

GWEN ARAUJO

b. February 24, 1985

d. October 3, 2002

TRANSGENDER HERO

Araujo's murder helped bring awareness to the incidence of violence against transgender people and the "panic defense."

"Live as though this is your last day."

Gwen Araujo was a transgender teen who was the victim of a brutal murder. Her attack brought national attention to the issue of violence against transgender people.

Born in the San Francisco Bay area, Edward Araujo Jr. underwent hormone therapy in high school and adopted the name Gwen Amber Rose Araujo. She left school because of incessant bullying and ridicule.

The night Araujo was murdered, she attended a party at the home of Jose Merél. According to police reports, there were four young men involved in the attack—Michael Magidson, Jose Merél, Jaron Nabors and Jason Casarez. At trial, Nabors testified that Araujo had consensual sex with a few of the men before it was revealed that she was biologically male. Araujo was beaten and strangled to death, hog-tied, wrapped in a blanket and buried in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

In exchange for his testimony against the other defendants, Nabors pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter. The other three men, charged with first-degree murder and committing a hate crime, invoked the transgender "panic defense,"

claiming that the victim provoked the attack by having sex under false pretenses. By invoking this defense, Magidson and Merél were convicted of second-degree murder and acquitted of the hate crime. Casarez pleaded no contest to voluntary manslaughter.

Araujo's murder helped bring awareness to the incidence of violence against transgender people and the "panic defense." In 2006, California enacted the Gwen Araujo Justice for Victims Act. The law allows a judge to instruct jurors not to consider their anti-LGBT biases during deliberations. That same year, Lifetime aired an original movie, "A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story." The case was the subject of a 2007 documentary, "Trained in the Ways of Men."

Each November, communities across the nation hold a Transgender Day of Remembrance to memorialize the dozens of transgender people like Gwen Araujo who are murdered every year.



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