

Big The Laramie Project Lie

- *The Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Hoax* -

Overview

The Laramie Project is an HBO film and a play that is performed in high schools across the country. *The Laramie Project* portrays the murder of Matthew Shepard as a gay-related hate crime and the prejudice, fear and guilt of people in Laramie in the aftermath of the crime. **The problem is that *The Laramie Project* is fiction and the play is predicated on a lie.** Interviews conducted by ABC's 20/20 with the convicted killers and with friends of Shepard conclusively expose the truth: that Matthew Shepard was a depressed methamphetamine user and partier, and that he was murdered for money and drugs – not because he was gay. The story also suggests that Aaron McKinney, who killed Shepard, knew Shepard and was himself bisexual. The story aired on ABC's 20/20 on November 26, 2004, see <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=277685&page=1>

The Facts



Russell Henderson & Aaron McKinney

“Matthew Shepard's sexual preference or sexual orientation certainly wasn't the motive in the homicide.

If it wasn't Shepard, they would have found another easy target. What it came down to really is drugs and money and two punks that were out looking for it.”

Laramie Police Detective and Lead Investigator Ben Fritzen

Late on the night of October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard was at the Fireside Lounge in Laramie, Wyoming. He got into a truck with Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, both age 21 at the time. Shepard was found approximately 18 hours later, robbed, severely beaten (pistol-whipped 18 times with a .357 Magnum), and tied to a fence. He died from his wounds on October 12, 1998. In 1999 Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney were convicted of Matthew Shepard's murder and kidnapping, and each received two consecutive life sentences without possibility of parole. Neither Henderson nor McKinney ever took the stand in their own defense.

The 20/20 Interviews with Henderson, McKinney and Others

In 2004, for the first time, Henderson and McKinney spoke on camera with 20/20's Elizabeth Vargas and relayed what they say happened. The 20/20 story also included interviews with many other key players. Below are statements from the interview and from the ABC News website account of the story.



"Everywhere I move, it seems like I get sucked into the drug scene."

**Reportedly said by Matthew Shepard
to College Friend Tina LaBrie**

- ✚ One of Shepard's college friends, Tina LaBrie, was concerned that Shepard's depression might be somehow connected to involvement with drugs. "He said 'Everywhere I move, it seems like I get sucked into the drug scene,'" LaBrie told Vargas.
- ✚ Tom O'Connor, known as "Doc," who ran a limousine service and sometimes drove Shepard, said just days before his death, Shepard told him he was HIV-positive and was considering suicide.
- ✚ Ryan Bopp, one of McKinney's friends and drug associates at the time, told 20/20 that he and McKinney had been on a drug binge in the week leading up to the attack on Shepard. "Aaron and I had been awake for about a week or so prior to this whole thing happening - we were on a hard-core bender that week." McKinney's girlfriend told 20/20 that McKinney was using methamphetamine every day during the time of the murder.

- ✚ Bopp stated that a week before the murder he was so desperate for methamphetamine, he traded McKinney a .357-Magnum pistol in exchange for one gram of methamphetamine. McKinney would later use that weapon to beat Shepard.
- ✚ McKinney told Vargas he set out the night of October 6, 1998, to rob a drug dealer of \$10,000 worth of methamphetamine. After several attempts, McKinney was not able to carry out his plan. But according to McKinney, when he encountered Shepard at the Fireside Lounge, he saw an easy mark. McKinney told 20/20 that Shepard was well-dressed and McKinney assumed Shepard had a lot of cash.
- ✚ Shepard was sitting at the bar, McKinney recalls. "He said he was too drunk to go home. And then he asked me if I'd give him a ride. So I thought, yeah, sure, what the hell," according to McKinney.
- ✚ All three got in the front seat of McKinney's pickup, and Henderson took the wheel. McKinney told police that at some point Shepard reached over and grabbed his leg. In response, McKinney said, he hit Shepard with his pistol. "I was getting ready to pull it on him anyway," he said.



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"I would say it wasn't a hate crime. All I wanted to do was beat him up and rob him."

