

# Obituary: Stuart Itzkowitz



BY TIM RETZLOFF

**P**ioneering Metro Detroit gay activist, psychologist, one-time diarist and retired Wayne State University lecturer and counselor Stuart Itzkowitz died Nov. 5. A resident

of Grosse Pointe Park, he had been battling a recurrence of cancer for several years.

Born to Abe and Marilyn Itzkowitz on May 3, 1948, Stuart George Itzkowitz grew up in Brooklyn and graduated from Stuyvesant High School. After earning his B.A. in zoology from Harpur College of what was then SUNY Binghamton, Itzkowitz moved to Ann Arbor in 1969 to attend graduate school at the University of Michigan. He received a master's in zoology from Michigan in 1971 and continued work toward a doctorate over the next three years.

While on campus he began to act on his same-sex attractions and, with a fellow grad student, attended a gay dance in June 1972 at the First Unitarian Church in Detroit during

the city's first Pride celebration.

"I didn't just come out. I sort of exploded," Itzkowitz recalled in a 2005 oral history interview.

Within weeks he helped staff the gay information table at the Ann Arbor Art Fair. He soon discovered the Flame Bar. He became active with the Ann Arbor Gay Liberation Front. He met people like Jim Toy and Harry "Kitty" Kevorkian, who had lasting impact on his sense of self as a proud young gay man.

That same year, Itzkowitz began to keep a diary, recording his activities in detail. He would eventually fill 14 volumes and more than 4,000 pages before his writing tapered off in 1985. On an almost daily basis, he described his goings-on and impressions at a pivotal time of life, all the while documenting a rich and vibrant gay world around him that was just coming into its own in new ways.

He was asked in the summer 2018 for the Queer Remembering blog how he felt about having kept the diary during his formative 20s and 30s. He expressed gratitude to his younger self.

"I did have a life and things did happen," he said. Some of what happened proved significant. "This is a very gay area."

He noted that in September 1974 he moved to 885 Covington in the Palmer Park apartment district of Detroit. Months later, he visited Menjo's nightclub on its first night open on Dec. 13, 1974. "Had a good crowded dance

time," he jotted in his diary.

Itzkowitz also recorded his response to the victory of Anita Bryant in overturning a new gay rights ordinance in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

"News on. The Gay Rights Amendment was overturned by a vote of 202,000 to 90,000," he wrote on election night, June 7, 1977. "It's depressing. I felt like it might pass. Oh shit..."

Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign sparked dread among many gay Detroiters but also spurred Itzkowitz and other activists into action. A committee comprised of Itzkowitz, Marg Cimafranca, Retty Schreiber, Larry Knox, Bob Vance and Don Mager, each representing a different facet of the local gay and lesbian community, met over the summer of 1977 to map out a new statewide activist group. After much discussion, they agreed on the Michigan Organization for Human Rights as the name.

Itzkowitz remembered meeting in the scorching hot office of Metro Gay News with a faulty air conditioner and editing the draft by-laws with Mager.

"He and I would go to Belle Isle beach, which was fairly gay then," Itzkowitz recalled. "And he and I did a lot of our revisions on pen and paper, because there were no computers back then."

In addition to helping to establish MOHR, Itzkowitz took part over the years in the Wayne State GLF switchboard, the Association of Suburban People, Studs 30, Gilda's House and

the Senior Koffee Klatch at Affirmations. He became involved, as well, as a volunteer and board member in the 1980s with Wellness Networks, the earliest Detroit-area organization formed in response to the AIDS crisis. He was particularly proud to have helped found one of the area's first HIV/AIDS support groups.

In 1978, Itzkowitz met Larry Zimmerman at a meeting of the Wayne State GLF. The two began dating and went on to share homes in Detroit, Grosse Pointe Park, St. Clair Shores and Clearwater, Florida. They married in Vermont in 2009 and were together for 38 years until Zimmerman's death from cancer in 2016.

While teaching at Marygrove College in the mid-1970s, Itzkowitz decided to change direction professionally and studied to become a psychologist. He went on to get a master's degree in counseling from Wayne State in 1978 and was awarded his Ph.D. there in 1984.

Itzkowitz was hired by Wayne in 1983 and enjoyed a long career in admissions, counseling and the School of Education. In 2004, Gov. Jennifer Granholm appointed him to the Michigan Board of Counseling. He retired from the university as senior lecturer and university counselor in 2014.

Services for Stuart Itzkowitz were conducted by Rabbi Marla Hornsten on Nov. 10 at Dorfman Chapel in Farmington Hills.

He was survived by his brother Howard and many friends.