

Transgender man killed in Hub

No signs of forced entry in William 'Rita' Hester's apartment, police say

by **Scott A. Giordano**
Bay Windows staff

Family and friends of William "Rita" Hester remember the 33-year-old transgender person as someone who was vivacious and full of life and love, someone who hated violence and someone whose life ambition "was to be a star."

The Boston Police Department (BPD) and Suffolk County District Attorney Ralph Martin's office are investigating the homicide of Hester, a gay man who

lived as "Rita" and was found stabbed to death in his Allston apartment on Nov. 28.

Meanwhile, about 75 people gathered at the Arlington Street Church on Dec. 1 to plan a community response to the publicity surrounding Hester's death, which they believe was based on a combination of anti-black, anti-gay and anti-gender bias.

"I personally believe my brother's death was a hate crime," said Diana Hester, a resident of Winchester, Conn., who was at

the Dec. 1 meeting in Boston. "There was no forced entry in [my brother's] apartment, and my brother wasn't a violent person."

Also in attendance was William Hester's brother, who asked his name not be used in this article. The brother said he believes the crime may have been motivated by hate because "Rita" was stabbed about 20 times in the chest, because "Rita" was wearing all his gold jewelry when he was found

Continued on page 19



William "Rita" Hester, who was found dead in his Allston apartment on Nov. 28

Transgender person found dead in his Allston apartment Nov. 28

Continued from page 1

by police, and because the apartment was left in no disarray and robbery doesn't appear to be a motive.

Hester was found stabbed to death in his Allston apartment at 21 Park Vale Ave. after police received a complaint at 6:12 p.m. Dec. 1 from one of Hester's neighbors claiming there was a fight in apartment four. Official police and homicide reports state that when the police arrived at the scene, they observed a victim lying on the floor, suffering from multiple stab wounds. The victim was taken to Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, where he was pronounced dead and identified as Hester by his brother.

A coroner's report was not available at Bay Windows press time, but a spokesman from the district attorney's office said the official time of death was 6:15 p.m. Nov. 28, with the official cause of death believed to be from multiple stab wounds.

Hester was a tall, broad-shouldered black transgender with long braids that fell to the middle of his back; he performed at Jacques, a gay bar at 79 Broadway St. in the Bay Village section of Boston. He also was a regular patron at several of the area's other gay bars, including Chaps at 100 Warrenton St.

"Rita" was last seen at the Silhouette Lounge, an Allston neighborhood bar located on Brighton Avenue. His brother said he heard there was an altercation between "Rita" and another person at the bar who may have followed "Rita" home.

"This individual told some people at the bar that he was going to do something to Rita, and there were witnesses from across the street who say they saw two white men who left from the back of the apartment house," the brother said. "I heard talk that one of them was named Tyler."

Friends and activists, many whom did not know "Rita," also were present at the

Dec. 1 meeting and agreed that the murder was probably motivated by hate.

"Even though we don't know all the details about this murder because it is an ongoing investigation, based on the experiences in our own lives and what we have seen in our communities, I don't think it's too much of a leap for us to make the conclusion that this crime was motivated by hate," said Dave Shannon from the Violence Recovery Program at Boston's Fenway Community Health Center.

The murder wasn't classified as a hate crime at Bay Windows press time; and police had no suspects in the case.

"She was a very unique and beautiful person, and if she knew your astrological sign, then she would call you by your sign rather than [by] your name."

Other activists attending the Dec. 1 meeting included representatives from the Boston (Gay) Pride Committee, Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, Gender Identity Support Services for Transsexuals, MOCAA and the International Foundation for Gender Education.

Emotions ran high at the meeting, with several moments in which friends and family members broke down in tears while speaking about "Rita," and others in which people shouted angrily that they were tired of the "genocide against transsexuals."

Many also expressed outrage with how the local media has been covering the murder, upset by initial reports in the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald that referred to "Rita" as transgendered rather than transsexual, and disturbed with the papers' use of "he" when referring to Hester. A committee was formed to prepare a media packet to distribute to editorial staff at the publica-

tions to educate them on diversity issues.

"I did not know Rita, but when I read about what happened, I felt it was time to develop a coalition to hold the media accountable for the portrayal of our community," said Daviko Marcel, director of the Transgender Education Network who is heading the media committee.

Local transgender activist and radio talk show host Nancy Nangeroni helped oversee the meeting.

"We're here because something happened that pissed us off and because we want to do something about it," Nangeroni said.

But the overall consensus at the meeting

was to focus on preparing a visible and public response to the murder. By the meeting's end, it was agreed to have people meet at 7 p.m. Dec. 4 inside the Model Cafe at 7 Beacon St. in Brighton for a public vigil. It wasn't clear at Bay Windows press time whether the group meeting there will proceed to hold an outdoor vigil. That will depend on several factors, such as whether they would need a permit. But some at the meeting said they felt it necessary to show their rage to the public and make it known they will not tolerate violence against their community and would be willing to do so without a permit.

Hester's body was taken to Connecticut, Diana Hester said, where it will be cremated and a memorial service will be held from 5-7 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 8th at the Henry Al Fuqua Funeral Home, 96 Granby St. in Bloomfield, Conn.

Diana told Bay Windows she is happy

that her brother's death will serve a purpose by drawing attention to the discrimination and bias faced by gay and transgendered individuals.

"People just aren't very sympathetic to others' differences, including the police. ... [My brother's] death is a tragedy because he was loved so much," she said.

Hester's brother said "Rita" was a family-oriented person who had studied psychology for three semesters at Manchester Community College in Hartford before he moved to Allston in 1988, where he lived until his death. Diana Hester added that "Rita" loved to read and write poetry.

In addition to Diana and his brother, "Rita" Hester is survived by another sister, a mother and many friends.

One friend, who wished to remain anonymous, told Bay Windows that "Rita" was a very "unique" person. He recalled seeing "Rita" at Jacques in July after Hester had returned from a trip in Greece. "Rita" appeared at the bar draped in an eye-catching, white Toga-like sheet.

"She was a very unique and beautiful person, and if she knew your astrological sign, then she would call you by your sign rather than [by] your name. She never had a problem with anyone as far as I know," the source said. "She used to go out constantly to all the area bars. I would see her all the time, but in the last couple of months, I would only see her out at Jacques. She was a great person, very interesting and bizarre."

Those attending the Dec. 1 meeting said Jacques will hold an evening in Hester's memory on Dec. 13th. Employees from the bar refused to speak with Bay Windows.

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(For more information on the public vigil, call Daviko Marcel, director of the Transgender Education Network, at 617-988-2605; ext. 211.)