

We are Greenlee Investigates, an Iowa State Student group that reports on real-life Iowa cold cases. In this series, we will be discussing the life of Yore Jieng, a 14-year old boy who was shot and killed in Des Moines Iowa. We will cover who Yore was, his family, his dreams, his passions, and the fatal event that led to his undeserved death.

On October 24th, 2016, 14-year-old Roosevelt High freshman Yore Jieng was riding in the passenger seat of a borrowed car with two of his siblings, a younger brother, and an older sister. His older sister Nyabiay (Nya-Bay) was driving her brothers to a nearby McDonald's. The three siblings were on 12th and Keosauqua (key a saw kwah) Way in Downtown Des Moines heading north.

They were patiently waiting for the light to turn green when they heard five gunshots ring out among the traffic.

Yore's younger brother who was in the backseat at the time, was the first to notice that Yore had been hit.

A single bullet had come through the back window of the car and struck Yore in the head.

The 7-year-old alerted his sister to his brother's condition.

They immediately raced to UnityPoint Iowa Methodist Medical Center.

Nyekuoth (Nye -Kooth) Jieng, commonly referred to as Nya, one of Yore's older sisters, had been in New York at the time of the tragedy.

She only heard about what happened when a friend notified her once she returned home from work.

Nya immediately checked Facebook to discover a message from her sister telling her that her little brother had been shot in the head.

She rushed home with hopeful thoughts.

“So I kept telling myself, he's gonna come out of this. He's gonna survive. I'm gonna go home and my brother's gonna be okay.”-- 17:25 - Nykuoth

Friends of Yore’s quickly heard about what happened as well.

Peter Nho, a friend of Yore’s who attended North High School at the time, said that he found out while he was at school.

“Me and a classmate we had art together. And then, she just like she told me like, “Yo, Yore just got shot.” - Peter Nho 3:18

When Peter arrived home, his mother had also heard what happened.

Though Peter was not allowed in the hospital, likely due to visitation restrictions, his mother was able to visit Yore.

Mrs. Nho returned to her son with honesty and a broken heart.

“..she came and said like, “It's a shot. It's a fatal to the head, he not gonna make it.” - Peter Nho 3:18

In the days following the shooting, students of Roosevelt High School were left reeling.

Ryan Williamson, who was a Roosevelt High School guidance counselor at the time explained that it was hard for everyone at the school, even if they didn't know Yore personally.

“It was just somber,” “We had a lot of traffic coming into the office.” “I remember the conversations around the kids just trying to process ‘why him?’” - Ryan Williamson -?

Students were in search of answers and comfort and anxiously awaited any news from the hospital.

5 days after he was shot, on October 29th, Yore Jieng succumbed to his injuries.

Insert another interview about his death and how it impacted people

Students solemnly gathered around the Roosevelt High School Courtyard on November 3rd, 2016 to hold a candlelight vigil in Yore’s honor.

Two days later a massive group of over 600 family and friends gathered at Capitol Hill Lutheran Church for Yore’s funeral services.

Yore was laid to rest that morning in Des Moines’ Glendale Cemetery next to other South Sudanese gravestones.

Reverend Minna Bothwell generously worked with Hamilton’s Funeral Home to pay for the plot, while a funeral director at Hamilton’s paid for Yore’s gravestone.

While the family has been blessed by the generosity of their community, the pain of losing Yore remains.

“It was hard for my family because you never expect a death like that- that is close to us like that,” .. “So it was new to us and it was kind of scary at the same time but we had to keep it together for our family. We had to stay strong for him because he was a strong boy, he loved to smile... And we had to keep going because you can’t sit. It was a tough situation.” - Nyeduel Jieng - ??

Nearly 7 years later, the case has yet to be solved. Sargent Paul Parizek, the information officer for the Des Moines Police Department says that investigators have exhausted all options and leads within the case.

insert a snippet of this convo - POI - sorry Evan I'm unsure where it is

Immediately after the sudden death of a young child, the community and surrounding area began debating theories and rumors about what had happened.

The leading theory for those who were not close to the case was that this was a random shooting, a reckless individual firing a gun from the backseat or passenger window.

Peter Ngo said,

“..You know, he had no parts in the streets, and it was a stray bullet,” - Peter 3:18

“..Somebody you know, being stupid with a gun and fired it, and then it just ended up, you know, wrong place at the wrong time.” - Peter 7:02

Reverend Bothwell and other community members expressed that they were left with more questions than answers.

“What could have been the thing to target this vehicle at that time? Or these people at that time? Right, they could have also been followed? And they could have been seen getting into the vehicle or something like that. We just don't really know.” - Reverend Minna Bothwell 51:41

Two of Yore's family members, however, firmly believe that the shooting was a targeted attack and that Yore was an unintended victim in a case of mistaken identity.

Though police remain unsure about the randomness of the crime, they have confirmed that they highly suspect more than one individual was in the assailant's car.

During the beginning of the investigation, Police were able to obtain car camera footage showing a plateless, silver Chevy Equinox driving aggressively with the driver's side rear window rolled down.

Though no bullets were shown being fired from the car, investigators are still searching for the elusive vehicle that disappeared onto the Eastbound freeway after the shooting.

Of the five shots fired, two hit nearby buildings, and one struck Yore.

The five shell casings found at the scene left police at yet another dead end.

Though the Equinox is the best lead investigators have, Sgt Parizek says that it may not even be the vehicle involved.

“It is possible they might have witnessed the whole thing, and they were just trying to get away, and that is why they were driving so fast,”. “If we get hyper focused on one thing, we’ll miss other things.” POI - ?

Despite no new leads, police, family, and friends all agree that there is more information to uncover. Many have expressed frustration with the case due to the of the lack of individuals coming forward.

“There’s somebody out there that knows something.” - Nyakouth 27:00

“I believe there is more that could be done, I think they could try harder and better and I believe they could find the person that did it. It has been seven years now.” - Nyeduel - ??

“He was a wonderful kid and he deserves for us to know who his killer was.” - Gideon 10:55

“It could be anyone for any reason. And I think that's what's so unsettling about this, is that in daylight, and an open intersection where people drive by all day long, where people are taking their people to the hospital, right? Right next to Methodist, driving to get food, somebody opened fire, killed a 14 year old boy, and was never caught. That is unfair, and it's unjust. And I just that is unsettling for all of us.” - Reverend Minna Bothwell 1:00:06

The impact Yore Jieng had on his friends, family, peers, and community members is immeasurable. His life, though short, was something that continues to be celebrated to this day by those who loved him.

The basic facts are out there for anyone to see, but who really was Yore Jieng?

We do our best to answer that question in the next episode.

This has been Greenlee Investigates with Caitlin Allen