

Alabama mourns murder of gay teen

Scotty Joe Weaver was reportedly killed by his roommates

by Mark Johnson

BAY MINETTE, Ala. — An 18-year-old Alabama teen named Scotty Joe Weaver who was found dead July 22 was reportedly murdered in his trailer home because he was gay and dressed in drag occasionally, the town's police have confirmed.



The murder of gay teen Scotty Joe Weaver (left) brings to mind the death of another gay Alabama man, Billy Jack Gaither, in 1999. LGBT activists point to the deaths as evidence of intolerance in the state.

Weaver's severely decomposed body was found on the side of a dirt road by a man driving an all-terrain vehicle. Investigators point to statements by the accused and that the perpetrators robbed Weaver of less than \$100 as strong evidence to believe it may have been a hate crime. Weaver had been beaten, strangled, stabbed, partially decapitated and burned.

Three people have been charged in the crime: Chris Gaines, 20, and Nichole Kelsay, 18, who were Weaver's roommates, and 18-year-old Robert Holly

Lofton Porter, who is described as a friend of the pair who spent a considerable amount of time at Weaver's home.

According to a lawyer representing co-defendant Christopher Ryan Gaines, Porter expressed his hatred of gays and told others he wanted to kill Scotty Joe Weaver just days before Weaver was killed.

Weaver was last seen alive July 18, when he stopped by his mother's home to repay a loan after his shift at Waffle House.

His burned and decomposed body was found four days later in a wooded area not far from the trailer home he shared with Gaines and Kelsay.

All three suspects were out of work and Weaver was paying their bills. Police said it appeared that the roommates plotted the murder for several days before acting and then they amended their story on July 27 to say that only one of the roommates had started to kill Weaver and the others joined in.

The Bay Minette Sheriff's Department said July 26 that an autopsy indicated that Weaver was beaten, strangled and cut with an edged weapon, although it is unclear which caused his death. No weapons have been recovered or identified.

The death penalty is being pursued by police even though sexual orientation is not protected by Alabama hate crimes laws.

Those who knew Weaver in high school say that the climate for gay teens in Mobile — which is about 25 miles from Bay Minette — is not at all accepting.

"Everybody talked about him (Weaver) real bad, they acted like they hated him," said Destannie Edmonson, a former classmate. "I know for a fact Chris Gaines did, because he used to talk about him all the time. He lived with him."

Members of Mobile's LGBT community came out in force Aug. 2 to honor Weaver with a candlelight vigil. About 130 people attended the event in the town's Washington Square, where local LGBT leaders talked about Weaver and the political environment for gays.

"We started the community center [here] to prevent things like this from happening, and all week, I've felt like we've failed," said Tony Thompson, of Mobile's Bay Area Inclusion. "But when I come out here and see all these people who came to remember someone most of us probably never even met, I feel like we've succeeded."

A friend of Weaver's spoke about the teen to the *Mobile Register*.

"He was a sweet kid, funny, always smiling — a happy-go-lucky individual," said Jane White. "He loved his friends, loved his mother. There's just no reason for this."

Weaver's death is a disturbing reminder of the murder of Billy Jack Gaither, who was kidnapped and beaten to death before his body was set on fire in a pile of kerosene-soaked tires in rural Alabama's Coosa County in 1999. His killer and a cohort received sentences of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

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