

Counting the Cost

By Marti Abernathey

Published February 27, 2008 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/counting-the-cost_n_326.htm

Abstract

If my previous post seemed a little scattered and emotional, there's a reason for it. The first trans community function I ever attended was a TDoR function, as was the first event I ever MCed outside a support group. I've been sensitive to transphobic violence at every step, and my own transition began with violence. But [...]

Article

If my previous post seemed a little scattered and emotional, there's a reason for it. The first trans community function I ever attended was a TDoR function, as was the first event I ever MCed outside a support group. I've been sensitive to transphobic violence at every step, and my own transition began with violence. But seeing the settings for it shift to schools was not something I was prepared for.

At or around November 20th of every year, the transgender community commemorates a day of remembrance (TDoR) for transgender folk who have died as a result of transphobic or homophobic violence. Since that memorial, fifteen more homicides involving transgender victims have occurred:

- Sally (Salvador) Camatoy, Dubai, 19nov.07
- Kellie Telesford, London, 21nov.07
- Elly "Sayep" Susanna, Jakarta, nov07 (during a police raid)
- Gabriela Alejandra Albornoz, Santiago, Chile, 28dec07
- Patrick Murphy, Albuquerque, NM, 08jan08
- Stacy (Jarrell) Brown, Baltimore, 08jan08
- Fedra, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 22jan08
- Three unnamed transgender persons reported (plus seven gay men), Iraq, prior to 24jan08 (shiite squads cleansing campaign -- these are missing, presumed dead)
- unnamed, Detroit, 04feb08
- Sanesha Stewart, New York, 09feb08
- Lawrence King, Oxnard, CA, 12feb08
- Simmie Williams, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 22feb08
- Adolphus Simmons, Charleston, SC, 22feb08

Not all of these murders were necessarily related to being transgender. Some of them, we'll never be able to know the motives, or even confirm that anything has happened. In some cases, victims also

worked in the sex trade (Gabriela Alejandra Albornoz, possibly Simmie Williams and allegedly Sanesha Stewart -- although Stewart may have been simply portrayed as such by New York police), which has additional dangers of its own. But in many of these, the transphobia pieces would seem fit the puzzle thus far.

We do have to be careful not to co-opt these people and the significance of their lives. They are individuals -- some, unfortunately, with stories that will never be told. I am concerned that a certain amount of capitalization might happen with King, especially. Whatever we do, we must respect their memories and wishes when we know them, give respectful space when we don't, and stand shoulder to shoulder with any related communities (i.e. drag communities, schools, GLBT and Gay-Straight Alliances, and sex workers) affected by their passing, rather than attempt to trump them.

On the other hand, the threat of transphobic violence is very real, and the issue needs to be raised, if justice is ever to be done for some. Traditionally, there have been an average of 16 or 18 people added every year to the list of names we remember at TDoR. With potentially 15 people murdered in three months, we are seeing both an increase in the reporting of such violence, and an increase in the violence itself. Additionally concerning, several on the list are transgendered youths. This is serious, and the media must know. Awareness is one of the first few tools we have to try to prevent this from happening again.

The second is non-discrimination law, and this is why we need The Matthew Shepard Act in the U.S. and a counterpart in Canada. Although such laws' effectiveness less as a deterrent and more for creating awareness, it's more than nothing. It also sends a message that this situation is unacceptable. In an age where having a penis is still widely considered justification for murder in society, a hate crime classification can go some distance to change the use of panic defenses.

One Canadian activist has in the past held a formal day of celebration of transgender lives, on March 20 (although that would put it right before Easter weekend this year), for transfolk, be they with us or lost to us. I do think this is a wonderful idea. We need to mourn, but we should not have to spend our days in mourning. Whether for those listed above, for those in our history (parts 1, 2 and 3 of 6), for appreciation of those in our support groups who hold us up and give us advice, for support of transyouth, for the success stories that we look up to (MTF and FTM) -- or just to remember that transition is not an automatic death sentence, nor should it be -- I think we do need something like this now.

I think it's time my partner and I had that community BBQ we've been talking about....

(crossposted to Dented Blue Mercedes)

Suggested citation

Marti Abernathey. "Counting the Cost." TransAdvocate, February 27, 2008.
https://www.transadvocate.com/counting-the-cost_n_326.htm