

Norman's Road to Damascus

(A Long Row to Hoe)

Having little to his name when he died, the reading of Norman Harry's will went quickly; almost as quickly as the humanistic pretense evaporated upon the formaldehyde laden air. His extended family, adorned in blackest nightshade, soaked the well-dressed corpse with genuine tears—not for Norman's death but for the answer to everyone's question, "Where had Norman's fortune gone?"

So, why was Norman worthless? In this "day and age" people have retirement portfolios and life insurance policies, the sort of things that ensure we obtain the worth in death that we failed to attain in life. So, where was Norman's? Had he somehow managed to cheat fate and departed this world with their inheritance crammed into the black hole of his money grubbing soul? As the sad mood music failed in its respects, his extended lineage began to look upon the rouged and made up corpse in a much different light.

Memories are usually self-serving and rather fickle but always spiced with a flavor enhancing pinch of truth. Consequently, one should ask, "Just how was Norman remembered?"

As Bennie Franklin was all too aware, "To discover the true virtues of a woman, one needs only compliment her to her girlfriends."

Without being complimented, Norman was remembered as a hell-bent rabble-rouser, a prolific womanizer, a chronic liar, a good-for-nothing som'bitch with not one socially redeeming quality. He was the proverbial muhtha fuckah that we hear so much about. Einstein based his most famous theory upon Norman's very human peculiarity—reality is relative to the observer...thus giving us the multi-dimensional cop-out, "It's all relative, puff daddy."

You see, in another relative reality, Norman was the poster child of morals and values, a tax-exempt captain of industry, a card toting member of the morally right. He once smiled warmly in family photos and was a supportive father and loving husband that shown down from roadside billboards. He rose quickly through the ranks to become the Grand Dragon for the local chapter of the Christian Taliban. He charitably donated the kerosene for the monthly book burnings while penciling in another deduction for moral fortitude upon the bleached white hem of his, Good'ol Boys in the Hood robe.

But wait a minute—how is it possible for one man to exist simultaneously at opposite ends of the social spectrum? Why did he never venture into the myriad shades of melancholic grays in between? Why did he feel so at home upon the black and white squares of his checkered neuroses? And just as important, was one social extreme so completely different from the other? Perhaps like most of humanity, he'd learned to extend the truth so far upon the straight and narrow that it had bent back upon itself to form the circular reasoning that "begs the question".

But to answer such open-ended questions one needs to understand Norman and his circumstances, but we also need to ponder our fascination with worth...

He was born poor, what folks in the South label as “dirt poor”. His mama never knew his daddy and consequently neither did Norman. Ravenous hunger filled his days and nights leaving a cancerous hole right in the middle of his psychological well-being. As a child Norman felt worthless. The main reason being...people came right out and tattooed him with his value. Usually, they spoke it out-right but sometimes, when they were filled with “The Holy Spirit”, the good citizens of Wayside, South Carolina were more subtle with their condemnation and simply spat his value through clinched, better-than-thou, tobacco stained teeth. You see, folks here about, knew exactly where Norman comes from...

But I’m not here to depress you or make you feel sorry for Norman. Very seldom are things black and white, right and wrong, left and right or other such extremes on the scale of political correctness. However, it is important to understand how the Plantation Mentality influenced his extreme views of the world and consequently the extreme oscillation of his social bi-polar value.

Norman bought into the American Dream and became a factory bat working nights at Buck Creek Textiles, while spending his days attending classes at the local community college. With a degree in business, he worked his way up the ladder. Well, as far as the Southern caste system would allow. He lived the meager existence to which he was accustomed to in order to save money. He used his savings to invest in real estate while building his independent insurance agency into a pay by the week, check cashing and title loan emporium. As his monetary worth increased, people began to smile to his face but remembered where he “came from” as he walked away.

Eventually, a sweet young beauty sashayed into his life. They married, had children, joined the Wayside Baptist Church and daydreamed of fried chicken dinners while the red faced

preacher ranted and raved about the damning effects of alcohol, drugs, homosexuals, Dimmercrats, lesbian libbers and pinko Commies. You see, the preacher plotted a person's values upon the supply and demand curves of Capitalistic Christianity. He shuddered and cried foul to what he saw as Jesus' Socialist monopoly of just judgment. Norman recognized the church for what it was worth and teamed up with the opportunistic preacher to lead his fear laden flock in the front door of Norman's Insurance Emporium.

Norman was "real good" about selling people things they didn't need. He filled their minds with visions of death, then played on their fears to pry open their wallets. His methods weren't so different from the preacher's. Upon exiting the backdoor, his customers could purchase their epitaph for eternity, as Norman was also in the monument business.

As he grew older Norman's emotional swings increased in frequency. He oscillated between the extremes of eternal damnation depression and walking on the water, Sweet Jesus mania. His doctor labeled him a bi-polar manic depressive. But to Norman, the diagnosis seemed expedient and rehearsed. After that he had little use for his psychiatrist or his snake oil cure-alls. Norman's little pills stuck in his craw and consequently he spit them out.

