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Subject: SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: BRANDON TEENA & FRIENDS "...DESERVED TO DIE."
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SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: BRANDON TEENA & FRIENDS "...DESERVED TO DIE."

On "Saturday Night Live"s February 24th show, regular Norm MacDonald appeared during the "Weekend Update" before a blowup of a USA Today story. It headlined the recent death sentence of convicted murdered John Lotter resulting from his part in the bloody, execution-style slaying of Brandon Teena, a 20 year old transexual man in Falls City, Nebraska, and two of his friends.

Mr. MacDonald had this to say about the sentencing:
"In Nebraska, a man was sentenced for killing a female crossdresser [sic] who had accused him of rape and two of her friends. Excuse me if this sounds harsh, but in my mind, they all deserved to die."

Following close on the heels of a broadbased expression of outrage across the trans and queer communities, members of The Transexual Menace - NYC contacted NBC to vigorously express their shock and anger over Mr. MacDonald's statements. They received immediate responses from Dr. Roz Wineman (head of NBC Standards and Practices), Daniel Ferguson (Media Relations), Mr. Andrew Brewer (Standards & Practices, Community Relations), and Mr. Warren Littlefield's office (President of NBC Entertainment).

By mutual agreement between NBC and The Menace, an information packet was prepared for hand-delivery to Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Lorne Michaels, SNL's executive producer. The packet including a statement from The NYC Menace, pictures of Brandon, a list of recent trans hate crime murders, and the original Village Voice article by Donna Minkowitz. [The full text of the statement appears below.]

Along the way, special help for the Menace's actions was offered by two NBC staffers in particular. One who related how his brother's best friend had been a male-to-male transexual like Brandon. And another, who came out over the phone as a lesbian to a Menace spokestrans, and declared she completely understood and sympathized with the community's outrage over such "humor."

The actual facts of the case, as it emerged from the trial testimony, is that prior to Brandon's death, Lotter and co-defendant Tom Nissan (who testified against Lotter) abducted Brandon, beat him bloody, and then took turns raping him. When Falls City Sheriff Charles Laux refused to press charges in spite of Brandon's obvious wounds and sworn complaint, Lotter and Nissen returned just 5 days later, stabbing Brandon as he slept on the floor and then shooting him in the head. They then turned and shot to death two of his friends who were visiting, an African American man and his girlfriend.

Over 40 transexual, transgender and queer activists from across the US, including Leslie Feinberg, Kate Bornstein and Minnie Bruce Pratt, held a day-long Memorial Vigil outside the opening day of the murder trial which eventuated in Mr. Lotter's sentence. In an all-to-common progression of events, as the demonstrators were leaving the courthouse that day, yet another young transexual, Ms. Deborah Forte, was being violently stabbed to death back in Haverhill, MA.

To date, NBC has declined to issue an apology or retraction, stating that it is not their policy to do so. If matters are not successfully resolved, the NYC Menace is planning a peaceful picketing of SNL when it returns to production in 2 weeks.

NBC and SNL staff can be reached via mail at NBC, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, NYC

10112. They can be reached via phone at: Mr. Warren Littlefield (818-840-3870 Burbank CA), Dr. Roz Wineman (212-664-5443), Mr. Daniel Ferguson (212-664-3733), Mr. Andrew Brewer (212-664-4458) and Mr. Lorne Michaels/Mr. Norm MacDonald (212-664-4444 general number). Mr. Littlefield's office, Dr. Wineman, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Brewer were all both constructive and sympathetic.
[END]

The NYC Menace's Statement to Mr. Norm MacDonald:

Mr. Norm MacDonald February 27, 1996
Saturday Night Live
NBC Studios
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10019

"In Nebraska, a man was sentenced for killing a female crossdresser who had accused him of rape and two of her friends. Excuse me if this sounds harsh, but in my mind, they all deserved to die."
Weekend Update Report

Dear Mr. MacDonald:

I am writing to you about your unfortunate attempt at humor over the violent murder of Brandon Teena, a 20 year old transexual man in Falls City, NB.

40 of us from around the US flew in to hold a Memorial Vigil outside the opening day of the murder trial which eventuated in John Lotter's, sentence, which in turn occasioned your remarks. I take pleasure in admitting I was one of those instrumental in organizing that Brandon's Vigil.

