

TACOMA
SOUND PUBLISHING INC

TACOMA
AMERICA'S #1 WIRED CITY®

Published Since 1890

Daily Index

**OFFICIAL
NEWSPAPER
OF THE CITY
OF TACOMA**

*Devoted to the Courts,
Real Estate, Finance,
Industrial Activities,
and Publication of
Legal Notices*

Visit our Web site at
www.tacomadailyindex.com

**INSIDE:
LEGAL NOTICES
BANKRUPTCIES
LIENS
ORDERS
FEDERAL COURT
AUDITORS OFFICE
NEW BUSINESSES**

editor@tacomadailyindex.com

Tacoma Homicides Jack Cameron wants you to remember the city's murder victims

Article and Photo By Todd Matthews, Editor

It's safe to say Jack Cameron has a unique perspective on Tacoma. Since March 2006, he has written brief profiles of Tacoma's homicide victims on his Web site tacomastories.com. His posts are based on newspaper articles, police reports, and information shared by people close to the victims. If you are reading a newspaper or watching television and learn about one of approximately 18 homicides that occur every year in this city, Cameron will probably provide another layer to the story.

"I'm interested in what makes people desperate and what causes these violent actions," explained Cameron over a late lunch last week at a bar in downtown Tacoma. "More importantly, and specifically when it comes to these homicide victims, these are people who didn't want to go. It's different than a suicide. It's different than somebody dying of old age or something. Somebody else took these people out, and they didn't want to go. I think their stories deserve to be told as to who they were and what happened."

When a 26-year-old man was killed in a Tacoma alley in 2006, one commenter wrote, "To the parents and family, I loved your son. I will never forget him and I'm sure no one else will either. He was the kind of person who could walk into a room full of mad people and say one thing. Then the whole room would be laughing. He always brought the best out in everyone. I miss him so much!"

"I knew [him] since high school back in the early 90's," wrote one person commenting on the murder of a 30-year-old man in the Old Town neighborhood. "He is missed and loved. He leaves behind three beautiful children and a distraught wife. It is a terrible loss and no one can replace him. Rest in peace."

When a 27-year-old man was stabbed to death on a Sunday afternoon last November, a woman claiming to be his mother posted a comment to correct the spelling of her son's name and add, "I pray someone comes forward to find my son's murderer."

Finally, when a 31-year-old Tacoma man was murdered on July 4, 2006, by a stranger who offered a ride home from a Tacoma bar, Cameron's post drew comments from people claiming to be family members and friends. They offered updates on a memorial service held in the victim's Florida hometown, the accused



"I'm interested in what makes people desperate and what causes these violent actions," says Tacoma resident Jack Cameron who writes about homicide victims online. "More importantly, and specifically when it comes to these homicide victims, these are people who didn't want to go. It's different than a suicide. It's different than somebody dying of old age or something. Somebody else took these people out, and they didn't want to go. I think their story deserves to be told as to who they were and what happened."

murderer's trial, and information about where donations could be made to support the victim's young daughter.

"He was just out doing what should be totally safe and OK to do," wrote one woman who claimed to be the victim's aunt. "Here is another totally senseless waste of a life filled with promise and love of a child and new marriage." Another person wrote, "Jason was a good friend of mine in college. He was and always will be very close to my heart."

Eight years later, Cameron still clearly remembers that post. "I think that one sticks out to me the most," he said. "There was a guy who was almost exactly my age. He was out at a bar the same night I was out at a bar. He had pretty much the same night, except that he got a ride from a stranger and that stranger killed him. That resonated with me personally because I thought that could have been me, instantly. It wasn't a stretch at all. It was just dumb luck. That stuck out for me."

Cameron, 39, is a Tacoma native who grew up on the South Side and now lives in the North End. He is a true-crime fan who owns boxed sets of *The Wire*, *Homicide: Life on the Street*, and even *Barney Miller*. He arrived for our interview with a novel by Elmore Leonard tucked under one of his arms. He plans to self-publish a crime novel this fall. But his interest in Tacoma homicides dates back more than a decade to a former job transcribing police reports.

