

a tribute

TOM BAILEY

coach, mentor, teacher



My names is Jodie Ebeling, I may not know you but we've shared a common friend and therefore have a common bond. It's worth noting I ride bicycles too :) I'd like to share a little about Tom, who and what he was to me. Briefly, as it puts our relationship into context, I was a pretty good athlete and played a lot of sports growing up. I went to Brock completed my undergrad in Physical Education and played basketball for 5 years. I went on to play professionally for 6 years in Europe and the United States. I have since retired and returned and now work on a Medical Transfer Team and serve with the Niagara Regional Police as an Auxiliary Police Constable.

Tom walked into my life at Gainsborough elementary school. I was in grade 5, about 10 years old. He was never my teacher, but he coached the basketball team - and frankly, that's all that mattered. I instantly liked him. Maybe it was because he road his bike to school long before cycle commuting became a thing, or, maybe it was because he wore these Nike cross-trainers that all the cool kids wanted, but didn't have. Or maybe, it was that he spent recess organizing us into teams and then joining, in an attempt to prove he

"still had it". I do believe the record will show, I won more games of "21" than he did. Whatever it was, it was abundantly clear Tom was a special guy.

He caught my attention first and foremost from his bicycle. Tom rode his bike to school everyday, rain or shine, wind or...well, there is *ALWAYS* wind. This is a group of cyclists so you will fully appreciate the grind and mentally taxing nature of pedaling west - straight into a nasty headwind. You will also understand that encountering wind is simply a matter of when, not if. Tom obviously embraced this challenge - **daily** - and that was incredibly inspiring. I saw Tom riding everywhere and it hit me years ago, that I wanted to be that person. I really started riding after retiring from basketball. And can now say, I am that person. Friends and co-workers ask all the time about cycling - I start off every time with "Well, I had this teacher in elementary school....". I'm one example of where Tom's passion for cycling will live on.

I also mentioned Tom had these Nike cross-trainers, running shoes, I loved them. I asked my parents for them, I scoured our yearbooks for pictures of Mr. Bailey wearing them, I hunted in shopping malls for them - I realize now, this behaviour was totally absurd. But, as everyone knows women love their shoes, so unabashedly, I embraced the inevitable awkwardness that comes from staring at a man's foot and simply carried on obsessing. Tom knew I **really** liked them. He probably thought I was completely ridiculous, if not slightly creepy, but he had a good laugh at my expense. I'd like to think he would have been proud of the fact that I became so good at basketball, people just gave me shoes!

The time has come to talk about his Van. Tom had this van. You've all seen it, don't look around the room and act like you haven't. There was nothing subtle about the red and white Lincoln Leapers turtletop cruising around suburban Fonthill. It was his skipping van. Despite his urgings, I did not skip. I did somehow manage a ride every now and then, as he insisted on loading the entire basketball team into it. I'm certain this was highly illegal, something about an F-Class license and seatbelts come to mind but, this was the 90's so I guess that made it ok. Speaking of that van, we took it to a tournament once. A mini weekend tournament - "mini" because we were so bad we had zero chance of making it past noon on Saturday. Naturally, everyone including Tom, made plans anticipating an early exit, but then I played well, and we accidentally won a game. Tom walked over to my

mom with a huge grin and said "you'll have to thank your daughter for ruining my weekend."

I wish I'd had more of a relationship with Tom as I got older. I'd like to think he followed some of my basketball accomplishments (throughout high school, university and then pro), and I hope at some point he thought of all the time we played, he taught, and then we played some more. I never told him what that meant to me, I guess because I thought it would be an awkward thing to do, but something tells me he already knew.

When I first heard Tom was sick, I was living overseas, an old school friend sent me the St. Catharines Standard article, my heart hurt for him and the people closest to him. I eventually made it to Linhaven, where I first met Pat. Pat, I know your reading this and it might feel awkward to say, but Tom is very lucky to have had you by his side. I left a note and signed a picture for Tom, that said "Mr. Bailey, thanks for everything". At the time, I wasn't sure what everything meant. By saying "everything" I was trying to convey the positive impact he had on me at such an impressionable age. There is no question, he influenced who and what I wanted to be. His energy, his cycling, his healthy habits, his shoes, his passion for sport, his simple kindness....until him we didn't have those type of role models at school.

It's important we remember the person Tom was and a lot of what he stood for. When I sit and reflect on what I know of Tom's life, I think he loved teaching, making people better, making life better. He devoted a lot of his life to improving the lives of others - and isn't that life's most selfless act? Does that put him at the very top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is Self-Actualization, defined as "becoming the best person that one can possibly strive for in the service of both the self and others"? I think it does. I am very thankful for Tom's life, I became a better person for having had him in mine.

I will leave you with a favourite quote from Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Tom made me feel important, talented, special; I am so very thankful for him and always will be.

Jodie Ebeling