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The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson

By David France

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[indistinct chatter]

[woman 1] Do you know what this is?

[woman 2] It's for Marsha. Marsha Johnson.

-[woman 1] Who's that?

-[woman 2] Well, she was, um...

a transvestite from the Village
who recently died.

She was a big activist.

Um, we're not sure how she died yet.

Murder, maybe?

Marsha Johnson,

a veteran of the Stonewall riots,

and a prominent figure

among transvestites,

was found dead in the river

near Christopher Street, Monday morning.

Marsha, whose real name

was Malcolm Michaels Jr.,

was last seen alive on Thursday.

The police lists suicide

as the cause of death,

but community leaders cite

a lack of evidence,

and charge that police

have yet to begin an investigation

into the death of this beloved founder

of the gay movement.

A demonstration is planned

for next week on Christopher Street.

Marsha was 46 years old and is survived

by four brothers and two sisters.

She will be greatly missed.

[thunder rumbling]

[siren wailing]

[Sue Yacka] Do we have everyone?

Let's start with the most recent incident,
which happened over the weekend.

A 35-year-old transgender woman
was attacked

outside of her home

in Jackson Heights, Queens.

Um, last we heard was that the survivor
is not yet conscious

or able to communicate,
and they've not been in a position
where we could offer support.

She had her head smashed
against the curb of a sidewalk
by, uh, someone who has fled
and has not yet been apprehended.

[man] Keep us posted.

[Catherine Santos] And let us know
what you need.

[Sue] Remember, the Nettles case is back
in court this Friday.

[man] Yeah, we'll be there.

[Victoria] I've been working for the LGBTQ
Anti-Violence project for many years,
and I'm about to retire.

But there's a massive number
of trans women who have been murdered,
and their cases have just gone cold.

And they're yelling out
from their graves...

for justice.

Most of them were unknown,
but even famous people, cases go cold,
just like Marsha.

Marsha was famous all around the world.

Her case has been cold for 25 years.

If we can't bring justice for Marsha,
how can we bring justice
for all these other unsolved cases?

I wanna try to give Marsha justice
before I leave.

[camerawoman] This is the memorial
that the street people laid down,
where they laid Marsha's body
when they pulled Marsha out of the water.
Right over the edge here.

[man] You're looking for '92, right?

[Victoria] It was July of '92.

[man] Everyone knew Marsha.
Marsha was so full of life.

It's hard for me to believe
that she would commit suicide.

[Victoria] Yeah, this is her case.

-I was there when they pulled her out.
-[camerawoman] Yeah?
Where did you see her floating?
[man] Right over there.
She was about this...
Right there, let's say.
And the head was up
and the feet were down.
She wasn't floating flat,
she was floating down.
And she had a hole in her head.
[camerawoman] How do you know
she had a hole in her head?
-I could see it.
-Really?
-[cameraman] You can't judge that...
-It could be the fish--
I'm just saying it was a hole.
I'm not saying what happened.
All I'm telling you is what I saw.
She didn't look anything like we knew her.
[indistinct chatter]
[Taylor Mead] Isn't this calming
and nice to come here?
They set aside this whole pier for us
so we could come and relax here.
[man on street] Marsha!
[Taylor] Marsha Johnson,
Queen of the Village. One of the great...
This is one of the most courageous people
in the world.
I've always loved...
I always wanted to put on drag
and I never had the courage.
This is one of the people
that has the courage.
And bravo for him. Her.
Or whatever he wants to be.
And not only that, he doesn't give a shit
whether he wears men's clothes
or women's clothes.
-Right? He's totally free.
-Right. That's right.
If he feels like going out as a man,

he goes out as a man.

-He feels like a woman, he's a woman.

-How do you know all this?

If he feels like wearing roller skates,
he wears roller skates. Whatever.

I know Marsha Johnson.

-Marsha Johnson is our queen forever.

-[both laughing]

[dialing]

[operator] You have reached
the Office of Chief Medical Examiner
for the City of New York.

My name is Victoria Cruz
and I'm inquiring about a Malcolm Michaels
who was found dead in 1992.

There was an autopsy.

How would I be able to get
this particular information?

[woman] Are you calling
from the media or--

I'm calling from the Anti-Violence Project
here in New York City.

I can give you the cause of death
and the manner of death.

You would not be entitled
to a full autopsy report.

If you're looking for all that paperwork,
then the family needs to request it
in a written letter,
and you can get the record that way.

[Victoria] 907.

"The Michaels family."

[knocks on door]

[Jean Michaels] How are you?

-[Victoria] Pleased to meet you.

-Pleased to meet you, too.

Here, I'll take this one
'cause it's much easier to get up from.

-Okay.

-[Jean] Okay, go ahead.

Okay.

What do you know about the case?

I really don't know anything.

All we know is that

they found him in the river.
We really don't know anything about that.
[Victoria] That's what
we're investigating,
'cause we have eyewitnesses
that report seeing him... her...
What do you prefer me...
for me to call Marsha?
-It doesn't matter. Okay.
-Okay.
When was the last time you saw her alive?
We saw her before the Fourth of July.
-Monday? Tuesday?
-I don't know what day that was.
It was during the week.
She stopped by our house
and I took him to the train station.
-He got on the train and that was it.
-[Victoria] Okay.
Next thing we know, we got a phone call
saying that he was dead.
Yeah, we sure did.
We went to New York and everything.
[Victoria] And did you request
to see the body or no?
My sister asked, they told her no.
They couldn't.
They're not allowed to do that.
Okay.
This is the letter that we requested
in order to get the autopsy report,
toxicology report
and the pictures, if some were taken.
And hopefully, we can bring
some closure to her case.
Because to me, she was the Rosa Parks
of the LGBT movement.
-You miss her?
-Yes, I miss him.
[Robert] He adopted the name
of Marsha "Pay It No Mind."
[Victoria] Pay it no mind.
That's your problem, not mine.
[all laughing]

[Robert] Anything he did,
he'd have you laughing.
When he told us stories,
we didn't believe him.
I'd tell him, "You're lying.
You didn't know Andy Warhol.
-You didn't know those people."
-[Victoria] Yes, she did!
She knew a lot of famous people.
She was famous herself.
Well, she told us. We...
I didn't believe her.
I thought he was joking.
Only thing that Marsha couldn't do
was sing.
-Horrible. Horrible.
-[Jean] No, no. No.
[all laughing]
He could not sing.
[Jimmy Camicia] And now,
ladies and gentlemen...
Miss Marsha P. Johnson!
[audience cheering and applauding]
It sent Zelda to the nuthouse
It sent Scott into a drink
It sent Caesar, Cleopatra
And caused Ilium to sink
[audience laughing]
Now let's not be pessimistic
I say love is worth a try
Make no mistake, unless it's fake
The price you pay is high
The price you pay is high
The price you pay is...
High
[audience cheering and applauding]
[man] Encore! Encore!
-[Victoria] Hi, Randy. Remember me?
-[Randy Wicker] Hi.
Yes. You look very familiar.
-Yes. How are you? I like your shirt.
-Fine. And yourself?
You got the same button, huh?
-Yeah, how do you like that?

-How are you?

-Well, come on in the living room.

-Okay.

[Randy] As you see,
Marsha's a big part of my life.

[Victoria] Yes, I know.
In my opinion, I want that picture someday
to be in the Schomburg Museum.
They call her "Andy Warhol model,
prostitute, starring actress and saint."

