

William Cimillo

Born 1909. Runaway bus driver.

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1. Introduction



William Cimillo after his arrest.

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Ephemeral New York website at www.ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com.

Collect fares, hand out transfers, navigate traffic—like most jobs, driving a city bus is pretty routine.

That’s why William Cimillo, 37, a married father of two from the Bronx who had been driving a bus for 16 years, became fed up.

“Day in and day out it was the same old grind. He was a slave to a watch and a schedule,” reported the Brooklyn Eagle.

Boredom led to daydreaming. Cimillo what it would be like if he “disobeyed the rules and forgot to look at his watch and did not get to that street corner at the right time,” wrote the Eagle.

One morning in March 1947, something came over him as he pulled away from the garage to start his shift on the BX15 route along Gun Hill Road.

“All of a sudden I was telling myself, baby, this is it. I left that town in a hurry. Somehow, I didn’t care where I went. I just turned the wheel to the left, and soon I was on Highway 1, bound for Florida.”

2. Trying Something Different



William Cimillo's New York City bus.

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Knowledge Nuts website at www.knowledgenuts.com.

William Cimillo was a New York City bus driver back in the 1940s. He was a hard-working guy, never complained, and was even recognized for his exemplary work ethic. But eventually, the daily grind was just a little too much for Mr. Cimillo, and in 1947, he left his route and drove south, heading straight for Florida in his bus.

It was 1947, and William Cimillo had been picking up passengers in the Bronx for 17 years. Cimillo was a family man who worked for the NYC Surface Transportation System, and every day was the same. “Up and down, every day,” he once told a TV interviewer, “the same people, the same stops, nickels, dimes, transfers, and—well, this morning, I thought I’d try something different.”

Tired of the same old routine, fed up with New York traffic, and probably feeling pressure to pay off some gambling debts, Cimillo decided he’d had enough. Instead of sticking with his daily routine, he headed his bus south, going nowhere in particular. He stopped in New Jersey for a bite to eat, and parked in front of the White House and took a look around D.C. He even picked up a hitchhiking sailor along the way.

Three days later, he was in Hollywood, Florida, where he stopped for a nighttime swim. Cimillo was totally free . . . and strapped for cash. Hoping to make a few bucks, he wandered into a nearby racetrack, but when that didn't pan out, he telegraphed his boss in New York, asking for \$50. And that's when the cops showed up. William Cimillo was under arrest for stealing a bus.



William Cimillo (second from left) with the detectives and mechanic sent to arrest him and drive back from Florida to New York City.

Two New York detectives and a mechanic were sent to fetch the runaway driver and his bright red bus, but according to Cimillo, the mechanic couldn't really drive the darn thing. Worried they'd end up in a ditch, the officers decided Cimillo should drive them back to New York. And when they arrived, William Cimillo discovered he'd become a legend. People across the country sent him fan mail, newspapers portrayed him as a working-class hero, and his bus-driving buddies raised enough cash to cover his legal expenses.

Realizing they were the bad guys here, the Surface Transportation System decided not to prosecute. In fact, they gave Cimillo his job back, and when he showed up for work, everybody in the Bronx wanted to ride his route. On one occasion, over 300 high school girls mobbed his bus, demanding an autograph. And Hollywood almost turned his story into a movie, starring Elizabeth Taylor as a totally fictional beauty queen who joined Cimillo on his wacky roadtrip. For some reason, the movie was never made.



On the way back from Florida to New York City.



Cimillo being arraigned in the Bronx County Court.

For the rest of his life, Cimillo was something of a superstar, but he never pulled any more wild stunts. Instead, he kept on driving that bus for 16 more years before finally passing away in 1975. Those three crazy days in 1947 were more than enough adventure for William Cimillo.



Cimillo is carried aloft through the crowd at an event organised by his fellow bus drivers to raise funds for his legal defence.

3. Grave



The entrance to the Old St. Raymond Cemetery, Bronx, New York City.

William Cimillo is buried in the grand Old St. Raymond Cemetery, noted for its large, elegant entry gateway. There, William shares a granite tombstone bearing the carved names of a host of his family members, all nestled nearby in the family plot. He had a son, Richard Cimillo, who became a firefighter and does not hesitate to tell of his Dad's adventure.
