

# BOUND FOR GLORY



As dreamers go, no one peddles his fantasies of stardom quite as passionately as Biker Fox.

BY JESSE HICKS  
PHOTOS BY VAN DITTHAVONG

# BIKER FOX ENTERS TO THE THUNDER OF APPLAUSE,

a grinning, bespectacled 51-year-old in red spandex shorts, gliding into the downtown AMC theater on a matching red Cannondale bike. Four hundred Tulsans cheer as he pedals to the front of the auditorium and dismounts with a flourish, a sheath of brown curls waving beneath his high, bald crown.

The crowd of quasi-hipster 20-somethings is packed in for the premiere of *Biker Fox*, a low-budget documentary stitched together by a local filmmaker from hours of raw footage of the hometown hero. When the applause dies down, Biker Fox does a loose-limbed shuffle behind the Cannondale and takes questions: *Have you ever considered a reality TV show? Where did you get your name? How many miles do you ride per week?*

It seems strange, all of this attention for a guy who, when you get down to it, *bikes* a lot. Many of the premiere's attendees have waited nearly two hours to meet him. Children thrust their tickets forward, requesting autographs. A minivan cruises past the theater lobby and two young voices shriek, "We love you, Biker Fox!" A man in a wheelchair thanks him, tells him to never give up, to keep living his dream.

Biker Fox wants you to remember him. He's outlandish and attention-seeking, shaking his rear end in traffic and recruiting fans on MySpace and Facebook. He's a proud weirdo in a place that doesn't take kindly to rainbow-clad oddballs. "Spandex don't go over very well in Oklahoma," he says.



**Pale Rider** Biker Fox, né Frank DeLarzelere, basks in the sun of his backyard patio.

A lot of things Biker Fox does don't go over well in Oklahoma—and wouldn't in plenty of other places, either. He rides on four-lane highways and growls at passing drivers. He does flips over his handlebars, a middle-aged man hanging impossibly in the air before landing on his feet—at least some of the time. Every night, he feeds dog food to the pesky raccoons that congregate around his one-story, red-brick house. (That's how he learned to growl.) Biker Fox raises bluebirds. Biker Fox howls at the moon.

In another time, he'd have been called a "local character." But this is the age of *Jersey Shore* and YouTube, of celebrity based not on accomplishment but on—let's call it Kardashian will. To draw our attention, people no longer have to *do*, they just have to *be*.

And more than anything, Biker Fox wants to be. He's a no-compromise dreamer whose kookiness inspires Tulsa's kids to be iconoclasts and challenges adults to find their

individuality. Stardom, Biker Fox hopes, is the epilogue to this ongoing process of casting aside his inhibitions and discovering his true self. So what if that means, on a daily basis, squeezing into a garish wardrobe of compression shorts, gelling his hair into a plasticine curtain, stirring the ire of local law enforcement, and risking the ridicule of those who see a train wreck where others see a stud. It's all part of his plan. "To be a celebrity," Biker Fox is fond of saying, "you have to be abnormal."

**B**IKER FOX EATS ONLY one meal per day, usually around 9 p.m. The rest of the time, he'll scarf light snacks or drink water, which, he says, tricks the body into thinking it has been fed. Eating, Biker Fox insists, is psychological; mind over body. Distilled to its essence, his philosophy is that *everything* is psychological. "You are what you think you are," he says, tucking into the seafood special at Bonefish Grill, a chain restaurant in the Tulsa suburb of Broken Arrow. "Think you are that splendid person others long to see when you come into the room and you'll *be* that person."

It's the night before the hometown premiere of *Biker Fox* and a storm has just rumbled through, the kind of biblical torrent unique to the Southwest. At Bonefish, Biker Fox sits in a back corner, far away from the polo-shirt crowd that lines the bar. He uses the waiter's first name when ordering a root beer. "Sure thing, Biker," the waiter replies.