-Where'd you meet Marsha?

-Uh...

I had a kid who lived with me,
who was like an adopted son, Roy.
That's a picture of Roy and Marsha
right there.

And one night, it was, like,
five degrees outside.
He said, "Could Marsha come
and sleep on the living room floor?"

So Marsha came in that night
and stayed for the next 12 years.

[Victoria] What do you think
happened to her?

Well, it certainly was not suicide.
That was an insult to the family.
No way could Marsha in any way
have committed suicide.

But let's face it.

The police department,
they had made up their mind.

"This case is over with.

We don't wanna be bothered.

'Cause this is a nobody.

This isn't a person."

Let me ask you a question.

Would you be able to give us any contacts
or information that you may have?

[siren wailing in distance]

[Randy humming]

I have worked
to make this place more accessible.

[continues humming]

Somewhere I have a printout

of the names and contacts
that I consider to be
the best leads. [grunts]
Oh, okay. Yeah. I found that.
We began down at the river.
-[indistinct chatter through speakers]
-[Victoria] Who's "we"?
A group of Marsha's friends.
Maybe 20 people.
And this was the...
[Randy over speakers]
And the police have written us off
as marginalized citizens.
[Victoria] That was the memorial
at the pier.
That was where her body laid
and damaged the sidewalk.
[through speakers] Well, I just meant...
What we're really here today to talk about
is what we're gonna do
about this loss of a national treasure,
this icon of the gay community,
this fire at Stonewall.
[man] The cops aren't doing their job.
They're just sitting on their fat asses.
We have to send a message to these people.
We demand justice here.
Join us. Sixth precinct is not
doing their job again.
We want some answers!
I knew Marsha.
Marsha was the happiest person I knew.
[male protester] Yeah. Yes, she was.
[protesters] Do their job! Do their job!
Do their job! Do their job!
[Joe Cooper] We know that this wasn't
a suicide.
You guys closed your books on it
and decided,
because she's a marginal citizen,
that you weren't going to do
anything about it.
We don't agree with that,
and we want you guys

to do your fucking jobs.
My name is Randy Wicker.
I was the deceased's roommate.
I think the problem is that,
first, it's been classified as a suicide,
and I came to believe that
there was a good chance of foul play
'cause she was talking about
the Mafia after her
and in a very bad state.
And we may never know what happened.
But we wanna see
this investigation proceed
in an orderly and thorough manner.
And that the investigation will continue
to accumulate evidence
if new evidence does become available.
I don't think that it's possible
for you to schedule a meeting
that will resolve this problem
to your satisfaction today.
I don't think that's possible.
We want justice here,
to find out who the hell murdered Marsha,
while you fucking people are standing here
not doing your fucking jobs!
-Justice for Marsha!
-[Randy] Justice for Marsha!
My name is Sylvia Rivera,
and I'm giving permission
to have this filmed.
When I met Marsha,
I must've been 12 years old.
She was like a mother to me.
Marsha was an icon of the gay movement.
Marsha was known through the world.
Marsha and I, we were the liberators.
And the street people
and the drag queens were...
the vanguard of the movement.
We were the ones that stood the forefront
and fought the cops off.
And we're the ones that didn't mind
getting our heads bashed in.

When I first came to the Stonewall,
I was the only drag queen there,
just about.
I said, "Honey, what do you think,
I'm a boy or a girl?"
They didn't answer,
so I decided to go in. [chuckles]
'Cause it was a all-men's bar.
The Stonewall was
a very nice campy little bar
owned by the Mafia, you know.
Gay people were not allowed in bars.
The Mafia would pay off the cops.
Typical of that era.
It was hard being a drag queen back then
because they would take us into jail
for no reason at all.
We lived in an era that was unreal.
[indistinct chatter]
I was spaced out on black beauties
and scotch.
We would dance, my lover and I.
The next thing we know,
the lights came on and...
Hey, we're being raided.
Queens started being filed out
and being put into police cars,
and guns had been drawn.
Molotov cocktails were flying.
And I'm like, "Oh, my God,
the revolution is here. Thank God."
You've been treating us like shit
all these years?
Uh-uh. Now it's our turn.
[Marsha] When I got downtown,
the place was already on fire.
Sylvia Rivera and them were
over in the park having a cocktail.
And we were in the streets
turning over cars
and, oh, my dear, blocking traffic
and screaming and hollering
and everything.
I mean, there was a lot of bloodshed

that night.

And the movement started the next day.

[crowd shouting indistinctly]

[reporter] The world is having to notice what it used to try to ignore.

Homosexuals no longer meekly melt away under the blast of scorn, ridicule or hatred.

Today's gay power people are struggling for full economic and legal recognition and acceptance.

[crowd chanting indistinctly]

-[reporter] Why are you here today?

-Darling, I want my gay rights now.

I think it's about time the gay brothers and sisters got their rights.

-And especially the women.

-[reporter laughs]

Marsha was very good-natured.

She was funny. She laughed.

But that shouldn't be mistaken for a lack of serious purpose and political intent.

[Agosto Machado] Her mission in life is going about spreading peace and goodwill. Giving license to, "You don't have to be dressed up in a suit."

You can express yourself.

She became, to me, like a bodhisattva.

A holy person who would wander the Village in whatever adornment she wanted, being at peace.

How will this affect your job?

Darling, I don't have a job.

I'm on welfare.

I have no intentions of getting a job as long as this country discriminates against homosexuals.

[man] Right on.

[protesters chanting] Justice!

Justice! Justice! Justice!

[Karla] Sylvia was always very outspoken. She was unrelenting.

She was... Sylvia was very in-your-face.

Very intense eyes. A slash of a mouth.
A guttural laugh like Marlene Dietrich.
Sylvia was quite the serious one.
She pushed her way to the front line.
"Homes for the homeless!
Food for the poor!
Gay rights! Gay rights!"
[protesters] P!
-[Sylvia] O!
-[protesters] O!
-[Sylvia] W!
-[protesters] W!
-[Sylvia] E!
-[protesters] E!
-[Sylvia] R!
-[protesters] R!
-Tell me what!
-[protesters] Gay power!
-I can't hear you!
-[protesters] Gay power!
A little bit louder!
[protesters] Gay power!
After a while, I think they knew
that they most had to concentrate
on the area
that no one was addressing for them,
and that only they could address.
And that was being transgender.
[Sylvia] Marsha and I thought one day
we needed to do something for our own.
That's where STAR was born.
Street Transvestites
Action Revolutionaries.
[Marsha] Sylvia Lee Rivera deserves
all the credit for STAR.
I was just one of the queens
that was behind her,
like the vice president of STAR.
She knew exactly
what she was talking about.
She was talking about nobody's
representing transvestites, ya know?
The one thing they had in common
which bonded them,

why their name
should always be connected,
is that they helped those
who were on the street,
just trying to live their lives.
And a lot of them got on the street
and ended up hooking or hustling
to make a buck,
and they sometimes had no place to stay.
[Sylvia] Marsha and I started STAR House
to keep the kids off the streets.
To get these kids
get their things together.
STAR was part
of the people's revolution,
and it was time for us to show the world
that we are human beings.
[Victoria] I didn't know Marsha, but I
became very close friends with Sylvia.
Back in the late '60s,
I was going out with Frankie,
who was a bouncer at the Stonewall.
Frankie was always cheating on me,
and he was going out
with Sylvia's best friend at the time.
Sylvia and I didnt get along too well,
so I had lost sight of her for 25 years.
One day I went to a meeting,
and who was there? Sylvia.
She sat right across from me,
and she got up and she says, "I know you."
And I got up, too,
and I says, "I know you, too."
And then this button,
she had it on her left side,
popped out and it just rolled to my feet.
So one of the girls picked it up
and Sylvia says,
"No, give it to her. She's one of us."
And from that moment on,
we became very close friends.
We spoke to each other
at least twice a week.
And she was always there