By mid-afternoon, the local Neo-Nazis and skinheads were circling the block, spitting out their windows at us, trying to sideswipe us, and giving "Seig Heil" salutes. Eventually the police had to step in to protect us. Such is the climate of violence and hate in which we as transpeople live, even when simply trying to mourn our dead.

I noted that in your Update report, you said " who had accused him of rape..." Actually, there was never any doubt that Lotter and his accomplice Tom Nissen repeatedly raped Brandon, following an extended beating which left him dripping blood from his face and back. After raping him twice each, they made him shower (to remove evidence), then warned they would kill him if he reported anything.

When Brandon, bruised, still bleeding and in great pain, courageously went to Sheriff Charles Laux anyway and swore out a complaint, the Sheriff, practically awash in Probable Cause, simply refused to act. There was still ample forensic evidence of the multiple rape and extended assault on Brandon's body, and we have a copy of Brandon's signed and horrific complaint. Sheriff Laux ("You can call it 'IT' as far as I'm concerned) made it plain in later statements that he, like you, simply believed that transpeople deserved whatever they got.

According to Nissen's testimony at the murder trial, 5 days after Christmas, true to their word, he and John Lotter returned to Brandon's home where they found him asleep on the floor. Nissen stabbed Brandon deep in the chest as he lay there. When Brandon began moaning and thrashing, Lotter stepped forward and shot him once, execution style, in the head. Then to eliminate any witnesses, they shot two friends who had been sleeping over with Brandon: an African-American man and his girlfriend. These are the people of whose deaths you burlesqued. Lotter would later cynically claim he was asleep in the car during the entire incident.

Brandon's dried blood is still on the floor of that farmhouse for anyone to see.

Brandon's mother is too poor to afford a phone, so fortunately I doubt she would have seen your broadcast. And she still cannot afford a headstone. The Menace offered to start a collection, but she told us the hatred runs so high that it would be almost immediately vandalized. As you read this, Brandon Teena still lays buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in Nebraska.

I want you to know that as we were heading to the Lincoln Airport after the Brandon Teena Memorial Vigil, at that moment another transexual, Deborah Forte, was being brutally murdered back in Haverhill, MA.

Mr. MacDonald, transpeople are never murdered with high-powered rifles at long distances: we are always killed up close, and personal. These are crimes of immense, almost unbalanced hatred. The phrase that inevitably occurs and re-occurs in forensic reports is "multiple stab wounds to the head and chest," And unfortunately in this, Deborah, like Brandon, was no exception.

Not 6 months after Deborah Forte, Channel Picket, one of 2 twin sisters, was brutally murdered in Boston. In between, Tyra Hunter, a transexual woman in Washington, DC, was denied medical treatment by an EMS technician who refused to treat her as she lay bleeding and critically injured from a car accident. Instead, he turned to the gathering crowd and began making jokes. Doubtless he shared your fined-edged sense of "over-the-top" post-modern humor.

We are an embattled community, Mr. MacDonald. We need your attempts to make our deaths into occassions for amusement like we need a heart attack. These are not abstractions for us: every time a transperson falls as a result of a hate crime, the Menace organizes another Memorial Vigil for the first day of the murder trial. We'll be at Deborah's. And at Channel's. And we've already held a Vigil for Tyra.

What's nice about transgender activism is it's reliable work. Another transperson is brutally murdered in an fairly unambiguous hate crime every 4-5 months. This will not change with better laws or more legislation. It will change when we are no longer considered disposable people. It will change when we are no longer considered freaks. It will change when people no longer find the violence of our lives a fit and amusing response for our having crossed gender lines. We will continue to die violent deaths, Mr. MacDonald, until people's attitudes change.

The fact is, performers like you do a great deal to set and solidify popular attitudes of what is fashionable and hip. I hope you lose at least a couple nights of sleep over this. I've enclosed the Village Voice article on Brandon's murder, and I made certain the pictures of him were in color. He is a beautiful young person in any gender, isn't he Mr. MacDonald? Please look at his face, and that of Lana, beside him, and realize that by your actions you've helped bring the deaths of the next beautiful young person like Brandon, or Deborah, or Chanel, or Tyra just a wee bit closer.

Riki Anne Wilchins
The Transexual Menace - NYC Chapter
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