank me for what I’m doing, they really are thanking Scott, the man [p. 110] I love. He’s the one who put up with me. The world may one day be better because Scott was there.” Despite these tender words, Scott’s disappointment was tremendous.

p. 112 – After the election, Harvey threw his energy into electing George Moscone as mayor. Though heterosexual, Moscone was a strong supporter of gay rights, and he was the state legislator who headed the effort to repeal California’s sodomy law. Moscone pledged to Harvey that if he won the mayoral race against a staunch conservative, he would appoint Harvey to a city office. Harvey turned out the gay vote, and Moscone won. He immediately appointed Milk as Commissioner to the Board of Permit Appeals. In early 1976 Harvey was sworn in, to the board in charge of approving all city permits. At the first board meeting, two vice squad officers from the Police Department opposed granting a license to a Korean woman who wanted to open a massage parlor. Harvey immediately came to her defense, criticizing the police for trying to enforce morality, instead of doing their job to ensure public safety. It was a victory he relished.

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p.120 – “Scott wanted absolutely nothing more to do with Harvey’s interminable runs for office. He just wanted his hippie back, the long-haired, bead-wearing, pot-smoking loving fellow who had picked him up [p. 121] five years earlier. The glory of victory at the polls had been Harvey’s big dream, never Scott’s. Scott had gone along with the first two races because he loved Harvey. But he came to detest Harvey’s incessant campaigning.... Harvey was too busy to tend to Scott’s needs.... Scott threatened to leave and then did leave. Then he came back because of his love, and left and came back again.

p.128 – Finally, after Harvey lost another election, Scott moved out permanently.

“Scott never returned as Harvey’s lover. They remained partners in Castro Camera for as long as the store stayed open, and despite the breakup, Scott never stopped being the most important person in Harvey’s life. Until Scott died, seventeen years after Harvey’s death, Harvey remained the most important person in Scott’s life too.”

p. 128 – After Scott left, Harvey felt terribly alone. He received piles of hate mail, and many death threats from anti-gay bigots. [p.129] Then his father Bill died. “He had never been close to his father. As a child, he could not please Bill... while Harvey was enamored of supposedly effete pastimes such as listening to opera. Bill had a short fuse with Harvey, just as Bill’s own father, Morris, had had a short fuse with Bill. Both whacked and hollered at their kids, who were so different from them.” When Bill died, Harvey told a friend he did not shed a tear.... “With all his young lovers Harvey tried to re-create the father-son relationship and make it come out better. He would be the good, gentle, nurturing, accepting father. But he could not help exploding and belittling, just as his father had.... His intentions [were] to be totally available to his young lover, as his father had never been available to him.”

p. 141 – In early 1977, Harvey started seeing a 23-year-old gay Latino from Fresno, named Jack Lira, who escaped to San Francisco to get away from his machismo father who beat him. Jack was living with a wealthy older man, who eventually grew tired of Jack’s “emotionally wobbly instability” and threw him out. Harvey took him in, and got him a job working at a deli. Jack worked for a month and then quit. “That should have been a warning signal to Harvey. But when it came to affairs of the heart, he was never good at reading warning signals. Jack perfectly fit the pattern of the waifs who had always attracted Harvey: troubled, needy, young, and pretty.... Jack had made serious suicide attempts. Yet Harvey could not relinquish the idea that he could save this young man.... Once again Harvey undertook the role of loving father figure who would give his beloved everything he needed to make him happy and whole.”

p. 142 – “But Jack was an embarrassment to Harvey in public. He would get obnoxiously drunk or high on pot, dress like a street person, and sulk by himself at fundraisers.... Jack would throw tantrums or call him on the phone incessantly, no matter how much scheduling pressure Harvey was under.” Jack would watch soap operas on television instead of helping out with campaign duties. Friends tried to warn Harvey that Jack was a detriment to his campaign and that he would not be a supportive partner: “He’s not salvageable. You gotta get rid of him.” But nothing would make Harvey kick out the young man who had already been kicked around so much by others.”

TACTICS

p. 143 – In 1977 Christian fundamentalist singer Anita Bryant founded a group Save Our Children, which sought to repeal an anti-discrimination ordinance that had recently been passed in Miami, Florida. Bryant was well known as the spokesperson for the Florida Orange Juice Commission. Her campaign pictured homosexuals as child molesters, and flooded the media with stories about homosexual pornographers selling “dirty pictures of little boys” and gay scoutmasters raping Boy Scouts. With her proclamation that she was leading “a holy war” against gays, she convinced a majority of Miami voters to repeal the ordinance. Gay people across the country staged protests in response, and many came out as gay and lesbian in reaction to her claims. In San Francisco, thousands congregated in the Castro, with so many livid people that the police feared a riot would break out. The police chief came to Harvey and begged him to calm people down. He had mixed feelings, because he also felt the anger of the anti-gay vote.