for me and the community.
And I will never forget that.
When she spoke about Marsha,
there was always a tear in her eyes.
She loved Marsha, and she said that
that was our mother.
What's been going on
with the Marsha P. Johnson case?
There seems to be conflicting evidence
on the last time she was seen.
Randy said he last saw her on the second.
-[Marsha] Thank you very much, doll.
-[man] My pleasure.
[Victoria] And then someone reported
seeing her on the night of the fourth.
And the body was found on the sixth.
So we're gonna ask more questions
of people who knew her
or reported seeing her during that time.
And that's what we're trying to find out.
We'll get to the bottom of it.
Okay.
[line ringing]
[busy signal beeping]
[line ringing]
[automated voice] Please leave a message
after the tone. When--
[line ringing]
[Daniel Massanova] Can I help you?
Yes. May I speak to Daniel Massanova?
That's me. What's the matter?
What's up?
Daniel, my name is Victoria Cruz.
I work for the Anti-Violence Project.
I'm working on a reopened case
from 1992...
-What was the name of the victim?
-Marsha P. Johnson.
Are you talking
about the girl off the water?
Yes.
Yeah, that was Jimmy Abreu's case.
Jimmy is retired like I am from the NYPD.
Okay, you wouldn't happen

to have his number, would you?

No, I don't.

I'm trying to get in contact
with a James Abreu.

[woman 1] I'm not familiar with that.

[woman 2] I don't know that person.

There is nobody here named James Abreu.

[line ringing]

-[man] Daryl.

-I'm looking for a James Abreu.

Yeah, hold on. Jimmy, phone call.

[James Abreu] Hello?

-James Abreu?

-Yes.

Hi, my name is Victoria Cruz.

I'm working for the Anti-Violence Project.

I'm working on a reopened case
on the Marsha P. Johnson case
that was... She was found in 1992
by Christopher Street Pier.

Right.

Can I meet with you
in reference to this particular case?

Definitely not.

Because?

Because I'm retired from the NYPD
and you're calling me at work.

Can we meet outside of your job?

No, definitely not.

I don't want to meet
in regards to anything.

[line disconnects]

He didn't want to tell me
anything about the case.

He doesn't wanna look back.

[James] I can't control
what people say to you.

-I understand.

-I don't know who you represent.

I don't even know
if you are who you say you are.

-Are you a lawyer?

-No, I'm not.

-You a private investigator?

-No.

How about I give you a little advice?

Don't play detective yourself.

Leave this to the people
that should handle it.

[sighs]

Okay.

This is me in '67.

Look at the hairdos. [chuckles]

I was doing shows at the time.

I just loved the stage.

Oh.

I used to do the catwalk in the city
till they found out I was trans,
and then I got booted out.

Back in the '60s, it was against the law
to be dressed in drag.

I was very fortunate
that I was small and petite,
so I really wasn't detectable.

[chuckles] I was very careful
not to get arrested.

X-rated.

This is my beach outfit,
when I had the body. [chuckles]

I had a 24-inch waist.

[chuckling]

I've been very blessed and lucky
that my family accepted me.

As a matter of fact,
my mother was a dressmaker,
and she was very supportive.

This was a friend of mine
who got murdered back in '73.

This is him in drag. Carlos Sanchez.

We never found out who did it or...

Cold case.

They just didn't care.

They were trans.

Outcasts. Society doesn't want them.

I've dealt with those feelings...

my own personal experiences.

-[Kitty Rotolo] Victoria?

-Miss Kitty?

[Kitty] Hi.
-How are you?
-Thank you so much for coming.
Thank you for allowing me to come.
-Thank you.
-Sit, please.
Thank you so much.
-You're more than welcome. Thank you.
-[sighs]
So, I heard so much about you.
[Kitty] And was it good or bad?
-[Victoria] It's all interesting.
-[Kitty] Yes.
[Victoria] How did you meet Marsha?
I was probably 13 or 14 at the time.
I would always pass Sheridan Square Park.
And when I first saw Marsha,
she was just this elaborate,
with feathers and plumes and...
makeup that was never put on correctly.
And Marsha was all,
"Honey, you are fabulous,"
and, "You would make a beautiful girl."
She used to come by
and snatch my hair up on both sides,
and it made me feel so special.
It made me feel like
I wanted to be a part of that crowd.
And Marsha and I remained great friends
up until the day she died.
Have you seen this?
This was a flyer that was given out.
[Kitty] I remember this poster
being posted in the window of Uplift,
which was Randy Wicker's store.
And Randy had, like,
this little memorial going on right there.
Yes, I do remember this.
I had went in there once or twice
after Marsha's death.
Just to pay my respects to him
and offer my condolences to him.
I actually never read this.
"Malcolm, 46..."

Oh, Anvil icon.
Amazing, because the night
that she was murdered,
her and I were supposed to
go to the Anvil together.
[Victoria] Okay, tell me about that time.
I wanna say it was the Fourth of July.
I ran into Marsha in front of
the Christopher Street bookstore,
and it was broad daylight.
She was in full drag.
-How intoxicated was she?
-Marsha was always in her right mind.
She always knew
what the main prize was, you know.
We separated,
and we were gonna meet at midnight,
and we were gonna
troll the streets back and forth.
And we were gonna go to the Anvil,
like, at the usual time,

it was 2:

But she never showed up.
And then, later, I remember...
I was down by the Stroll.
The girl stroll, the queen stroll,
was on that left side.
On the right side was
where all the boys used to do their thing.
The butch queens.
I remember the girls had put me on point.
"Miss Kitty, watch out.
There's a car full of guidos,
you know, just driving around."
And later that evening, I heard
that Marsha had gotten in the car.
The thing is...
Yeah, we told her not to get in that car.
And I never saw her again
after that, you know.
The police from the Sixth Precinct,
they just brushed it off like...
like another one bites the dust

type of thing, you know.

You know,

it kind of makes me think, Victoria,
what happens when a flower gets wilted?
Does it just die away and it's forgotten?

[Victoria] Well, hopefully, that flower
would have shed some seeds
-that will grow into a movement.

-Right.

[Victoria] That's what I hope.

[reporter 1] Police are investigating
a possible hate crime
that led to the death
of a transgender woman.

[reporter 2] Twenty-one-year-old
Islan Nettles was attacked on the street.

[reporter 3] Nettles was out with another
transgender female, a friend.

[reporter 4] Police say the pair
met a group of men who attacked them
once they realized Nettles and her friend
weren't born as females.

[reporter 3]

The friend tells investigators,
when she ran away to get help,
the suspect was on top of Nettles,
punching her in the face.

[reporter 5] Nettles was punched
in the head, hit the ground.

She lapsed into a coma and later died.

[reporter 6] Twenty-year-old James Dixon
faced a judge

here at Manhattan Criminal Court.

He's charged with manslaughter
and assault.