Reading Cameron's blog can put a strange and dark lens over Tacoma. It can be heavy material for readers, commenters, and even Cameron himself.

"I did take a break for about a year-and-a-half," said Cameron. "It gets depressing. It became a thing where I was only updating my site when somebody in this city died. I felt like my Web site had a body count. I came back to it mainly because the daughter of a victim e-mailed me to ask why I wasn't doing it anymore and how much it meant to her that I wrote about her mom. Since then, it's just been something that I feel like I have to do."

(It also helps that Tacomastories.com isn't only about homicides. Cameron also writes a weekly column entitled "Five Question Friday," which has featured brief interviews with the kinds of people that make a city interesting — local brewers, musicians, writers, restaurant owners, and even movie theater operators.)

One person who finds value in Cameron's work is Shalisa Hayes. In August 2011, Hayes' 17-year-old son, Billy Ray Shirley III, was murdered in Ta-

**CONTINUED
ON PAGE 2**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 coma. One month later, Hayes founded the Billy Ray Shirley III Foundation, which aims to build a community center on Tacoma's East Side.

"Although I haven't read each and every article he has written, from those that I have read, I found that Jack's project was one that reported each incident based on what information was released to the public and without judgment," explained Hayes. "He highlights the good in the victim, leaves the negativity up to others, and if unsure of any particular portion of the story, he makes a point in indicating that the information is unclear. They say there are always three sides to a story — yours, mine, and the truth. I feel like Jack does his best to stick with 'the truth' and not what would get him the most viewers."

Hayes was uncomfortable when she first learned Cameron had written about her son. At the time, media had incorrectly reported information on the circumstances surrounding Shirley's death.

"Because of this, when I started to read Jack's article, I was initially tense assuming that I would read something that would make me angry all over again," recalled Hayes. "But once I was done reading, I found that I was relieved. Relieved that he had taken the time to research and find the comments and statements given by the voices of people that actually knew Billy Ray. And he pointed out facts that no one else seemed to notice. While other journalists were creating this picture of Billy Ray being a troublemaker, Jack broadly pointed out what others missed or didn't fully grasp."

Hayes also pointed out that writing about every Tacoma homicide might seem like a horrifying project, but it could provide a service to the city.

"Everyone wants to live in a city that they deem to be safe, so not only does it hurt us emotionally to hear of anyone's life being taken, it also gives us an idea of the horrific crimes that go on in our immediate area despite any possible false sense of security," said Hayes. "Jack's project provides us with important information about our neighbors, even if their stories don't make it to the larger media outlets."

The *Tacoma Daily Index* spoke with Cameron to learn more about his online project. Here are some excerpts from the interview, condensed and edited for publication.

ON HIS EARLY HISTORY IN TACOMA

I was born in South Tacoma. I grew up near South 40th [Street] and Fawcett [Avenue]. I literally had a collection of shell casings from drive-by shootings. I grew up in the early-1990s, when I think one year we actually had more drive-by shootings than Los Angeles. Things got pretty bad. Things have improved substantially.

After middle school, I chose to go to Wilson High School on the North End of town, literally as far away as I could legally go to school. That was a very conscious choice on my part. Part of that was that I had been in a lot of altercations in elementary and middle schools, and now all of these kids were into guns. I wanted to go [to high school] far away where I didn't know anybody. That's what I did. That was an entire culture shock for me. There were kids there that had never been in a fist fight. I didn't understand that.

ON CREATING THE TACOMA HOMICIDES PROJECT

In the late-1990s, I worked for the Law Enforcement Support Agency (LESA) transcribing police records. One of the things that I would do on my lunch breaks was just look at the homicide files. It interested me because I've always been interested in crime and

how we deal with it as a community.

Later on, when I started writing online, there was this 1990's idea of what Tacoma is [like]. I said to somebody, 'I bet I could write about every single homicide in Tacoma and I wouldn't be *that* busy.' There are just not that many [homicides in Tacoma] — maybe one a month, if that. At the time I started [Tacoma Homicides] back in 2006, there [were] 15 [homicides] for the whole year. That's basically how it started.