"I've eaten here over a hundred times," Biker Fox says in a voice flecked with a Southwestern drawl. He looks spry for a man his age, eyes sharp behind glasses, and hands darting over his food as he speaks. "I'm 51, but I say 52 because I'm going to have a birthday this year. And I'm just glad—excited—to be 52 or 62 or 72, because of the way I feel. I just feel like a kid and feel so good about life. A lot of people don't."

He credits much of that transformation to the invention of his alter ego. Before Biker Fox, his friends and family knew him only as Frank—specifically, Frank Palmer DeLarzelere III. Born in Monroe, Louisiana, but up-and-moved to Oklahoma at age 4, the boyhood Frank had a lot of energy, and



quickly earned a reputation as a class clown. But in more disciplined school settings, his hubris gave way to shakes and stutters. He couldn't focus or follow through on his thoughts.

Frank's mother and father—a school bus driver and photo copier salesman, respectively—put their son on medication: Ritalin or maybe Librium, Biker's not sure. It backfired. "For a few months I sleepwalked," he remembers, "fell out of my bed, knocked the lamp over. So they quit that." He says he still has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. And it's evident in his conversation, which flits sparrow-like from topic to topic, his sentences launching in one direction and arriving somewhere completely different, or not arriving at all. His wires become especially crossed when talking about his past, the time before Biker Fox.

"I have no memory, except when it comes to muscle-car parts. How's that possible?" he says, laughing. Biker Fox



**Muscle Memory**  
Biker's car parts  
are well organized.

has a salesman's gregariousness, and it came in handy after he graduated—barely—from high school. Following in his father's footsteps, he spent his 20s peddling things: jet skis, motorcycles, classified ads, mortgages. He tried a brief stint in telemarketing, and

then hustled used cars. He'd often work a job for six or seven months and quit. A friend dubbed him "The Shortcut King," for his itch to skirt work and look for the easy out.

His eureka moment came at age 28, while shilling on the used-car lot. In

his free time, Frank loved to tinker with his 1967 Pontiac GTO. When someone suggested that he post it for sale in the *Hemmings Motor News*, he figured, why not? "I got at least 50 calls in one week," he says. The sale netted him a healthy profit and the angle the Shortcut King was looking for. Adopting the slang term for GTO (collectors call them "goats"), he became "The Goat Farmer of Oklahoma," targeting a niche market of muscle-car restorers and enthusiasts who'd eagerly pay top dollar for rare parts.

For the next decade he worked 12-hour days, buying and selling, boxing and shipping struts, traction bars, and the like. He developed a network of contacts and grew his inventory. The business, which he runs out of his house, became his life. When he made time to feed himself it was either junk food or an all-you-can-eat buffet. Exercise? Hours of ping pong every day and football-watching on Sundays.

**T**HEN CAME THE crisis. Cresting 40, he began experiencing chest and abdominal pains. His 5'10" frame, once lean, had bloated to 245 pounds. He felt sick all the time. To combat it, he tried the Stairmaster, then running. Nothing helped. His two ping-pong pals—like Frank, 40-somethings with a lust for saturated fats and lazy weekends—died within a year of each other, one from an aneurysm, the other in a motorcycle accident. "We played almost every day," he says, his voice still uncomprehending. "They were my two best friends."

The deaths brought his own mortality into focus. "You pray and you talk to God and you ask him for guidance," he says. "One Sunday, I got down on my hands and knees, and started crying. 'God,' I said, 'I'm sick, and I need your help. Please help me. Please.'"

Biker Fox has told this story dozens, maybe hundreds of times, yet he still recites it with the earnestness of the newly converted. Worn smooth by the re-telling, it has acquired the concision of a foundational myth, the Death of Frank Palmer DeLarzelere III and the Birth of Biker Fox. It isn't meant to inspire listeners so much as reveal the turning point that ushered in his radical new persona.

