

RANDY SHILTS

b. August 8, 1951

d. February 17, 1994

Randy Shilts was the first openly gay journalist to cover gay issues. He authored groundbreaking books on AIDS and on homophobia in the military.

“History is not served when reporters prize trepidation and propriety over the robust journalistic duty to tell the whole story.”

Randy Shilts was the first openly gay journalist to cover GLBT issues in the American mainstream press. He held positions at The Advocate and the San Francisco Chronicle and is the author of three books.

Shilts came out at age 20 and was head of the Eugene, Oregon Gay People's Alliance.

After working as the Northwest correspondent for The Advocate, he moved to San Francisco to become a staff writer. He covered gay issues and city politics at San Francisco area television stations.

Shilts wrote “The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk” (1982), when a biography about a gay political figure was groundbreaking.

His New York Times best seller, “And the Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic” (1987), was the first major book about AIDS. It chronicles the first five years of the epidemic and exposes the infighting and inaction that led the virus to become a pandemic. The book earned a nomination for the National Book Award and was translated into seven languages. It was adapted into an Emmy Award-winning HBO film starring Alan Alda, Anjelica Huston, Steve Martin, Matthew Modine and Lily Tomlin.

While suffering from AIDS-related causes, Shilts dictated the last chapters of “Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the US Military: Vietnam to the Persian Gulf” (1993). The work examines homophobia in the military and is based on more than 1,000 interviews.

Shilts never compromised his professional integrity. In 1993, a year before he lost his battle with AIDS, he was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.



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