

# Shackelford: 'Survivor guilt' plays a part in generosity

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The next day, he drove to the winery, paid McCoy \$6,000 for 50 percent of the inventory and took over. "I wanted to move from Texas, anyway," says Shackelford. "So I did."

Sixteen years later, the 68-year-old with a penchant for custom safari shirts and black jeans lives alone above the rustic red-and-white tasting room set on 1½ acres a mile from U.S. 101. He bought the winery outright when McCoy died in 1993, and these days leaves the winemaking to a vintner in Salem.

From a tiny office cluttered with books, photos and tokens of thanks from afar, Shackelford directs the catered parties, weddings and annual festivals that earn the winery \$1.2 million in sales each year.

His contributions to the community are the stuff of legend. Friends tell of his "world famous" Blue Grass Festival, his efforts to spearhead the local oyster bake, the Ken Kesey reading, and the time he had the lumberyard deliver plywood so there would be a place to dance at a concert in the park.

"He sponsored the first Oregon Coast Symphony production on his stage, where the audience wept to hear Bach played by their neighbors," says Barbara Matson, a former Wheeler resident. "He always rose above the mundane and came up with some new way to support his passions for music, gatherings, charities — and he was successful beyond anyone's dreams."

Yet for all the high school fundraisers, the art shows and country-music weekends, friends know that — should they stop by to raise a toast — odds are he won't be there.

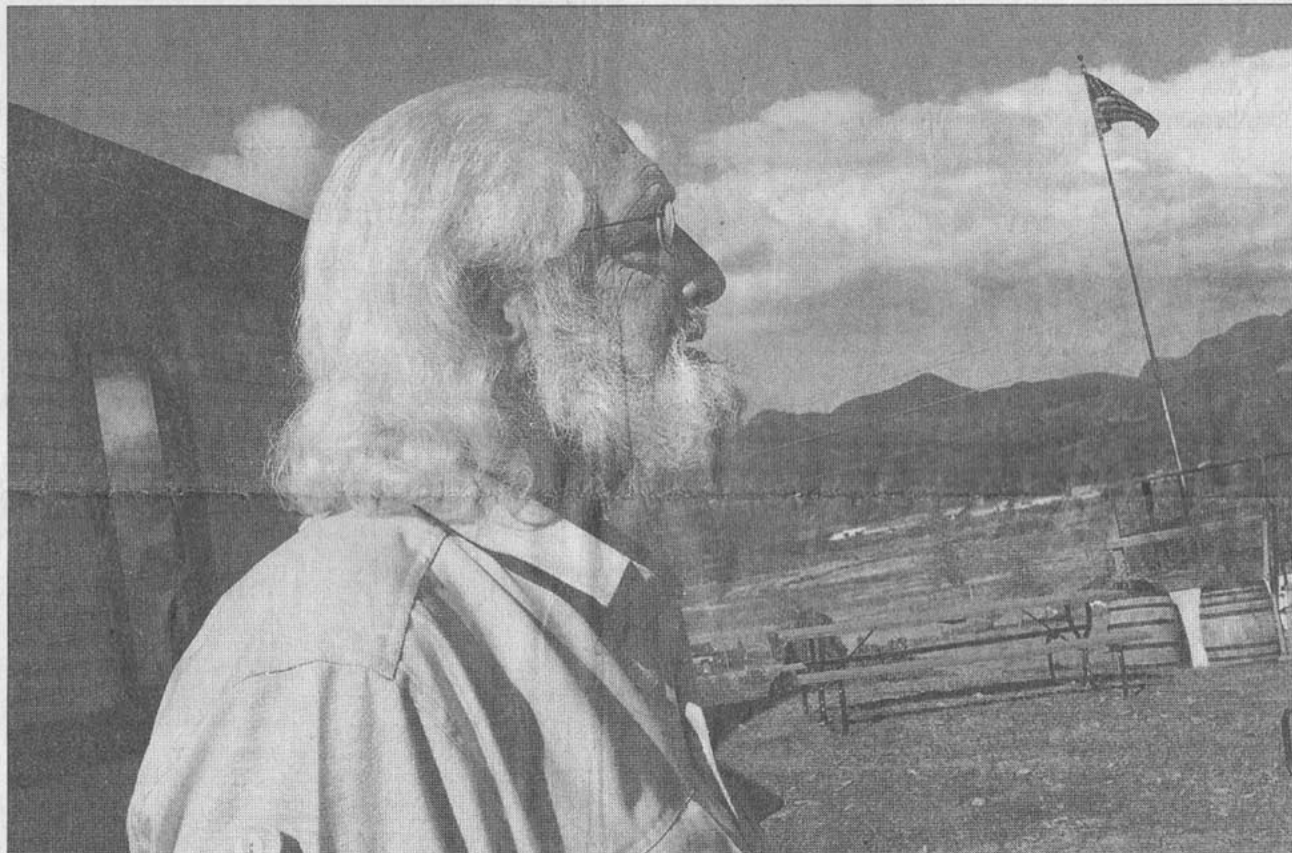
"I once spent the entire year outside the U.S.," says Shackelford. "For as long as I can remember, I did not want to live just a normal life in a house with a white picket fence. I wanted to be myself."

