

BEN MATSON

killed by Vancouver police in 2002

In the early hours of May 12, 2002, in the heart of downtown Vancouver, Ben Matson was pronounced dead.

After a verbal altercation regarding the location of Ben's motorcycle, Vancouver Police were called in. The situation, which was between an off-duty police officer and Matson, diffused before the police arrived, and Ben returned to the bar to re-join his friends. The police entered the bar, to question Ben, who exited the rear of the club. The police followed, and a foot chase ensued down the alley. At the entrance of the alley, Ben tripped, and was quickly surrounded by five officers who kept him down by kicking him and restraining him. A violent struggle followed. There were direct kicks to Matson's head, neck, back, mid-section and hip. There was deep bruising in all of these areas, some with clear boot prints, prompting the police investigating the incident to confiscate the boots of the officers involved in Ben's death.

Being a holiday weekend in the centre of a major urban area, many witnesses saw the death of Ben Matson that night. Many recall hearing him say "stop you are killing me," and "you are hurting me, I can't breathe." In prone position, Ben was handcuffed, and remained on his stomach, on the ground, under the weight of many of the officers. Shortly after, the surrounding crowd vocalized the sudden change in Matson's behaviour. He slipped in to a state of unconsciousness. Although the Vancouver Police training recommends removing an individual from their stomach as quickly as possible, those actions weren't executed in the case of Ben Matson. His death was due to massive peripheral aspiration due to restraint-associated cardiac arrest. He choked to death on the contents of his stomach while in prone position.

Matson's daughter, Julie, launched a *Police Act* complaint, which launched an investigation of the police officers involved. In June 2003 the investigation deemed that no criminal proceedings be commenced. In October 2004, the Office of the Chief Coroner held an inquest. After eight days, the inquest returned a verdict of accidental death. These outcomes didn't come as a surprise to the surviving Matson family. During the entire process of the investigation in to her dad's death, Julie felt that not only did the investigating officers display complete incompetence in their efforts, but that their findings conspicuously supported and protected their uniform. She represented her family during the public inquest, and saw that the jury was constantly reminded that no one was on trial, and their role was only to determine the circumstance of death – accidental, suicide or homicide. She revealed gross inconsistencies in the investigation to the jury, but still, they were reminded, no one was on trial. It was outlined by the other lawyers representing the police, and the coroner himself that no one wanted Ben to die that fated night in May 2002.

She still has unresolved questions surrounding her father's death, and finds solace with others who recognize the injustice and impunity of many police actions.

[Justice for the Victims of Police Killings Coalition – October 2011 – 22octobre.net]