

FREE

# BETWEEN THE LINES

For Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals & Friends

#25 APRIL 1995

## HOMOPHOBIA KILLS

Another gay man  
dead in Michigan

On March 13, 1995, Scott Amedure died from two shotgun blasts to his chest, delivered by Jonathan Schmitz of Orion Township.

*Between The Lines* examines the homophobia behind the incendiary remarks of Oakland County Prosecutor Dick Thompson, the poor media coverage of the murder, the talk show hate, and the murderous actions of Jon Schmitz.

*See Murder, page 9*

6

### AIDS Housing

Wellness House pushes city, neighborhood to allow new AIDS housing in Royal Oak

9

### Talk Back!

Community Equality Project offers ways to respond to homophobia in Michigan

17

### OutWrite '95

Queer writers from coast to coast meet and talk about putting out the good word

# Homophobia Kills: The Murder of Scott Amedure

On Thursday, March 9, 1995, in Orion Township, Scott Amedure, 32, was murdered by Jonathan Schmitz, 24. Earlier in the week, the two had been in Chicago to tape a segment of "The Jenny Jones Show" about secret admirers.

Three weeks before the murder, Scott Amedure met Jonathan Schmitz through a mutual friend, Donna Riley. According to family and friends, Amedure was a fan of television talk shows. He responded to a request from the Jenny Jones show for secret admirers.

Producers of the show contacted Schmitz, who initially refused to go on the show, but was convinced by friends and co-workers his place of employment, the Fox and Hound Restaurant in Bloomfield Hills to attend the taping of the segment. Schmitz had recently ended a relationship with a fiancée and was apparently intrigued by meeting a new partner. According to reports in the media, he purchased \$300 worth of new clothes in anticipation of the show.

When Schmitz arrived on the show, he walked onstage and saw his friend Donna Riley, leaned over and kissed her, apparently believing her to be the admirer. Jenny Jones then told Schmitz that Scott Amedure had the secret attraction and the show was about men who have crushes on other men.

Schmitz told the audience he was heterosexual and politely maintained his composure for the rest of the taping, police and neighbors said Thursday. On the plane ride home from Chicago, Schmitz told a woman on the plane that he was "bitterly disappointed and humiliated when (the secret admirer) turned out to be Amedure," according to the Detroit Free Press. After greeting Riley and Amedure as they boarded the plane, Schmitz told the woman who sat next to him on the plane ride, "I'm not mad, but if I think about it a while, I might get mad," according to Sheriff's Deputy Randy Praski in the Free Press.

Upon reaching Detroit, Schmitz offered Riley and Amedure a ride home to Orion Township. The three partied that night at Brewski's in Lake Orion.

On Thursday morning, March 9, Jonathan Schmitz returned home after spending the night with a friend. He found an unsigned, sexually-suggestive note taped to his door, along with a flashing road sign. Amedure had taken such a sign from the Chicago airport.

Later that morning, Schmitz's neighbor Laurie Caddick saw him get into his

car, according to the Detroit Free Press. He was nicely dressed, and she assumed he was going to the Fox and Hound, where he worked. His first stop, however, was Gary's Guns Shop in Oxford.

Nancy Morgan, owner of the gun shop, told the Free Press that Schmitz bought a pump-action shotgun. Schmitz told Morgan that he was going duck-hunting with his father, and she showed him how to break down the shotgun. He paid \$200 cash, asked her for the time, and said, "Good, I have time before I go to work."

Schmitz stopped at Tom's Hardware in Oxford to buy five rounds of buckshot, before proceeding to Amedure's trailer in Orion Township. He arrived at the trailer shortly before 11am, knocked on the door, and asked Amedure if he had written the note. Gary Brady, Amedure's housemate, says that Amedure denied writing the note, at which point Schmitz told him that he had to go turn off his car. Schmitz returned with the shotgun and shot

Amedure two times in the chest.

Schmitz drove away to a gas station, where he call 911 from a phone booth. He told the operator that he "just shot a man," began crying, and said he killed Amedure "because he fucking humiliated me on national TV."