The other thing was that every time you hear about a murder, it's almost always about the killer. It's almost always the name of the victim, maybe what they did, maybe how old they were — but that's about it. I thought, 'The killer is not the person who deserves any sort of recognition. It's the victim.' I really wanted to focus specifically on the victims because I didn't think anyone was doing that.

ON THE RANGE OF FEEDBACK TO HIS PROJECT

If the victim had a big online presence — if they had a Facebook page and a lot of Facebook friends — I'll hear from a lot of people. If they don't have a Facebook page and I could find almost nothing about them online, odds are most of their friends aren't online either and I won't hear anything. I think part of it is that I'm almost 40 years old. I think that people of our generation, we're online more than others. When there's a homicide victim in their late-50s or early-60s, I don't usually get a lot of responses. If I do, it's from their grand-daughters.

There are some [Tacoma Homicide posts] I hear nothing about. There are others I will hear about years later. There was one where a homeless man was killed years ago. A former classmate of his looked him up just a few years ago. The only thing his friend could find about him was my Web page.

Almost universally, when I have had problems, they have [involved] gang-related shootings. They have been things where I am saying something nice about the guy the other gang killed. They're not happy about it. There was another situation — again, it was a gang-related shooting — [where] the gang that the victim was in posted this really long thing that went into specifics about who in the other gang was going to get killed. I forwarded that on to the Tacoma Police Department. I didn't want any part of it. That's really rare.

I get a lot of e-mails from victims' families and friends, and they are great. I really wish more relatives and friends of victims would do that sort of thing. The main thing I want to do is share who these people were, and the best way to do that is through family and friends.

ON HOW THE PROJECT HAS SHAPED HIS VIEW OF TACOMA

It's shaped it a little in that I think there's this whole concept of 'good' and 'bad' neighborhoods. East Side is bad. South Side is bad. Whatever. I grew up on the South Side and ended up living in the North End. So I kind of have an idea of both of those places. There's a certain truth to what's 'bad' and what's 'good.' But when it comes to homicides, they don't differentiate. Homicides happen all over the city. You might be more likely to be robbed someplace, but you're not more likely to get killed anywhere. At the same time, it's one [homicide] a month — if that — in a busy year. When you compare that to Seattle — yeah, Seattle is bigger — but I think they are at, like, 30 [homicides] now, and we're at five so far this year. Tacoma is not nearly as dangerous as many people think it is.

More information about Jack Cameron and Tacoma Stories is online at tacomastories.com.

Tacoma Homicides *Shalisa Hayes on Jack* *Cameron's online* *project*

Article By Todd Matthews, Editor
Photos Courtesy Billy Ray Shirley III
Foundation

One person who finds value in Jack Cameron's online project to document Tacoma homicides is Shalisa Hayes.

In August 2011, Hayes' 17-year-old son, Billy Ray Shirley III, was murdered in Tacoma. One month later, Hayes founded the Billy Ray Shirley III Foundation, which aims to build a community center on Tacoma's East Side.

The *Tacoma Daily Index* spoke with Hayes — a public speaker, mentor, and neighborhood activist — to learn her perspectives on Cameron's work.

TACOMA DAILY INDEX: What are your impressions of Jack Cameron's "Tacoma Homicides" project?

SHALISA HAYES: I think it's a great project. Although, at first glance, one may think it's horrifying to keep track of every homicide that occurs in the city. However, it wasn't long before I personally found the information useful for a number of reasons.

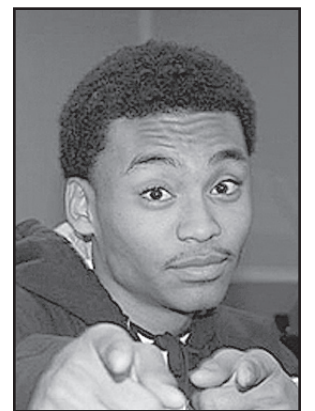
Everyone wants to live in a city that they deem to be safe, so not only does it hurt us emotionally to hear of anyone's life being taken, it also gives us an idea of the horrific crimes that go on in our immediate area despite any possible false sense of security. Jack's project provides us with important information about our neighbors, even if their stories don't make it to the larger media outlets.