This person beat my baby
with their bare hands to death.

And I don't feel

he should walk in the streets

'cause my baby can't walk.

[Ted McGuire] He faces anything

between 5 and 25 years.

The child was murdered in August of 2013.

And this has been going on,

we're going on three years already.
The family's been in limbo.
This is a very important case.
This place should be packed.
There should be people outside
that couldn't get in the door.
We had the gay marriage.
Everyone was out for gay marriage.
We used to march these streets
up and down.
We got arrested over here.
We handcuffed ourselves to that thing.
The privileged people,
they got their gay marriage,
and now they're off...
[mumbles] They're gone.
And they've left
the transgender community behind.
What about the rest of the community?
What about the T?
Remember the T? LGBT, you know?
As long as my people don't have
their rights all across America,
there's no reason for celebration.
That's how come I've been walking
for gay rights all these years.
And in 1973,
they told me and Sylvia Rivera
that we get to lead the Gay Pride march,
the transvestites
in the front of the parade.
Honey, they chickens put
all of the drag queens
way in the back someplace.
Honey, that was not the right thing to do.
They don't care if you were there
at the beginning of the gay movement,
demonstrating in drag with them.
They don't care.
[crowd cheering]
[Karla] Transgender people felt
that they were being pushed to the side.
That their place at Stonewall,
that their place from the beginning

was being forgotten.

[Sylvia] I had been promised
a spot to speak.

And they were having a conflict
about the drag queens on stage.

Because we were supposed
to be stereotypes.

But if it wasn't for a drag queen,
there would be no gay liberation movement.

We're the frontliners.

I said, "Well, I'm gonna speak
one way or the other."

[crowd shouting]

[announcer] One person, a man,
Sylvia gets up here, and--

Just a moment, just a moment.

I would like to avoid any trouble.

This is a day of unity for us.

I want us to be happy.

[crowd applauding]

Sylvia!

[indistinct shouting]

[crowd cheering]

Hi, baby!

[crowd shouting]

[crowd booing]

You all better quiet down!

[crowd continues shouting and booing]

I've been trying to get up here all day
for your gay brothers
and your gay sisters in jail!

They're writing me
every motherfuckin' week,
and ask for your help!

And you all don't do
a goddamn thing for them!

And they write STAR,
not the women's group.

They do not write women.

They do not write men.

They write STAR because
we're trying to do something for them.

But you all tell me
go and hide my tail between my legs.

I will not put up with this shit!
I have been beaten.
I have had my nose broken.
I have been thrown in jail.
I have lost my job.
I have lost my apartment
for gay liberation.
And you all treat me this way?
What the fuck's wrong with you all?
Think about that!
[scattered cheering]
I believe in the gay power.
I believe in us getting our rights,
or else I would not be out there
fighting for our rights.
That's all I wanted to say to your people.
Come and see your people
at STAR House on 12th Street.
The people that are trying
to do something for all of us,
and not men and women
that belong to a white middle class club!
And that's what you all belong to!
Revolution now!
[scattered cheering]
Gay... Gay power.
[shouting and booing]
-Louder! Gay power!
-[whistling]
[crowd continues shouting]
I was hurt, and I felt that...
the movement had completely betrayed...
the drag queens and the street people.
And I felt that the years that
I had already given them had been a waste.
So, I went home, locked up the house.
If it wasn't for Marsha,
I wouldn't be here right now.
I got 60 stitches in this arm.
She came home
and found me bleeding to death.
After the march of 1973...
I left the movement.
I found myself up in Westchester.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
Welcome to the Music Hall in Tarrytown.
I want to give special thanks to everyone
in the audience for still supporting us.
-[piano music playing]
-[audience cheering]
Of course,
you get the first strange looks.
Ain't bothering me.
Next thing,
you become friends with everybody.
I feel that I have liberated
a lot of people
just by living here in the suburbs,
just by being myself.
Just by being a campy queen.
And they appreciate. They really do.
That's how I was letting out
most of my anger.
But I will not forgive the movement
for anything that they have done
to my community.
-[Victoria] Give me a hug, girl.
-[Rusty Mae Moore] A hug. I'm sorry.
[Victoria] Yes, girl. Oh, good to see you.
-Mmm!
-[Rusty] Mmm. Nice hug.
-Yeah, I like to give good hugs.
-[chuckles]
-Good hugs.
-So, can I open this?
-Sure.
-Thank you.
-You can light it up if you like, too.
-Light it up?
Incense.
Chelsea, come here, girl.
What's the matter with you?
-Give me a hug, baby. Blessed be.
-Blessed be. How you doin'?
Anything you may be able to tell me
may be very, very helpful.
I don't know anything that you can't get
better from Randy Wicker.

Maybe you can tell me about the cops
that were around during that time?

-I really can't.

-You can't?

-No.

-All right.

You went on an investigation
in a white van with Randy. Remember that?

[Randy] Do you always smoke this much,
or is this just because
you're a little nervous?

I always smoke this much
when I'm down here, baby.

Honey, this is a fishing expedition.
We'll either catch something or we won't.
We're just kind of trolling.

Um...

Let's start all over. [clears throat]
Randy wanted to talk about Marsha
and how Marsha had died,
and how we suspected
that she was murdered.

And could I make some highly irregular
and very unofficial inquiries.
And I did, and I really didn't come up
with anything. I wish I had.

[Randy] Where do you wanna go?

[Chelsea] I want to park the van.
We're gonna go talk to the girls.

[Randy] Yeah.

You're gonna be out that back window
with the camera.

[Randy] Close the door
so the lights go off.

You know, I asked around the piers
and in the neighborhood.

And asked around
because I knew a lot of the girls
that were just walking around,
looking into matters
on my own, or whatever.

[Randy] How long have you
been involved in this?

[Chelsea] Twelve years.

You're on the street,
with no place to go and no money.
Most of these girls are underage.
Most of them are more throwaways
than runaways.
And the older ones are people like me
that started out when we were young and...
-[Randy] You're a survivor, then.
-Yes.
I'm practically the only one still alive
from the girls I first started with.
[Randy] What happened to most of them?
Drug overdoses, suicides...
murdered by johns, murdered by pimps.
A lot of girls plain fucking disappear
the way Marsha did.
[Chelsea] Marsha can't even be understood
in 1992 without the context of...
Dead trannies were literally
washing up on the street.
I mean, lying there dead, and...
no interest shown whatsoever
in doing a damn thing about it.
You know more about this than I do.
[Victoria] Before the Anti-Violence
Project, this is where I worked
from 1993 to 1996...
until I was sexually assaulted
and physically assaulted
by nurses and aides in this building.
Right after this happened,
I couldn't feel the ground beneath me.
And I would get up in the morning
and just walk, walk and walk and walk.
It was like I was walking in a daze,
but when...
I stopped there on Congress.
I had a knife in my pocket
'cause I wanted to hurt them.
What stopped me was
that I was thinking about my mother,
and how would she feel
if I went to jail. [sniffles]
It took me three days to get enough guts

'cause I was angry.
And I finally made the call to AVP.
And the person was so understanding
and knew what I was going through.
I spoke with her for over two hours
of what I was feeling. [sniffles]
The agency stood with me for a year
that I kept on going into court,
back and forth,
case canceled, case postponed.
And I felt supported,
so I just wanted to give back.
So, I volunteered
for the Anti-Violence Project.
Fortunately for me, a space opened up
at administrative assistant,
and from there I moved myself up
to domestic violence counselor advocate.
I helped myself, my family
and the community.
Was AVP involved
with the investigation then?
-[Victoria] Of Marsha's case?
-Yeah.
-Yes.
-Okay, okay. Wow, okay.
-We've been around since 1980.
-Yeah.
So, during that time,
we were involved in the case,
and here's some of the flyers
that AVP had given out.
That's Marsha.
There's her death certificate.
We haven't got the toxicology report
or any pictures, or anything like that.
That's what we're trying to get to see
what condition the body was in,
and if it says
that she had a hole in the head.
It sounds like a lot of people think
it was a murder,
-or that she was pushed.
-Yeah.

