



Marge J. Summit

September 3, 1935 - May 16, 2023

Longtime LGBTQ+ activist and community organizer, icon and former owner of the now defunct His n' Hers bar Marge Summit died May 16 due to complications from a stroke. She was 87.

Summit was born Sept. 3, 1935, on the North Side of Chicago in an attic. During her childhood, she and her younger brother Richard Summit were raised first by their grandparents, and then, from age 12 on, her mother and stepfather, who lived on the South Side of Chicago.

In a 2017 interview with this publication, Summit spoke about knowing she was different even before she reached her teen years, and then realizing that meant she was a lesbian. Summit told Windy City Times in that 2017 interview that her mother kicked her out of the house right after her stepfather died, because her mother did not like her "lifestyle."

This did not deter Summit from graduating from Chicago Vocational High School (where she played trumpet in the school band). Summit got a job at a phone company to support herself and, after she graduated, moved from the Hyde Park office to the downtown Chicago office, where she worked in the accounting department.

Summit went on to work as a bartender and manager at the now-defunct Togetherness bar in the early '70s and then became owner of P.Q.'s, which

she renamed with her initials MS.

His n' Hers, Summit's bar, opened in late 1975 on Lincoln Avenue and then moved underneath the Addison L track stop, and finally North Broadway in the 48th Ward, where it remained until she closed it in 1992.

Her bar offered live entertainment including open-mic nights. She also allowed many organizations to use her bar to raise funds for their causes and produced a number of her own fundraisers.

Among the many artists that performed at His n' Hers were Ginni Clemmens, Tricia Alexander, Lori Noelle, Kristin Lems, Paula Walowitz and Toni Armstrong Jr., Jorjet Harper, Dev Singh, the Wacker Drive vocal trio, operatic comedienne Sharon Carlson and, at that time, new comic Judy Tenuta.

Both Summit and gay businessman Frank Kellas spearheaded the "Gay \$ Project" ink stamp for members of the LGBTQ+ community to use to mark their paper currency. This was aimed to show businesses that those dollars were coming from queer/trans customers.

Summit adopted a daughter, Tayna Nelson, in early 1975. She was also a foster parent to a few other children.

In that same 2017 Windy City Times interview, Summit recalled how she met her now-late wife Janan Lindley on Facebook in 2012: "I had just finished my first bout of cancer and was kibitzing with a friend, and Janan chimed in. I looked her up and she was in my age group. I asked her if she wanted to meet for coffee and she said she only had one cup a day. So, I asked her if she wanted to go walking in the park. She messaged me on Facebook later and gave me her phone number. I called her and said, 'Look, I'm bald and I just finished with cancer. I'm clean, but I'm bald.' She said that's no problem.

Half her friends were bald, too.

"I drove to her building on inner Lake Shore Drive and she came out and I went, 'Oh fuck, she's gorgeous.' And I wasn't looking for a relationship at all. I'd had it with romance. We talked for two hours and then she asked me up to her place on the 38th floor. Her place was gorgeous, white carpet and black furniture. I figured she might be out of my league. When I went downstairs, I had a parking ticket. She called me later and said she was going to be over near me. She came over, and we talked for a little bit, and ended up in bed. She never left. We have our ups and downs, but I wouldn't trade her for anything in the world. I'd been with some wonderful ladies, and we were together for a reason, but never my reason."

The couple got married at the Andersonville bar The Call on May 18, 2014. Chicago gay icon and close friend Gary Chichester officiated with her family and many close friends in attendance. The wedding took place amidst one of David Boyer's Chicago Original Country Dance Parties, in which Summit had sometimes served as a bartender.

Summit's many accolades include being inducted into Chicago's LGBT Hall of Fame in 1993, the Jon-Henri Damski Award in 2018, the Dignity Chicago John Michie Award, the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the Independent Voters of Illinois and Independent Precinct Organization Glynn Sudbery Award (for community service), being featured on the Chicago Gay History website, a two-time Gay Chicago Magazine Awards honoree and recognition by Mattachine Midwest.

