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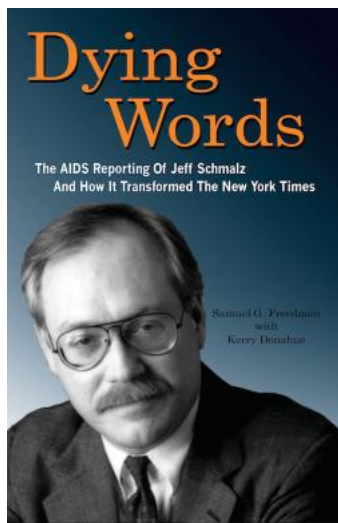
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NYC Center's Interactive Reading of Schmalz's 'Dying Words'

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Monday Mar 14, 2016

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Head to NYC's LGBT Center at 7 p.m. on March 16 for an interactive reading of late New York Times AIDS Reporter Jeffrey Schmalz's "Dying Words" project, featuring a presentation by Prof. Samuel G. Freedman and Producer Kerry Donahue.

"Jeff Schmalz was a journalistic prodigy," said producer Kerry Donahue. "He was hired by The New York Times while a college student, running its metropolitan coverage by his mid-20s and regarded as the 'consummate Timesman.' People in the newsroom thought that he would be a top editor one day, not knowing he was struggling with his identity as a gay man. He came out to many friends and peers at the Times, but kept his sexual orientation secret from the newsroom management. Under the executive editor A.M. Rosenthal, the Times newsroom of the 1970s and 80s was a homophobic place, and journalists known to be gay or lesbian were stalled or even demoted in their careers."

Schmalz was essentially running its metropolitan coverage by his mid-20s. From his crisply pressed trousers and shirts to his unerring sense of how to structure a feature story, he was a consummate Timesman. People in the newsroom speculated that someday he could be "on the masthead" -- the list of the

top editors on the world's most important newspaper. All the while, though, Jeff was struggling with his identity as a gay man.

Then, one day in December 1990, Schmalz collapsed in the newsroom with a brain seizure. It was the first evidence that he had AIDS -- a death sentence in these years before drug cocktails were available to victims of the disease.

"With AIDS, Jeff was endangered and he was outed," Freedman continued. "Yet he was also cracked wide open in positive ways. He found his calling in writing about HIV and AIDS, doing memorable portraits of Magic Johnson, Mary Fisher and other, as well as chronicling his own experience reporting on the most personal beat imaginable."

As Schmalz himself said at the time, having AIDS stirred an empathy in him that he had long obscured beneath a witty, cynical, hard-driven exterior. Who he was and what he did deeply changed The New York Times, sensitizing it as never before to the humanity of gay people. The Times of today -- publishing same-sex wedding announcements, editorializing in favor of marriage equality -- is the fruition of changes that Schmalz helped set into motion but never lived long enough to fully see.

And now, 22 years after Jeff died at age 39, his contributions have been largely forgotten.

"Our hope is that 'Dying Words' will restore Jeff's name and work to the annals of LGBT history and journalistic history," concluded Freedman.

"Dying Words: The AIDS Reporting of Jeffrey Schmalz" is a project with two parts -- an audio documentary and a book. Both were based on our contemporary interviews with many of Schmalz's friends and colleagues, existing recordings of Schmalz himself, and excerpts from his AIDS coverage. The project features interviews



Jeff with friends and family for the 1993 AIDS Walk (Source:out.com)

with major journalists as Anna Quindlen, Adam Moss, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., and Elizabeth Kolbert, as well as the AIDS activist Mary Fisher and the LGBT historian Eric Marcus. Our project had the full and enthusiastic support of Wendy Schmalz, Jeff's sister, who is his closest living relative, who provided access to the original microcassette recordings of his interviews with Larry Kramer, Magic Johnson, Randy Shilts, and Bill Clinton, among others.

The audio documentary was produced by Kerry Donahue and edited by Ben Shapiro, both award-winning journalists. It was distributed by PRX to more than 125 public radio stations, including eight of the top 10 markets. It is also available for

download. The "Dying Words" book was published by CUNY Journalism Press and released on December 1, 2015 to coincide with World AIDS Day.

Signed copies of "Dying Words" will be available for sale and Kerry Donahue, producer of the audio documentary that has aired on hundreds of public radio stations across the country, will attend. Suggested donation of \$5 to benefit the Bureau. Beer, wine, sparkling water available for purchase. Light refreshments will be provided.

'Dying Words' will be presented at 7 p.m. on March 16 at the Bureau of General Services-Queer Division, Room 210 of The LGBT Community Center, 208 W. 13th Street.

For information, call 646-457-0859 or visit bgsqd.com

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.



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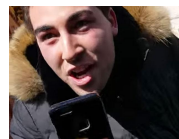
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