

Company president shares the pain of losing an employee to an on-the-job fatality

Lonnie “Homie” Olsen was a star employee who always put his customers first, and his customers loved him for it. Homie would joke that president Marty Johnson might own the company, but that he “Homie” was the CEO. He was a fast, efficient worker and a fun-loving practical joker who loved his job and his family. Homie had been with Tacoma Motorfreight Service (TMS) for 10 years when tragedy struck.

Marty shares that TMS is a family owned company that has never had even a crippling injury in their 100 years of service. That is until February 21 when he received the horrifying phone call.

Marty still can’t believe that it happened at all, much less to Homie. Homie was so good at his job that he was often the one to train new workers. He valued his customers so much that when the company gave Seahawks tickets out to the employees, year after year, Homie would take a different customer from his route. His customers were everything to him.

But something happened on that Friday night. Speculation runs that as he was hurrying to get home on the last day of the week, he noticed that he had left the landing gear down and in his haste forgot to set the parking brake when he went to crank it up. Without the parking brake, the slight grade was all it took for the truck to shift and roll. He was trapped between two trailers and killed instantly.

A co-worker, who was a former police officer, was the one who found him. He heard the music coming from Homie’s truck, saw the door open and in his gut, he knew something was wrong. Being a truck driver, the first thing he did was set the parking brake before he went back to find his friend and confirm that it was too late.

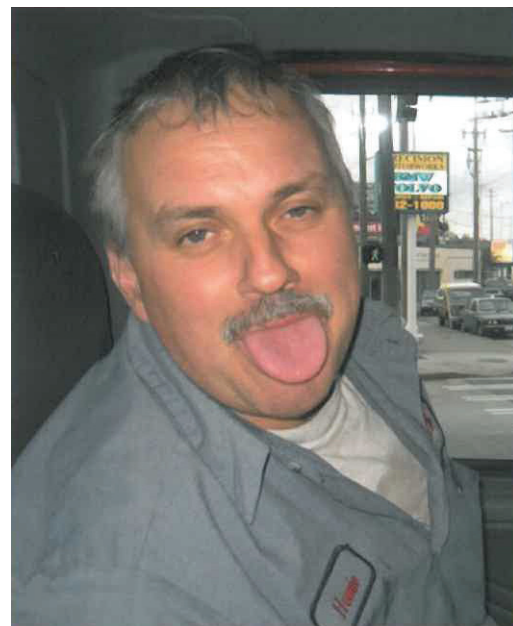
A few minutes later, Marty Johnson received the call that something had gone terribly wrong. As he rushed to the scene, he thought of Homie’s wife Kathy, who was also an employee of the company. What would he tell her? What would he tell the other employees? Theirs was a small, tight-knit company of 25. This would impact everyone.

Marty remembers the commotion of the scene and working with the local authorities to get someone to Homie’s house to tell his wife Kathy. As the minutes ticked into hours, he shared how he regretted not driving immediately to their home to give Kathy the news. It took the authorities too long as they lived outside the local jurisdiction. Finally the call came in on his cellphone. It was Kathy. She wanted to know why her husband hadn’t come home and hadn’t called and why no one was telling her anything. Marty still regrets breaking the terrible news over the phone.

He and other managers made call after call that weekend, delivering the news to each employee. Marty confided that he couldn’t bear the thought of sharing the news on Monday morning with the expectation that drivers would need to work all day after receiving it. Their company is a family and he knew they’d need time.

As Marty tells the story, you realize for him, there will never be enough time.

Interview with Marty Johnson, President of Tacoma Motorfreight Service.



Lonnie “Homie” Olsen

December 10, 1962 - February 21, 2014

Fun-loving, practical joker.

Photo provided by Kathy Olsen and Tacoma Motorfreight Service from their celebration of his life.

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