

'SKEETER



BITES

BY SKEETER SANDERS

# A Lynching in Laramie

Boston flower shop owner Robert Hillsborough. San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk. International fashion designer Gianni Versace.

These are just the three most prominent names of human beings who were brutally murdered solely because they were gay.

To that list, we can now add a fourth most-prominent name: Matthew Shepard.

Shepard didn't do anything in his life that made him stand out among then early six billion human souls who inhabit this planet we call Earth. But the brutality of his death catapulted him into the public spotlight in a way none of us expected or deserve.

Matthew Shepard was a 21-year-old student just beginning his freshman year at the University of Wyoming in

Laramie, an Old West town made famous by Hollywood in both movies and television. And the manner in which he died could have been a scene right out of an Old West movie.

Shepard was in a bar on the University of Wyoming campus where people of all sexual orientations mixed freely — much like a few of Burlington's taverns.

It was here on the night of October 6 where Shepard met and openly flirted with two straight men. Big mistake. Bars are the worst places in the world to flirt with people, even if you're straight. There's simply no way to know in advance whether the person you're interested in is even available, much less whether he or she is straight, gay or bisexual.

According to Laramie police and news media reports, Russell Arthur Henderson, 21 and Aaron James McKinney, 22, became

annoyed at Shepard's flirting with them — so annoyed that they decided to teach Shepard a lesson he'd never forget.

So, pretending to be a gay couple, Henderson and McKinney talked Shepard into going with them to an undisclosed location where they would privately have drinks — perhaps leading into a menage-a-trois sexual encounter, the reports said.

After leaving the bar and driving off in their pickup truck, Henderson and McKinney, according to police, attacked Shepard, severely beating, kicking and stomping him. One of the suspects was armed with a pistol and used it to beat Shepard over the head, smashing his skull.

The suspects then tied Shepard to a fence and left him hanging there like a scarecrow, bleeding profusely, police said. By the time two bicyclists discovered Shepard hanging on the fence in the near-freezing cold a few hours later, he had lapsed into a coma.

Shepard was rushed to Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado, but doctors there had little hope for his survival, according to The Associated Press. The AP quoted the hospital's president, Rulon Stacey, as saying that Shepard's skull was so badly smashed, it was impossible for the doctors to perform surgery.

Matthew Shepard became the latest victim in what appears to be a never-ending cycle of violent attacks, not only on GLBTs, but also on people of color. But it was not the first time he had been attacked.

According to the San Francisco gay newspaper Bay Area Reporter, Shepard had only three weeks earlier flirted with a straight man who, offended by Shepard's actions, beat and

kicked him.

Shepard apparently lacked either the experience or the common sense to know when NOT to flirt with men who aren't gay or bi. But that did not give anyone the right to physically attack him or anyone else for making that mistake.

Yet Matthew Shepard's mistake ended up costing him his life.

This has happened before. Many times before. Even in the "queer capital of America," San

ed murder that can only be described as yet another lynching.

Now, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, queer people are being lynched.

And what has been the community's response? A chorus of calls for Congress and the states to pass hate-crimes legislation. What a joke. What's really needed is for GLBTs to start fighting back — literally.

According to the Bay Area Reporter, the same two men who

**Anti-gay violence will not subside until GLBTs demonstrate that we are equally capable of resorting to brute force if we have to.**

Francisco. But what made this particular anti-gay murder so shocking — and drew media attention of an intensity not seen since Harvey Milk's assassination 20 years ago this month — was the fact that Shepard's killers tied him to a fence and left him hanging there to die.

Matthew Shepard wasn't just murdered. He was lynched. And he was lynched solely because he was gay.

Lynchings have long been a dark stain in the history of this country. And they have always been motivated by hate, regardless of the circumstances.

In November 1933, a violent mob in San Jose, California stormed a local jail and hanged two men who were suspects in the kidnapping and murder of the son of a prominent local businessman.

Many a Native American were lynched by angry white mobs in the Old West during the Indian Wars of the late 1800s.

And as recently as the mid-1960s, African Americans by the dozens were beaten and lynched by white mobs — most often by hooded Ku Klux Klansmen.