p. 144 – Harvey took a bullhorn and addressed the angry crowd, saying that Bryant had done the gay community a service, because her hatred had united them and made them strong. He told the crowd to show their anger not just in the Castro, but to follow him and march through the whole city to let straight people know their anger and their power. He then led the crowd on a five mile march to City Hall, chanting and disrupting traffic, and ending up in exhaustion at Union Square, where they held a midnight rally. This was a brilliant move, which honored the anger that all of them felt, while avoiding a violent riot that would have hurt the Castro neighborhood most of all. The police were grateful for Harvey’s intervention. This increased Harvey’s status in both the gay community and in the city as a whole.

p.145 – Harvey also gave strong support to the Imperial Court, an organization of drag queens organized by José Sarria, who was crowned Empress José I. Harvey especially liked José’s rendition of feminine opera performances, and they became close friends. The Imperial Court appreciated Harvey’s attendance, and raised much money for him in their drag show competitions.

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p. 146 – A main theme of his speeches was the need to give hope to young gay people. “In public discourse older gays had previously kept their distance from youths, lest they be accused of predatory interests. The subject of gay youth had been taboo because, according to the stereotype, a homosexual was someone who lurked in the shadows waiting to pounce on a young person. Harvey was the first politician to publicly declare his determination to help young gays.”

BRIGGS INITIATIVE

p. 171 – Conservative California state senator John Briggs was running for governor, and to attract attention to his campaign he sponsored two initiatives on the ballot. to increase use of the death penalty for crimes, and to prohibit any homosexual or any person speaking positively about homosexuality to be employed as a teacher in California schools.

p. 172 – Briggs made wild claims like “One third of San Francisco teachers are homosexual. I assume most of them are seducing young boys in toilets.” He raised huge amounts of money at Christian fundamentalist “God and Decency” rallies. Rev. Jerry Falwell spoke at Briggs’ rallies, predicting the passage of Proposition 6 would produce “a landslide will begin across the country.” If Prop 6 won in liberal California, it would surely be copied in other states. Polls showed it would pass by over 60%, a large margin. Gay activists despaired.

p. 173 – Harvey’s approach to challenge Prop 6 was for massive numbers of gay people “to come out to everyone—parents, friends, coworkers, neighbors—because it was impossible to fight the lies, myths, and distortions about gays if they remained in the closet.... All gay people must tell those who already know them as human beings and not malevolent stereotypes that THEY are who gay people are.”

p. 174 – The approach of David Goodstein, publisher of *The Advocate* magazine, was the opposite. He felt the only way to defeat Briggs was to have heterosexual spokespersons talk only about “non-gay issues” like how Prop 6 would increase the power of government over peoples’ lives and violate privacy, that it would increase the size of government bureaucracy, and taxpayers would have to pay for it. In the brochure published, it talked about Prop 6 as a violation of the Constitution and of human rights, but there was not one mention of homosexuality. p. 175 – Harvey objected strongly to this rhetoric, and instead said the issue needs to be addressed head-on, that gay people deserve the same rights as other minorities. Harvey said every gay person must say bluntly to everyone in their lives: “I’m asking you to help protect ME.”

The Socialist Workers Party began their own campaign, sending working class gays to speak to labor unions, to tell them Briggs was not only against gays but also against collective bargaining and other labor issues. They sent people of color to speak to ethnic organizations, saying that if rights could be taken away from gays they could be taken away from other minorities too.

p. 176 – Harvey wanted to speak to the middle class as well, so he formed his own group San Franciscans Against Prop 6. His group organized over 800 volunteers to go door to door, telling their own gay stories and saying why Prop 6 would be harmful to them personally, and would be harmful to everyone because it threatened privacy and would start witch hunts. Harvey hired a black

lesbian as head coordinator. She met with the Black Ministers Alliance and the Black Leadership Forum, telling them that Prop 6 was a danger to all black people.

p. 177 – Harvey focused on getting support from liberal Democrat leaders, and the media. He spoke on TV and was quoted in newspapers.

p. 178 – Harvey was stung by criticism from other gays, saying he was hogging the limelight solely to advance his political career. He hated the infighting, and replied that some favored a more conservative approach and some were more radical, but “I sit in the middle. Those on the extreme left think I’m too conservative. Those on the extreme right think I’m too liberal.” He politely replied that all three approaches worked on three distinct levels, all in the service of defeating a dangerous proposition.

p. 179 – Harvey recognized that Briggs was primarily motivated in advancing his own career, so Harvey focused his attack on the danger posed by Briggs, comparing him to Hitler. He spoke to Jewish groups, saying “I cannot remain silent anymore. There was silence in Germany because no one got up early enough to say what Hitler really was. If only someone did, maybe the Holocaust would never have happened.... Just as Proposition 6 would prevent gay people from teaching, so, 45 years ago, did the German law prohibit Jews from teaching or holding any other civil service positions.” [p. 180] “Briggs is using the gay community as scapegoats, much as Hitler used the Jews as scapegoats.”

