

Finding Aid
Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie
Personal Collection
Sexual Minorities Archives
Holyoke, Massachusetts
Created March 12, 2018

Ben Power collected all materials after Christa's death. Christa's father, Mr. Willie Steele, donated some materials after Christa's death.

See also: digital folder on the SMA laptop named "Materials about Christa," which includes photos, links to articles, and other information.

Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie (December 2, 1975 – January 4, 2018) was a trans rights activist and organizer who was a co-founder of the first New England Transgender Pride March and Rally held in Northampton, Massachusetts in 2008, and the founder of the Miss Trans Northampton Pageant, Miss Trans New England Pageant, and Miss Trans America Pageant from 2009 through 2015.

Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie, originally from Minnesota and Rochester, New York, moved to the Pioneer Valley, Massachusetts in 2005 in search of a community that would accept her identity as a woman and a transgender person. She arrived in the area homeless but determined and became a homeowner, transgender activist, and a central and influential figure in many people's lives.

On January 4, 2018 Steele-Knudslie, 42, was killed in her North Adams, Massachusetts home. Mark Steele-Knudslie, her husband of 9 months, initially confessed to killing Christa and was charged with her murder, but then pleaded not guilty. Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie was the first reported murder of a trans person, worldwide, in 2018.

This collection includes articles and flyers about Christa's pageants and activism; articles about her murder and the community response to it; and personal items of Christa's related to the trans pageants she ran.

Folder 1: Christa's pageants and activism

1. Flyer: Miss Trans Northampton 2008, white with black text, 8-1/2" x 11"
2. Flyer: Save the Date: June 7, 2008, New England Transgender Pride, yellow with black text, 5" x 4"
3. Newspaper clipping: Event announcement for Miss Trans Northampton 2009 pageant, "Dude Looks Like a Lady," *The Valley Advocate*, September 3, 2009, p. 41
4. Newspaper article: "Transgender women ready to bring back the beauty pageant," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, July 30, 2009, front page
5. Newspaper article: "Miss Trans is crowned: Crowd cheers 8 pageant hopefuls," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, September 7, 2009, front page
6. Webpage printout: Miss Trans New England Pageant, from www.causes.com, includes links to About, Related Issues, Cause Started On, and Cause Leaders
7. Webpage printout (2 copies): Miss Trans New England Pageant in Northampton, MA – September 4, 2010. Includes Event Details
8. Webpage printout: Miss Trans New England Stock Photos, from www.alamy.com. Includes two images, one of which has a photo of Christa waving, red hair
9. Webpage printout (3 stapled pages): Miss Trans New England. Includes 10 online posts from 2010 and 2011, to Christa and one post is from Christa
10. Online article printout, "Northampton, Mass Fourth Annual Miss Trans New England Pageant," from *The Rainbow Times*, July 31, 2012. Five pages plus 2 pages in text-only form.
11. Online article printout, "Miss Trans New England Crowning," from *Hartford Courant*, August 31, 2013. Includes a photo of Jasmina Andino, who was crowned Miss Trans New England 2013

Folder 2: Articles about Christa's murder

1. Online article printout: "Number 1 – Rest in Power, Christa" from TransGriot, January 6, 2018, written by Monica Roberts. Includes three photos of Christa
2. Online article printout: "Founder of Miss Trans America pageant is stabbed and beaten to death by her husband inside her home" from DailyMail.com (UK), January 8, 2018. Includes five photos of Christa
3. Online article printout: "Steele-Knudslie arraigned on a murder charge" from Mass.gov, January 8, 2018. Written by Frederick A. Lantz
4. Online article printout: "Founder of MissTans America Pageant Killed in First Reported Transgender Murder of 2018" from NewNowNext.com, January 2, 2018. Includes two photos of Christa
5. Online article printout: "Miss Trans America founder's husband charged with her murder" from WashingtonBlade.com, January 9, 2018, written by Mariah Cooper. Includes one photo of Christa
6. Online article printout: "Miss Trans America Pageant Creator Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie Found Stabbed to Death in Her Home" from Jezebel.com, January 10, 2018, written by Aimee Lutkin. Includes one photo of Christa
7. Online article printout: "Miss Trans America founder beaten stabbed to death in her home" from CBSNews.com, January 11, 2018, written by CrimeSider Staff, AP. Includes one photo of Christa
8. Newspaper article: "After a hard past, she had found joy" from *Boston Sunday Globe*, January 14, 2018, written by Evan Allen and Laura Crimaldi, front page. Includes two photos of Christa and one photo of Vickie Boisseau
9. Online article printout: "Documents in North Adams slaying: 'She wouldn't die'" from *The Berkshire Eagle*, February 13, 2018, written by Bob Dunn. Includes information about Christa's last words, "Baby, what are you doing? Includes a photo of Christa's house at 107 Veazie St, North Adams, MA

