

## FOY, THE MAN

Floyd was grossly obese. He worked the counter of the plumbing supply store, but unable to stand, he was given a shopping cart to push himself around. Perpetually hunched over as his spine could not support his mass—from the register to the sales office, through the swinging door that led back to the warehouse, he had to cart his enormous gut before him in a steel basket on four small castor wheels designed to hold groceries. They wretched and squealed all the while, the bearing seized on one, it just dragged. This rendered thick, black trails on the tile floor marking his daily paths, and a fainter trail led to an oversized, unadvertised door in the back corner of the shop...I surmised it was his own specially outfitted bathroom.

They made Floyd work, though. He wasn't a charity case. And I'd bet it was on his own insistence—he didn't expect to be favored. When heavy pumps or motors were ordered at the counter, he'd have to haul himself out into the warehouse and pick them off the rack and place them in the cart beside his belly. And then he'd push them out to the waiting customers in their trucks outside the rollup doors. Everyone that knew Floyd would insist on loading themselves out, but no customers were allowed inside the warehouse ("Employees ONLY", the sign said). Anyway, he wasn't incapable—just abominably slow.

Pitying him shuffle himself across the shop floor one day, I noticed the shoes he wasn't wearing. Instead he had some house slippers, mashed on the bias where his ankles turned in. I then noticed his outfit—a stained sweatshirt and probably pajama pants—whatever was available on the XXXL rack at TJ Maxx, or Walmart, if he was lucky. Finding clothing that covered him was surely a challenge. And it occurred to me that someone had to dress him each day as it would have been impossible for him to get clothed, to say nothing of bending over to don shoes or socks. He probably needed help bathing as well. And someone no doubt prepared and set before him the massive quantities of food he required each day to assuage his addiction.

I inadvertently saw who that was one morning as I drove to work. In the lane in front of me was a small hatchback Toyota or a Volvo—probably from the previous century—listing badly to the passenger side. It was moving at a snail's pace in the left lane, and slowing traffic to the point that it was inevitable we'd all get caught behind the dreaded, flashing "school zone" intersection where we'd wait 5 minutes while crossing guards with whistles transported half a dozen first-graders over the street Jordan to the promised land of Stephen J. Foster Elementary. Therefore, as I hurriedly weaved around it, I caught a glance at the driver—an old-ish woman, cigaretted, notably oblivious to the traffic jam she'd caused, and in animated conversation with the passenger which consumed the bulk of the car's interior—one Floyd. I guessed this was his

mother, and I realized that besides being dressed and fed each day, someone also had to drive him to and from work. She was smiling, and so was he, with his hands folded over a fair-sized cooler on his lap, which I expect was his daily rations. They were clearly enjoying their time together, and being “late to work” wasn’t part of their reality.

I was amazed at this scene, but it dawned on me at that moment that this “need” that he had was not so much of the chore I may have thought it was. Here were two people leading equally empty lives, probably having no one else to share it with, and they were happy to do it together. Being nigh 60 years of age and dependent upon an old woman to care for him, I imagined their relationship—odd as it may be—was mutually beneficial, and more or less loving... In reciprocation, I suppose his income from Gorman’s Pump and Supply paid the rent for the both of them, and maybe a good portion of his food habit as well.

Thus I thought about Floyd differently after that. And each time I’d call the shop, and ask for the “counter, please”, I hoped it would be he who would answer. Indeed, he was always an affable man, eager to help in any way, who remembered your voice and connected your name with your company and greeted you as “buddy”. “How ya doing today, Floyd?” I’d ask. “Couldn’t be better!” he’d lie. Sometimes he’d get my order mixed up, but always made it good with an apology and a complimentary pair of Nemesis safety glasses...and, when in season, a free school-drive chocolate bar which he pilfered from the box on the counter after looking both ways and winking. (I expect they were his to begin with—the fundraiser box was just a ruse for his personal snack shack).

For ten years, he placed my orders, called me to tell me they were in (“Thanks, Floyd! I’ll pick it up in the morning!”) and sometimes just called to give advance “insider information” that a sale would be going on for some of the products we normally purchased, and that if we could wait another week, we’d get the discount! Often times when I’d come into the store, other customers—plumbers, tradesmen—would be sitting at the counter in the barstools chatting with him, drinking the house-coffee, as he hunched over his shopping cart and saw me enter and say, “excuse me, boys, I have a paying customer here!” And I’d get immediate attention, and riles from the other guys... “If ya came for the coffee, it’s awful, and half-cold.” Floyd didn’t drink coffee, but he was happy to make it—it was a daily chore he was capable of, and relished it. And besides, he was frugal, and knew to use the same filter at least twice.

But each time I saw him—every couple of months, I suppose—I noticed the difference. I realized he was not going to improve. He steadily degenerated, and *grew*, and became less and less ambulatory.

One day, he was off the cart, and in the rolling chair. He no longer went out to the warehouse, but was full-time counter-man. And it seemed to irritate the other guys who had to share the

space with him, and had jobs to do as well. Again, the traffic pattern was stifled as only one lane behind the counter connected the shop to the office. The warehouse door was in between, so all personnel had to cross the mountain of Floyd many times per hour to conduct their business. He was like the omnipresent fat man in the aisle seat of every plane, concert hall and movie theater. And in fact, that's what he was.