Harvey founded a “No on 6 Campaign” to bring together gay groups from both northern California and southern California, who rarely cooperated and were often hostile to each other. When asked which group someone should support, Harvey answered “All of them.”

As a result of his prominence, PBS television asked Briggs and Milk to debate. To keep lesbian separatists united in the campaign, Milk asked Dr. Sally Gearhart, a professor of Women’s Studies at San Francisco State University, to be his debate partner. John Briggs chose as his debate partner a Baptist minister, who let Briggs do most of the talking. When it was revealed that former Governor Ronald Reagan was opposed to Prop 6, Briggs slandered Reagan by saying “he comes from the Hollywood crowd. And 90% of the films that come out of Hollywood that are pornographic films are homosexual films.”

p. 182 – When Briggs asserted that most child molesters are homosexual, Sally Gearhart calmly quoted statistics from the FBI and Child Abuse Treatment Center that the vast majority of confirmed child sexual abuse was by heterosexual men.

Harvey viciously attacked Briggs, “How many lives will you destroy in your lust for power?” When Briggs said homosexual teachers would teach their students to be homosexuals, Harvey replied with humor, “How do you teach homosexuality? Like you’d teach French?”

p.183 – Behind the scenes, Briggs grew to respect Milk as a worthy opponent. He told his assistant that Harvey was “a natural politician, very gifted.” He said that he and Harvey were “the same species,” super-aggressive, hyper, using angry language even when they were not really angry. He said the debates were “nothing personal.” [p. 184] As their unlikely friendship developed, Harvey convinced Briggs to come with him to the wild Halloween celebration in San Francisco. Photos in newspapers showed Harvey with his arm around Briggs, who looked like he was having the time of his life. Harvey told him, “John, if you hadn’t come along we would have had to invent you.”

Harvey was quoted in the press repeatedly, saying Prop 6 was “un-American, based on the same abuse of civil liberties that gave us witch hunts and McCarthyism.”

As the effect of Harvey and Sally’s wins in the debates sank in, as they spoke passionately at rallies across the state, and as editorials in newspapers and TV came out against Prop 6, polls showed it to be in a dead heat. When voters went to the polls on November 7, 1978, Prop 6 lost by over a million votes. Harvey organized a victory party in the Castro, with hundreds of balloons like at a presidential nomination. He knew how to plan a theatrical event.

DEALING WITH PERSONAL PROBLEMS

p. 187 – In 1978, when the landlord raised the rent on his store, Harvey and Scott had to relocate Castro Camera to a small kiosk. He had unpaid taxes to pay, and he was forced to give up his car because he had accumulated so many debts in his political campaigns. But, putting on a cheery public face, he announced to the press that from now on he would take public transit, which is what he said every government worker should do, to support the environment, help the city, and cut down on traffic.

A political supporter provided a small apartment for Harvey and Jack Lira to move to, at a greatly reduced rent. “Harvey’s friends had tried to persuade him not to take Jack with him when he made the move, but Harvey refused to give up the illusion that he might still be able to save the young man.”

p. 188 – “He was barraged with venomous threats from those who hated gays in general and hated him, San Francisco’s most famous gay, in particular.... Some letters were frighteningly graphic—threatening to decapitate him or chop him into pieces after making him suffer prolonged torture.”

p. 189 – At the same time, he continued to receive much criticism from within the gay community. The San Diego Gay Democratic Club found him “loud, New-York-in-your-face, presumptuous, abrasive, a know-it-all who had the audacity to pretend to speak for all gays.” When he was giving his “That’s What America Is” speech at the 1978 Gay Freedom Day rally, which has gone down in history as his most eloquent speech, “the lesbians in charge of the stage thought he was going on too long. After 20 minutes one of them sat down at the piano onstage and banged loudly to shut him up.... Those who did not love his intense and colorful style often found it objectionable.”

p. 190 – While Harvey was busy fighting the Briggs Initiative, the Pride Foundation headed by Paul Hardman filed a lawsuit against Harvey, claiming that he had defrauded the San Francisco Gay Community Center of federal money. This led the U.S. Attorney General to ask the FBI to investigate the matter. Harvey wanted to expand the Center, to add a VD clinic, a mental health facility, and a big meeting hall. When the Center did not agree, Harvey tried to get the funds to start a new community center.

p. 191 – “But Harvey’s financial and legal problems paled by comparison with the disaster of his personal life. Things at the apartment were imploding. Jack Lira often staggered [p. 192] around in public, scruffy, disheveled, beer can in hand. His depression worsened [perhaps abetted by the] traumatic memories of the abuse he had suffered at the hands of his father.... Harvey did all he could to cheer him up, to pull him up with tenderness, to shake him up with threats. Nothing helped. Jack was at the mercy of his demons. Harvey felt responsible for Jack, but he was beginning to feel trapped too.”