Additionally, Summit was a founding member of the PFLAG Chicago chapter and a Mattachine Midwest member; produced an album, Gay and Straight Together, that featured His 'n Hers performers; co-produced the documentary

Crimes of Hate about anti-LGBTQ+ occurrences in Chicago with QED Productions, Chichester and R.J. Chaffin; was featured in the award-winning 1984 documentary Before Stonewall, the WTTW documentary Out and Proud in Chicago and its companion book, Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay History and participated in AIDS Walk Chicago and Strike Against AIDS.

Summit was preceded in death by her parents and Lindley. She is survived by Nelson and her husband Phil; two grandchildren, Katherine and Zachary; her brother; and countless chosen family members and friends.

"When I came to Chicago in 1976, one of the first friends I made was Marge Summit, then owner of His n' Hers, a popular community bar located under the L tracks on Addison," said longtime friend Boyer. "Marge created a wonderful space that brought many facets of our community together to celebrate. Marge's staff served us great drinks, prepared fabulous food including the best burger I ever enjoyed in Chicago. And Marge made a space for lots of local talent to perform, grow and succeed.

"She became a dear friend and mentor to me in the service industry. Those of you that joined me for Chicago's Original Country Dance after closing Carol's Speakeasy should remember Marge helping us serve drinks at various spots along the way—Pusch Studios, Paris Dance, Whiskey River, Bedrock, to name a few.

"As an icon of our community, Marge was there when AIDS first struck Chicago. Her support for many of the early first organizations that came to be in response to this emergency was fantastic. Howard Brown, Chicago House, Open Hand and numerous others were causes championed at His n' Hers in the '80s, with the support by the talented artist that performed at the bar. Marge did more than just host benefits; she took action when needed. One of

my favorite things she did was to push peoples' comfort zone.

"To stress the economic force of our community, she was the Gay Dollar campaign. She bought rubber stamps that read Gay Dollar and stamped thousands of one dollar bills. In the 80s that got the attention of the Feds, they visited her and threatened her if she persisted. She did persist and straight folks were forced to be embarrassed by handing over 'gay money' when shopping, dining, etc.

"Marge met the love of her life Janan in her later years, and I was honored to host their wedding at my Country Dance at The Call. Sadly, we had to celebrate Janan's passing there too. The past few months were hard for Marge, failing health and loneliness made for a vicious circle. I was fortunate to spend time with her these past few weeks, sharing memories, meals, helping her cope as she became weaker. I got to sit with her one last time on Tuesday in her final hours as she passed from this world knowing she would be reunited with her wife Janan."

"Marge was an inspiration to all the activists she proceeded," said longtime friend Chichester. "She was a tough lesbian in the truest sense. She did not take shit from anyone, but she could still dish it out to get things done. Her main focus as a bar owner was to bring the community—gay men, lesbians and allies—together in a safe space through food and music. The Gay \$ campaign went to show the people in power the monetary impact of the LGBTQ+ communities. She could tell a story in such a way that that would piss you off and make you laugh. Marge was true one-of-a-kind individual that I am proud to consider a loving friend."

"I awarded Marge the prestigious "Jon-Henri" Award in 2019," said longtime friend Lori Cannon. "It was my way to acknowledge her decades of trailblazing efforts for the LGBT community she so proudly represented and served. It was

a star studded afternoon at The Call where all of her admirers could gather and offer their gratitude and affection for her long and purposeful life. She along with her wife Janan at her side, had a great time re-connecting with customers from her legendary bar His n' Hers, as well as folks from all walks of life who were assisted, supported, fed and housed by her generosity over the years. She was able to hear the words 'thank you' and 'love ya' Marge' while she was still alive. That was my plan all along."

"In 1985, I was coming out and [had] just moved to Chicago," said longtime friend Terry Gaskin. "I met Marge Summit behind the bar at His n' Hers under the Addison L track. Marge took me under her wing and our friendship has been for close to 40 years. We went to see the Weather Girls at the Vic Theatre. That was the night I saw Chilli Pepper. I would beg her to take me to the Baton Show lounge to see Chilli and the rest of the cast. Other nights, we would hit the North side bars. We would go to the Loading Dock , Loading Zone, Normandy and head north to the Gold Coast and see Frank Kellis.

