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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA  

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TODD SPITZER

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS RELEASE**

Date: July 3, 2024  
Case #: 18HF0073

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**Newport Beach Man Convicted of Stabbing Gay Former High School  
Classmate  
to Death in 2018 Hate Crime Murder**

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A Newport Beach man has been convicted of a hate-motivated murder for stabbing his gay former high school classmate to death during a late-night rendezvous in a Lake Forest park after reconnecting on a dating app for men seeking men with the 19-year-old pre-med college student.

After a nearly three-month trial, a jury convicted Samuel Lincoln Woodward, 26, of Newport Beach of first-degree murder along with a hate crime enhancement and personal use of a knife for stabbing 19-year-old University of Pennsylvania student Blaze Bernstein to death on January 2, 2018, while Bernstein was home from winter break visiting his parents. He faces a maximum sentence of life without the possibility of parole in state prison. He is scheduled to be sentenced October 25, 2024.

On January 2, 2018, Bernstein made dinner with his family and then, after responding to messages from Woodward on a dating app, he arranged for Woodward to pick him up a few doors down from his parents' home just after 11 p.m., leaving his glasses, keys, and wallet behind.

Less than two hours later, Bernstein's body would be buried in a shallow grave in a Lake Forest park after having been stabbed 28 times by his former high school classmate who had led him to believe they were in the park for a romantic encounter.

At 2:38 a.m., after having killed Bernstein, buried his body, and cleaned up, Woodward sent a text to a friend, "hey man, life is good."

Bernstein's parents reported him missing the next day after he missed a dentist appointment. His body was discovered a week later buried in Borrego Park after heavy rains had washed away some of the dirt covering his makeshift grave.

While Bernstein was missing, his parents went through his online activity and found that the last person he had communicated with was Samuel Woodward, Bernstein's former classmate at the Orange County School of the Arts. Woodward told the Bernsteins that he had met up with their son but that he had walked off into the park with an unknown person and he never saw Blaze again.

Bernstein's blood was found on a knife belonging to Sam Woodward that had his father's name engraved on it and blood droplets were found on a skull mask that prosecutors argued Woodward wore to represent his allegiance to Atomwaffen, a Neo-Nazi and homophobic group that he traveled to Texas to train with after studying their teachings. Woodward continued to draw pictures related to Atomwaffen and their beliefs following his arrest for Bernstein's murder. Investigators also discovered what prosecutors called a "hate diary," which detailed Woodward's online activities to lure gay men and boys into believing he was "bi curious," and then unfriending them. The diary contained numerous slurs referring to gay men.

"I am eternally grateful for the unwavering commitment and perseverance of Senior Deputy District Attorney Jennifer Walker in her pursuit of justice not only for 19-year-old Blaze Bernstein, but for every victim of hate. This was not a crime committed in the heat of passion; it was planned, it was carried out, and it was attempted to be covered up and Walker painstakingly walked the jury through every piece of evidence that proved it. Every one of the 28 stab wounds inflicted on 19-year-old Blaze Bernstein was an act of hate that was carried out over and over again not just to kill Blaze, but to send a message," said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. "Samuel Woodward is someone who educated himself on how and who to hate, who surrounded himself with other people full of hate, and carried out the ultimate act of hate – brutally stabbing someone to death because they embody everything you hate simply because of who they love. Hate will never be tolerated here in Orange County – and instead of a symbol to be revered by other haters, he is a symbol of how society will never tolerate those who terrorize the most vulnerable members of our society through hatred and fear."

Senior Deputy District Attorney Jennifer Walker of the Homicide Unit is prosecuting this case.