People began to avoid Norman, crossing to the other side of the street, not sure which Norman they were about to meet. His emotional hunger worsened as nothing could satisfy his appetite. He felt he was eating little wiener smokies at a wedding rehearsal when what his soul cried for was devouring a thick bloody steak with the promiscuous matron of honor.

Norman was trapped, locked into a decaying orbit about his black soul nothingness. The inward pull of depression ripped at his being, devouring his hopes to feed the mass gobbling center of his low self-esteem. He began to spend his money on loose women and to drink in excess with the effect that he became isolated from his family. He rationalized his actions by

pretending it made him feel better about himself and was therefore in everyone's best interest. In reality, the depressive effect of alcohol and guilt put him on the back of an earth pawing, spit slobbering, two thousand pound behemoth of damnable fury. The ride was ecstatic but the dismount always ended with his face in the dirt and a set of horns up his ass.

Paranoia set in as his wife fell under the influence of an opportunistic bastard called a divorce lawyer. He began to realize that his humanistic worth was directly related to his material worth and began thinking of a way to cheat the devil. Norman wasn't above drilling Satan Satan right up his red hot ass with his cold hard poker.

Norman fashioned himself a thinker and pondered into the wee hours of the morning. He read the Bible and wondered why no one followed its far left doctrine. One night during a summer thunderstorm an epiphany fell from the old Magnolia tree and hit him right in the head. In his semi-conscious state he saw the divine vision. Only two things in life are fair—death and sin, each is shared among the masses without regard to race, creed or color. Norman realized that folks seemed to always lose their way on the yellow brick road to Heaven but never needed to ask a munchkin which bricks lead straight to Hell. He found the concept fascinating as he contrasted the sexual preferences of the shapely Good Witch in a frilly pink teddy with the craggy Wicked Witch in a studded black leather corset. Somewhere in the deviant imagery was a message that related to eternity. He wondered if fate was as fickle as which witch our houses fall upon.

He read Paul's laments in the New Testament that no matter how much he wanted to do what was right, he invariably did what was wrong. Like Paul, there was something in his lower nature that always won the fight. Peeking out from behind a lightning bolt were the Revelations—the impossibility of quantitative sinning. The gist of the matter being—we all sin

in abundance—none any less—none any more. Our only escape is to constantly ask for forgiveness. So Norman asked for forgiveness and was sincere in his request.

When Norman began to feel better about himself, he wondered why everyone feared death. He thought long and hard on the matter and finally decided that our fears lie with human nature and the hypocrisy of equality. Death places everyone upon a level playing field, but no one dreams of being equal to his neighbor. No, we covet a bigger house, a more expensive car, greener grass, a sexier wife and to literally sit on the right hand of God while squirming about. Only the downtrodden dregs of society harp on equality and level playing fields. However, once our flat, hairy feet touch that first rung of the ladder, we all lust for superiority. Since Adam and Eve it's been that way and it probably ain't gonna eva' change. Human nature seems to be a powerful attraction to resist. Beneath a cool refreshing rain, the blue eyed Anglo caricature of Jesus bled onto the back cover of King James' book of verse. The brilliant flash of heaven ignited the night sky revealing the Good Old Pharisees in a most revealing light.

Norman pondered upon the afore mentioned opportunistic bastard affectionately known as a divorce attorney. He winced at the cruel irony—in divorce, everything Norman worked so hard to achieve would be passed on to his family. They in turn would use it to purchase a new husband and father, who would enjoy the forbidden fruits of his labor. In Norman's mind, the redistribution of his wealth would only bring damnation and sorrow to his loved ones. He saw his wife's attorney for what he was, a devil disguised as a snake in the grass. The whole Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit gig was about to be played out all over again.

Norman read in Luke about the eye of the needle and the chances of the fat ass camel passing through it. Then he remembered his own impoverished youth and how he felt less guilt when he had nothing.

Like a Holiness preacher shouting about the damning effects of not tithing, Norman realized what he needed to do. No, he didn't send his money to Oral Roberts' Tower of Prayer to be consecrated and blessed upon the tax exempt steps of Oral's Swiss bank account. Instead, Norman did something very unusual—sold everything of value, cashed in his retirement and life insurance policies and gave the swollen sack of cash to the toothless hooker on the corner of King and Franklin.

Norman felt light-hearted as he smiled upon her fair visage. He knew she would never keep the money long enough for it to do any real damage to her soul. As he turned and stepped into the street, Jack Rabbit the crack dealer ran over him with his 76 Coupe de Ville—killed him, dead as hell. His timing was perfect as his death occurred at the opportune instant of forgiveness, equality and justice for all.

His epitaph scratched into his tombstone serves as testament to his humanity. Here lies Norman Harry. He departed this world the way he came into it—the accident of a drunken backseat driver, without a penny to his worthless, fucking name.