

A DEATH BLAMED ON HATE IS NOT THAT AT ALL - GAY DETROITER HAD ARTHRITIS, EXAMINER SAYS

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As the story went, **Andrew Anthos** was beaten to death in February for simply being gay.

But it was arthritis - not hatred - that ultimately led to the death of the 72-year-old Detroit, the Wayne County medical examiner told the Free Press on Wednesday.

The Detroit Police Department said it has accepted that **Anthos** died of natural causes and closed its investigation, saying no witnesses have been found to confirm a beating.

It is a decision that has surprised and upset his family and a growing list of gay-rights advocates and politicians who cited his death to promote the prosecution of hate crimes based on sexual orientation.

"That sickens me," said Athena Fedenis, the dead man's cousin and the person who widely promoted the account that **Anthos** was taunted and beaten by an assailant with a pipe. It is an account she said she heard directly from her cousin as he lay dying in a Detroit hospital. "They're going to say it didn't happen?"

State Sen. Hansen Clarke, who is supporting legislative efforts in Lansing, urged police not to give up.

"I believe there are witnesses that Mr. **Anthos** was being harassed because he was gay," Clarke said. "I'd ask the police not to close this case yet."

Wayne County Medical Examiner Dr. Carl Schmidt said **Anthos** succumbed to a degenerative condition, known as spinal stenosis, that developed and worsened over many years.

Schmidt said that his condition, which narrows the spine and compresses the spinal cord and nerves, caused him to suddenly lose the use of his legs that night and fall. Following surgery, the paralysis spread through his body, ultimately resulting in respiratory failure.

Schmidt said his examination of **Anthos** did not support the widely reported accounts that **Anthos** was attacked outside his Detroit apartment after leaving a city bus. Police said they could not find evidence that a pipe-wielding assailant shouted antigay slurs.

Anthos, known for his singing and eccentric campaigning for a long-held dream to light the state Capitol dome, died Feb. 23 after languishing for 10 days in Detroit Receiving Hospital.

Anthos' death had been widely reported by the news media, including the Free Press, as a hate crime.

From the sidewalks near his Lafayette Park home to the halls of Congress, the death was decried.

On March 2, U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., promoting new legislation, recounted on the Senate floor how an assailant "struck **Anthos** in the back with a metal pipe, leaving him critically injured, lying in the snow."

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, implicated religious conservatives soon after the death.

"The hatred and loathing that led to the vicious murder of **Andrew Anthos** only because he was gay is not innate," Foreman said in a statement. "Instead it is being taught every day by leaders of the so-called Christian right and their political allies."

But it was likely a simple movement, not a whack on the head, that felled the man, Schmidt said.

"He probably just flexed his neck," which caused arthritic spurs to compress his spinal cord enough to cause paralysis of his legs. After spinal surgery in the hospital, that numbness later spread to his upper body and caused **Anthos** to stop breathing, Schmidt said.

The only injury noted in the autopsy was a 2-inch-wide bruise on the back of **Anthos**' head, which likely came when he fell, Schmidt said. The injury was minor, he said.

A CT scan "of his head disclosed no skull fracture, no injury to the brain, no bleeding to the brain," Schmidt said.

Fedenis has said in interviews that her cousin told her about the attack while **Anthos** was in the hospital. She said police interviewed him and a friend of **Anthos**, whom she believed witnessed the attack.

Police said they indeed interviewed that friend and the bus driver. The driver reported that he had heard raised voices from the rear of his bus, but couldn't make out who was saying what.

The friend, police said, reported getting off the bus in front of **Anthos** and hearing a thump. He turned to see **Anthos** lying on the sidewalk and another man standing over him. That man turned and walked away without a word.

According to the friend, there was nothing in the man's hand and he did not see him touch **Anthos**.

Initially, **Anthos** told police he did not know what happened to him, police said. But about a week later, he told police he was struck from behind after someone called out, asking him if he was gay.

The friend helped police create a sketch of the man reportedly standing near **Anthos**, but that man has not been found.

In addition, detectives rode and walked the bus route for three days looking for witnesses, but could find nobody, said Lt. Linda Vertin, who oversees homicide investigators.

"So the case will be closed," Vertin said.

Melissa Pope, director of victim services for the Triangle Foundation, a metro Detroit advocacy group that promotes gay and lesbian issues, said her group still believes evidence exists of a hate crime given the statements of **Anthos** and his friend.

"We are still hoping the police will aggressively investigate this crime," Pope said.

Fedenis said her cousin was a gentle person, openly gay and loved singing.

She has pledged to carry on his campaign to light the Capitol dome on the Fourth of July in red, white and blue to honor military veterans, saying she has established a fund to keep the deathbed promise, and had collected about \$600 so far.

She said the dry, clinical conclusion of the authorities can't trump her cousin's anguish.

"He was crying - because he was just crushed that someone would do that to him."

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: **Andrew Anthos** of Detroit was known for his singing and eccentric campaigning for a long-held dream to light the state Capitol dome to honor military veterans. He died Feb. 23 at age 72.

CAPTIONWRITER: 1996 photo by J. KYLE KEENER / Detroit Free Press

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