

Gay Activist, Author Eric Rofes dies at 51

By KATHERINE VIOLIN

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Gay author and activist Eric Rofes died June 26 in Provincetown, Mass., from what was presumed to be a heart attack, according to his longtime friend Chris Bartlett. He was 51.

Rofes, a California resident, was spending the summer in Provincetown while working on a book about gay life in the 1970s, Bartlett said.

Rofes was born on Aug. 31, 1954, in Manhassat, N.Y., and grew up on Long Island.

After earning his bachelor's degree in literature from Harvard, Rofes worked as an elementary and middle school teacher for several years, according to a biography on his web site, EricRofes.com. Bartlett said that Rofes was the first openly gay elementary school teacher in Massachusetts.

Rofes wrote and edited 12 books on the role of sexual orientation, AIDS and education in contemporary society.

Rofes organized 1997's Sex Panic Summit in San Diego. The summit examined whether safe-sex education had become tantamount to vilifying gay men and other minorities.

"He wanted to recover the sense of gay is beautiful," said Dan Vera, an editor at White Crane Journal, a publication on gay men's spirituality.

Rofes worked with White Crane Journal to organize a Gay Men's Health Leadership Academy this March, which was derived from his Gay Men's Health Summits. The summits, which Rofes began in the late 1990s, were daylong events addressing contemporary issues in gay men's health.

"Rofes believed that there was a 'Gay is Pathologist' mind-set that had snuck in in the early '90s, and he was alarmed by a number of gay authors and thinkers that had internalized what our critics and enemies had been saying throughout the early '90s," Vera said. "I think he was trying to decolonize the gay mind."

Rofes served as executive director of the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Community Service Center until 1988. He also led San Francisco's Shanti Project, an AIDS service organization, and worked as an associate professor of education at Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif.

In addition to Crispin Hollings, his partner of 16 years, Rofes is survived by his mother, Paula Casey-Rofes, brother Peter Rofes, sister-in-law Ruth, nephew Lex and friends.

A memorial was held last Wednesday in Provincetown. Another memorial will be held at 3 p.m. July 15 at San Francisco's Metropolitan Community Church, 150 Eureka St.

Hollings asks that in lieu of flowers donations in memory of Rofes be made to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force in New York or the Highlander Center in Tennessee.