"And from that day on I stopped eating fried foods and at buffets," he concludes. "I stopped eating all the food I could gorge." He started biking, the one exercise that let him feel free of his weight, pushing himself and his body, riding for hours through the demoralizing Tulsa heat. And then through the punishing winters, when temperatures dropped to 18 degrees.

He began to recognize himself in the mirror again. He shed 60 pounds in the first 10 weeks of pedaling Tulsa's streets. After a year, he'd lost 80. He shaved the beard he'd been hid-

## FOR MANY, THE PURSUIT OF CELEBRITY IS ABOUT THE PROMISE OF REINVENTION, THE CERTAINTY THAT A NOBODY CAN BECOME A SOMEBODY, THE CONVICTION THAT FAME WILL COMPLETE US.

ing behind and grew out his hair. He rediscovered his curls, the "lockses," he calls them. "I'd lost all that weight and I felt so cute," he says without a clue as to how silly that sounds. Eager to show off his radically new 42-year-old body, he went to a nearby Glamour Shots and had photographs taken. He posed in a tuxedo, holding a bouquet of roses, then in a pair of form-fitting jeans, looking coyly over his shoulder at the camera. And, of course, he snapped a couple of portraits with his blue-and-yellow Cannondale mountain bike.

Now he needed a name to complete the about-face. In high school, he remembered, some of the girls used to call him a fox. Combining that with his newfound love of exercise,

he had his answer. In August 2001, [www.bikerfox.com](http://www.bikerfox.com) debuted with the declaration "Frank Paul is BikerFox." He put his Glamour Shots photographs online and hoped they'd work their magic. Biker Fox, the site announced, "is a heterosexual male, and is looking to meet a nice girl for a fulfilling relationship." He listed his height and weight, hobbies (biking, swimming, nature, radio-controlled airplanes, and ping-pong), heart rate, and blood pressure. He posted his phone number, calling it his "singles dating line."

He also began uploading photographs of his various bike tricks, including the "Fox Flip," a headfirst maneuver over the handlebars. He supplemented that with a collection of philosophical musings. "That's the

meaning of life, my friends," he'd write, "just to be young and to be enthusiastic about whatever opportunity arises." Or, "The secret to happiness is telling yourself you are happy, even when you are not."

Exercise transformed him; the Internet gave him an audience. But not everyone wanted to tune in. The local police, for one, were far from welcoming to Oklahoma's most ostentatious two-wheeler. "The cops were hammerin' on my ass for 8 or 9 years," Biker Fox says. So far, his cycling-related infractions—impeding traffic, failing to signal, failing to have a bike light (in the middle of the afternoon)—have cost him \$3,000, and that doesn't factor in legal fees. In December 2008, after being charged with resisting arrest, he was mandated to attend anger management classes. Lurking beneath the inspirational showman was, sometimes, just a combustible crank.

His father didn't live to see Frank the III become Biker Fox. But his mother, before her death a few years ago, watched as her son traded his suits for hoop earrings and neon-loud biker threads. "She didn't like the earrings and the spandex and everything," he says. "But I created this person as someone who would have a strong opinion."

For the most part, those elements of the past, the life of Frank DeLarzelere, have faded into a gauzy distance. Biker Fox wants to talk about the future, the realm of infinite possibility. In 2005, he legally ditched his surname, telling the court, "The petitioner is an entertainer and his current name would not be suitable or easily recognizable to further and promote his career as an entertainer." (His driver's license now reads "Biker Fox.") He's still waiting to see what happens with that documentary, which is generating some buzz on the festival circuit. He'd like to be on *Saturday Night Live*, or maybe on a sitcom like *Everybody Loves*

*Raymond.* What would he do? He doesn't know, maybe play a Stuart Smalley-like self-help guru. Something comedic.

"I'm kind of a, I don't know, not Mr. Rogers, but who's a children's entertainer who's older?" he asks, before concluding there isn't one. It's a role he could fill. A Biker Fox action figure is possible, too. "There's just so much to do," he says.

