

NYC: Suicidal Man Saved by Huge Pile of Trash

Monday, 03 January 2011

A suicidal man plummeted nine stories and survived in midtown Sunday when he landed on a mountain of trash that had piled up since last week's blizzard, officials said.

Vangelis Kapatos, 26, wearing only pajama bottoms, jumped from his family's apartment in the Whitby building on 45th St. near Eighth Ave. just after noon.

The troubled young man, fresh out of a psychiatric facility, had tried to end his life in a number of other ways before making the leap, police sources said.

"He landed on a garbage pile," one official said. "That's the only reason he's alive."

Kapatos, whose family hails from Greece, was taken by ambulance to Bellevue Hospital. He was in critical but stable condition there Sunday night, police said. His injuries were not life-threatening.

Kapatos landed on his back, causing some of the black plastic garbage bags to burst, spewing their rotten contents all over the sidewalk.

The Sanitation Department suspended trash collection after the Dec. 26 snowstorm paralyzed the city. It was expected to resume today.

Residents of the building, where Kapatos lived with his father, said the garbage had been kept in the basement since the storm hit.

Workers at the building put the rotten haul - some 100 bags in all - on the curb Sunday morning, residents said.

"He's probably alive because of it," said one longtime resident of the building who would not give his name.

Joe Kantor, 55, said he looked out his apartment window after hearing police-car sirens blaring outside the building. He said he was stunned to see Kapatos lying amid the bulging trash bags.

"He wasn't moving at all. I didn't think he was alive," Kantor recalled. "He was bleeding from the side, and I thought he might have been stabbed."

Kapatos had a history of psychiatric problems, the police sources said. Before he took the plunge, he sliced his throat with a knife, the sources said.

One other official source said Kapatos had tried to hang himself inside the apartment.

Kapatos had been undergoing treatment at Bellevue and was discharged Friday, a police source said.

Another neighbor, Austin Colyer, 80, called Kapatos "a good boy."

He said the young man had lived in the building since his parents moved to New York from Greece when he was 3. His mother returned to her homeland a few years ago.

"He went to school, but was quiet, kept to himself," Colyer said of Kapatos. "I don't think he had a very happy childhood."