

## Fresno cross-dresser stabbed killed

*Police arrest fleeing naked man, review whether slaying was a possible hate crime.*

By Pablo Lopez

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Friends say Joel Robles worked hard as a dental assistant and for charity. He also liked to wear long, curly wigs and dress as a woman.

Robles, 29, became Fresno's 34th homicide victim this year after police found him stabbed multiple times early Sunday inside his apartment near downtown Fresno.

Police arrested Estanislao Martinez, 23, as he ran naked on Freeway 41 from Robles' apartment, Deputy Chief Rene Martin said Monday.

Robles' slaying is being closely monitored by his friends and gay advocates who contend the killing was motivated by hate. Martinez is in the downtown jail on suspicion of murder. His bail is \$1.025 million.

Martin said investigators are trying to determine whether there is evidence of a hate crime, which would be a penalty enhancement if Martinez were convicted. Martin declined to elaborate on the evidence against Martinez or whether he made any statements to detectives. The jail's records show Martinez was arrested at 5:20 a.m. and booked into jail at 9:07 p.m. Sunday, leaving him ample time to tell his side to detectives.

Robles lived with several other people in a spacious apartment in the 2900 block of East Huntington Boulevard, west of First Street, near Holmes Playground.

On Monday, red, white and pink roses and a religious candle formed a memorial shrine on the doorstep of his home, which had a broken front window. Residents say a naked man broke the window by jumping through it after Robles was stabbed.

At a vigil Monday evening, Robles' friends, some of them drag queens themselves, remembered him as a man who worked as a dental assistant during the week and as a woman who liked to wear wigs and dress conservatively in pink.

He was planning to be in a drag-queen fashion show Thursday. The winner typically donates the prize to his favorite charity, a friend said.

"Joel dressed as a woman not to pick up men, but because he felt comfortable that way," said Crispin Sanchez, 25, who lives in the same apartment complex as Robles.

Police, responding to a 911 call from Robles' home, found him stabbed multiple times about 4:30 a.m. Sunday. He died at University Medical Center about 7 a.m.

Martin said a preliminary investigation revealed that Robles "possibly met the suspect at an unknown location, near Chinatown," in southwest Fresno.

Martinez agreed to accompany Robles to Robles' apartment, Martin said, but at some point, "a disturbance occurred between the two parties, and the victim was stabbed multiple times."

Martinez then ran from the apartment, Martin said, but was arrested within minutes.

Sanchez spoke for the group of friends because many of them feared being ostracized if their identities were revealed. He contends Robles did not know Martinez and that Robles was a victim of a hate crime because he was dressed as a woman on the night he was slain.

"I don't think [Martinez] knew Joel was a guy, because when he dressed up, he really did look like a woman," Sanchez said.

If Robles was killed because Martinez suddenly discovered he was a man, then police should charge him with a hate crime, said Chris Daley, a lawyer and co-founder of the Transgender Law Center in San Francisco.

The reason: Robles was likely killed because of his sexual orientation, which is protected by state law, Daley said.

It would be similar to someone's killing his partner because he suddenly found out he was a Christian and not a Jew, or if he discovered he was white and not black, Daley said.

But police say it is too early in the investigation to determine whether a hate crime occurred. In general, Martin said, police have to prove a suspect targeted his victim strictly because of his race, nationality, religion or sexual orientation.

"We have to prove intent," Martin said.

There's no doubt in Sanchez's mind that Robles was singled out. He recalled other cross-dressers who have been beaten or killed in Fresno, and no one has been held accountable.

In one case, murder charges were dismissed against two men accused of fatally stabbing Charles Roe, 22, in the early morning hours of Sept. 20, 1998, and then setting his Clovis apartment afire to cover up the crime.

Prosecutors never filed hate crime charges.

Roe lived as a woman, kept his true sexual identity secret from most people and went by the name Chanel Chandler.

In Robles' case, Sanchez vowed: "This time, we're going to make sure police charge it as a hate crime and justice is done."

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