

HARVEY MILK

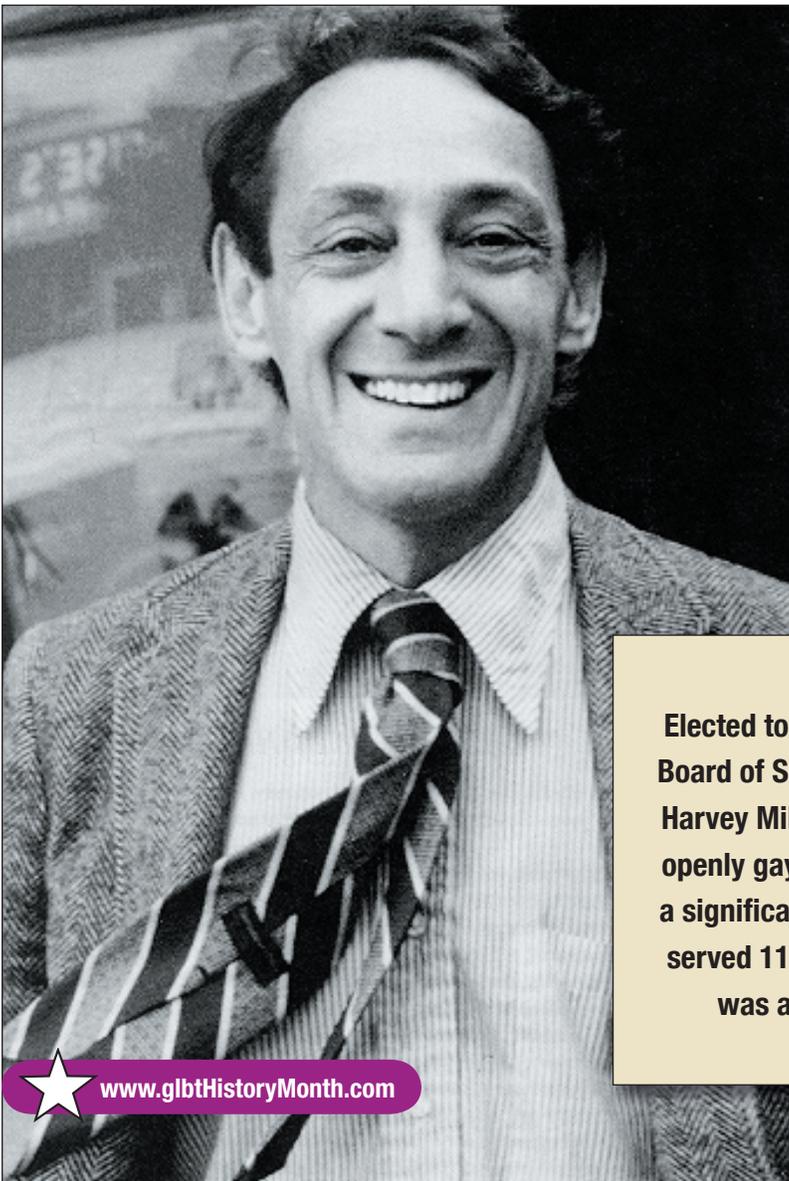
5/22/1930 – 11/27/1978

“The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone, but that life is not worth living without it.”

Harvey Milk was a New Yorker who migrated to San Francisco in the 1970s when an influx of gay immigrants from across the country was changing the Castro neighborhood into the city’s gay village. Milk opened a camera store and founded the Castro Valley Association of local merchants. His willingness to represent the interests of local merchants with city government earned him the unofficial title “Mayor of Castro Street.” Milk discovered that he had a natural flair for politics.

Harvey Milk was a political outsider and a populist who made his own rules. From his shop in the Castro, he ran grassroots campaigns based on relentless meetings, door-to-door canvassing and media interviews. His supporters formed “human billboards” by standing along major thoroughfares holding placards. Milk’s first three tries for office were unsuccessful, but they earned him increasing credibility with the electorate.

When Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977, a lesbian wrote, “I thank God I have lived long enough to see my kind emerge from the shadows and join the human race.”



Milk was shot to death in his City Hall office on November 27, 1978, by Dan White, a conservative anti-gay former supervisor who also murdered Mayor George Moscone. White was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to five years imprisonment. City-wide violence erupted in San Francisco when White’s sentence was announced.

Harvey Milk had forebodings of his assassination. He left a tape-recorded “political will” naming his preferred successor on the Board of Supervisors. On that tape he said, “If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.”

Elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay person elected to a significant public office. He served 11 months before he was assassinated.

