

## Wrong Message

by **Kris Darlington**

April 19, 2001

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[Re: “Shoot the Messenger” by John Greenfield, March 30]

When I left the [bike messengering] profession in December of 1999, it was during a media circus surrounding the Union Station incident, which was the cherry on top of a shit sundae of a year. Many of the same issues raised weakly in the book of contention [The Immortal Class by Travis Culley], along with the others expressed more strongly by many of the folks Mr. Greenfield interviewed, quoted, or cited, were on my mind, all of them to do with the downright fucked-up conditions and hazards basic to the messenger profession. As a mere two-and-a-half-year veteran, bowing out for personal reasons rather than political ones, I felt it wasn't my place to be the voice for all the personal injustices I have witnessed committed against my fellow messengers, including my spouse, because I was not an impersonal judge of all the conflicting information and points of view. As a compromise, I tried to find a sympathetic and impartial ear in the press, to tell the facts as I knew 'em, and provide contact names of people who knew the score better than me, so that a counterpoint to the plethora of Killer Bike Messenger stories and editorials might be given to the general public.

It was the Reader's own Neal Pollack who decided I had no story, and that the essence of the attack [at Union Station] was completely racial in nature. I left the profession grieving dead friends and associates, with a suspended license and a huge tax debt, convinced that Mr. Pollack had spoken for the general public, saying between the lines, “No one gives a shit about messengers.” Guess he was wrong.

The essence of this book's controversy has a lot to do with everything that happened after Mr. McBride's demise, the people who it affected on a personal and individual level, as well as the deaths of the equally legendary Eric Sprattling and George Olzanski, topped off by the Union Station attack and the media backlash. Our would-be activist wasn't in it, wasn't affected directly by it, and this is the basis for a lot of the resentment expressed in Mr. Greenfield's article.

Professions engaged in thankless and dangerous tasks always have their own cults of personality, and when these cults are dissed it only creates further dissension and resentment when what is needed most is some basic solidarity. I'll probably never read the offending book, as I got enough stories of my own, thank you, as

well as knowing a lot of the anecdotes pilfered by the author, having heard them from the sources themselves. What's sad to me is that what could have been a vehicle for greater understanding from the public was first turned into a self-serving document for a shrewd opportunist in activist's clothes and then into a public chest-beating display that was as impotent as it was probably boring to read by most of the nonmessenger public. What's sadder still is that members of your own staff had the resources to do a much better article, using all that "journalistic objectivity and integrity" y'all always talk about, and due to their laziness, we get this gruesome display. I honestly don't know whether to be horrified or amused or both.

Peace, love, and respect to the kids still playing in traffic, and a big fat raspberry to the staff of this rag for their lack of interest, objectivity, or integrity in checking facts and stories out for themselves.

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PS: How funny is it that corporate media giant Tribune Media were the only ones at the time to do fair and unbiased newspaper stories and local TV news "human interest stories" about the other side of messengering? What do you people do all day? Sit around and find new contexts to use the word "trope"?

John Greenfield replies:

Soon after Tom McBride was killed in the road rage case, Eric Sprattling died following a brain aneurysm suffered during a bike race. In his 40s, Sprattling had messengered for 13 years and coached the younger messengers of the XXX racing team.

McBride and Sprattling were memorialized in the 13th issue of "Dead Air," the messenger zine edited by Donny "Quixote" Perry. This issue included a eulogy for McBride by George Olzanski, who started On the Fly Courier in 1993, when he was a young messenger. McBride was one of the service's first riders. In his eulogy, Olzanski credits McBride with building the city's first company to offer bikers salaries and health insurance.

Shortly after "Dead Air" came out, Olzanski fell from the balcony of his high-rise apartment. Perry was dispatching at On the Fly at the time. The Immortal Class ends with the memorial ride for McBride and does not describe the deaths of Sprattling and Olzanski. Sprattling appears in the chapter about the "alleycat" race and Culley thanks him for his leadership in the acknowledgments. Olzanski does not appear in the book.