A lot of people think
that it was foul play.
But they first said it was suicide.
Some people say
she was giving things away,
-and flowers and some of her clothing.
-Yeah.
I says, well, sometimes a person,
when they're gonna commit suicide,
-they give their things away.
-Yeah.
But then, at the same time,
that's how she was all the time.
-She was always giving--
-She was always giving things away.
Somebody says, "I like your scarf."
"Here, darling."
She'd give 'em the scarf,
or she would go around giving flowers.
That's Marsha.
[crowd cheering]
She had too much to live for,
like she was looking forward to Gay Pride.
-She showed up at Pride...
-Mmm-hmm.
...and was her old regal self,
enjoyable self, and things like that.
-Just normal Marsha.
-[Eddie] Yeah.
[man 1] Marsha!
-[man 2] Marsha!
-[man 1] Marsha!
[Victoria] But the police,
they didn't pay it any mind.
Something that they were accustomed
to sweeping under the rug.
Things that still go on.
Nothing really has changed.
[protesters chanting]
No justice, no peace!
[Frances Baugh] So what's going on
with this case?
They're gonna get motions.
They're getting set for motions.

Then they're gonna
jury selection on Monday.
Okay, okay.
You know, he confessed already twice,
to the detective and to the witness.
How much time do you think he's gonna get?
Who knows?
Back in the '70s,
we went through all this crap.
But back then, it's just that
you didn't hear about all these killings.
You didn't hear about it
because now there's more media coverage.
Right. That's true, yeah.
I gotta text my honey.
Sorry, I have some private business--
-[chuckles] Oh, my God. A honey.
-I'm in love with him.
-You're in love with him?
-Yes, I am.
-You'll be sorry. [chuckles]
-Why? Why do you say that?
Foolish little girl
Fickle little girl
So, this is what I am, huh?
You didn't want him when he wanted you
Love dont need a reason
Love dont always rhyme
And love is all we have for now
What we dont have is time
[Coco Rodriguez] She tried to help
through the AIDS epidemic.
If you were sick,
she'd sit right by you.
She'd stop by and say, "Hey, are you okay?
Do you need something?"
She was helping a person survive.
[Marsha] I always meet these young people
that don't have nobody
who wants to stick by them and help them.
So I help them out with,
like, a place to stay,
or some food to eat,
or a little change for their pockets.

They don't call me
"Pay It No Mind" Johnson for nothing.
[Coco] And you can't find
another butterfly like that in life.
She always changed from her cocoon.
And you never knew
what she was gonna wear.
You never knew what she was gonna wear.
Did you see this morning's treatment?
Didn't you love that?
[Randy] What was this morning's treatment?
With the little hairdo and everything.
Did you see the fur coat I got her?
There she is, Miss America.
Well, tomorrow morning,
I'll give you the breakfast treatment.
-I'm fixing breakfast for ya.
-Yes, yes, yes.
-I'm gonna put on my Valentine outfit.
-I love it.
-And you're gonna be--
-For breakfast?
Yes, you're gonna be gagging.
You'd be surprised
how many gorgeous clothes
Randy got around here for me
that I don't even wear.
Oh, the red velvet suit?
Yes, and all the furs.
We're gonna give you the treatment
tomorrow morning,
just to get your heart ready
for heart failure.
-[Alexis] Are you taping all this?
-[reporter] Yeah.
-[Alexis] Right now?
-[reporter] Right.
[Marsha] He's gonna try and
write an article to try and help us.
[reporter] I'm trying to
get some information
about what's going on on West Street,
with the police harassing everybody.
[Alexis] In my whole time

of having any dealings
with the Sixth Precinct Vice Squad,
these little creeps slapped me...
threatened to kill me,
told me right in the precinct,
in front of everybody.
The one with the glasses,
he says, "What are you, a girl or a boy?"
Next thing I knew,
I was getting punched in my jaw.
[Chichi] The first time,
we was all on the corner,
and somebody had just said, "Run."
And they just started beating on me
and kicking me in the chest.
[Marsha] They do that
to a lot of people that run.
[Tina] He pulled out his gun.
He said, "If you come back down here,
I'm gonna shoot you."
Then the other cop said,
"I oughta throw him in the water.
But he might be too skinny.
He might not hit the bottom."
[Marsha] Yeah.
[Alexis] They seem to believe
that it is their job and duty
to extricate all transvestites,
to torture transvestites.
[Victoria] How many trans murders
did AVP record in 1992?
That summer was the worst summer ever.
We had many, many marches.
We were demonstrating all the time,
because that was a way
to get public and police attention.
But anti-LGBT violence was at a peak.
That year we had 1,300 reports
of bias crime.
[Victoria] Some were from the police?
Yeah. If you look at
the annual reports there,
you're gonna see, whatever,
12, 18% of those

were based on violence
perpetrated by police.
Was this after or before Marsha's demise?
[indistinct shouting]
[Matt] It was going on
before what happened to Marsha...
and it went on for a long time.
It's that whole period.
We were sick at heart
about this unrelenting wave of attacks,
particularly given the circumstances
surrounding Marsha's death.
[crowd shouting]
[Victoria] What was the community's
relationship with the Sixth Precinct?
It was not positive because
it was not an adequate response
from the police to all this violence.
It wasn't an adequate response
from One Police Plaza
that went all the way down
to the Sixth Precinct.
[crowd clamoring]
[Matt] They did not pay
sufficient attention
to crimes like what happened to Marsha.
It was obvious that she had been murdered,
and it was obvious that the police weren't
giving it the attention that it deserved.
I mean, I don't have any peace
at home anymore, doll.
My roommate Randy's really after
the people from the Festival Committee.
-Tommy, thank you.
-[Tommy] You're welcome.
I mean, he's doing
this whole great big trip
with all these organizations
to change all these people around lately.
Which can get you murdered, you know.
Honey, and wait until they get ahold
of you for taking their money away.
Randy tried to put me in the middle of it.
I tell him I don't bite my tongue

for nobody.

I tell him I dont want to be bothered.

So, honey, we're wondering when the Mob is gonna come with the bullets. [laughs]

[interviewer] I understand you.

[Marsha] And when the Mob comes, darling, they say,

"Why are you giving out these flyers?

What do you got against us?"

"Oh, I dont have anything against youse.

It's just that my roommate suspects...

[chuckles] that youse have been racketeering and stuff."

[Randy] Hi, my name is Randy Wicker.

I have started the campaign

to expose and replace

the Christopher Street Festival Committee.

I'm tired of shady operators running

the Christopher Street Festival

on Gay Pride Day.

Where do all those festival dollars go?

[indistinct chatter]

The Christopher Street Festival Committee

is widely rumored to be Mob-controlled.

