

HPD seeks motive, suspect in homeless man's slaying

Dale Lezon
Houston

February 13, 2009

The dead man was wrapped in dirty, well-worn clothes, his body stretched on a bus bench on the University of Houston central campus on the city's south side. He had been shot once in the back of the head as he slept, police said.

Investigators have no suspects or motive in the Feb. 7 killing of Joe David Tall. They also have no leads. And even seasoned homicide investigators are stumped at why a disheveled, unkempt and apparently homeless man would be killed for no apparent reason.

They don't believe Tall's killer was another homeless person. The homeless, they said, don't use guns to kill.

They say the 47-year-old may have been a victim of a gang initiation, killed because he was homeless or the target of random violence. But their speculation is just a hunch.

"We're scratching and clawing at anything we can come up with," said Mike Miller, a Houston Police Department homicide investigator handling the case. "To drive and just kill somebody doesn't happen that often."

Miller said a man passing the area saw Tall about 6:30 a.m. lying on the bench that Saturday morning. He said he didn't call police because he thought Tall was sick and that it was vomit dripping from him.

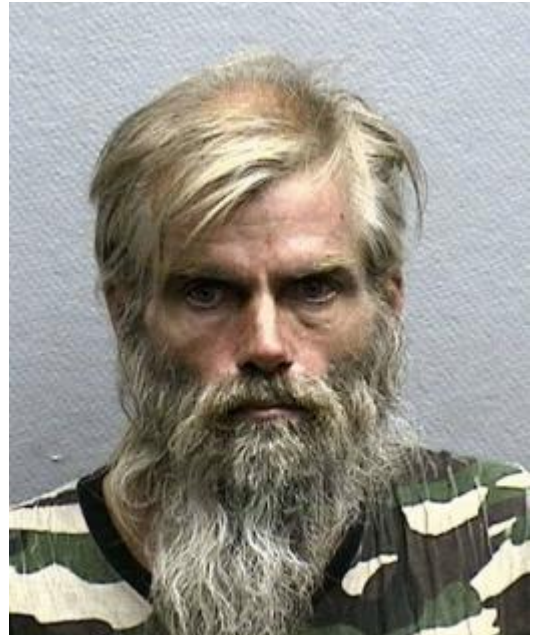
About a half hour later, a student waiting at the bench for a bus to go to work saw blood on Tall's head and called 911. Paramedics pronounced him dead.

Neither man saw or heard a gunshot or saw anyone near Tall or a car passing the bus stop in the 3500 block of Cullen.

Investigators also have reviewed images from security and traffic cameras in the area, but nothing in them reveals a possible shooting or anything out of the ordinary.

That time of day, traffic is less than light and few if any people are walking on the sidewalks, Miller said. Investigators have been unable to identify any cars on the tapes.

The bullet wound and how Tall was lying is all the evidence they have.



Joe David Tall, 47, was found shot to death on Feb. 7 at a bus stop at the University of Houston.

He was on his side with his back to Cullen. He was shot once with a large-caliber weapon.

Miller said Tall had been released about 11 hours earlier from the city jail on Mykawa, but he didn't have the records to determine why he had been arrested. He also didn't know how he could have traveled from southeast Houston to the university.

Houston police said they had no record of him being at the jail, but that many times homeless people give false names when they're arrested.

Tall had been in and out of county jail for years dating back to 1991. He had been arrested and convicted of felony and misdemeanor assaults. Most recently, he pleaded guilty to criminal mischief in August 2008 and served 30 days in jail.

During court appearances in most of his criminal cases, a psychiatric evaluation was ordered.

Miller said that someone knows what happened to Tall and he urges anyone with information to contact police.

"We're looking for somebody to talk," he said. "Things are fizzling out for us."

Anyone with information should call detectives at 713-308-3600 or Crime Stoppers at 713-222-TIPS (8477).