Aaron McKinney

- ✚ McKinney says he asked for, and got, Shepard's wallet, which had only \$30 in it. But even though Shepard handed over his money, McKinney continued beating him. When pressed by Vargas as to why he continued beating Shepard after he had already taken his wallet, McKinney said, "Sometimes when you have that kind of rage going through you, there's no stopping it. I've attacked my best friends coming off of meth binges." McKinney said, "I would say it wasn't a hate crime. All I wanted to do was beat him up and rob him."

- ✚ McKinney says he directed Henderson to drive the truck to a secluded spot on the outskirts of Laramie so they could leave Shepard and have time to get away. They stopped at a wooden buck fence and took Shepard from the truck.
- ✚ On McKinney's instructions, Henderson got a rope from the truck and tied Shepard to a fence post. Henderson claims at some point he tried, but failed, to stop McKinney from beating Shepard further.
- ✚ In a statement to the court, Henderson said McKinney struck him across the face with the gun when he tried to stop the continued beating of Shepard.
- ✚ McKinney took Shepard's wallet and his shoes, got back in the truck and told Henderson to drive to town. He says his plan was to burglarize Shepard's apartment. But when they parked the truck they encountered two young men who police say were vandalizing cars. Hostile words led to a fight and for the second time that night, McKinney went on the attack.
- ✚ Just hours after Shepard's battered body was discovered, and before anyone knew who had beaten him, Shepard's friends Walt Boulden and Alex Trout began spreading the word that Shepard was openly gay and that they were concerned the attack may have been a gay-bashing.



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"If Aaron McKinney had not become involved with methamphetamine, Matthew Shepard would be alive today."

Cal Rerucha Lead Prosecutor

- ✚ Cal Rerucha, the lead prosecutor in the case, attributes McKinney's rage and his savage beating of Shepard to his drug abuse: "The methamphetamine just fueled to this point where there was no control. It was a horrible, horrible, horrible murder. It was a murder that was once

again driven by drugs." Rerucha concluded that "If Aaron McKinney had not become involved with methamphetamine, Matthew Shepard would be alive today."

- ✚ "Everybody knew Matt Shepard was a partier just like Aaron, just like the rest of us," said Bopp.
- ✚ As word spread of the attack on Shepard, other people who knew him also suspected the drug scene might somehow be involved.



"Aaron [McKinney] was selling [drugs], and him and Matt [Shepard]" would go off to the side and they'd come back. And Matt would be doing some meth then."

**Ryan Bopp,
Friend of Aaron McKinney**

- ✚ Bopp said he had seen Shepard and McKinney together at parties. "Aaron was selling [drugs] and him and Matt would go off to the side and they'd come back. And Matt would be doing some meth then," he said.
- ✚ A bartender familiar with the local drug scene, who asked to be identified only as "Jean," says she was friendly with Shepard. She also says McKinney and Shepard knew each other. When she learned of the beating, she said, she recalls thinking, "It's either money or dope, yeah. He'd be the perfect target especially because Aaron knew him."
- ✚ Another Laramie resident, Elaine Baker, says she also saw McKinney and Shepard together in a social situation. Several weeks before the murder, she spent a night on the town in Doc O'Connor's limousine with a group that included both McKinney and Shepard.
- ✚ "In the back of the limo, there was me, Stephanie, Doc, Aaron [McKinney], Matthew Shepard," she said.
- ✚ Doc O'Connor had known Aaron McKinney for years. In flush times, McKinney partied in O'Connor's limos, and, in fact, McKinney and his girlfriend lived for a while in an apartment on O'Connor's property.



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"I know he's bisexual. There ain't no doubt in my mind. He (McKinney) is bisexual."

**Doc O'Connor,
Acquaintance of Shepard and
McKinney**

- ✚ Doc O'Connor says he never heard McKinney express any anti-gay attitudes. In his interview with Vargas, O'Connor reveals his belief that McKinney is bisexual. "I know of an instance where he [McKinney] had a three-way, two guys and one gal - because he did it with me. I know he's bisexual. There ain't no doubt in my mind. He is bisexual."
- ✚ McKinney's former girlfriend Price says she now believes that as well. "He was always into trying to talk me into having a three-way with one of his guy friends," she said.

