

# A FAMILY'S FUGITIVE HEART

The boy who became the brash bank robber struggled with a nomadic life and a learning disability, family members say. He also had chances to change, they say, but the criminal life never let go.

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People had forgotten about bank robberies in Albuquerque: they were such easy, bloodless crimes. Money changed hands, no one got hurt, and detectives got their man — or the occasional woman — three-fourths of the time.

But things began to change in December 1998 when a big, bold guy who called himself "Blanco" started hitting the banks, sometimes two in the same day, sometimes the same bank branch in a matter of weeks, 14 banks in all over an 18-month period.

Bank robberies were news again.

Blanco, whose given name was Byron Shane Chubbuck, got noticed not only for his spree but for his story and his style: He would smile, offer a compliment or a blessing, and politely ask the teller to dismantle the dye pack hidden in the loot as if he were asking for another helping of Sunday dinner. He would tell them he was stealing the money to feed starving children. He would one day tell a judge that the female tellers were practically applauding him by the time he left.

His antics earned him the nickname Robin the Hood.

But they also earned sorrow for the family of a 33-year-old man with the soul of a poet and the heart of Billy the Kid, hardened by a childhood spent mostly bereft of his parents, snarled by the shame of an undiagnosed learning disability and scratched away by drugs, gangs and a life served increasingly behind bars — with the prospect of many more years there, with his recapture this morning.

## The broken cord

Byron Shane Chubbuck was 18 months old in 1968 when his father was forced out of his life by his mother's parents for reasons neither side will explain.

"I was not allowed to see my son for many years," John Byron Chubbuck said in a recent telephone interview from a job site in California where he is an ironworker. "I

fought those people tooth and nail to see him."

John and Melody Chubbuck were divorced. For Melody, there would be several more marriages and divorces and dozens of moves across the Southwest with her young son until she decided that it was best to leave him behind with her parents in Albuquerque for the stability she could not provide.

"His mother, God bless her, she's not a bad woman," John Chubbuck said. "There's just certain ways about her that she can't help."

By then Byron Shane was just Shane, a handsome child with his mother's startling green eyes and the exotic features of his father's Cherokee blood. Edward and Elvina Strance gave him a home steeped in the simple and stern traditions of their Pennsylvania Dutch roots, and for a time that seemed enough.

"He was the best kid in the world," John Chubbuck said. "He had two of the best grandparents raising him. He was polite and good looking and talented and smart." Shane developed a love of the guitar and of poetry, the latter of which was instilled in him by his grandmother, who once headed the New Mexico State Poetry Society.

But although family members said Shane possessed an intelligence beyond his years, he faltered in school.

"He had a hard time in school," Elvina Strance said. "He was a smart kid, but he had a learning disability. And back then, they didn't know much about those."

The Strances shipped Shane to a number of schools across Albuquerque, including parochial schools. But the shame of his learning difficulties and the loss of both his mother and father began to pull Shane toward a dark path mined with gangs and drugs. By middle school, he had stumbled into both.

## Fraying apart

The standoff that had kept John Chubbuck from his son subsided more than 10 years later when the Strances softened their

stance and let him attempt to forge a fatherly bond with a son who by that time was a teen-ager teetering close to the edge.

John Chubbuck was remarried and raising a son and daughter when he brought Shane to live with them in Bloomfield in northeast New Mexico.

"I really didn't know my brother at all when he first came to live with us," Shane's half-brother, Nathan Chubbuck, said in a recent phone interview from Gunnison, Colo., where he and his sister, Cresta Chubbuck, attend college. "I'm 10 years younger, and I was about 6 or 7 at the time."

Nathan Chubbuck remembers Shane as a patient and talented teen who took time to teach him how to play the guitar. But he also remembers the stress between his parents over Shane's growing troubles with the law.

"He kept getting in trouble, but I'm not sure what for," he said. "I know it was an emotional strain on our family. I was really too young to understand. To this day, I still don't understand."

Shane Chubbuck eventually returned to Albuquerque, but his troubles with both school and the law continued. Court records indicate that Chubbuck served his first adult jail term in 1986 when he was 19. His last recorded attempt at school was in 1980 when he briefly attended ninth grade at Eldorado High School before withdrawing to take a job that his father had secured for him as an ironworker. He was 23.

By the summer of that year, he was back behind bars.

He earned his general equivalency diploma as well as a couple of college correspondence degrees in prison, his brother said.

But life behind bars was brutal. Family members say Shane has endured unjustified cruelties and the continued corruption of corrections officers. In a taped message aired Tuesday on KZRR-FM (94.1), Shane Chubbuck himself railed against a jail guard at the Santa Fe County Detention Center, where he had been housed before his escape Dec. 21.

"They stuck him in solitary confinement

for six months," John Chubbuck said. "If they stuck you in a 6-by-5-foot cell, what would you be like?"

## Chances that didn't take

The poetry of his grandmother and of his youth helped to pull Shane through some of the roughest times.

"Oh, I have hundreds of his poems," Elvina Strance said. "Beautiful poems. It's nice. He writes about the Earth and the animals, about the mud of the Rio Grande and the pink of the mountains."

But with each new incarceration, a little more of Byron Shane Chubbuck twisted inside. Several times while on the outside, Shane was given several chances to rehabilitate. He was offered a recording contract for his blues guitar music, provided he could stay out of prison for a year, his brother said.

"He made it to eight months and he was back in jail," Nathan Chubbuck said.