## Prosecutor Aids Defense Case

In a press conference on Friday, March 10, Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson lambasted the media and talk shows as the reason for this murder. "In my view 'The Jenny Jones Show' ambushed this defendant with humiliation," Prosecutor Thompson said in the Detroit News and Free Press, "In retaliation, the defendant ambushed the victim with a shotgun. . . Had this [show] not occurred, I don't believe this defendant would be facing these charges."

Statements made to the press by both the prosecutor and the police led the media to focus on the ostensible culpability of "The Jenny Jones Show" and unethical media practices in general,

instead of focusing on the admitted murderer's homophobia.

Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols called the talk show, "A cynical pursuit of ratings over common decency and good taste. They used a ruse to humiliate a person on national television."

Newsprint, television, and radio media outlets printed the facts of the murder, but gave credence to the viewpoints of prosecutor Thompson and the police by using headlines such as "Deadly trick on 'Jenny Jones'" (The Detroit News), "Man is slain after talk show surprise" (The Detroit Free Press), and "Man killed over stunt on TV show" (The New York Post). Stories focused on the personality and problems of Scott Amedure, and the responsibility of the talk show, rather than the homophobia of the admitted murderer, Jonathan Schmitz.

It is not legally appropriate or possible for the prosecutor in this murder case to bring charges against "The Jenny Jones Show," and the types of statements put forth by prosecutor Thomp-

son to many observers seem inappropriate and unhelpful to his role as an attorney bring charges against Schmitz.

According to Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga, "It is not legally foreseeable that somebody would commit a murder as a result of being put into an embarrassing situation on a TV show... I don't see anything in this show that made this segment more embarrassing or humiliating than any other segments. Simply because two people were of the same sex is not cause for heightening the reaction to murder."

Marlinga continued: "I think that prosecutor Thompson made a number of unfortunate remarks. I was hoping that by this time he would apologize for them. ...I think it was inappropriate to shift some blame on 'The Jenny Jones Show.' It misdirected attention from the real crime, which was, on an individual basis the tragic death of Scott Amedure, and on a more general basis an indication of society's willingness to give in to irrational hatreds."

Prosecutor Richard Thompson would not come to the phone or return calls from *Between The Lines*.

### Queer Community Leaders Bring Focus to Hate Crime

The Michigan gay/lesbian community, however, does not believe that queer crushes provoke violence and murder. In a press conference on Monday, March 13, local queer community leaders spoke out about the homophobia motivating this murder, the mislaid blame of the criminal justice system on talk shows, and the misconstrued issues portrayed in the media.

Responding to prosecutor Thompson's refusal to see this murder as a hate crime, Shea Howell, Professor of Communications at Oakland University said, "This case in every instance meets the criteria for a hate crime."

"Richard Thompson is a public official, and whether or not he agrees with anyone's sexual orientation, he has an obligation to stand up for the citizens in Oakland County," continued Howell. "We have seen that in every state and every city, if public officials and civic leaders took a gay-affirmative stance, violence went down. If officials remain silent or express 'concern' about issues of sexual orientation, violence went up, such as in Colorado after the anti-gay ballot initiative was introduced."

Jan Stevenson, Executive Director of Affirmations Lesbian/Gay Community Center, said that in the weeks following the murder, Thompson has dug his heels in, refusing to condemn anti-gay violence. "He recently said on TV that he talked to a psychiatrist who has said that murder is not an extraordinary response. It's in the range of what could be expected of a man approached by another man." Questioning the helpfulness of such statements to Thompson's ability to prosecute Schmitz on murder

charges, Stevenson said the clear motivation for the statements is political.

"Dick Thompson is a Republican. The Republican party has been very clear nationally and locally that they're not legislatively going to be a friend to the gay community," explained Stevenson.

Triangle Foundation's Jeff Montgomery agrees. "Thompson is blatantly pandering to his Republican constituency. He's not doing anything for the gay community in Oakland County except instilling fear and terror."

While Thompson has responded, in turn, that gay community leaders are using the issue to advance a gay agenda, Shea Howell asserted, "It would be nice if we didn't have to interject in this case.

