

**Doug Frank**  
**Grand Marshal for Alaska Pride Fest**  
**Celebrating Diversity Parade 2011**

Since the 1980's Doug Frank has worked as a volunteer and occasionally in a leadership role in the GLBT community.

The AIDS epidemic prompted a shift in his priorities. Doug spent years working with the Names Project Foundation to educate and initiate the necessary AIDS conversations by helping to bring the Quilt to Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks and other cities nationally and internationally.

His vision was key to the success of the 2001 "Celebrate Diversity" library display. This was a huge coup for the GLBT community generating great press.

**Doug Frank**

- Was instrumental in bringing the first World AIDS Day to Anchorage in 1988 and the Names Project Quilt to Anchorage in 1989.
- Became a Quilt Display Coordinator and helped bring the Quilt to Fairbanks, Juneau, Portland, Oregon, Philadelphia and Paris, France.
- Was the Northwest Regional Display Coordinator for the Names Project Quilt
- Was the Opening and Closing Ceremony Coordinator for the last full display of the Quilt in 1996 on the Mall in Washington.
- Is one of the three founders of the annual fall GLBT Conference in Anchorage which started in 1994 and is still a vital weekend of workshops, keynotes and introductions.
- Helped create the amazingly successful 2001 Pride Month display at the library. It was taken down the second day by order of the mayor and generated immense publicity and mostly positive support from the larger community.

Doug Frank moved to Alaska from the East Coast in the summer of 1974.

He knew that he was different from an early age and during adolescence realized that he was gay. Due to a strict religious background, he did not come out till his late twenties. A weekly gay/lesbian support group held at the first gay and lesbian community center played a critical role in this process. At this time there were no positive role models in the public media or popular culture. "It was so refreshing to be with other gay men and lesbians in the same room and to hear ordinary stories from these truly remarkable and heroic individuals".

For years, Doug was very active in the Metropolitan Community Church since this provided a format to deal with spiritual and religious questions from a gay perspective. He hosted the founder of MCC, Troy Perry, in his home during Rev. Perry's visit to Anchorage. Over time Doug's spiritual path has evolved to be more inclusive. "What is nice about being gay is that one gets to create ones own definition of family and spirituality". This is a completely different journey than a religious exploration, which is often confounded by dogma, exclusivity, homophobia, and distrust of women. These views have been heavily destructive toward the often sensitive spirit and nature of GLBT people.

During this time Doug often looked for ways to develop community and healthy relationships. At one point in the 70's, he organized a gay and lesbian roller skating night. It was attended by over 200 people and allowed the community to actually skate as same sex couples at a time when this was quite unusual and potentially risky.

Doug credits his younger brother (now a deputy mayor of Los Angeles) in navigating the tricky passage of coming out at a time when it was often a lonely journey. Larry hitchhiked to Alaska to show his support and love and gave Doug the best gift in the form of a simple question, "Why don't you learn to be comfortable with yourself? That began a life long journey of self-discovery and acceptance.

At about this time, in a cruel affront to self-acceptance, the HIV virus was hiding and beginning to ravage the gay community. The gay rights and liberation movement was sidelined as this crisis consumed the community. Attending the exhilarating March On Washington in 1987, Doug witnessed the unveiling of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. It commemorated 1920 people who had died of AIDS. No one, including the president of the United States, was talking about AIDS. When the subject came up, most gay men's eyes would glaze over, partly in fear. Without individual and collective conversations, the epidemic would spread unchecked. American culture did not find it easy to discuss death and dying and human sexuality. AIDS required both of these taboo subjects to be handled with candor and honesty.

Doug felt that the display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in smaller communities including Anchorage would allow the conversation to start. He went to D.C. the following year in 1988 with the intention to make sure that the Quilt would visit Anchorage at sometime in the future and stated this request in a large impromptu meeting the day after the second national Quilt display. The idea for traveling around with the Quilt was still new but they did plant the idea to go back to Alaska and work on the first World AIDS Day. On a cold evening, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988, at the Park Strip, a large globe with an interior light was presented as a symbol of a "world full of light and understanding as opposed to darkness and ignorance". (These words were actually used on the six o'clock news to describe the event.) This became a watershed moment with a remarkable front page newspaper picture and article that elevated AIDS to a topic of conversation in the press.

At the end of the WAD event, Doug was able to announce that a large portion of the Quilt would be displayed in Anchorage in July of 1989. This major event allowed extensive coverage and many comprehensive articles in the local newspapers. This was the first time a person locally and publicly admitted on TV to being HIV positive. Cleve Jones, the founder of the Quilt, along with many of the Quilt staff, were invited and came to Alaska. Doug remembers one evening as Cleve talked about being stabbed with a knife by a homophobe on his return to San Francisco after he had appeared on 60 Minutes as a person living with AIDS. That episode expressed the level of fear and hatred in this country surrounding gay men and the issue of AIDS.