He was given the chance to begin at least two business ventures — one a small coffee and ice cream shop, the other a cabinet-making operation. Both failed almost immediately.

"He used to talk about going straight all the time," his brother said. "He got kind of religious in prison, joined a church band. He thought that could help him. But it didn't."

He met and married Leticia Antillon, who bore him two sons. One is about 12; the other 2, his brother said.

But even his sons could not keep him on the outside.

"My own opinion is he has an anti-social disorder," Nathan Chubbuck said.

"They've kept him in jail so long that he can't function on the outside. He just fell into this criminal life. He got used to it. He got good at it."

After the escape from a prison transport van in December, Byron Shane Chubbuck was placed on the U.S. Marshals Service's 15 Most Wanted list.

His brother, Nathan, is studying to become a officer with the U.S. Marshals Service.



## LOCAL/REGIONAL NEWS

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**CHUBBUCK** from A1

Chubbuck sparked one of the most extensive manhunts in recent New Mexico history after he escaped from a federal transport van in the North Valley late last year. He had been in custody after entering a plea agreement on charges of robbing 14 Albuquerque area banks and shooting at two FBI agents.

The FBI had called him Robin the Hood because the agency said he told tellers he was giving the money to charity, although authorities said there was no indication that was so.

The Northeast Heights neighborhood where Chubbuck took his last stand, a trailer park located just off I-25 and Paseo del Norte, had been under surveillance for some time, Beldon said. He would not detail how authorities had tracked Chubbuck to the area.

Neighbors in the area said they had no idea Chubbuck was in their midst until reporters began phoning them early this morning.

However, the shootout — and the attendant police activity — did capture their attention.

"That was crazy, some gunshots going off," said David Newell, a carpenter who lives near the area where the shootout occurred.

"The cops reacted so fast. It was like they knew he was here."

Another neighbor who lives close to where the shooting occurred said after Chubbuck was shot, emergency personnel wheeled him away from the scene all the way to San Pedro Boulevard, about 150 feet away.

"I looked out my door and saw four people standing around something," Tommy Thompson said. "I saw a cowboy hat lying in the middle of the yard where they had been."

Thompson said he didn't know his neighbors well but said there were times when a variety of people would show up at the trailer at "1, 2, 3 in the morning, off and on."

John Byron Chubbuck burst into tears this morning when told of the news of his son's capture and shooting this morning.

"My emotions are so mixed," he sobbed in an interview from a California con-

struction site where he is an ironworker.

"I'm happy he is alive, but sometimes for his sake I wish he wasn't. I know that sounds harsh coming from me, but I know what he is facing when he goes back to prison. That's why my emotions are just so mixed."

John Chubbuck said he did not blame law enforcement agents responsible for his son's wounding and capture.

"I have to realize that my son built his own palace, and sooner or later someone was going to destroy it," he said.

Tom Bustamante of the U.S. Marshals Service credited the cooperative efforts of his agency along with the FBI, Albuquerque police and the federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agency for today's capture.

"This was a tough, tough case, and we are happy it's over and has come to a conclusion in which no lives were lost," Bustamante said.

Bustamante said that authorities were able to track Chubbuck to the Northeast Heights location because of "hard-nosed investigation."

"We had very little support from leads coming in," he said. "It became apparent that he did have someone helping him — driving him around, doing his errands. And when you have outside people like that helping to hide a suspect that sometimes makes it harder."

The \$32,500 reward fund offered in the case and the high publicity apparently had little effect on eliciting tips on Chubbuck's whereabouts, Bustamante said.

"The loyalty to Chubbuck was apparently worth more than the reward," he said.

Authorities have yet to connect Chubbuck and the three suspects accused of helping him to any gang, Bustamante said.

Today's arrest had no connection with an earlier sighting of suspected Chubbuck associates in the South Valley late Tuesday night, Beldon said.

In that incident, two people were taken into custody for questioning after their white pickup truck was seen in the neighborhoods around Sunset Gardens Road and Atrisco Road Southwest, Bernalillo County sheriff's dispatchers said.



Albuquerque police Officer Ernest Serda looks toward the intersection of San Pedro Boulevard and Anaheim Street Northeast near where Byron Shane Chubbuck was apprehended after being shot early this morning.

Pat Vasquez-Cunningham/Special to The Tribune

**THE CHUBBUCK SAGA**

**Dec. 29, 1998 - Aug. 10, 1999:** Byron Shane Chubbuck is suspected in a string of bank robberies throughout the Albuquerque area and is dubbed "Robin the Hood" by law enforcement authorities.

**August 1999:** Chubbuck is arrested in southeast Albuquerque. He is accused of shooting at two FBI agents who were trying to apprehend him.

**Oct. 17, 2000:** Chubbuck enters a plea agreement on charges of 14 bank robberies dating back to December 1998 and of shooting at two FBI agents.

**Dec. 21, 2000:** Using a handcuff key he said he purchased from a prison guard, Chubbuck escapes from a prison transport van in Albuquerque's North Valley. A massive search fails to turn up the fugitive.

**December 29, 2000:** Chubbuck is placed on the U.S. Marshals Service's 15 Most Wanted list.

**Jan. 12-16, 2001:** A string of bank robberies occurs, and law enforcement authorities suspect Chubbuck's involvement.

**Jan. 26, 2001:** Chubbuck is the suspect in two bank robberies in the Northeast Heights that occur within moments of each other.

**Today:** Chubbuck is captured after being shot in the chest by an Albuquerque detective.