



# PRIDE AWARD

## Center for Homicide Research



Joe Shulka (left) and Dallas Drake

by Terrance Griep

"I SHOULD PREFACE this," Dallas Drake, Cofounder and Principal Researcher of the Center for Homicide Research (CHR), croaks at the beginning of our interview, "by saying I'm having a really bad allergy day today. I'm having a little trouble talking. But I'll keep going."

It's the perfect metaphor, really. Despite numerous discomforts, Drake, along with the CHR crew, always trudges forward, gamely pressing on like the intrepid US Postal Service. It's this dedication, this tenacious commitment, that has earned the nonprofit a *Lavender Pride Award*.

Drake had been a photographer for the local queer press, and his work got him to thinking about who keeps tabs on gay murder. Sniffing around the worlds of academia, media, and law enforcement—which included an in-person visit to the FBI—he found that no one was. And the die of his professional life was cast.

"My partner, Joe Shulka, and I formed the Minnesota Gay Homicide Study (MGHS), and formalized it into an organization," Drake recounts. "We started looking for funding, and started working toward developing a methodology so that we could proceed with this work with results that would be acceptable to the academic community, to law enforcement, and to our own [GLBT] community."

MGHS expanded its focus to the entire United States in 2003, and CHR was born.

But what is gay homicide, precisely? Drake is characteristically precise.

"We look at three things," Drake replies. "We look at victims, we look at offenders, and we look at incidents. Say some heterosexual offender goes into a gay bar, and opens gunfire. He doesn't kill any gay people, but he kills a heterosexual. That's a homosexual incident."

CHR's work is important and innovative, but also perpetually grim.

When asked about balancing the human with the high-brow, Drake responds, "It's important to care enough about the work to actually do it, but to be detached enough so that you're not overcome or overwhelmed by it."

"I think a lot of people in the GLBT community are overwhelmed by GLBT violence, partly because we don't know what to do. And when we don't know what to do, there's a feeling of powerlessness."

"In our office, we feel empowered because of what we're doing. And that's part of what makes us able to do the work. We're actually making a difference. We're actually doing something to hopefully prevent homicide."

Perhaps CHR's most important focus isn't on the grisly details of past crimes, but on a hopeful future—specifically the prevention of gay homicide.

"Our work helps increase law enforcement's ability to solve these homicides," Drake notes. "That has a preventative impact, because if you know you're going to get caught, you're not going to go out and offend."

"That's not 100 percent true. Some people will go out and offend, regardless of whether or not they're going to get caught, but overall, people have to know that they're going to get caught."

With Drake and company on the case, the odds are stacked a little more in our favor.