

RON BUSS 1958-2024

*A muscle car aficionado,
newspaper editor and
music lover who never
knew a stranger.*

BY SAVANNAH BROWN

RON BUSS WAS A *EUGENE WEEKLY HAPPENING*
PERSON IN 2014. Photo by Paul Neevel

Ronald “Ron” Allen Buss “made friends everywhere he went,” says his friend Sharon Poitra. With a heart of gold, a patient demeanor and a supreme sense of humor, Poitra says Buss was loved by everyone who knew him.

He lived on the streets of Eugene on-and-off for about eight years, before finding stable housing around 2020. He hung out in The Kiva Grocery’s parking and general downtown area, where he used to distribute his \$1 publication, *Our Streets of Eugene*. It shed light on Eugene’s homeless community through the written word, with poems, stories and experiences.

On Christmas morning 2024, Buss passed away peacefully at Valley West Health Care Center.

Buss was born the youngest of four siblings on Dec. 17, 1958 to parents John and Anne Buss in Tacoma. He was close with his older siblings, and because they lived out in the country, Vicki Sullivan, his only sister, said they would often be found playing baseball, catching frogs in the creek or getting into mischief together.

As a teenager, Buss was a mechanically minded, music-loving rebel. He loved shop class and history most, but those were some of the only classes he ended up going to. “He would go to school, then he’d step out the back door pretty quickly,” says his Eugene housemate Sylvia Gregory. “He would sign the letter from the school saying he wasn’t there, and forge his parents’ signature saying he was excused. Then he’d get back before they got home from work.”

Ever since he was a child, Sullivan says, “He loved as deeply as anyone could ever love.”

He played many instruments, including guitar, bass and drums, so much so that when he was a teenager his parents gave him the attic so he could play as loud as he wanted. He loved classic rock, and his favorite bands were The Rolling Stones and Nirvana. He passed on this love to his many nieces, giving them each different albums for birthdays and Christmas, and teaching them how to play music. “I’m a huge music person myself, now, because of my uncle,” says his niece, Tonja

He was also a practical joker. When his nieces were little, “He’d tell us these scary stories, and then he would incorporate everything around him into the story at the perfect time,” Guizzetti-Clark says. From having a flashlight flicker behind his back, to having his friend bang on the window at just the right moment, “He would just petrify us,” Guizzetti-Clark says. “My Uncle Ronny was just the coolest person ever. He was our favorite.”

When he was in his late teens, he moved to Modesto, California. He worked for many years at a moving company with his brother. After he left the company, other jobs he worked included being a PepsiCo driver, a candy distributor and working at a container manufacturer. “I never knew him not to have a good, solid job and a nice muscle car. He always had some type of fast car,” Guizzetti-Clark says. After that, he returned to the moving industry and was making “\$100,000 a year” he told *Eugene Weekly* in 2014.

He married a woman named Diane in

1986 and together they had four kids. The couple divorced in 2008. After years of suffering many injuries through his various jobs, in 2011, Buss moved to Florence to be closer with his kids.

He ended up in Eugene living off of his disability check. Being faithful to his child support meant there wasn’t much money left over to pay rent, Gregory says. After a year of living off of his 401(k), he became unhoused, living on and off the street for about eight years. It was during this time that he met and got a job with David Gerber, who had a street paper focused on art and written pieces by Eugene’s homeless community called *Oregon Vagabond Motivator*.

Buss sold the paper from the Kiva parking lot until it stopped printing. In October 2013, he started up his own newspaper, *Our Streets of Eugene*, complete with a newsletter written by Buss himself. *Our Streets of Eugene* carried on OVM’s legacy. “He knew absolutely everything there was to know about what goes on downtown,” Gregory says. “He was so observant.”

“We all enjoyed talking to him because he’s an interesting guy, nice person, and easy to talk to,” says Gregory, speaking on behalf of the flock of ladies who frequented Kiva at the time and befriended him. Poitra, who knew him from distributing another local newspaper, confirms his popularity. “People tended to bring him things, and he would usually ask for milk instead of any kind of coffee or anything. On a really hot day, he would ask for a Coke.”

“It was very interesting to talk to when he wasn’t your run of the mill houseless person. He was an interesting stand up guy,” Gregory says. “He always dressed well, he was clean and didn’t do street drugs or anything like that. He didn’t drink, either. He just smoked. But that was it. If he had half a chance, he could have done anything he set his mind to.”

One cold January day in 2020, Gregory ran into him on the street, and he told her he had just gotten out of the hospital for the second time in three months. Aside from various injuries he acquired over his storied career in the moving and warehouse industries, he also suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. “I thought to myself, ‘He’s gonna die out here, if he doesn’t get housing,’” Gregory says. “And so I remodeled and made my base-moment habitable.”