We're gonna take this festival back,

run it for our community.

Take back the day.

[Victoria] Remember this event here,

Take Back the Day?

Where Randy was trying to take back

the Christopher Street Festival

from the Mob?

I remember he had signs about it.

It was a...

concern with him.

I don't remember a particular day.

Who was running

the Christopher Street Festival

during that time that you remember?

If you take charge and make

a logical decision, people will follow.

Heritage of Pride would organize

the annual march, rally and dance.

And we'd march downtown

along Fifth Avenue, into the Village.

-[marching band music playing]

-[crowd cheering]

In the Village, there was the annual Christopher Street Liberation Festival, which was basically booths and meat on a stick, and your standard street festival.

The guys who ran the festival were Ed Murphy, who had been a bouncer at the Stonewall, and his friend Red Mahoney.

And Red Mahoney was his...

you know, um...

assistant.

They worked for whatever part of the Mafia ran the gay bars at the time.

They did their thing and we did ours, and--

The reason I'm bringing this up is because Marsha would go around saying the Mob was after her.

-That's why I'm asking these questions.

-I can see getting that upset.

But the gay bar business wasn't gonna be where you put your folks who could shoot well, and it wasn't where you put folks who could run the business.

It was what you did with the idiot nephew who wasn't capable of being a mobster.

He was capable of showing up and getting whatever percentage at the door he got, and selling overpriced toilet paper.

[Victoria] Well, Randy Wicker

hired Sam Ciccone

to do an investigation,

and there was some guy

named Jacques Garon.

[reporter] A couple of the accusations being made about the Festival Committee is that it's backed by some of the Mob.

Two, you're making a lot of money and profit off this thing

and nothing goes back
to the gay community.
The first thing
is about the Mob connection.
That rumor has been going on
for centuries.
I've been in the committee
for seven years
and I've never seen any Mob connection,
'cause I wouldn't be involved
if that would be the case.
Number two, as far as making
a lot of money? God, I wish.
The only money that we get
is through the sale of the booths
on Christopher Street on Friday.
And what happens with that money?
That money is given back in many ways.
We help a lot of people
throughout the year.
We don't make a big issue out of it
because we don't want to.
[Randy] It's outrageous that these kind of
people, Jacques Garon and Red Mahoney,
are running our particular event.
I say that we're gonna
take this festival back.
We'll run it for our community.
We have nothing to fear but fear itself.
This is Randy Wicker saying
keep the faith.
[Candida] Randy was good
at antagonizing people.
But why stop at knocking off Marsha?
Why not punish Randy?
-[Eddie] Okay.
-[man] All right.
[Victoria] Here we go. Here we are again.
-Number seven.
-Call log, that's what you're looking for?
[Victoria] Yeah, call logs.
To see if there's anything we've missed.
Maybe it's one of those two boxes there.
Shit, wouldnt you know it.

What's this here?

-[Eddie] Ms. Vicky, do you need help?

-[Victoria] Nah.

[man] Look, Ms. Vicky.

[Victoria] Wait a minute.

Here it is.

-Found it?

-Yeah.

Okay.

"Received a call.

Do you know Randy Wicker?

Tell Randy Wicker to leave Jacques Garon,
Red Mahoney and...

did not get name... alone,
or what happened to Marsha Johnson
will happen to him."

Shit.

It was a very chilling phone call,
particularly given the circumstances
surrounding Marsha's death
and everything that was going on
with the Festival Committee.

And then... I don't know
if this happened the same day.

You received a call
from a Rodger McFarlane
and he said he remembered seeing Marsha
on the fifth at 4:00 a.m. in the morning
on 22nd Street.

He said that Marsha was kind of terrified
and was being followed by two guys
going west to the river.

-Was that reported to the police?

-That was reported to the police.

'Cause that determines
someone saw Marsha on the fifth,
and her body was found on the sixth.
We made that statement publicly known.
It was up to the police
to follow up on it.

Right. Then that would tie in
about Randy taking on the Mob,
the call that you got
of Marsha being followed and her death.

Well, those pieces certainly fit together.
There's all these pieces here
that point to exactly
what we were saying back then, that...
Marsha did not die by suicide.
In any other community,
had a similar hero been found dead
under unclear circumstances,
it seems self-evident that the city
would have put real resources behind it
to try to figure out what happened.
[speaking indistinctly]
[line ringing]
[Litwin] Cold Case Squad,
Detective Litwin. Can I help you?
Yes, good afternoon, Detective Litwin.
It's Victoria Cruz.
-Hi, how are you?
-Very well, thank you.
-And yourself?
-Very good, thank you.
Okay, I know that you had spoken
to a couple of retired detectives,
and they called me because I investigated
this case about two years ago.
And I'm not gonna say
she committed suicide,
but there's no credible evidence
that she was murdered. None.
[Victoria] Let me ask you a question.
Did the police ever record
the threats made to Randy Wicker?
That's never come up at all.
I don't have any record of that.
So I can't really say anything on that.
Did AVP ever pass that on
to the police department?
They said they did.
And what about the sighting of Marsha
on the fifth at 4:00 a.m.
in the morning on 22nd Street?
She was kind of frightened
because there were two men following her
as she was rushing down

towards the Hudson River.

Do you know if the police ever recorded two males following her?

-I see no record of that in the case.

-You see no record?

No, there was never anything conveyed to the police about her being seen on the fifth and being followed.

So, that's new to me.

[indistinct chatter]

-So how you been?

-Pretty good.

Okay, listen.

I have a couple of questions to ask you because all the, um...

-All that we've been finding out...

-Right.

...points to the Mob.

Okay.

What do you know about that?

So, Marsha...

apparently had a fear about the Mob or the Mafia.

-And I don't--

-Because?

Because I was investigating the Christopher Street Festival Committee. Have you and Marsha ever had a conversation about this subject?

Of you taking on the Christopher Street Festival and the Mob?

Maybe that's why she didn't wanna go home. She thought she was in danger.

She probably raised the issue with me about what I was doing.

I don't remember that.

But if she had, I would've laughed at it, because to me

it was just a political fight.

I don't think of political fights

as being heavy duty,

where they murder your roommate

because they don't like what you're doing.

Heritage of Pride tried to get control of the Festival a couple years before I did, and they were threatened.

-By whom?

-By the Mob.

They told me, "Randy, don't do this. We tried to do it and we were threatened." And I said, "Well, I'm gonna do it." Well, on July 28th, they've made a threat to you. Here.

At 5:

just five minutes before AVP closes, my informant gets this call.

"Do you know Randy Wicker?"

Matt said, "Yes." Then he said,

"Tell Randy to leave Jacques Garon, Red Mahoney,"

and another person who did not get named, "alone or what happened to Marsha Johnson will happen to him."

And the person hung up.

Oh, God.

I am sure that he did not tell me that.

I'm willing to bet you now--

So, you were never threatened when you took them on?

No. I never... Who would forget that?

When people would tell me things about the Mob and whatever,

I was the one that just...

Don't go there, you know.

I was actually...

I look at it now,

I realize I was really in heavy denial.

That might've been

why she ended up staying out,

and why staying out, she winded...

Instead of being home and safe in Hoboken, you know, with me,

and the dog, you know, and our family.

Could I say

you're blaming yourself for it?

Yeah, I think that...

I mean, it really bothers me.

I mean, I didn't know that.

[Sylvia] This is a beautiful turnout.

