

RENTON REPORTER



Renton man convicted of defrauding Microsoft

Page 6

SOUND PUBLISHING, INC.

RENTONREPORTER.COM

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2020

Family mourns son who lived a life on the streets

Rylee Russell Marks was identified as the victim of a shooting at a Renton encampment

BY HALEY AUSBUN
hausbun@rentonreporter.com

Renton lost a protector and “guardian angel” in the recent shooting death of 27-year-old Rylee Russell Marks. Friends and family are mourning someone who didn’t always fit in but loved and protected those who got to know him. As someone who’d lived homeless in downtown Renton periodically since as young as 13, he was known to sit with a friend who’d missed a late bus for hours, or walk someone home in the dark after work.

“The problem with cases like this is they get swept under the rug and forgotten about. And he was a real human being that was loved by a lot of people,” friend Jordan Hermundson said. “And the fact that this happened the way that it did is heartbreaking because he deserved a lot better than that.”

Russell Marks was shot at an encampment at a large property along Hardie Avenue South. Officers administered CPR but he did not survive.

Immediately, those who knew him began to share on social media the identity of who they believed shot him, that Renton Police Department has now identified as 30-year-old Kelcey M. Gornowich. She allegedly shot him following an argument. The two were a couple, sources say. “(Russell Marks) would



PHOTO COURTESY OF RYLEE RUSSELL MARKS' FAMILY

Rylee Russell Marks was shot last Sunday, Feb. 16 at a transient camp in Renton. Police are still trying to track down the suspect, identified as Kelsey M. Gornowich, who goes by Loki.

have never done that, not let them lay there and die,” his mom, Kathy Nevi, said. “And he’d expect (the suspect) to come forward.”

Gornowich is noted as going by the name Loki and described as a 5-foot 8-inch tall, white female, known

to frequent camps around Renton. She also frequently changes hairstyles. If spotted, police ask that folks call 911 to report her.

“He was definitely Renton”

Russell Marks, 27, was born on a farm in Bellingham, living there until his parents split. He lived with his mother in Fairwood and his father in Blaine. He was born with cerebral palsy

See **MARKS**, Page 2



PHOTO BY HALEY AUSBUN

During halftime, athletes and coaches have individual meetings, while parents watch a video prepared by Highlands Community Church for whatever biblical principle teams are learning about that week at the Upward sports league.

Sports that help kids grow

Church league gives to neighborhood

BY HALEY AUSBUN
hausbun@rentonreporter.com

Athletics is a microcosm of Life, Jeff Belmondo says. He’s the director at a Renton church’s sports league.

“You have setbacks, victories, boundaries, rules, teammates,” he said.

That’s why Belmondo so passionately believes through sports kids can learn more than to score, but how to grow as a person.

The sports league, Upward, has been working out of Highlands Community Church for about 15 years. Upward is a larger organization that works with churches to bring sports to the local community, that also encourages Christian values, the website states it’s “promoting the discover of Jesus through sports.” The league, which includes basketball and cheer, is for kids from first to sixth grade and brings in much of the greater Highlands community. Each week is

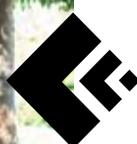
an hour of practice and an hour of game. The league has grown from 100 kids to 350 today.

Yes, the athletes and families hear about Bible verses, but there’s something more to it than preaching. About two-thirds of the kids involved don’t attend Highlands, and even one-third of the volunteer coaches, Belmondo said. The online registration fills up overnight.

“You can’t go to Highlands and not hear about Upward,” Coach Jim Quigg said. “You can’t go through Renton without hearing about Upward, it feels like.”

Parent Somer Martinson is one of those out-of-church families involved, but she was married at Highlands. Two of her kids have been involved in both cheer and basketball for about two years, and she’s had a lot of friends’ kids also join the league who don’t attend church.

See **UPWARD**, Page 8



TEAM LISA LAM

Selling homes in Renton since 1989

206.949.1696
team@teamlisaliam.com



COMPASS

Marks

From Page 1

of his right side and caused speech problems. He didn't feel like he fit in, his mother said, and didn't adjust to the education system while struggling with learning disabilities. He would move between his parents in Blaine and Fairwood and started running away around 14 years old.

One day, Nevi said she came home to Russell Marks in her shed in Fairwood. He had snuck off from his dad's and navigated the bus system to get back.

As he more frequently ended up outside, he started spending more time on Renton's streets. He was then taken in by a group of young people. They had all ran away or suffered difficult home lives and were surviving on their own.

One of the members of this "family" was Hermundson. She said a lot of people didn't understand him, and his loud passionate, rambunctious impulses often got him in trouble before they took him in.

"He needed somebody to help him and protect him, and show him how to survive if this was what he was going to do," Hermundson said.