Additionally, as a part of my community work, I locate the names of young people who have lost their lives to violent acts, then I attempt to connect with their mothers. Unbeknownst to him, I have used Jack's project to gather names, dates, and ages of victims that I hadn't found in other public resources.

So both as a resident in Tacoma simply wanting to know what's going on around me, and as an community activist, his project proved to be one well worth the time he puts in to it.

INDEX: Were you supportive of Cameron including a post about your son as part of his project?

HAYES: Absolutely . . . eventually.



SHIRLEY

CONTINUED
ON PAGE 3

Maritime Heritage Area

Congressmen to visit Tacoma for proposed legislation announcement

Representatives of the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) will be in Tacoma next week to promote proposed legislation to create a National Maritime Heritage Area in the State of Washington.

The National Heritage Area Program began in the 1980s as a way to promote heritage tourism while supporting maritime trades and businesses. There are currently 49 heritage areas nationwide, and most are located in the eastern United States.

Washington State Historic Preservation Officer Dr. Allyson Brooks was at Tacoma City Hall in 2009

to share plans to pursue the legislation. At the time, Brooks noted the special designation is made by Congress, but program administration — including the distribution of federal grants to groups and organizations that promote Washington State's maritime history — would be managed on the local level.



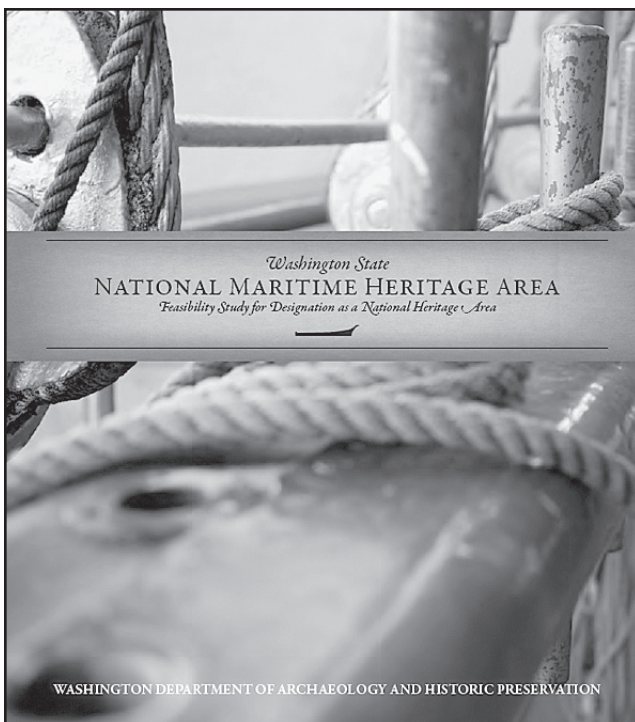
KILMER

DAHP contracted with Parametrix and Berk & Associates to compile a feasibility study, which was completed in March 2010, and Tacoma-based Artifacts Consulting to compile a Maritime Resource Survey, which was completed in June 2011.

On Mon., June 30, at 10 a.m., Congressman Derek Kilmer (D-Gig Harbor) and

Congressman Denny Heck (D-Vancouver) are scheduled to join DAHP officials at the Foss Waterway Seaport, located at 705 Dock St., to announce their plans to introduce legislation to create the special designation.

