

# Gays hunted for sport, says dead man's family

MEGAN LEVY



Seeking closure ... Scott Johnson's siblings, Rebecca and Steve, appear at a news conference on Tuesday in support of the reopening of the investigation into their brother's death. Photo: Megan Levy



Gone ... the last family photo of Scott Johnson, who died in 1988. Photo: NSW Police

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Steve Johnson, brother

GAY men were systematically hunted down and attacked for sport in Sydney during the late 1980s, says the family of a man found dead at the bottom of North Head.

Police have reopened the investigation into the death of Scott Johnson, a mathematics genius, and are offering a \$100,000 reward for information.

The announcement on Monday follows a long campaign by Mr Johnson’s family for police to look again at the death originally ruled a suicide. Steve Johnson said the gay hate attack on his brother was among hundreds in Sydney, and the family hoped their case would prompt other victims to come forward.

“The perpetrators who operated for so long with impunity are still living among us,” he said. “This is an opportunity to bring not closure but justice to a community that has lived in fear and distrust for so many years.”

Mr Johnson’s naked body was found at the base of North Head at Manly more than 24 years ago. He was an American PhD student studying at the Australian National University.

Mr Johnson spoke with his university supervisor on the morning of December 8, 1988, and left the family home of his boyfriend in central Sydney and bought a ticket to Manly.

Two days later he was dead.

An initial investigation by the Manly Local Area Command and a later inquest in 1989 determined that he had committed suicide.

The family refused to accept this ruling and hired US journalist Daniel Glick to investigate, uncovering evidence that gangs were targeting and bashing gay men at known gay beats often for “sport”.

The theory was based on similarities between Mr Johnson’s death and the murders of up to six men, including WIN television newsreader Ross Warren, in Sydney’s eastern suburbs between 1987 and 1990.

In 2004, Coroner Jacqueline Milledge ruled that violent gangs preying on homosexuals probably hurled three men to their deaths at Marks Park, overlooking Bondi Beach. She also determined that gay bashings in the park were common and that similar attacks might have occurred at gay beats at Alexandria and Randwick.

Spurred by the findings, Mr Glick and retired NSW detective John McNamara were asked by the family to determine if the same scenario occurred on Sydney’s northern beaches.

“In the information that we’ve supplied to the police, there were many similar gangs operating in the northern beaches, going from beat to beat to beat, it was like a sport and there is evidence and evidence and evidence that this was happening,” Mr Glick said.



“I have personally spoken to dozens and dozens of men who were assaulted who were afraid to come forward at the time, and their stories dovetail with each other.”

A second inquest into Mr Johnson’s death in June last year overturned the verdict of suicide and an open finding was returned. The case was referred to the State Crime Command’s unsolved homicide team.

Detective Acting Superintendent Chris Olen, acting homicide squad commander, said detectives now had formed Strike Force Macnamir to review the case.

“At this stage, it is not known whether Scott’s death is a result of suicide, misadventure or murder,” he said.

“What we need is fresh information to help us solve this case and bring some closure to the Johnson family.”

Anyone with information about Mr Johnson’s death has been urged to contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.