



## Remembering John Iversen, activist, musician and songwriter

Activist, musician and songwriter John Iversen passed away Monday, Oct. 1, 2018, at Alta Bates hospital in Berkeley after experiencing a massive stroke. He was 69.

John, part Chippewa, and a member of the Bois Forte Tribe, was born on Feb. 25, 1949, in Duluth, Minnesota. He went to the University of Chicago, where he participated in organizing against the Vietnam War, and subsequently went on to work with a community kitchen run by the Black Panther Defense Committee and a health center run by the Chicano Brown Baretts.

He moved on to Madison, WI where he worked with the United Farm Workers and was later at Wounded Knee, NE for six weeks supporting the standoff by the American Indian Movement (AIM) was were responding to an authoritarian reign of Wounded Knee.

John then did a short stint at the Columbia School of Journalism before moving to Berkeley, where he performed with a partner as the Rhythm and Sleaze Revue at venues including the Sutro Baths in San Francisco. In the late 1980s, he started a band called The Stickers, later renamed Dreams Die Hard. A song of John's criticizing Oliver North gained some notoriety with campus radio stations and Dreams Die Hard performed around London after being contacted by Virgin Records.

In the 1980s, John was on the steering committee for Local 535 SEIU where he helped win grievances against the city of Berkeley for underpayment of service workers, joining the contract negotiating teams for city workers in 1980s.

After being diagnosed with HIV, John ran successful legal campaigns to change insurance provider policies on access to vital meds for people with HIV.

He continued in that decade to take a position as a senior service aide at the West Berkley Senior Center and become a precinct captain and organizer in Vice Mayor Maudelle Shirek's campaigns from 1984 through 2004. He staffed her office as a legislative aide from 1984 – 1986.

John was part of founding ACT-UP East Bay in 1989 and the Berkeley Needle Exchange in 1990. He organized demonstrations against Bayer Corp. for bloating the price of life-saving medications and against restrictive government and corporate AIDS policies.

He became a life-long supporter of Leonard Peltier, unsuccessfully pleading with President Barack Obama to grant Peltier clemency prior to leaving office. In Feb. 2018, John was one of three Wounded Knee '73 veterans [honored by AIM-West \(American Indian Movement\)](#).

John might best be expressed as complex and feisty, but always engaged and active in a broad range of social justice issues. He was a pioneer in creating broad LGBTQ visibility.

Individuals are encouraged to make a contribution in John's name through taking an action for justice in an area of your choice or sending a donation to either the [International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee](#) or the work of [Winona LaDuke Executive Director – Honor the Earth](#).

John is survived by his mother, Alice Iversen, and brother, Paul Iversen, in Two Harbors, Minnesota and a village of colleagues, family, friends and loved ones. John's mother Alice will celebrate her 99th birthday in April of 2019; he had planned on attending the celebration. A public memorial will be planned for the spring of 2019. John's remains are being cremated.