## Hate Crimes Designation Guidelines

The following criteria, which largely follow those established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation pursuant to the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, are used to determine if an incident was motivated by anti-lesbian/gay hate:

- 1) offenders used anti-gay or AIDS-related language;
- 2) a history of anti-lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender incidents in the same area;
- 3) crime shows evidence of intense rage (e.g. severe beating or mutilation);
- 4) a substantial portion of the lesbian/gay community where the crime occurred perceived that the incident was motivated by bias;
- 5) the incident coincided with a lesbian/gay event, such as Pride Day or National Coming Out Day; or
- 6) the victim was engaged in activities promoting lesbian/gay rights, or activities in response to AIDS.

Additional criteria are used to determine if homicides are or appear to be motivated by anti-lesbian/gay hate.

In Dearborn Heights, this type of response was not necessary, because the police understood that the murder of Gary Rocus was a gay hate crime."

### Continued Pressure on Thompson

On April 4, Jonathan Schmitz will attend a preliminary hearing based on the charge of premeditated, first degree murder. Affirmations, the Triangle Foundation, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force have planned a vigil at 7 pm at the Oakland County Courthouse to remember Scott Amedure and speak out against homophobia.

Until then, activists continue to place pressure on Dick Thompson for a hate crimes designation. Chris Dietz, member of Log Cabin Republicans, a gay and lesbian political group, says Log Cabin is trying to get support from Republicans in Oakland County to recognize the murder as a hate crime and put pressure on Thompson. As of now, Log Cabin's Republican contacts want to wait for more information about the murder, and are not pressing for a hate crimes designation.

Says Dietz, "This case is about murder, the murder of a gay man. It is also about the very Republican concept of personal responsibility, which Mr. Thompson seems to have forgotten about."

### Questions Remain

Some facts of the case have not been resolved. Scott Amedure's mother asserts that Amedure told her that he and

Schmitz had sex after their night out with Riley following the talk show. Schmitz's lawyer, Fred Gibson, was quoted in the Oakland Press on March 11 as saying, "My client is not a homosexual and takes great offense to anyone who says he maintains such a lifestyle."

Whether or not Schmitz is gay or bisexual, the murder of Scott Amedure is a hate crime. Homophobia is the motivation and legitimization of hate crimes against gay men and lesbians. According to Jan Stevenson, "Fear and hatred of gay men and lesbians leads to murder. Hate crimes and the designation of a hate crime by criminal justice offices is about the reason for the crime or murder, not about the sexual orientation of

the perpetrator. In the Amedure case, the perpetrator, Jon Schmitz, was clearly motivated by hatred, fear, and revulsion of Scott Amedure because he was a gay man. Jon Schmitz' sexuality aside, this is clearly a hate crime."

### The Broader Context and Response

Unfortunately, the murder of Scott Amedure is one in a string of anti-gay/lesbian homicides in Michigan over the past decade. These homicides reflect continued and increasingly violent and hateful attacks on gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people in

Michigan and throughout the nation and demand a cogent and forceful response from the queer communities.

Murder is one extreme on a continuum of violence against queer people. Violence of any form against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people enforces the repression and oppression of queer people through the powerful weapons of homophobia and heterosexism. A single murder of a gay man or lesbian sends a powerful message to all of our communities that we are hated, despised, and unsafe. A single incident of violence serves to put all of our communities on notice that we are vulnerable to attack and to murder. Violence serves to pressure us to be silent and compliant, to stay "in line", to not speak out, to not come out.

Our response to the murder of Scott Amedure and to the murder and/or victimization of every other gay man, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person must be exactly the opposite of the intent of the violence. While we must acknowledge our vulnerability, we must also be visible, speak out, and come out. Violence demands fear; we must assert pride. Violence demands submission; we must assert liberation.

In the particular case of Scott Amedure, the collusion of the media and criminal justice system to resist labelling the murder as a hate crime continues to entrench the notion that queer people are not victimized by hatred and bigotry. In fact, the violence that gay, les-

bian, bisexual, and transgender people experience as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is but one piece of hatred and bigotry. Hateful language, legislation which persecutes people based on their sexual orientation, and murder all exist in the same continuum as mechanisms to continue the oppression of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Our response as a community must not be to cower in fear, to limit or minimize our activities, to silence and edit our lives. Our response must be to come out more, to speak publicly about our lives as queer people, and to demand justice for those who victimize us and for ourselves. We deserve to live and be heard. We deserve lives free from violence. We deserve civil rights. We deserve to demand our vision of a world free of homophobia and heterosexism.