

## DEATH, from page 9

In many ways, Chappelle's job is a lot like a detective's, with science, logic, and sometimes only scant evidence on their side. Determining the cause and manner of death is fairly easy. No identification was found on Grigorieff or around where he died. Additionally, his fingerprints did not match any records. These situations constitute the most difficult cases he and his colleagues take on. But they do not give up, taking various routes, including consulting police records, taking DNA, blood, hair, dental and tissue samples, and finding reliable people to talk to.

Sometimes when the Medical Examiner runs into road blocks, a short blurb asking the public for help will be sent out to newspapers with as much physical detail about the person as possible.

### Other winter deaths

At least five people, including Grigorieff, died because of the winter weather in the Pacific Northwest in late December. The other four are:

■ Charles Sinclair Grant, 46, died of hypothermia on December 24 in Beaverton, Ore.

■ Thomas Egan, 60, died of hypothermia in Eugene, Ore. on Dec. 16.

■ A woman known as Tracey burned to death on Dec. 19 trying to stay warm underneath her overturned shopping cart in Vancouver, B.C.

■ Harold Ensminger, 55, died either of foul play or hypothermia in Bend, Ore. on Dec. 16.

Such a write-up was published about Grigorieff in The Oregonian and The Portland Tribune the week of Christmas.

Doing that, Chappelle says, is a last resort.

"If your family member was deceased, the last way that you would want to find out about it is looking in [the paper]," Chappelle says. "When we make a death notification, we try to make it in person."

In the case of a homeless person, Chappelle says, talking to fellow homeless campers may only yield the person's

street name. But in attempting to identify Grigorieff, talking to other homeless people did the trick.

"Most of the time we have pretty good luck, especially with transients," Chappelle says. "Generally, most of these people at one time or another have been arrested [and have had fingerprints taken]."

Beginning to exhaust their options, investigators took a picture of Grigorieff's body and showed it around a number of homeless camps. Someone recognized him and gave the investigating examiner Grigorieff's name and date of birth. On December 27, a definitive identification was made.

"Luckily, his body was in good shape," Chappelle says.

Contacting Grigorieff's family after identifying him, Chappelle says, was easy. Many times, when Chappelle notifies the next of kin about the death, he inadvertently steps into the emotional world of the family, who are often

estranged from their now-dead family member. Chappelle says a very small number of families estranged from a deceased relative, about 25 percent, will take the body and make their own funeral arrangements.

That leaves the vast majority — 75 percent — who leave it up to a random funeral home contacted by the Medical Examiner's office to pick up the body, cremate it, and dispose of the cremains.

With nothing left but a body, it seems odd to let the lack of communication, emotions, and tensions of estrangement continue even in death.

"If you dislike someone, your dislike for them doesn't end with their death," Chappelle says.

Oregon state law stipulates that a "responsible friend" can claim the body when family does not. Chappelle says that happens infrequently.

The Medical Examiner spends five days attempting to contact the family. After that, Chappelle says, "we just can't take any more time," and the body is taken to a funeral home for cremation.

Once the body is taken to the funeral home, the body is no longer in the custody of the Medical Examiner. It is cremated, and the funeral home keeps the cremains for up to ten years in case the family decides to retrieve them.

Grigorieff did not meet that fate. Even after 10 years of estrangement, Jim Grigorieff says that when his family met to decide what to do with George, none of them thought to leave his body up to someone else.

"He was family," Jim Grigorieff says. "Albeit he chose a path that none of us would have chosen."

Cell phones helped Barry and Charles "Chip" Grant stay in touch, even though both were homeless. Chip's last message from his brother still haunts Barry. It was left on his phone just days before Chip was found dead of exposure in Beaverton. He still has it recorded.

"He said he was hurting and he was out in the snow," says Grant, speaking of Charles "Chip" Sinclair Grant, whose body was found Dec. 23. "He basically said goodbye."

The two didn't camp together, but they stayed in touch to check in on each other's situation. Chip had just been released from jail earlier that month, but couldn't find shelter, Grant said. "So he put a board against the side of a building. That's where they found him. It took them several days to find him," Grant says.

"He was lonely, very lonely, and felt that the situation was almost hopeless," says Grant, who survived the elements himself because he found shelter. For his funeral, the family opened up the doors to all of Chip's friends on the streets. (See his obituary, page 3)

As a veteran, Grigorieff was entitled to a veteran's burial, and that is the path the

family took. On Tuesday, January 6, Grigorieff was buried with military honors in Willamette National Cemetery.

"We thought it would be something that he wanted," Jim Grigorieff says. "He was proud of [his service]."

At a later date, Grigorieff thinks the family will gather privately to reminisce about George. They may talk about George's football games, or the fishing adventures he must have had in the woods west of the I-5 corridor. And then there are the "wacky and weird experiences," too, that the family heard a little about throughout the years and at the funeral.

"There's a lot of those," Grigorieff says, almost laughing.

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Deputy Medical Examiner Tom Chappelle says identifying someone as homeless depends almost exclusively on the person's physical appearance, and the environment where the body was found.

"If you have a decedent that looks unbathed, looks like he's wearing three or four layers of clothes, sleeping on a cardboard box, that's kind of a good sign," he says.

That, says Genny Nelson, the founder of the non-profit Sisters of the Road, is "making assumptions based on stereotypes."

Assumptions went terribly wrong when R.J. Anheier, a formerly homeless man and Street Roots vendor who had been living in the Biltmore Hotel, collapsed at the intersection of Northwest Burnside Street and Northwest 6th Avenue and died of a heart attack on Jan. 4, 2008.

The Medical Examiner's office could not identify him, so they gave his body to OHSU's Body Donation Program, which uses cadavers for dissection in anatomy classes.

In March, Nelson says, she and two of Anheier's friends found out about the donation. They knew that Anheier had identification. If the Medical Examiner had gone to the Biltmore, Nelson says, they would have discovered that Nelson was listed on Anheier's rental application as an emergency contact.

"They didn't do their job," Nelson says. Because Anheier's friends intervened, Anheier's sister was contacted. She retrieved Anheier's body. Because of the uproar the Medical Examiner's mistake caused, OHSU is no longer accepting indigent bodies for donation.

"It's not really a setback," says Steve Carmichael, manager of OHSU's body donation program. "We didn't get that many."

**"I can't invest any of my emotion in these cases, because after a while it would break (my) heart."**

— TOM CHAPPELLE  
DEPUTY MEDICAL EXAMINER

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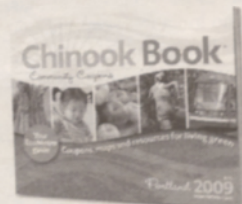
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