And she's gonna be so proud.

And remember that the last name...

The middle name is Marsha P. Johnson,
and the P stands for

"Pay It No Mind" Johnson!

[crowd cheering]

A band of angels

Coming for me

Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Comin' for to carry me home

If you get there before I do

Comin' for to carry me home

Tell all my friends I'll be there soon

Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Comin' for to carry me home

Thank you all. Thank you so much.

Marsha thanks you all.

-[man 1] Yeah, Randy!

-[man 2] Thank you, Randy.

-[man 3] Bravo, Marsha!

-Bravo, Marsha!

Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot

Comin' for to carry me home

[interviewer] How long

have you lived here?

I've been here since a week

before Gay Pride Day this year.

This is my little house.

When I got that telegram

that Marsha was dead...

part of me went with her

because one of our pacts was that we would

always cross River Jordan together.

And to me, this is the River Jordan.

The Hudson River.

And that's when I started reaching
for the bottle
more heavily than I was doing.
After Marsha's death...
[crowd cheering]
I came back to New York City.
We are your history!
She's not here, but she's here in spirit,
Marsha P. Johnson.
-She's always--
-[woman] Yeah. She'll always be with me.
Always.
She'll always be
in the front of this parade.
[crowd continues cheering]
Let's put Marsh there.
Can't forget Marsh.
[Henry over phone] Records, Ms. Henry.
Hi, good afternoon, Ms. Henry.
My name is Victoria.
I sent an inquiry
in reference to getting, um,
the medical examiner's records
from a case back in '92,
and I was just wondering
if you've received it.
Okay, Victoria, I'm getting ready
to send you a letter
to say that, as of now,
our office can't locate this case file.
-You can't locate the case file?
-That's right.
Any particular reason
that it's not locatable?
I don't know. It's not in archives
and it's not in the container.
That's kind of strange.
These things do happen
every now and again.
Did some other department check that out
or your department did?
It's my department only
that has custody of those case files.
And... [sighs]

And then in all your 1992 cases,
the only file that's missing is that one?

I wouldn't say that.

I've never said that,
and I will never say that.

-You searched personally?

-Yes. Correct.

And who can I speak to more or less
to get something really done on this case?

I don't know who to tell you.

[indistinct chatter]

We're here today
to support justice for Islan Nettles.

Today will be the start
to the trial at 9:30.

We're hoping that the outcome
of the trial, whenever trial ends,
is gonna be the maximum sentence
for James Dixon,
the person accused
of killing Islan Nettles.

That maximum sentence is 25 years,
and that's what we're asking the DA
to ask the judge for.

[reporter] You've been following
Marsha's case.

So what has, like, this case...
Has it helped to bring some light
to past cases of violence
against transgender people?

[Victoria] No. On the contrary.

Just as most cases that come up
against trans women,
they plead the panic defense,
or they just think
they can brush it under the rug,
and people will pay no mind to it.

Can you actually speak a little bit more
to this panic defense?

The panic defense? Well, they didn't know
she was a trans woman.

There was a case back in '97,
Fitzgerald case.

Picked up this person in a gay bar,

male gay bar,
and took them home.
In court, he didn't know
she was a trans woman.
The person was stabbed multiple times,
and he got off.
Pleaded panic defense.
Just like now, in the Nettles case.
He claimed he panicked.
That's his defense.
[news anchor] The West Side Highway
is due for a fix-up.
It's been a long time coming.
There are concerns
about uprooting some people there.
The homeless will be asked to move
tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m.
The plans call for
the Hudson River Boulevard,
trees, traffic for seven lanes
and paths for bikers, joggers and skaters.
The homeless will have to pack up
their few possessions and get out.
There's a sense of anger
and desperation here
for about 30 homeless people
who call Pier 54 their home.
What about going to a shelter, or getting
some of the services that are available?
Is that not an option for you?
The city shelters are not safe.
-Do you feel like it's safer here?
-Yes.
It's called a sweep.
Not even a fucking eviction.
A sweep. Like we're trash.
There's so many fucking buildings
in this fucking Manhattan,
and they can't give up
a fucking building to fucking...
maybe 15 people that will go in
and try to re-renovate it?
Marsha and I did it back in the '70s
on our own.

Yeah, I'm crazy,
because the world has made me crazy.
Don't be going in my house!
Excuse me, don't be going in my house!

[grunts]

Well, Marsha, we tried.

That's all I can say.

[sighs]

[cell phone ringing]

-[Victoria] Hi, Ms. Henry.

-[Henry] A package was mailed out to you.

[Victoria] Okay, so you mailed us
the autopsy report.

[Henry] I mailed you
whatever I was able to put together, okay?

[Victoria] So, we'll be receiving it
in the near future?

-[Henry] Yes.

-[Victoria] Okay.

Thank you. You've been most helpful.

-Hi, Eddie. Come on in.

-Hi.

-Did you bring the report?

-Yeah.

Okay, Ms. Henry said it was only partial.

Is it a big envelope?

It's kind of heavy.

This looks flimsy.

"Office of the Medical Examiner,
City of New York,
have performed an autopsy
on the body of Malcolm Michaels
on the 7th day of July, 1992,

at 1:

But they classified it
as drowning at first,
but then they circled "possible homicide."
Like, here.

It looks like they found
a lot of discoloration,
but no evidence of trauma.

-Does that sound right?

-No trauma on the skull. Yeah.

"There is a sub... Uh..."

[sighs]

I don't know what the fuck this word is.

Maybe we should look at

another examiner's look at them.

-Or get... Right, get somebody--

-Have a professional look at this autopsy.

-Dr. Kildare.

-Doctor... Who's that?

[chuckles] He was before your time.

"Images of photos on CD."

Okay. [sighs]

[Eddie breathes deeply]

Oh, God. [clicks tongue]

Oh. [sighs]

[Dr. Michael Baden] What we have here is an unwitnessed drowning.

She went into the water

while still alive and breathing.

It wasn't a situation where

death occurred someplace else,

by whatever means...

and then put in the water.

Whether she's pushed in,

whether she's being chased

and falls accidentally,

we can't tell from the autopsy.

That depends on the police investigation.

Could you rule out a violent assault?

Yes, there's no evidence there

of violent assault.

There was no injury, no impact injury, to any part of her body.

There was no fracture of the skull,

there was no damage to the brain at all.

[Victoria] What about

the hole in the head?

Well, the body gets injured after death...

-Okay.

-...by floating debris and all that.

And the body starts breaking apart faster in warmer water.

So what looks like

a gash on the left side,

-is really just the peeling of skin.

-Okay.

But it's just normal separation of skin.

[Al] I don't think it was a suicide.

It could've been an accident.

It could've...

They said the pier was dilapidated.

He could've stepped through

a hole in the pier.

Or people could have been following him,

and because there was no evidence

of any type of trauma to the body,

that don't mean they beat him up

and threw him in the water.

They could've chased him, scared him,

and he also fell through the pier.

[Dr. Michael] Yes, that certainly

brings up the issue of homicide,

because if somebody's being chased...

and runs in front of a car,

or accidentally falls into the water,

runs into the water,

that would be called a homicide.

Well, we have documentation

where she was frantic, being followed.

Credible person giving this report

to our agency,

and then wasn't even investigated.

[Dr. Michael] Well, there's no, um...

statute of limitation on homicide,

and that goes beyond my pay grade.

[Victoria] Something's wrong.

