

## After investigative delays, funerals finally under way for alleged Bruce McArthur victims

VICTORIA GIBSON >

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Haran Vijayanathan holds the cremated remains of Dean Lisowick in Toronto on Nov. 1, 2018. Mr. Lisowick's remains went unclaimed from the coroner's office and so Mr. Vijayanathan, a community organizer, will hold a quiet funeral for Mr. Lisowick on Nov. 2.

CHRISTOPHER KATSAROV/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Haran Vijayanathan didn't know Dean Lisowick. But when he heard the slain 47-year-old's body would be left unclaimed in a local coroner's office, he couldn't let it stay there. He'd pick up the remains himself and ensure they were put to rest.

Mr. Lisowick, a man who struggled through his life with a crack-cocaine addiction, transience and violent outbursts toward some of his relatives, fell off the radar more than a year ago. In January,

police listed his name among the grim ranks of eight men allegedly slain by 67-year-old Bruce McArthur.

But, as with the seven other men, a funeral for Mr. Lisowick would have to wait. For most of 2018, police searched for remains, pathologists and coroners examined and identified them and lawyers from both the Crown and defence teams probed for information they'll need for trial. Finally, this fall, all the requisite sign-offs came together and the bodies were released to the families.

So began the chapter of funerals, at last – of burials, cremations and some degree of closure – for those who knew Andrew Kinsman, Selim Esen, Kirushna Kumar Kanagaratnam, Soroush Mahmudi, Abdulbasir Faizi, Majeed Kayhan and Skandaraj Navaratnam.

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Mr. Lisowick's remains, however, went unclaimed from the coroner's office. That's when Mr. Vijayanathan, a community organizer who has spoken out for LGBTQ+ communities throughout the McArthur case, offered to help. On Friday, he will hold a quiet funeral for Mr. Lisowick at the St. James Cemetery. "There was just too much trauma there," Mr. Vijayanathan said of the situation for Mr. Lisowick's relatives. He's been in touch with the family and said he's doing this to support them, as well.

Coming to terms with the men's deaths, for all the families, is a painful task. "I can't even imagine putting myself into their shoes," lead investigator Detective Sergeant Hank Idsinga said during a recent phone call. Some families were receiving dismembered remains; others, skeletons.

"It's certainly tough enough to deal with when you have a loved one or a family member that's been killed, let alone killed in the way that we're alleging has happened. But then, to receive those remains back in the state that they're going to be in?"

On a Saturday in mid-October, around 40 of Mr. Mahmudi's loved ones squeezed into his old home, to mourn, pray and share a meal – prepared by his widow, Fareena Marzook. Ms. Marzook, who came to Canada from Sri Lanka, assembled kebabs, curries and sweets from Mr. Mahmudi's native Iran.

A collection of friends and family said prayers together for Mr. Mahmudi, as Ms. Marzook does each day. Her late husband's remains were buried five days earlier, more than three years after he disappeared. Flowers now fill the apartment and she keeps a photograph of Mr. Mahmudi on display in the bedroom that now belongs to her alone. Every day, Ms. Marzook said, "I see him."

Mr. Esen's funeral also took place in mid-October. The family bypassed tradition, in favour of a ceremony they thought reflected Mr. Esen's life. Although the funeral was held in a local church, there was no religious sermon, and close friends in the LGBTQ+ community gave the opening remarks. "This was in tune with him," older brother Ferhat Cinar said.

Mr. Cinar was one of several family members who flew in from overseas for the funeral. It was an expensive pursuit – brothers, nephews and nieces in Turkey couldn't afford to make the trip – but it was important to the family to hold the ceremony where Mr. Esen lived out his final years. When Mr. Cinar heard of his brother's death, he said he felt helpless.

"It was devastating. I can't find the words that describe the feeling," Mr. Cinar said. "Then, I started reading about lovely stories by his friends who knew him, spent time with him, supported him and shared beauties of life with him. First thing that came to my mind was going to the place where he lived, meet his friends and talk about my brother."

He shared stories with The Globe and Mail about his brother pausing his education to work and support their family, then going back to school to finish a degree in sociology and philosophy. He saw courage in his brother's life as a gay man, especially back in Turkey.

As with Mr. Esen and Mr. Mahmudi, many of the slain men immigrated to Canada. After the remains were released, several families debated if, and how, they should bring their loved one back home. But that option was expensive, Mr. Vijayanathan said, and would likely have been difficult to organize given the condition of the remains. So, all of the funerals so far have been held in Canada, although some families from abroad are electing to bring a container of ashes home.

Mr. Vijayanathan is assisting six of the eight families as they navigate the anguished process of laying their sons, husbands, brothers and nephews to rest. He launched a GoFundMe campaign to offset extra costs, although it hasn't raised as much as he'd hoped so far. The goal was to raise \$60,000 to give each family \$10,000. Right now, he's raised enough to give each of them around \$550. He believes some are also likely to need help dealing with the psychological reverberations of their loved ones' death.

"Was that person at peace when they died? That's what we normally ask if someone died in a hospital or at home," Mr. Vijayanathan said. "But those are the kinds of questions these families don't have answers to. Was he aware; was he awake when this happened?"

"It's heartbreaking and wrenching to listen to them ask me that question, and I have no answer."

Markham resident Rohit Jayaprakash separately transferred more than \$5,000 from a different GoFundMe campaign to the Sri Lankan family of Mr. Kanagaratnam several months ago.

Some families and friends are making every effort to separate their loved one's legacy from the murders. Mr. Kinsman's memorial in September concentrated all the attention on his life – filled with moments of wit, warmth and “buzzing ruckus” – rather than the highly publicized way in which he died.

“If we had lost Andrew under other circumstances, we would be able to gather without that pressure,” his roommate Meaghan Marian said.

There was no program, no eulogy, no speeches and no fuss. The sombre notes of traditional hymns were eschewed for the kick of Canadian punk band Nomeansno. The room was decorated with items the 49-year-old had refurbished himself, and since nearly everyone who knew Mr. Kinsman had a story of him baking or cooking for them, they offered a banquet of desserts to those who came. An Indigenous elder gave a statement recognizing the land they were on and offered a smudge – it would have been important to Mr. Kinsman, his friends and family thought.

“Andrew was deeply feeling but unsentimental,” Ms. Marian said. “He would be mortified to have so much attention paid to him. We sought to be as true to his sensibilities as possible.”

Although they're finally able to hold such a memorial, she sees complete closure as an “imperfect” idea. The funeral was more a transition, she said, from acute grief to more enduring bereavement. As life carries on, she'll try to practise simple things that were important to Mr. Kinsman – taking care of animals, eating well and sharing food.

And soon, a plaque will be installed on a city bench in Allan Gardens in Toronto, borrowing a line from a recent book by Mark Winston and Renée Sarojini Saklikar on the subject of honeybees – apt, Ms. Marian said, because Mr. Kinsman's friends liked to think of him as something of a community pollinator.

“In gratitude for Andrew Kinsman,” the inscription will read, “and ‘the wonder of being part of something more than just our isolated selves.’”