HECK



**CONTINUED
FROM PAGE 2**

In the first few weeks after Billy Ray's death, I was not only grieving and wanted to grieve in peace, but I was also upset. Upset that the media would rush to point a camera in my face within the first 24 hours of his death, knowing that I had just suffered one of the biggest tragedies that a person could imagine. To add insult to injury, in some cases the media reported my son's story wrong. In their rush to be the first to break the story, initial reports from some news outlets attempted to paint a picture of my son as someone who went to this party (where he lost his life) to cause trouble, and at least one journalist reported that his reason for attending the party was to pick me up. When I heard this, I was *devastated*. Not only because this was inaccurate and knowing that once you say something, it can't be taken back, but most importantly, it gave the audience this picture that I was such an irresponsible person that I would actually put my son in a situation to have to pick me up from a late-night party. Those are negatives from the start — him being a trouble maker, and me [being] irresponsible. [It was] absurd [and] the last thing that I wanted to deal with in the midst of my grief. It's almost three years later and I'm still finding myself correcting people because of this one false statement.

Because of this, when I started to read Jack's article, I was initially tense assuming that I would read something that would make me angry all over again. But once I was done reading, I found that I was relieved. Relieved that he had taken the time to research and find the comments and statements given by the voices of people that actually knew Billy Ray. And he pointed out facts that no one else seemed to notice. While other journalists were creating this picture of Billy Ray being a troublemaker, Jack broadly pointed out what others missed or didn't fully grasp. Billy Ray was shot while he was *leaving* the party. That speaks volumes if he was assumed to have gone there to cause trouble.

What was apparent to me was that Jack took the time to describe things that the general public didn't know about my son — or were just learning — and even though he, too, included the statement about Billy Ray picking me up from this party, he clearly stated that the information was "unconfirmed," ensuring that his audience understood that this was not yet factual information. Thank goodness!

Out of all the stories I had seen on television, I was happy to finally see something that focused on Billy Ray as a person in life and not just the circumstances surrounding his death. Because of that, I had no concerns about the article and was content with its content. While other news reporters were back-tracking and attempting to correct their stories about Billy Ray, Jack's story was able to remain unchanged simply because he took the *time* to do the research first. I wish all writers, both for television and print, would take the time to do the same for such sensitive subjects.

INDEX: Cameron hopes that by writing about homicide victims, he is focusing the attention away from murderers and toward the victims and the lives they led. Do you think he is accomplishing this through his Web site?

HAYES: Yes, and I wish there were more projects like this, or that Jack could have a larger platform to share the information he gathers.

By taking the time to focus on the victim, his readers have the ability to get to know things about the victim that may not otherwise have been known. Instead of just another picture and a name, Jack attempts to bring the person to life so the public can truly understand what they as a community have lost. More often than not, if the general public and entities that feed the public its information (i.e., police and media) are not focused highly on the murderer, the focus shifts to looking for something "wrong" within the victim. Questions that arise tend to be about what the victim did — or didn't do — to cause or contribute to the incident, or determining if the victim had a criminal background — as if that information would indicate that they somehow deserved to die. Rather than assuming innocence, there is a tendency for many to leap right past one of the most important guidelines that our justice system uses — "innocent until proven guilty."



HAYES

Although I haven't read each and every article he has written, from those that I have read, I found that Jack's project was one that reported each incident based on what information was released to the public and without judgment. He highlights the good in the victim, leaves the negativity up to others, and if unsure of any particular portion of the story, he makes a point in indicating that the information is unclear. They say there are always three sides to a story — yours, mine, and the truth. I feel like Jack does his best to stick with the truth and not what would get him the most viewers.

Finally, one thing that I really appreciate about Tacoma Stories that I don't see being done by many online newspapers — and even on social media sites — is Jack's diligence in moderating the comments that are added by his readers. By weeding out the negative comments and providing space for those that knew the victim to discuss the victim's life, he steers the focus back to the victim and not the situation that caused the death or the killer. What those who have not suffered a loss don't always understand is that behind every violent death is a family and a group of friends that loved that person — good or bad. So any negative comment, especially by those who didn't know the victim (which often happens online), can and usually is taken to heart by those who did. It breeds anger, it silences voices that would otherwise speak up, and for some it can push a person or family deeper in to depression. Tacoma Stories is a "safe place" for loved ones to reflect on the incident and discuss the things they want the public to know about the deceased.

More information about the the Billy Ray Shirley III Foundation and Shalisa Hayes is available online at billyray.org and shalisahayes.com.