We keep on running into a brick wall

whenever we deal with the city.

Every time I spoke to a cop,

and they just brushed me off.

Something's wrong.

Every time I made a call,

"You have to do this and this and this."

Something's wrong.

Why this particular case?

I think maybe we should go up

one step higher,

and maybe seek some assistance

from someplace outside of New York City
to just look over what we have here.
You know, it's obvious that
the police are not cooperating with this.
Well, we don't have an endless pot
of people or time or resources.
And so, I'm not really sure
what is involved in that.
You know, just today, you all were
at the trial for Islan Nettles.
I mean, there are so many cases,
and so many have not had any resolution.
We've had, in the last couple of months,
a number of murders across the country.
When trans lives are under attack,
what do we do?

[protester] Stand up, fight back.

[reporter 1] Eight transgender women
across the country
have been murdered in the last 34 days.
There have been more than
400 people murdered in the past decade.

[reporter 2] Transgender women
face the most severe violence
within the LGBTQ community.

A transgender woman was found
strangled to death.
Police say she was stabbed several times.

[reporter 3] In street lingo, it was a
curb stomp. He was dressed as a woman.

[Jennifer] And shame on the media
for calling us men dressed
in women's clothing.

Shame on the media for that.

This cannot go unanswered.

I say, hands off my sister.

Do we not deal
with the immediate needs there
to go back and spend the time
to investigate this case?
Or even, like, what does that mean?

[Victoria] What does that mean?

Justice for Marsha.

[protesters chanting]

Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!
[Victoria] And justice for so many others.
The visibility that we can do something
about a case that's been cold,
and then seeking justice,
if not for the family,
but for the community.

-I know--

-Because this is part of our history.
It is part of our history.
I completely believe that.
And I'm also worried about the future.

[protesters chanting]

Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!
Keep your hands off my sister!

[helicopter blades whirring]

[sniffles]

[shudders and exhales]

[sniffles]

Whatever happened,
it must have been around here.
We live as who we are.
This is us. This is us being at home.
I don't know,
we just want to be ourselves.
The women we are, inside-out.
Right? Am I wrong?

-[Rusty] She's right. Very wise of her.

-[giggles]

It started out,
it was just Chelsea and me.
And, um, then,
people just started to come.
We started to think of ourselves as,
you know, this was the house
that Sylvia and Marsha had.
And we really looked at STAR House
as our reference point.

[Rusty] Aw, there they are.

I have to get this picture.
She'd been homeless, and she'd been living
on a pier, and that sort of thing.
And I said, "Hey, you're not homeless.
I got a place.
Long as I got a place,
you're not homeless."
She didn't move in right away,
but she started coming around.
She'd do some work in the backyard,
do some work around the house
in lieu of paying rent.
...went around the streets.
We have to help one another.
We really do. It's important.
The people in the house
really related to Sylvia.
She mothered them, in a way,
and gave advice.
She talked with them.
But when she sobered up,
then she was much better with them.
Just like cold turkey.
Bang, no more drinking.
[crowd applauding]
We have to remember,
we must continue to fight this government
because this government is the one
that's going to keep us divided
at all time.
[crowd applauding]
[Rusty] That's when she got back
into her role, I think,
as an activist in the community.
And all of a sudden, we noticed
people were coming up and saying,
"You're Sylvia Rivera, aren't you?
I thought you was dead!"
I began to realize that
she really had a lot of projection
in the community.
[crowd cheering]
[in French] It's a huge party,
and its mission

is to fight against discrimination.
[news anchor] In the streets of Rome,
World Gay Pride gathered 200,000 gays,
transgender people and lesbians
from Italy, as well as America,
France and Germany.

[crowd cheering]

It really gives me great
pleasure to be here in representation
of the gay liberation movement
and the transgender movement
all the way from the United States.

[crowd cheering]

I didn't think 31 years ago
that I would have so many children,
but I'm proud to have liberated you.
Viva and love Pride,
and continue your struggle
all around the world!

[crowd cheering]

[crowd chanting]

[Sylvia] The crowd went crazy.
At one point in between my speech,
they started calling me
a living myth in Italian.
Mistica. Mistica.

Oh, my God, it's hard.
Then people were coming up
and kissing my hand,
and then giving me the double kiss,
and going through the whole scenario
with the little bit of English
that they knew.

"Thank you for what you did at Stonewall."
I was really emotional
about the whole thing.

-Guess what?

-[Rusty] What?

Guess where Mother has keys to now, then?
To the church.

-[Rusty] To the church?

-Mother got a job at church.

[Rusty] What are you doing?

-[Sylvia] Bagging up food and whatnot.

-And are they paying you?

-[Sylvia] Yes.

-[Rusty] No kidding.

I can go home and say that

I've actually tried to make a difference.

[Rusty] That's what marriage does to you.

-She's made me an honest woman.

-[Rusty] Really? That's good.

I mean, me of all people, Sylvia Rivera,
had the keys to a church.

[all laughing]

[news anchor]

Sylvia Rivera was 50 years old
when she died of liver cancer last week.
Virtually up until the moment she died,
she was lobbying for legislation
to protect the rights
of this most despised of minorities.

[all chanting] Trans rights now!

Trans rights now!

Doubtless, there will be many stories
told about Sylvia.

Some true, some pure myth.

That happens with great leaders.

And make no mistake tonight,

Sylvia Rivera is the mother

of our movement,

-a great leader of our people.

-[audience applauding]

[Xena Grandichell] I'm tired of people
assaulting and murdering trans women.

I want it changed, and it's gonna change.

'Cause we're gonna keep pushing the issue
until it does.

Nobody's prosecuting
these people properly.

They don't get

what any other murderer would get.

They get a pat on the wrist

and a little bit of time and let go.

This judge and DA have to do

the right thing.

Prosecute him

like you would a regular person.

[indistinct chatter]

[judge] As everyone is aware,
we're here today for sentencing.
First, the People are gonna be reading,
I understand, a statement.

[prosecutor] I'm going to be reading
a statement that was sent to me
by the biological father of Islan Nettles.
He had asked me personally
to read this on his behalf.

[clears throat]

"There was a very outgoing,
free-spirited, young, promising individual
that had a very bright future,
that had the potential
to make a mark in the world.

And it came to a screeching halt
by an individual that was upset
because he was clowned by his friends,
because he didn't know
the woman he was trying to holler at
was actually a transgender woman.

He made a conscious decision
to beat a transgender woman to death
because of who she was
and the embarrassment
he felt he had suffered.

I was extremely proud
of the person she became.

But no matter
what amount of time this man gets,
it will never fill the hole in my heart
that a person that had
such a magnificent future
and was my only child
and a lifelong gift had once filled."

[judge] Mr. Dixon, I hereby sentence you
to a determinate sentence of imprisonment
with a term of 12 years.

All right, we're adjourned.

[indistinct chatter]

[woman] You're crushing us.
You're killing us.

This young man is only going to end up

doing ten and a half years,
learn nothing,
come back out and do this again.
This needs to stop.
We're not letting none of this go anymore.
[Marsha] Really,
everybody goes sooner or later.
Tomorrow's not promised to anyone.
I learned that in church
when I was five years old.
And I've never forgotten it.
So, uh, every day counts. [chuckles]
[sniffles]
Come on, girl.
Chin up. [sniffles]
[grunts and sniffles]
[exhales]
[dramatic music playing]