Doug became deeply committed to the Names Project Foundation and using his own money and time took pieces of the Quilt to Paris, France. He also became a Quilt Display Coordinator and helped with displays in Fairbanks, Juneau, and twice in Portland, Oregon, and Philadelphia and eventually was the Northwest Regional Representative. The last time the Quilt was displayed in its entirety on the National Mall in 1996, it tragically covered the entire space between the Capital Building and the Washington Monument. Doug was the Opening and Closing Ceremony Coordinator for this event where the President and Vice President showed up symbolically show their compassion and support. The former Presidents would not walk across the street to see the Quilt in previous years. Hundreds of thousands of Americans saw the Quilt that weekend including tens of thousands of school age children. With education and precautions no one should suffer from this disease. It devastated the gay men's community for years but also spurred the creation of many programs and support groups as gay men, lesbians and allies responded to this crisis.

Doug has also been involved in the political process to win equal rights for gay people. During the second attempt to provide protection from discrimination for the GLBT community, he invited many members of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community to his home. The living room was filled with standing room only space for vibrant discussions concerning how to collectively handle the upcoming debate. This process was the seed for a political action group called EQUAL- an acronym for Equal Under Alaska Law.

In 1994, Rebecca Rogers, the former executive director of the Alaska AIDS Assistance Association, solicited a grant from the Seattle Pride Foundation to help heal the community after the 1993 political debate over whether to provide equal rights based on sexual orientation for municipal employees. Doug Frank and F. Ken Freedman, conducted numerous meetings to develop the foundation for this first conference. The gay community had allowed their opponents to define the debate and dialogue for too long. To reflect this shift, the theme of the first conference was "In Search of ... A New Vision for Gays Lesbians and Bisexuals. The initial question in the program was "What would life be like, as an individual and as a community, if we lived in a land free of shame and full of pride? What if it gave us a strong and enduring sense of hope, inspiration and purpose? What if we felt totally connected to each other and the world around us?" Maybe it was a bit naïve and overly ambitious but it still is a goal worth considering particularly for a group whose "love dare not speak its name" for many centuries.

Ellen Ratner, a White House correspondent and talented lesbian, appearing on over 100 radio stations, was the keynote speaker. It was amazing that she showed up because the President of the United States had personally requested an interview by her. The Presidential secretary asked Ellen half jokingly if her prior commitment in Alaska required her to speak to a group of gay men, lesbians and radical feminists. Her reply was an unequivocal, "Yes". Attendees were able to write a personal message on a large card that was personally delivered by Ellen to Bill Clinton after conference.

During the conference closing ceremony, David Kanash, a Tlingit Indian from Sitka walked to the podium and started drumming and singing in Tlingit. The translation was: “It is now time to open our containers of wisdom which we have been entrusted” Seventeen years later the Conference is still vital and occurs annually in October and is now sponsored by Identity. A rash of gay suicides in 2010 and 2011 have made national news. The statistics for suicide rates among gay and lesbian and transgender youth in small Alaskan native village is tragically high. In a remarkable testament of creating connections and loving support, members of the Anchorage community held a fundraiser this spring and raised over \$10,000 dollars for scholarship funds to bring native youth to the conference in 2011. No one should ever feel that they are alone and have no support system as they explore the wonderful world of human sexuality and its many expressions.

Another major turning point in the struggle for equality in Anchorage was a 2001 exhibit in the Loussac Library for gay pride month called “Celebrate Diversity”. This beautiful display covered an interior wall on the second floor. It was unceremoniously taken down the following day on the direct orders of the mayor even though it had been properly vetted and approved in advance. This resulted in a numerous articles and an ACLU lawsuit that eventually required the Municipality to put it back up. This display was conceptualized by Doug Frank, Jan Richardson, the MCC minister, and F Ken Freedman. This was an important event in the history of equal rights in Anchorage.

Doug Frank never dreamed that gay rights for equality would evolve at such an accelerated pace. It is the result of tens of thousands of individuals and organizations across the country and locally. He is proud to have known many, if not all, of the brave individuals who have fought for equal rights in the Last Frontier. Rarely are there permanent leaders in the gay and lesbian community but luckily there are people who have provided vital leadership at critical moments. Many of these people are not here anymore but their vision and legacy remains. Doug hopes that the next generation of gay men and lesbians will live in a community that is closer to one with a sense of hope, inspiration and purpose. The world desperately needs individuals who can bridge the rational world of the mind and the world of the heart. After all, coming out of the closet is a metaphor for telling the truth about one’s intimate and private feelings of love for someone of the same gender. The masculine and feminine and sex are often compartmentalized and confused. If one has the courage to open one’s inner awareness this bridge between what it means to be a male or female is the potential that gay men, lesbians, bi-sexual and transgender individuals have been given as a birthright. There is still time to “open our containers of wisdom which we have been entrusted.”