

# Thomas McBride

Chicago, d. 26.April.1999  
murdered by Carnell Fitzpatrick, driver of a Chevy Tahoe.

Thomas McBride was my friend and I will miss him. I have been very sad about this tragedy and I would like to tell you about how Tommy affected me as a friend, and helped me and many of you a great deal. When I met Tommy, he was 19 years old, just left home, and simply needed a job as a bike courier. As it turned out, he made a huge contribution to the growth and development of On The Fly Courier.

If you knew Tom, you knew him. I think he was an idyllic person with great qualities. If you did not know him, you are probably learning about the many things that he did, that now summarize his life. While Tommy's efforts at OTF were just a small part of his own life, they were invaluable to me and the rest of us who took on the challenge of building a courier company. Tommy McBride helped make OTF happen. Each courier service has its original crews, with their amazing stories of what it took to get the job done. Sixty-six was on our crew in the early, early days and he gave a lot of himself to see that OTF kept going. His commitment helped set standards and acquire a client base that allowed many more people after him to make a living.

Tommy worked alongside such infamous couriers as DeShawn White, James Boyking, Capt. Jack Blackfelt, Jeff Mathis, Frank Merlo, and Eddie Agnew. There are many more of course, including many of Tommy's best friends, (and now at least 20 people make On The Fly tick daily). Thomas was only our third biker, off the board. Just like many of you, Tommy and these others believed that being a courier is as much about the intangible aspects, as it is about the cash. At the time, 1993, there was hardly the (Chicago) messenger community that there is now. Mostly, it was just all of us, banged up, and pissed off, who knew there was a greater calling than a BA in finance or 'whatever', a tie to hang yourself with. I don't have to tell any of the reasons why we choose, and feel strongly about this job. Or why we respect our fellow couriers. But one thread runs between us, at least, being a bicycle messenger, and everything that is. Tommy and I discussed the art of the job and the business (different things) many times he helped design OTF.

Tommy was a smart guy and a great courier. He knew the business and could have made a lot of money at a more established company. When he joined our gang, of three, he was working at one of those companies, I don't remember which one. It was a February day, call it, negative sixty-six degrees. He could have cleaned up at "Messenger Company X", just because so many riders would have called in sick. Instead, he bailed to come and help his friends get through a very important 9 hours. Because of the large absenteeism in our industry that wicked day, OTF, (me and Shawn and James) had a chance at 2 new clients, and we needed Tom's help, we still have those clients today. (Capt. Jack joined us the next day in his tee shirt and shorts). That Tommy came to work with us, at that time, revealed qualities in him that I would respect and appreciate for years to come. He was a sincere, soulful person, tough as hell with a lot of endurance. He cared about other people, his friends and fellow couriers especially. He was the type of person who wanted to contribute to something that was larger than himself, and his own personal interests. He was an idealist and he gave his best.

He wanted to make On The Fly work because, under any circumstance, building a small business is a challenge. Tom thought it was very important to have an alternative like OTF, and he wanted to make sure we did it right. One idea he liked very much was that the wage structure removed the inter-competition with your fellow riders. Tommy was a team player, and he loved it when we kicked ass as a group. There were other ideas, of course, but at the time it was just that; concept and rap. It was up to us to make it work. Tommy stayed around for years and we moved towards that ideal. His contribution ranged much further than his amazing performances as a courier. He had a great personality, was well liked, and I'm sure, remembered by our clients. He developed relationships that have lasted for a long time. He committed a lot of his time (overtime) and energy. He understood the importance of his role, worked through pain, the worst conditions, the tightest deadlines and conflicting routes... really conflicting. He attempted to do things that he had never done before, like dispatch, or handle customer service and other office problems. He took all of that on, and managed the pressure with grace. Tommy added even more with his ideas and opinions. It is impossible to manage any company properly without listening to the needs of the people who make it work. Tom always had insightful and useful things to input, and we had many dramas and issues to think through. I'm glad he was there to help me when I needed this thoughtful advice and perspective the most.

In addition to riding out some pretty harrowing, and tough situations during the years, we all had a lot of fun. That was really the quality I liked best about Tommy, his sense of humor. We shared many jokes. He loved to spend time talking to people, and hanging out with his friends. There was one summer when so many of Tom's close group of friends were at On

The Fly there wasn't much difference between working and going out nights. Tommy enjoyed the camaraderie very much and I know he liked what he did at OTF because the system opened itself up to it. Even after he left, he still sent people our way.

It sucks that he is gone. I really think a lot of him, and I wanted all of you to know about yet another contribution he made. So, thank you Tommy for just being yourself, and giving your best to On The Fly and us all. On behalf of the current staff of OTF thanks for leading the way and helping to create solid jobs. Thank you for helping me to reach one of my goals and adding a new company to the mix. But mostly, Thomas, thanks for your friendship. Go easy, see you again.

-George Oliver, Owner of On The Fly Courier  
reprinted from [Dead Air](#) #13

---

At first I thought I should try and write a poem (and perhaps one will come) but certain moments came first to my mind today, as I tried to work with the knowledge of the murder of my friend Thomas McBride. A lean, blue-grey eyed youth slapped on a conga whilst jamming with Mickey's band Disarray at the Lower Links in late '92. The girl I was courting remarked on how peaceful and beautiful he looked. A shot of protective jealousy rang alongside a private agreement inside my soul.