p. 192 – On August 28, 1978 Harvey spent the morning preparing for a debate with Briggs the next day. All afternoon he was in the Board of Supervisors meeting, “In the midst of it all Jack kept calling [p. 193] Anne Kronenberg and demanding that she go into the chambers of the Board of Supervisors, get Harvey out, and bring him to the phone. Jack was, as usual, drunk. Anne kept telling him that she could not interrupt the meeting.... The board meeting adjourned at 6:55. From there Harvey rushed to an evening committee meeting that did not adjourn until 9 p.m. Then, he walked home.”

p. 194 – When he came into the apartment, he found piles of empty beer cans, of Coors the beer that Harvey had led the boycott against. In the bedroom, Jack had hanged himself. Harvey cut down the dead body and called the coroner. Harvey “blamed himself. He had been away too much, had neglected Jack, had been absorbed too much with campaigning and then with the board and then with fighting Briggs. And all those lovers he had had in the past who had tried to do exactly what Jack Lira had just succeeded in doing He could not understand how his good intentions to love them and help them could end in such disaster.”

p. 195 – Later, Jack’s sister wrote Harvey a letter, telling him that Jack’s death was not his fault. She blamed her parents for the traumas they inflicted on Jack when he was a child, which led to his confusion and unhappiness. “That was a thought Harvey had to hold on to because he had to keep functioning. His debate with John Briggs was the next day.... But he was in shock, and there was no way he could or would turn to his extended family in New York for consolation. He ignored an invitation to the wedding of his cousin, though he might have enjoyed being with his 17-year-old nephew Stuart Milk, who he suspected was gay. When Stuart was 12 years old he told Harvey that he felt he was different, and Harvey was pleased to give him avuncular assurance that being different was a tremendous gift. It was the same [p. 196] encouraging message he would give to all young gay people.

p. 197 – The story of the suicide of Supervisor Harvey Milk’s lover was front-page news. Condolences poured in from around the country and the world.

p. 206 – The pattern, of finding “a needy young man whom he thought he could save ... was his deepest emotional need. The pattern, which seemed to hold out the promise of righting his troubled relationship with Bill Milk, was as unbreakable as it was doomed to failure.” In following months Harvey tried to get over his sorrow, and eventually dated several young men in their twenties, including a graduate student at San Francisco State University.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON

p. 231 – In his famous 1978 Gay Freedom Day speech, he had called for a March on Washington modeled on Martin Luther King’s 1961 civil rights march. Later, Harvey issued a press release a week before he was assassinated, calling once again for a March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in 1979, the ten year anniversary of Stonewall. Soon after his death, his aides met with San Francisco gay groups, and there was unanimous approval. When the New York Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights was holding a meeting when they heard of Harvey’s death, they immediately passed a resolution calling for the march. They had been debating the idea previously, but it was Harvey’s assassination that galvanized the actual organizing.

p. 232 – The March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights was held on October 14, 1979, and over 100,000 people showed up. The second national march, in 1987, attracted 600,000. And the third, in 1993, almost a million. The Marches on Washington led to millions of people coming out, as gays or as their supporters.

HARVEY MILK’S LEGACY

p. 233 – He not only had aspirations for LGBTQ people to hold public office in San Francisco, but on higher levels of government as well. If he lived, he could well have become mayor, or assemblyman, or senator. “It was certainly through his dramatic story that America first learned that an openly gay man had been an admired and credible politician. That surely helped voters take seriously the candidacy of other openly gay people; and it encouraged more openly gay candidates to dare to run. As of 2016 43 states have elected at least one out LGBT person to their state legislature. Twelve members of Congress are openly LGBT.”

p. 233 – “From his earliest political campaigns Harvey had argued that gay people had to make coalitions with all dispossessed people. Not only did they have common enemies; the “them” that kept the poor and minorities in positions of powerlessness, but also because it was the morally right thing to do.”

YOUTH

p. 234 – Harvey’s most ardent political efforts were almost always focused on the disenfranchised. The disenfranchised included young gay people, and Harvey was a visionary in championing their rights. His fight on behalf of young gays was especially brave because activists of his generation had carefully excluded gay youth from their purview.... ‘Responsible’ homosexuals were worried about accusations of ‘child abuse’ if they reached out to help the young. But Harvey, remembering how alone he had felt as a gay adolescent, thought that one of his most important roles as a public figure was to give hope to young gay people.”

p. 235 – “It was a revolutionary idea.... But his pioneering conviction—that gay adults have a responsibility for the well-being of gay youth and must work for their causes and serve as their role models—is no longer debatable.”