"I was there with Marge smashing cans to raise money for Chicago House, and stamping "gay \$" on every dollar bill that came into the bar, and babysitting her adopted daughter Tanya. When Marge met Janan, she found the love of her life. The two of them loved dancing and helping animals. It took a lifetime for her to meet Mrs. Right, and it was well worth it. My love for Marge is forever, for all she sacrificed in a time that was not easy for the LGBTQ community. The entire community owes a great deal to this woman. She needs to be remembered forever in our history."

"RIP to longtime bar owner, community pioneer and activist Marge Summit," said friend Owen Keehnen in a Facebook statement. "There will never be another Marge.

"She started going to gay bars in the 1950s down in Calumet City. Then, starting in the early 1970s, Marge began managing gay/lesbian bars like Togetherness and then MS. After that, Marge got a backer and opened her own place, His n' Hers, which was open for decades in three different locations.

"His n' Hers was known for endless AIDS and community fundraisers, open mike nights, as an outlet for LGBT singers and comics...and the bar also featured some of the best food in town. His n' Hers hosted holidays for the LGBT elderly, food drives and donations. It was a bar that was about the community. His n' Hers was known for its heart and Marge was behind every bit of that. Marge loved hard and defended her own. She was one of those behind the Gay \$ campaign to show the power we had to business owners.

"Marge Summit was a powerhouse, a trailblazer and a friend. She will be deeply missed by many. She is together again with her beloved wife, Janan."

"Marge Summit was one of the first butch dykes I ever met and I soon discovered that beyond that gruff exterior was a heart as big as the sky," said longtime friend and Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame Board Co-Chair Rick Karlin. "She was and shall remain an icon in Chicago's LGBT community. She provided a home for Chicago's LGBT music scene in the 70's and 80's with His n' Hers when it was under the Addison L stop (and made a great hamburger, as well) and brought the concept of the LGBT community as a commercial force to the forefront with the Gay \$ campaign she initiated in the late 1980s. She was a terrific storyteller and was an invaluable link to the pre-Stonewall days. I will miss her greatly."

"Back in the day - Marge was a force to be reckoned with, out and proud, and dedicated to community," said friend Kathy Munzer. "She gave opportunities to many future iconic Chicago performers, producing a multitude of shows at her

bar, His n' Hers. At His n' Hers, the door was always open, before the word, 'inclusive' became part of the queer lexicon. Any panel she was on, Marge dominated—she had a fabulous memory, had the best, funniest and cheekiest stories. She had a no bs, feisty attitude. The labels—pioneer, activist, shero, fit perfectly. Nothing but gratitude to Marge, who helped build, fought for and inspired the LGBTQ+ community we love today."

"The word 'legend' gets thrown around a lot, but this time it really applies," said Armstrong Jr. in a Facebook post. "Tributes will be forthcoming but I especially appreciated all the opportunities she gave openly lesbian and gay musicians to play live in her bar."

"I never really knew Marge the way so many others did," said friend Victor Salvo. "The first time I heard her speak was during an interview Owen Keehnen moderated at the Chicago History Museum, populated by several icons from Chicago's rich past bar history. Marge brought the house down. After that, Marge and Janan began attending luncheons Lori Cannon would host. It was at those lunches that one could not help but fall in love with Marge Summit. Her passion and humor and stories made it quite apparent why she was considered a living legend. I am very grateful I got to know her these last few years. I knew, once Janan passed, Marge would not be far behind. They were meant to be together, and now they are forever. Our loss is Heaven's gain."

Memorial service details TBA.

See windycitytimes.com/lgbt/Chicago-Icon-The-Marge-Summit-Story-Part-One-of-a-two-part-feature/61433.html and windycitytimes.com/lgbt/Chicago-Icon-The-Marge-Summit-Story-Part-Two-of-a-two-part-feature/61478.html .