Folder 3: Community response to Christa's murder

1. Online article printout: "In 2018, We Must Look Beyond Numbers to Stop Anti-Trans Violence" from National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), January 11, 2018, written by Harper Jean Tobin and Cerys Beckwith. Includes a sub-article, "In North Adams, a vigil for a slain friend, and against domestic violence."
2. Newspaper article: "Memorial set for slain trans activist" from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, January 24, 2018, front page, written by Bera Dunau. Includes two photos of Christa
3. Program booklet (two copies) from the memorial service for Christa held on January 27, 2018 at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts. Includes a photo of Christa on the cover, and one copy of the booklet has a homemade pendant attached to it with a tiny photo of Christa on the pendant. One of the mourners at the service made these little pendants and handed them out to attendees.
4. Newspaper article: "Friends honor slain trans activist's life, legacy" from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, January 29, 2018, front page, written by David McLellan. Includes a small photo of Christa and two photos of memorial service attendees.
5. Newspaper article: "Farewell to Christa: Mourning the Tragic Murder of Western Mass Trans Activist" from *The Rainbow Times*, cover, and "GBTQ ME community mourns tragic death of Western Mass trans activist," page 3, February 1 – February 28, 2018 issue, written by Nick Collins and Mike Givens. Include photos of Christa
6. Event flyer: "Stop Killing Trans People! March & Rally." Blue and pink graphic, black text on white 8-1/2 x 11" sheet of paper. Flyer announces the protest of Christa's murders and the murders of all trans people, held on February 24, 2018 in North Adams, Massachusetts
7. Speaker Lineup for the "Stop Killing Trans People! March & Rally." 2 copies
8. Op-Ed: Stop Killing Trans People! Written by Ben Power for *The Rainbow Times* and delivered as his speech at the "Stop Killing Trans People! March & Rally

9. Ben Power's organizing notebook for the "Stop Killing Trans People! March & Rally. Ben Power was the lead organizer of this protest held on February 24, 2018 in North Adams, Massachusetts. Blue, spiral bound notebook, 4" x 6". Includes handwritten notes by Ben: his to-do lists for the protest, contact emails and information, rally speaker list, statistics about trans murders, etc.
10. Note paper, 4" x 6" with URL to a major news story about the "Stop Killing Trans People! March & Rally, ABC TV news10.com coverage on February 24, 2018
11. Online article printout: "Local Woman's Murder Sparks Rally to Raise Transgender Awareness" from iBerkhires.com, February 26, 2018, written by Tammy Daniels. Includes two photos from the "Stop Killing Trans People!" protest
12. Online article printout: "Defending trans lives from violence" from Workers World, February 27, 2018, written by Gery Armsby. Includes two photos from the "Stop Killing Trans People!" protest
13. Online article printout: "Not-a-Hate-Crime Victim Still Bears Scars" from PRIZMNews.com, March 1, 2018, written by Tommy Wilcox. Includes a color illustration by Christian Cimoroni depicting Tommy Wilcox and the four trans women who were murdered up to that date in 2018: Viccky Gutierrez of Los Angeles, California; Christa Leigh Steele-Knudslie of North Adams, Massachusetts; Tonya Harvey of Buffalo, New York; and Celine Walker of Brandon, Florida

Artifacts and Christa's belongings (these are loose inside the storage box):

1. Rhinestone tiara (stored in wrapping paper)
2. Miss Trans America sash handmade by Christa. White with rhinestone border and pink lettering
3. DVD copy of the movie, "Transamerica" which belonged to Christa.
4. Framed color flyer and ticket for the Miss Trans New England Pageant held on September 10, 2011 at the Northampton High School Auditorium, 380 Elm St., Northampton, Massachusetts. Painted blue wood frame, 10" x 12".
5. Framed newspaper article from the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, Massachusetts, May 2-3, 2009, "Start-up pride march a no-go for this June." This article mentions that Christa Hilfers (at that time, Christa's marriage name) was organizing the second Trans Pride march, called "Trans United" and to be held in October 2009. Marbled, black frame, 13" x 11".
6. Triangular rainbow flag with two grommets, fabric, 11" x 18", which belonged to Christa.
7. Long, rectangular rainbow flag with two grommets, fabric, 12" x 60", which belonged to Christa.
8. Transgender flag handmade by Christa. Blue, pink, and white fabric with a shiny gold trans symbol in the center, and in the lower-right corner is sewn in gold thread the following, "Larin A. Watson, Lars, 2008." Lars was a trans man who took his own life that year, and Christa honored him by sewing his name into the transgender flag that she made and brought to pride marches and other events. Rectangular, 40" x 66".
9. Sandwich board sign made by Ben Power to honor and remember Christa at the "Stop Killing Trans People!" protest he organized in North Adams, Massachusetts on February 24, 2018 following Christa's murder there. Two pieces of red poster board, each of them 14" x 20" and connected with blue, pink, and white yarn in two places at the top. The front board says, "Christa, Dec. 2, 1975 – Jan. 4, 2018" and has a Trans Rights Now! sticker on it and a

color photo of Christa. This photo was Christa's favorite photo of herself. The back board says, "Transgender People Demand Respect!" Ben Power wore this sandwich board at the "Stop Killing Trans People!" rally and march he organized. The rally was held in front of City Hall in North Adams and the march proceeded from there to Christa's house, the site of her murder, at 107 Veazie St. in North Adams.