



When a colleague suggested I talk with Matt Davis of the Portland Mercury, I was dismissive. It's a post-college shopper; pretentious and provincial; someone's plaything. But Matt had found Jamie Marquez, who had made a set of exceptional photographs with his cell phone camera, and more – Jamie was pissed off and wanted everyone to see the pics.

The fuzzy pictures showed a circle of uniformed police officers, fire personnel and emergency medical technicians standing over the limp body of James Chasse, who would die 90 minutes later without medical attention in the back of a police car.

Matt Davis had put Jamie's pictures on the internet, and within a couple of days everyone had seen the impassive authorities, blandly gabbing with their partners. Matt had made a bold move. "Portland media has historically been frightened of candor when it comes to the police," Matt told me recently, "Criticism of one officer is easily positioned by their advocates to be a blanket condemnation of all officers – most medias can't risk having the door closed, and make compromises."

The details: he's 28 and from London. He's been all over the world, and fell in love with a Portland girl who enticed him home. He has a quick smile, some bravado, easy wit and poor taste in clothes. Davis is working angles in Portland media no one has touched since Mark Christianson left for LA in the 1980s. And he's working without standard resources. He doesn't own a cell phone or a car. He uses an antique laptop, his own camera and has created his own beat – Portland's underclass. And he takes a certain glee in pissing people off.

Not only in the print edition of the Mercury does he play, which is fairly innocuous, but the romper room of the paper's active blog is where the duels have flourished – often Matt parrying several dozen hostile readers and an occasional editor at once.

Why Chasse? Why a documentary film? "We can show the rest of the country that Portland isn't as great as the New York Times would led us to believe. There need to be changes with the police, with the mental health system, with the state budget. I want this film to cry shame on Portland. Sure, we've learned things, we've made changes – but Jim Chasse's death should have been prevented. It's Portland's small town mentality which caused this tragedy."

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[Posted by Jason Renaud](#)

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## Meet the Filmmakers: Benjamin Haile

April 23, 2008

"I think Chasse's death is a great example of the lethal nature of commonly-used police tactics," says Benjamin Haile, who has signed on to be our attorney. "Maybe the police were being extra-aggressive because of the demographic changes in the Pearl District at the time, and the decreased tolerance for people who seemed out of place there."

"But the basic theme of Tasing someone then having the enormous weight of a police officer on top of them while they are in shock is something that I see very often," Haile continues. "I frequently have clients say they thought they were going to die during such encounters."



Haile qualified from Lewis & Clark law school in 2004, and initially focused on criminal defense work. In September 2005 he started a small practice focusing on civil rights, primarily police misconduct cases.

"That's always been something that concerns me," he says. "**The need to police the police.** Somebody needs to be doing it from outside of government. I think internal affairs investigations can be effective when they have effective civilian oversight, but in Portland at least, I don't think the Independent Police Review really has enough investigatory power to be effective, and I haven't seen very good results from the Citizen's Review Committee, either."

Frequently, Haile's clients come to him having exhausted Portland's police review process. If a client comes to him without having made a complaint to the city's oversight system, Haile frequently files such complaints alongside civil lawsuits, because he wants to empower the review process as much as possible.

One of Haile's first clients even alleged excessive force against officer **Christopher Humphreys**, in an incident in 2003. In that case, the violence escalated quickly. The police were looking for Haile's client's friend, and assumed that the client was the person they were looking for, even though he was sleeping in a car outside the person's house.

"They broke the car windows and pepper-sprayed him," says Haile. "So my client drove around the corner to another friend's house, where he stopped. The officers dragged him out of the car, Tazed him and beat him."

Haile secured an \$85,000 settlement for his client in that case, although there was no discipline for Officer Humphreys. Haile says he wasn't altogether surprised by this, but that he did feel the city's having to pay a significant settlement might draw some attention. Another of Haile's clients, Richard Prentice, alleges he was confronted by Humphreys in a cell in 2007, after putting up posters of him downtown.

Haile is excited about our project, especially that we are making *Alien Boy* while the lawsuit is being pursued by the Chasse family.

"**When a lawsuit is filed, often an issue drops out of public view,**" he says. "So I think it's very important that others who are concerned about the issue keep it in the public view. It's tragic when lawyers get involved and cause everyone to clam up."

Thanks for giving us your help and advice, Ben!

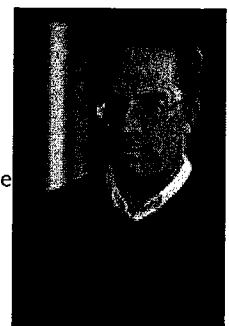
1 Comment | Uncategorized | Permalink  
Posted by matthewcharlesdavis

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## Meet The Filmmakers: Jason Renaud

April 22, 2008

"We were looking for a case we could follow for a long time through all its permutations," says Jason Renaud, when asked why his organization decided to follow the story of James Chasse's death. "These events happen frequently but the public moves from one story to the next, because the media moves from one story to the next. By focusing on one story, we're hoping to get to a deeper, more sophisticated understanding."



Renaud has been doing advocacy around alcohol and drug issues for almost 30 years. In 2003 he formed the Mental Health Association of Portland (MHAP), with the purpose of selecting a single project each year to put the group's utmost effort into, rather than getting buffeted about by the latest news.

There's a saying in the disability advocacy movement, nothing about us without us, that Renaud took to heart when he formed MHAP. Its board is made up of people suffering with mental illness, addiction, or those who care for such people. MHAP is particularly interested in how people with mental illness are affected within the confluence of large institutions like prisons, hospitals, churches and schools. Renaud also happened to know Chasse personally, as a fellow student at the Metropolitan Learning Center when they were in their teens.

"I've been trying to get more memories of Jim but they haven't come," he admits. "We spent time mostly after school going to clubs, record stores, and hanging out at coffee shops. He was a bit of a poet, and he had this newsletter he published and handed out. Often we were too young to get into the clubs so we'd stand outside."

What happened when Renaud heard about his friend's death?

"I was disappointed," he says. "I guess I don't really get angry, but I can be fairly determined, and Jim didn't have to die that way. It was a miserable, brutal death, and completely pointless. In general I'm tired of people with a mental illness being abused, and at