Shackelford is currently in Tanzania helping a friend he met 12 years ago in Ecuador fix up a house. Already this year, he's been out of the country five times, including a summer trip to the place that 40 years ago transformed his life.

## "New adventure"

At 25, Shackelford had married, fathered two children, divorced and served a few weeks in a Cuban army prison after showing up to help Castro win his revolution. In the winter of 1964, a new girlfriend in hand, he set off for Mexico. They played in the sun and camped on the beach. They also managed to lose Shackelford's wallet, and with it his draft card. In those days, you didn't go anywhere without your draft card, Shackelford recalls. So first thing back home in Oregon, he stopped by the draft office and applied for a new card.

Thirty days later, Uncle Sam called. "I looked at it as a new adventure," he



STEPHANIE YAO/THE OREGONIAN

Ray Shackelford owns the Nehalem Bay Winery but spends much of his time abroad.

says. "I wasn't doing anything, anyway."

He applied for officer training and volunteered for Vietnam. By the time he left in 1972, he'd spent 3½ years there, suffered two bullet wounds and permanent damage to his ears from an enemy hand grenade he managed to toss away from his bunker — barely. He earned two Silver Stars, suffered a punji stake wound, and grew fond of the locals.

"I like the Vietnamese people; I always did," says Shackelford, who was raised Methodist but says these days he's a better Buddhist. "Just because you go to war doesn't mean you have to hate."

Twenty years after leaving, Shackelford went back. "Quite a few times, I almost hyperventilated. I literally walked down the same trail where I triggered an ambush on an NVA (North Vietnamese army) officer and his lover. He was left first, and she went down and held his head to her heart until they were both killed."

It was on that first return visit that Shackelford met Chan Kem Lang, who worked as a bicycle driver. As it turned out, Lang — nicknamed Elephant — was from the same poor village, Chheng in Monduliri province of Cambodia, that Shackelford had served as a senior adviser to an artillery battalion. A friendship was born.

Shackelford helped Lang upgrade his bicycle to a motorcycle and then to a car, and he helped pay for Lang's schooling. Then, learning that Lang's village had never had a school, he built two — one for students in grades first through third, and a second for learning English. It was a start, but it wasn't food on the table.

"Elephant is very successful now," says Shackelford. "He is the only one in his village who has gone to college. I asked him, 'What can we do?'"

Lang suggested a sewing room, and last summer Shackelford returned to Chheng with \$1,500 from sales of the colorful silklike handbags, backpacks and wine bags he sells in his tasting rooms. "Four hundred dollars would

## Ray Shackelford

**Born:** Kansas, in 1939; lived in Oklahoma until his parents moved to Oregon when he was in the fourth grade

**Childhood honors:** Traveled to the United Kingdom in 1954 as one of The Oregonian's 1954 newspaper carriers of the year

**Marital status:** Married and divorced twice, father of one daughter and two sons

**Business:** Owner, Nehalem Bay Winery

**Dubious achievement:** Was robbed four times for the total U.S. equivalent of 52 cents on his way to Battambang, Cambodia

**Brush with infamy:** Took tea with Ieng Sary, brother-in-law of Pol Pot, and ranking officer in the Khmer Rouge

feed the village for 20 days," says Shackelford. "They don't have a lot."

Next, Shackelford plans to improve on the schools and build an orphanage.

"People in Chheng would like to name you 'Red Cross Without Sign,'" Lang wrote in an e-mail to Shackelford. "I and my family would like to extend the deepest thank you for to spend your valuable time to save the life of ethnic minority when they face starvation. You are a wonderful person, who I, my family and the whole Chheng villagers will remember and inscribe in their heart forever."

## "Help each other"

In the past few years, Shackelford estimates, he's spent \$25,000 to \$30,000 helping out in Cambodia and other developing countries. "People should help each other," says Shackelford, who considers himself a Republican with strong libertarian leanings. "That is a conserva-

tive principle that built this country."

His kindness, however, does not come without certain expectations, say those who know him.

"Ray expects you to work hard," says Darrell Spacek, a disabled man who has worked at the winery for three years. "He's very demanding, and when it comes time to do something, Ray wants to just get in there and get it done."

But he's fair, says Spacek, and a believer in second chances.

Spacek says Shackelford offered him an advance on his paycheck when he learned Spacek couldn't afford his medicine. And recently, as Shackelford prepared for his trip to Africa, he told Spacek to find as much work to do around the winery as he could.

"He said, 'I want you to come in, work, do your laundry, leave when you want. I want you to make a bunch of money while I'm gone.' How many employers do you know who would say that?"

There is another reason for this world traveler's generosity — one he might never outrun.

"Part of it is survivor guilt and having too much," Shackelford says. "When you travel, you see how other people live and how poor they are and how little it takes to help. We have so much here."

And so, he keeps giving it away, to a student in the Philippines, a family in Tanzania, a village in Belize. Even so, all the good will in the world goes only so far, and, often as not, when night falls, old demons return. Those are the times when Shackelford hops into his Chevy pickup and drives.

"A shrink once said that it was a continuation of being in Vietnam and getting up and checking the perimeter," says Shackelford. "Sometimes, I drive up the river or to the beach. And sometimes I just move the truck and sleep for a while."