In fact, Shepard's death came less than three months after a black man in Texas was beaten and dragged to his death by two white men in a racially-motivat-

now stand accused of killing Shepard also attacked two teenagers that very same night. But the teenagers fought back, slugging one of the suspects with a two-by-four. The suspects, caught off-guard, ran away.

The Israelis always strike back whenever they are attacked. And attacks on African Americans with impunity did not subside until African Americans started fighting back in self-defense. Remember the Black Panther Party?

Likewise, anti-gay violence will not subside until GLBTs demonstrate that we are equally capable of resorting to brute force if we have to.

We've done it twice before — at Stonewall in 1969 and in San Francisco in 1979 when Harvey Milk's killer, Dan White, received a light sentence for his crime.

GLBTs are not a violent people by nature, but like everyone else, we have an absolute right to defend ourselves when we're attacked. The time has come when we must defend ourselves, peacefully when possible, violently when necessary.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a violent world — and we cannot always turn the other cheek. Enough is enough. Our attackers will leave us alone only when we start giving them an immediate taste of their own medicine.

*Skeeter Sanders is the host of "The Quiet Storm," a weekly radio program of smooth jazz and soft R&B, which airs Sundays at 10pm on WGDR-FM (91.1) in Plainfield and on the Internet in RealAudio at [www.goddard.edu/wgdr](http://www.goddard.edu/wgdr).*

## Include yourself in the 2nd edition of NH/VT Gay Lifeline

As you may have heard, the Gay Info Line of NH and *Out in the Mountains*, Vermont's monthly l/g/b/t newspaper, will soon publish a NH/VT directory of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender social, religious and political groups; meeting places; community services; and professionals sensitive to the needs of our community. We are particularly looking for physicians, realtors, contractors, mediators, and resources in the most rural areas of VT and NH.

This second edition of Gay Lifeline will be distributed through the GIL and OITM to listed resources and to l/g/b/t communities and organizations. We'd like your help to make this edition even better than the first.

There is no fee for inclusion in the Gay Lifeline, but you can reserve your copy of our directory now by making a minimum \$25 donation to the Gay Info Line. Any person or group who donates \$50 or more will also be listed in the directory as a sponsor. Thanks for your help. Please give us the information requested at right to be included in the directory. Feel free to print out this form and share it with other individuals or organizations who think should be included.

NAME (or contact person) .....

ORGANIZATION.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY .....STATE .....ZIP .....

LOCATION (if different than mailing address) .....

TEL.....FAX .....

EMAIL.....WWW .....

Type of Service Org:.....

Do you have Meetings? YES or NO How Often: .....

\*\*\*\* Attach a short description (30 words max.)

L/G/B/T Owned/Identified? YES or NO

(indicated by a Lambda sign beside your listing)

Whom can we contact regarding your listing? .....

Thanks for your help and prompt return of this form. If you have questions, please feel free to call the gay info Line at 603/224-1686 or email us at [gayinfoh@aol.com](mailto:gayinfoh@aol.com)

RETURN FORM TO: 26 S. Main St, Box 181, Concord, NH 03301

## Greenhope Farm

**BED & BREAKFAST**  
RFD Box 2260  
East Hardwick, Vermont 05836  
(802) 533-7772

- 140 private acres of nature trails.
- Horseback riding on our own gentle horses.
- Cross country ski from our door.
- Cozy rooms and secluded campsites.

◆ Advisement ◆ Web Page Design ◆ Business Ad Design ◆

Tutoring

## CompAssist

COMPUTER SOLUTIONS FOR EVERYONE!

Call us: (802)362-5567

E-mail us: [Support@CompAssistVt.com](mailto:Support@CompAssistVt.com)

Our Web page: [www.CompAssistVt.com](http://www.CompAssistVt.com)

GAY OWNED AND OPERATED - ALL WORK STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

PC Backups

◆ Troubleshooting ◆ Graphic Design ◆ Win 95 Up-Grades ◆

## advertise in

# OITM

## 802/434-OITM