He takes inspiration from Jack LaLanne, the godfather of fitness. As for his own career stretching, he's undone by his diverse ambitions. He should get to work on that reality-show idea, he says, but he's spent too much time lately promoting his movie. He talks about an avant-garde talk show, something local, where he'd interview celebrities in front of a live and uniquely feral

audience: that pack of raccoons who romp in his yard. He'd model himself on Jay Leno, whom he watches religiously. He's still looking for that shortcut, a way through that ever-thinner scrim separating him from the celebrity he craves. "I've always been good at thinking smarter, differently," he says. "I want so badly to be this funny, happy-go-lucky, single guy. I think we all do."

After dinner he pulls a blank, oversized check from his pocket. He scans the bill and signs his name to the check: a looping, nearly illegible "Biker Fox." An autograph. He walks through the parking lot to his ride, a F-150 pickup with "BIKERFX" vanity plates. Just above the bumper, a sticker says it again: Biker Fox.

**T**HE CANNONDALE bike rolls to a stop at the end of a long suburban street lined with brick homes and well-kept lawns.

Biker Fox's house is the last one on the right. The attached garage holds bumpers, fenders, packing peanuts, and carefully labeled Rubbermaid bins filled with muscle-car taillights, grouped by year. In the backyard stands a homebuilt shed with a workshop where he and his assistants do car restorations. At night the woods behind the shop alight with dozens of glowing eyes as his raccoons come for their food.

Inside, his home is an austere bachelor pad. After suffering a sinus infection, Biker Fox became convinced his carpets were to blame. He replaced them all with tile. Then he decided to tile the walls, too. The flat-screen TV in his living room is tuned constantly to CNN. With nothing to dampen the sound, the anchors' voices echo like bathroom conversation. A shelf of alphabetized CDs shares one wall with a variety of Biker Fox paraphernalia. One room down the hall has a corner painted Mountain Dew green. There

he films himself trying on various costumes and personae. He can digitally replace the green screen with lush color images, transporting Biker Fox anywhere in the world. Or, at least he can make it look that way.

Biker Fox doesn't travel paved roads anymore, doesn't challenge motorists or provoke the Tulsa PD. The anger management classes have mellowed him. Instead, he

ventures out through his backyard and along sidewalks that border a development and lead into dense woods. There, he stops to check on a few bluebird houses mounted on a chain-link fence, noting where nests remain and other birds have flown.

He doesn't normally have a riding buddy, he says. The schedule he keeps is too late for some friends; others are too married to shake

free. But with a partner and a sympathetic ear, the ride becomes a discourse on the freedom of biking, the importance of hydration, and the problems of modern life (not enough exercise).

Along the way he garners honks and shouts of encouragement. When he summits a tall hill and starts down the other side, he coasts, arms spread, legs stilled, his face raised to the sky as his hair streams in the wind. Here, he says, he feels like a kid again. He passes a group of serious bikers, taking a water break in their uniform shirts and shorts. They cheer as he goes by. "Yeah! Biker Fox!" Asked how he feels about the nod, he replies, "I'm nobody. I'm trying to be somebody."

To be a celebrity, you have to be abnormal. For many, the pursuit is about the promise of reinvention, the certainty that a nobody can become a somebody, the conviction that fame will complete us.

Biker Fox is trying to be somebody. So every night he rides. He stretches out his arms like two great wings and is released from whatever troubles him, whatever fears and hopes he cannot articulate. He comes home to an empty house, usually with the TV on, and when darkness falls he calls to his raccoons. On his patio, he arrays buckets of water to slake their thirst, and scatters their food; sometimes he feeds them by hand. Then he retires to his brown recliner and watches Jay Leno toss jokes to the audience, their laughter echoing off the tiled walls of his home. Directly outside, *his* would-be audience scratches and growls. Still farther away, as a neighborhood kid is being laid down to sleep, he might be saying, "Hey, I saw Biker Fox today!"

And inside, the credits roll on another Biker Fox day.

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