Conclusion

The murder of Matthew Shepard was unconscionable. The cold-blooded killers will receive life in prison and their immortal souls will spend eternity in hell where their worm will never die and the fire will never be quenched. That said, his death was not because he was gay. The 20/20 story was credible and included many sources; but don't take our word for it. Order the video, order the transcript or read the story <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=277685&page=1> and see for yourself. Predictably the story was vilified by gay-rights advocacy groups and by Judy Shepard. The 20/20 story presented uncontroverted evidence from not just the only two people still alive who know what happened that night, but also from a range of people who have nothing to gain from speaking out.

The same cannot be said for the gay-rights lobby, those promoting *The Laramie Project*, and who continue to use Matthew Shepard and the hate-crime hoax as a poster boy for the homosexual agenda. The Laramie Project is fictional propaganda – nothing more, nothing less.

Mrs. Shepard also sadly gains from maintaining the hate-crime hoax. She is the Executive Director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation. The stated purpose of the foundation is to erase hate and educate the public on hate crimes and the

need for proper legislation among other things. In 2003 Mrs. Shepard received a salary from the Foundation of \$82,485. In 2002 the Matthew Shepard Foundation had total reported assets of \$423,894. In 2003 the Foundation had total reported assets of \$332,731.

The Foundation has a surprising number of revenue sources according to the website www.matthewshepard.org, including:

- ✚ Mrs. Shepard gives public speeches on the tragic death of her son, based on the premise that it was a gay-related hate crime, through www.kepplerspeakers.com. According to the Keppler website, Mrs. Shepard's fee range is \$5,001 - \$10,000 per speech.
- ✚ The annual Embrace! benefit concert, which is a one-night-only Broadway concert in New York City, receives corporate and individual sponsorships, and other fundraising:
 - Visionary Circle Sponsor = \$50,000 donation;
 - Platinum Sponsor = \$15,000 donation;
 - Gold Sponsor = \$5,000 to \$9,999 donation;
 - Silver Sponsor = \$2,500 to \$4,999 donation;
 - Event Sponsor = \$1,000 to \$2,499;
 - Event Supporter = \$500 to \$999;
 - Silent auction
 - Program advertising
- ✚ Bear to Make a Difference Event, Denver, which is an annual gala event that draws over 400 people from around the country. Opportunities are available for both corporate or individual support, silent auction item donations, and program advertising (see above). In 2005 the event netted over \$100,000.
- ✚ Metropolitan Tennis Jam - Brooklyn, New York. The Matthew Shepard Memorial Tennis JAM was founded in 1999 to raise money for the Matthew Shepard Foundation, an organization headed by Judy Shepard in Wyoming to fight intolerance against gay and lesbian people in America. This round-robin doubles fundraiser features a mixed-level playing field in a radical format and is open to all MTG'ers and their friends. This is a one day only competition, played over the Columbus Day weekend, to mark the 1998 passing of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming.
- ✚ Other events are being planned in Dallas (July) and Minneapolis (September).
- ✚ www.Matthewshepard.com Foundation Web Store. In your shopping cart you can purchase Matthew Shepard Foundation T-Shirt and polo shirt, teddy bears, erase hate wrist bands, posters, books (personally

autographed by Judy Shepard), and an educational package for high schools and colleges related to gay and lesbian youth homelessness.

- ✚ www.matthewsplace.com is a website sponsored by the Matthew Shepard Foundation. The website includes scholarship information, information on how to “Come Out,” educational material, etc.
- ✚ Monthly contributions to the Foundation in the designated amounts of \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 per month (including automatic deposit from your checking account).
- ✚ One time donations to the Foundation in the designated amounts of \$25, \$50, \$100 and \$500.
- ✚ Corporate sponsorships
- ✚ Foundation sponsorships
- ✚ Giving Through Your Will program
- ✚ Giving Through Life Insurance program
- ✚ Chartered Giving Plan

It would seem that the primary purpose of this foundation is the perpetuation of this fable, for the financial gain of Mrs. Shepard and her cohorts, and for the misleading of the youth of this nation. Genuine concern for the welfare of young Matthew Shepard continues in his death at about the same level it apparently existed during his life.