

BUT DOES IT MATTER HOW HE DIED?

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Maybe we'll never really know what happened in the final days of the life of **Andrew Anthos**.

Was he attacked because he was gay, as he told his family before slipping into a coma? Or maybe it was as the Wayne County medical examiner reported Wednesday: He fell victim to a degenerative disease that caused his spine to compress at age 72.

"I'm sick to my stomach," said his cousin, Athena Fedenis, who stands by the story that **Anthos** was the victim of a hate crime. "I don't want his life or his death to be tarnished. He wouldn't have made it up."

We may never know exactly what happened. But the one question I have is: Does it matter?

A death in vain?

Anthos was an eccentric man, a fixture in Greektown whose lifelong avocation was to deck the state Capitol dome in red, white and blue lights once a year to honor our police and veterans.

At his funeral, mourners listened to the show tunes **Anthos** loved and shared stories of his life. One thing everyone agreed upon: No matter how quirky he could be, he didn't deserve to be bludgeoned to death for who he was.

I was one of those people who was deeply affected by the idea that **Anthos** was killed because he was gay. I joined the public outrage over the hate crime and was heartened by the outpouring of support.

One woman I met at the funeral said that she had never met **Anthos**. She'd come to prove to the family that not everyone out there hated gays.

Now, with the possibility that he died from natural causes, I can't help but recall the Rev. Al Sharpton after the Tawana Brawley scandal. In 1987, the nation was outraged when Brawley, an African-American teenager, accused six white men of raping her, covering her body with feces and racial epithets and leaving her for dead.

After all the high emotions and investigations, it was ruled that she'd faked the whole thing.

And so, all of that righteous indignation was squandered.

Living for a change

But this is not an elaborate hoax; **Anthos** has gone. Today there may be questions about how he died, but there's no question about how he lived - as a gay man often weathering hideous acts of unspeakable hatred.

His death, however it happened, has engendered positive change. Just last week, U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit, introduced legislation to include crimes based on sexual orientation in federal hate-crime legislation.

State Sen. Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit, plans to do the same at the state level.

Such legislation would not only help track the incidence of hate crimes against gays, but it would allow more resources to be put into the investigation of those crimes.

And **Anthos'** family has vowed to continue his cause to light the Capitol dome, not only to honor police and veterans, but also to symbolize tolerance and compassion.

Does it matter how **Andrew Anthos** died?

Maybe not. Maybe what really matters now is how the rest of us choose to live.

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