He not only looked at peace; he exuded it. A couple years later, after several parties and hangings-out with Thomas, I went to see a yet newer incarnation of Disarray, to feature Tommy on rap vocals. He wore a thin suit and a porkpie hat and, out of stage-fright, put his back to the audience while postulating, "I'm the backbone." He never forgave my teasing him for that, or my referring to him sometimes as "the backbone". Soon I was working with Tom at a fledgling messenger service. I quickly understood him as a man a little more serious than me, a consummate professional. He was one of the fastest couriers I'd seen in my 5 years in the messenger industry.

I experienced rare moments of a sudden, Celtic rage (a trait I shared with him at, sadly, a more frequent tendency) brought on by drink or relationship problems. Yet what sticks with me more was the enthusiasm of celebration he'd have for us all when the Bulls won each Championship game during those magical seasons. Thomas had a way of high-flying and embracing that made you feel like the two of you had been on the bench together, with maybe 6 points and a steal a piece, every victory. But what I'll miss most is that soft but torso-rattling staccato chuckle he released so easily so often. One day while he was dispatching I was run over by a CTA bus. I escaped with cuts and bruises, but my bike was a pretzel. Returning to the base with my bike and still hyped on adrenaline, I asked him to ride while I took over dispatch. I cheaply replaced my terror with swaggering bravado, while Tom obliquely noted, "looking at your bike man, I don't know if I should go out there, but-well (that chuckle) I mean, I'm just saying . . ." I looked at him, maintaining my machismo and declared, "I think what happened to me is the worst thing that's gonna happen to any of us out there today, brother." At this, Thomas suddenly beamed with a wide smile, and I swear his eyes sparkled humorously as he said, "Oh, okay Jack" (knowingly and quite sarcastically).

Backbone, I'm sorry all I could do today was wear a black arm band for you. This afternoon, as I glided and hustled the hills and avenues of Manhattan, I remembered how much you enjoyed it here during your visit. Brother Tom, if I could, I'd go back to then and force you to crash at my place until you were settled in NYC. But I can't. I've just got to wait until I see you next. Hopefully, you'll be behind a cobalt-blue conga, at peace and exuding it.

-Jack Blackfelt (4/28/99)  
reprinted from [Dead Air](#) #13

---

## **The Memorial Ride**

On Sunday May 2nd, 1999 I attended the memorial ride for Tom McBride, the bicycle courier killed in a road-rage incident last Monday. I did not know him well, although I remember him from the short months he worked at Arrow in '96. He was a good man; intelligent and energetic. I mourn his loss.

About 200 bicyclists, perhaps 75 to 100 of which were couriers, showed up at the Picasso sculpture in Daley Center Plaza. Arrow Messenger Service was well represented with 8 riders; Cannonball, Velocity and Intercept had a good showing as well.

After several awfully long speeches we set out on the ride to 5300 W. Washington, the scene of the accident last Monday morning. Pedaling slowly west on Washington, it was gratifying to realize that not a single car was behind us!

As a messenger, I spent years constantly glancing over my shoulder to make sure no vehicle was bearing down on me. Every day, commuting down Milwaukee Avenue to Arrow Base, I wonder why the cyclists in front of me never look back!

When we reached the site of the accident everyone stopped. The entire street was blocked. Police Officers directed traffic around the obstruction. We sat down in the street and observed a moment of silence for Tom McBride.

His brother got up and made a speech. He asked everyone to "be kind." He told us how much he appreciated our caring enough to show up. He seemed to be saying, "Let's stop the madness."

The sit-in closed with a Hebrew death prayer.

## **Defensive Cycling**

Instead of "Tooth and Claw," "Tit for Tat," and "Survival of the Fittest," I'd like you to consider rising above the petty disputes of the pavement. Instead of "For every action there is a reaction." THINK: for every action, I choose PRO-action - I will not retaliate for to do so brings me down to their level.

When the adrenaline is pumping, the vehicle has put you in serious jeopardy turning in front of you, cutting you off, in the heat of the moment the instinct is to retaliate, but after you cool down you wonder; what good does it do?

On a bicycle you can out-manuever these morons nine times out of ten. So why not let it slide? I can't count the times I've felt WORSE after cursing out, even physically making my presence known to an aggressive driver.

The best policy is to keep a respectful distance from any moving vehicle, anticipating the drivers' often erratic moves, trying to keep contact to a minimum. Operate on the assumption that they are all slightly nutso.

Don't bother to make eye-contact with a driver they often don't even know you're there. Instead, watch the front tire. It will quiver, showing you their next move.

At all times, be aware of approaching vehicles, road conditions, other obstacles. Take a look over your shoulder every few seconds. This may sound stupid, but it could save your life. You never know which brain-dead fool might be right behind you. Also at every intersection, lighted or stop-signed, look both ways increasingly, people are ignoring traffic signals.

It all boils down to the utter necessity of being aware of what is going on around you at all times. Avoiding confrontations reduces stress and makes for a better day, so by anticipating other vehicle's stupid moves you can smartly speed on your way!

-Marshall F. Arnold  
reprinted from [Dead Air #13](#)

**BACK**