He lived with her until October 2024, when his COPD, injuries and wounds got the best of him, and he was placed on hospice before eventually being moved to Valley West. He passed away on Christmas morning, leaving behind many people who loved him deeply. “Despite the fact that he’d been through hell and gone in his life, he tried his very best,” Gregory says. “I’m just really proud that he was our friend,” Poitra says.

He is preceded in death by his parents, John and Anne Buss, and his oldest brother, Gary Buss. He is survived by his sister and brother, Vicki Sullivan and Doug Buss, as well as many nieces and also Jeremy. He is also survived by his four children, Michael, Tracy, Steven and Vincent.

His memorial service was held Jan. 25, at the Eugene Mennonite Church.

NEWS

Bricks \$ Mortar BY CHRISTIAN WIHTOL

TRAINSONG ‘TANK FARM’

Gasoline storage tanks and distribution plant proposed for Bethel/Trainsong

BY CHRISTIAN WIHTOL

The Bethel and Trainsong residential neighborhoods can’t catch a break.

A major California-based gas station chain seeks to build a regional fuel distribution “tank farm” next to the Eugene Union Pacific rail yard, drawing objections from neighbors and other activists who fear environmental and other impacts.

The proposal’s fate lies with Eugene planning staff who will decide whether the city’s land use code allows such a facility on the property, which is zoned for heavy industry. The city doesn’t have a decision timeline.

In its application, H&S Energy of Orange, California, said its “bulk plant” or “tank farm” would have above or below-ground storage tanks holding fuel that would be distributed by tanker truck to gas stations and government and business customers.

Bethel and Trainsong area neighbors are alarmed. The proposal “must be stopped,” says Lin Woodrich, co-chair of the Active Bethel Community neighborhood group. Residents are lobbying the Eugene City Council, although planning staff said the decision is based strictly on the city’s land use code.

The proposal comes just as activists succeeded in beating back an attempt by another company to build a fuels transfer facility next to the rail yard. In that case, Texas-based USD Clean Fuels said it wanted to build a fuels facility on Bethel Drive, at the south end of the sprawling rail yard. USD wanted to transfer fuels from rail cars to tanker trucks for regional distribution. Following community protests, the city decided Eugene’s heavy-industrial zoning rules don’t allow that use.

SCANT INFO

Only a few details are available on the H&S proposal.

The facility would sit on a vacant seven-acre parcel at the end of pot-holed, unpaved Kintyre Street at the northern edge of the rail yard. The site is wedged between the rail yard and Highway 99.

It would receive fuels via rail, truck or pipeline, says the application. A major gasoline pipeline operated by the Kinder Morgan corporation has a terminal and large tank farm near the rail yard.

H&S has not yet designed the facility,

says Jennifer Doty, H&S senior director of real estate.

The project is “a sort of if, sort of maybe sort of thing,” Doty tells *Eugene Weekly*. “It may or may not happen.” H&S is looking at other sites around the state, she says.

H&S, with more than 50 gas stations in Oregon, likes the site’s proximity to I-5, she says. The company has not yet settled on price with the landowner, Doty says.

Among the groups in opposition is Beyond Toxics, the Eugene-based environmental nonprofit.

“Our main objection to this proposal is that, similar to the [USD Clean Fuels] transfer station, this tank farm does not belong in the middle of our city,” says Lisa Arkin, Beyond Toxics executive director.

The proposed site is in a largely industrial/commercial strip along the west side of the rail yard. But it is close to densely developed residential areas in the Bethel, Trainsong and River Road neighborhoods.

INDUSTRIAL ZONING

The site is zoned heavy industrial. That’s the same zoning as the land the city rejected for USD Clean Fuels.

The company late last year submitted a zone verification request to the city, a procedure that requires the planning staff to formally confirm whether a particular use is allowed. The city doesn’t have a decision timeline, says Jeff Gepper, the planner handling the request.

Eugene’s zoning code says the purpose of heavy industrial land is to “serve a range of manufacturing uses, including those involved in the processing of large volumes of raw materials into refined products and/or industrial uses that have significant external impacts.” Lighter industrial uses are also allowed.

The land is owned by a corporation controlled by members of the Cole family in Massachusetts and Eugene, according to ownership filings. They bought the land in 1997 for \$145,000, according to a deed. It is listed for sale by Campbell Commercial Real Estate of Eugene for \$2,295,000.

The site is currently occupied by a caretaker in an RV. A few hens and roosters roam through the trees.

Privately held H&S has been growing rapidly. It owns several hundred convenience stores and gas stations under various brands along the West Coast, according to its website. Last year, it bought California-based Andretti Petroleum Group, which had nearly 170 convenience stores, gas stations and other fuel outlets on the West Coast, according to news reports.

Bricks \$ Mortar is a column anchored by Christian Wihtol, who worked as an editor and writer at The Register-Guard in Eugene 1990-2018, much of the time focused on real estate, economic development and business. Reach him at Christian@EugeneWeekly.com.