

BRUCE VOELLER

b. May 12, 1934

d. February 13, 1994

BIOLOGIST AND AIDS ACTIVIST

Bruce Voeller was a pioneering HIV researcher and a cofounder of the National Gay Task Force.

“We are everywhere.”

Bruce Raymond Voeller was a biologist and AIDS researcher who became a leading gay rights activist. He cofounded the National Gay Task Force and served as its executive director for five years. He helped lead the early fight against AIDS and founded the Mariposa Education and Research Foundation.

Born in Minneapolis, Voeller first confronted his homosexuality as a student. His school counselor assured him that he was not gay, but Voeller had felt same-sex attraction very early in life, which inspired his interest in biology.

Voeller graduated with honors from Reed College in 1956, winning a five-year fellowship at the Rockefeller Institute to complete his doctoral studies in biochemistry, developmental biology and genetics. He became a research associate at the Institute in 1961, and later a professor. He wrote four books and married a woman, with whom he had three children.

Voeller came out when he was 29 and divorced in 1971. In 1972 he was among a group that took over George McGovern's New York campaign office to protest the senator's opposition to gay rights. Voeller outlined a six-point statement before he was arrested, while chanting “gay power.”

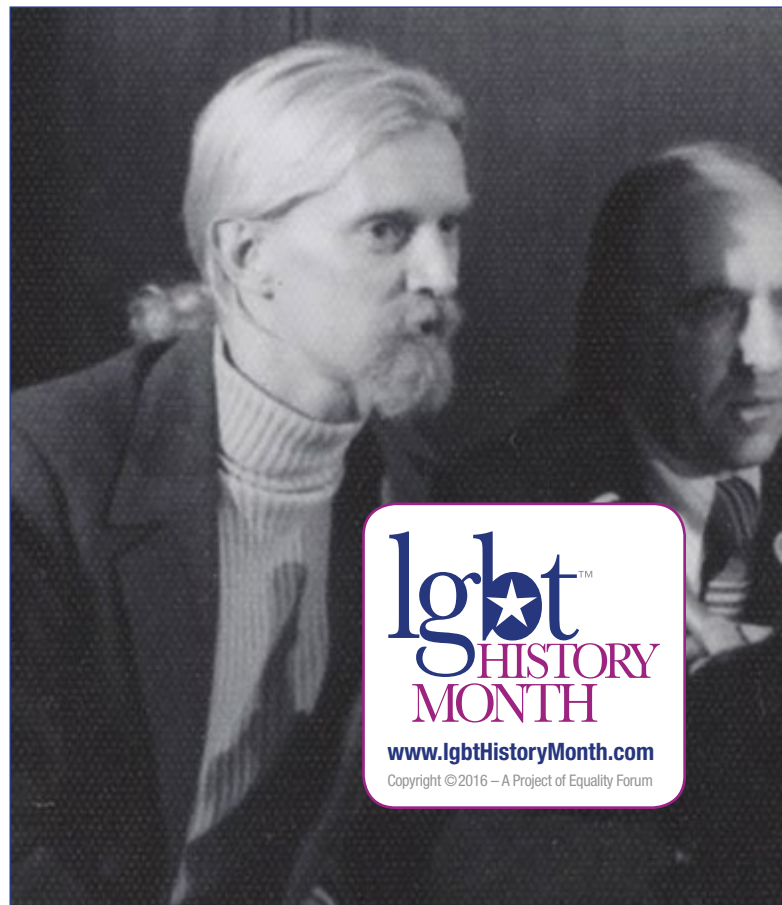
Voeller went on to become president of the New York Gay Activist Alliance. He founded the National Gay Task Force in 1973 (now the National LGBTQ Task Force), which became the first gay rights group to meet at the White House to discuss policy related to gay and lesbian Americans.

Voeller conducted pioneering HIV/AIDS research before the disease had a name. He co-edited “AIDS and Sex: An Integrated Biomedical and Behavioral Approach” in 1990 and wrote scores of papers on the subject. He also worked at Hunter College and Cornell University doing research on the effectiveness of condoms and spermicides in preventing disease.

In 1978, with Karen DeCrow of the National Organization of Women and Aryeh Neier of the American Civil Liberties Union, Voeller founded the Mariposa Foundation to study human sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases. Volunteers for the organization preserved important historical resources of the gay rights movement, which have become an archive on human sexuality at the Cornell University Library.

While with Mariposa, Voeller commissioned the famous George Segal sculpture of gay couples at Christopher Park, across the street from the site of the Stonewall riot. He also commissioned Dom Bachardy to create a series of portraits of Gay Pioneers, including Frank Kameny, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, Barbara Gittings and others.

Voeller died from complications of AIDS in 1994. His longtime companion, Richard Liuck, a former associate at the Mariposa Foundation, died the same year from an AIDS-related illness.



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