The group found solace in each other, protected



Rylee Russell Marks (right) with his stepbrother Mitchell Nevi and sister Baylee Marks.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RYLEE RUSSELL MARKS' FAMILY

each other. They stayed in encampments, under bridges, in parks and did whatever they had to for survival.

Russell Marks and his mother saw each other often in those days and she would meet up to take him and friends to Burger King, for example.

Nevi kept in contact with Russell Marks and still did up until the shooting, although he had started to visit in person less and less. They talked over Facebook messenger whenever Russell Marks was at the downtown library, which was often.

Hermundson said Russell Marks was determined to do what everybody else was

doing, despite low function in his right arm. He was also protective of the group, even though he was the youngest. The girls endured a lot of predatory behavior from older men, but Russell Marks would defend them and tried to drive dangerous characters away.

The dynamics started to change as the group aged to adulthood. Many got clean of drugs, moved away and started families. Hermundson became pregnant at 20 and left that life in 2008, moving to Shoreline. Still, she regularly came to Renton to spend time with the ones that didn't.

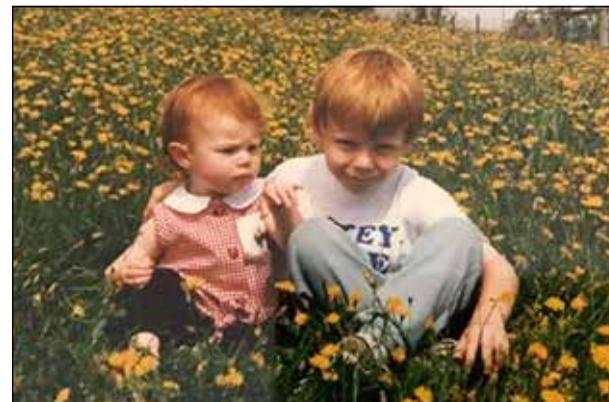
"For the most part, our lives took different turns, while Rylee's kind of stayed,"

she said.

Russell Marks was comfortable in his lifestyle and in that mentality. For some time he worked with his step-dad, and people in that workplace remarked that he was a hard worker, but it didn't stick. He liked his lifestyle even if it didn't seem a "normal" one to them, Nevi said.

Older folks and friends who remained on the streets after she left were watching out for him, Hermundson said. But both her and Nevi believe the people he was hanging around became more dangerous as he was getting older.

Nevi knew of the suspect, Gornowich. When she saw Russell Marks back in



Rylee and his little sister Baylee when they were young. Friends say Baylee was the "light of his life" as they grew up together in Whatcom County and later Renton.

December 2019 down at Gene Coulon Memorial Park Beach to get lunch and so she could give him Christmas presents, he wanted to share a gift card with Gornowich. He was generous that way, she said.

Since his death, Nevi said she looks at people around Renton wondering if they are Gornowich. She feels she could be anywhere. And people who knew Russell Marks continue to reach out to her, to tell her that he was a good person.

"He was my boy, you know? What did she think, that he had no family? Nobody who loved him? He does, he's got everybody loving him," Nevi said.

He also leaves behind his younger sister Baylee Marks and older step-brother Mitchell Nevi. Several folks told Renton Reporter that his sister was the light of

his life.

"I know his family had been trying to get him some resources, get him finally established," Hermundson said. "But unfortunately that fell through quicker than everybody wanted."

Nevi said her son's final resting place will be at Mount Olivet Cemetery, overlooking Renton. Russell Marks memorial will be 5 p.m., March 6 at Masonic Hall.

Russell Mark's memorial fund is available on Facebook under "Rylee Russell Marks Memorial Fund-raiser" or at bit.ly/2V8oF9W. Last week, the family had raised only \$1,000 or their goal. They are now at \$6,678 as of Monday, Feb. 24, with over 110 donors.

"He was definitely Renton," Nevi said. "He was like the guardian angel of Renton."

LEAVE THEM SOMETHING
to remember you by.



Announcing the new Westview Garden at Greenwood Memorial Park, with many cremation and burial options.

Establish a lasting legacy for generations to come. Call today for more information or visit us for a tour of this peaceful area of remembrance.

Dignity[®]
MEMORIAL

LIFE WELL CELEBRATED[®]

GREENWOOD
MEMORIAL PARK
RENTON

GreenwoodMemPark.com
425-255-1511



CALL FOR PERFORMERS 50+

2020 SENIOR
TALENT
SHOWCASE

Looking for Senior Singers, Dancers and Entertainers age 50+ to share their talents

A show filled with laughter and fun! There will be two performances, Thursday, May 7, 1 p.m. and Friday, May 8, 7 p.m. at Carco Theatre.

MANDATORY MEETING
Wed, March 11, 10 a.m.

Renton Senior Activity Center



Information: 425-430-6633, rentonwa.gov/rsac