

MICHAEL CALLEN

b. April 11, 1955, Rising Sun, Indiana

d. December 27, 1993, Los Angeles, California

AIDS ACTIVIST

*“The party that was
the ’70s is over.”*

**Diagnosed in 1982
with the “gay cancer”
and convinced it was
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Michael Callen was a pioneering AIDS activist. In 1982, when Callen was diagnosed with Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), little was known about the “gay cancer.” Those with the disease knew their days were numbered and that the disease stigmatized them. Callen did not hesitate to come out openly as a gay man with the fatal disease and to take action.

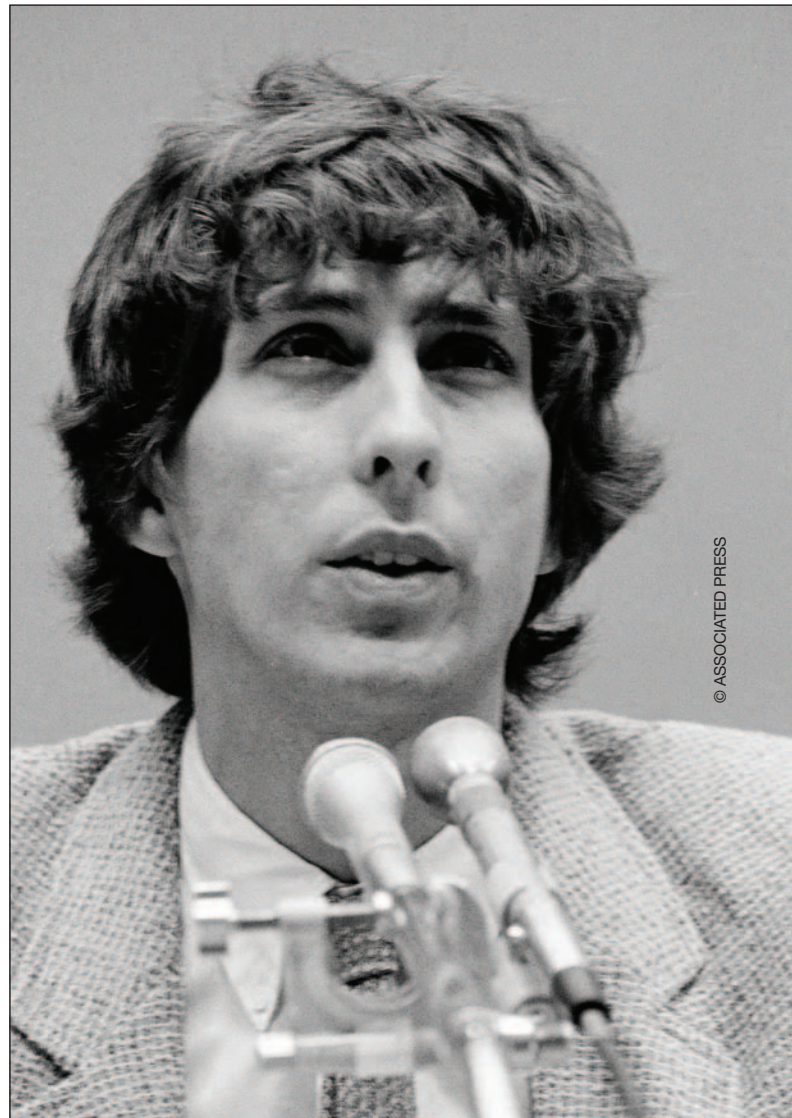
He was convinced that GRID was sexually transmitted. In 1983 Callen co-wrote one of the first guides on safe-sex practices, “How to Have Sex in an Epidemic.” He appeared on television talk shows and wrote for newspapers and magazines. He became the face of AIDS, as the disease was renamed.

While Callen never advocated for the closure of bathhouses, he did believe that gay men were suffering from their own promiscuity. In 1982 he coauthored an article in the New York Native in which he declared “war on promiscuity” and argued that gay men needed to rethink their attitudes toward sex and relationships.

Callen also gained recognition as a songwriter and singer. His music reflects the frustration of living with a chronic disease but also celebrates love as a powerful force for healing. His lyrics promote loving companionship and long-term partnerships for gay men.

Callen toured internationally with the gay a capella group The Flirtations. His solo album, “Purple Heart” (1988), won wide acclaim and features the hit song “Love Don’t Need a Reason,” which he performed at the 1993 March on Washington for LGBT Rights.

In 1985 Callen helped found the People With AIDS Coalition. In doing so he coined the term PWA’s (People With AIDS) to foster a self-empowered movement. He served on many boards and provided testimony for government bodies including the President’s Commission on AIDS. Callen died of AIDS-related complications.



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