But he'd learned to be genial and self-deprecating from early on in life, I much expect, as his problem had always been with him. He was agreeable, in as much as it was in him—the customer was always right, and so was everybody else... Probably a carryover from being ridiculed in "school". Maybe no one but his mother knew the whole story. His coworkers at Gorman's, where he'd worked for the last 19 years of his life, never pried too hard into his problems. To them he just had a "medical condition". Maybe "goiters" or something. It probably wasn't his fault anyway. The coworkers he'd began to annoy with his increasingly unavoidable presence didn't have to see him after hours or speak with him, so his problems—whatever they were—were mostly his... at least for 16 hours out of the day, and every weekend and holiday, and every paid sick-day, of which he took early and often.

And so it continued for a number of years.

I began to notice him missing, on and off, early into last year. I'd see him once in a while when I came in, but he never answered the phone anymore. And he stayed back with the two rough office girls mostly, assigned to paperwork or other mundane tasks like stocking the toilet paper in their bathroom and shuffling file folders. He was no longer congenial when I did see him, and he seemed to have forgotten who I was. I saw him back there rolling around in his chair, blowing off keyboards with duster-spray one time. I leaned my head in, "Hey Floyd," I said. He didn't answer. That may have been the last time I saw him—I can't remember another incident.

So it was a few weeks ago that I came in to pick up a pump head at the counter. There was a new guy running the register and he didn't know me or my company. A ratty, 40-ish dude, skinny, unkempt, balding, stank of cigarettes and something else (baloney? Jägermeister?)... He had to look up our account on the computer and couldn't find it. I just paid with a credit card.

As I was paying, I noticed on the wall behind him where there always hung a picture of the original owner of the store... "In Loving Memory Of," and then his name and dates of birth and death. "We'll miss you," it said at the bottom. There was a mummified corsage of flowers pinned over the frame. He was 61, I deduced, but he looked much younger in the picture, smiling, confident. Nevertheless, long dead... But today, for the first time, I noticed another picture next to his.

Oh... It was *him*. It actually gave me an instant shock of grief. He was smiling, as always, and hunched over his shopping cart, his hand flashing the “peace sign”. I read the dates of his lifespan—he’d died a few months earlier, in October.

It was his memorial, hung there on the paneled wall, slightly crooked on its nail.

The plaque said: “In Loving Memory of...FOY GIBSON”.

What? I asked the new guy what happened to *Floyd*?

“Who’s Floyd?” he said. I pointed at the picture. “Yes, he passed on a while ago.”

“Foy?”

“Yes, Foy. He died. Sorry you didn’t know.”

I guess there was nothing else to say. Here was a man who’d never bothered to correct me, in ten years, that I’d had his name wrong... ‘Floyd’ was always a figment of my imagination.

I refused to believe my false memory, and moreover that there even was such a name. I looked it up when I got home. *Foy*—is a French name. It means “Faith”. It was originally an English surname. Exactly two people had that name listed in Wikipedia... an American diplomat, and an Irish musician. And now a man who’d worked at Gorman’s.



I struggled to make an appropriate application of this story to the Kingdom. Finally, I just decided to leave it as it is. It’s just an odd and interesting anecdote on its own.

And yet, ultimately, this whole tale got me thinking about the nature of deception. Consider how we don't have to be openly lied to for a falsehood to be believed. Sometimes a narrative presents itself to us—just given tiny legs—and we run with it on our own. Turns out, it's rather easy to believe things that aren't true. No matter how outlandish they might be, or how smart or educated we are, all are susceptible to confusion in some part. None of us have all the information. In fact, much of what we think we always knew of this world is probably wrong. Some of our understanding is likely a total mess of error. But, it is our motivation that matters the most—"but God looks upon the heart". Our *desire* to seek after truth is a **quest for righteousness**... And in the end, all truth will be revealed.

Jesus has promised us, "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*"

What a promise!

In this world, in this age, at this particular time, confusion reigns supreme. And for so long we've been trained to believe one thing or another, and many of us have invested our entire adult lives into some concept, or a doctrine that was always wrong. We are human and this will happen from time to time. It is a failure, yes. **But it doesn't have to be fatal.** Confessing error when we see it in ourselves, hard as it may be, is merely a necessity of life in the Kingdom of God.

I've no idea, really, what sort of child he was or how he came to be what he was in the end, but as a man, Foy was a picture of human wreckage. Though he'd kept his good nature, he'd developed into a sad and grotesque caricature of himself. And having decided he had no means to reverse course and to undo the damage done, he just consented to his death and allowed himself to go over the falls. His personal failures and whatever lies he'd told himself did prove to be fatal.

But we stand upon a Solid Rock. We ARE able to overcome our failures and our error. Because we have promises that *cannot* fail, and the remembrance of an All Powerful God. Indeed, *our* legacy is forever tied up with *Christ's* legacy and it is FAR greater than a picture and a platitude and some stale flowers behind the sales counter of a pool supply store. That is our FAITH in a King who never fails and Ever Lives. He rules, right now, in the *Only True Reality*, on a throne where he looks down upon the earth and sees everything and everyone, and has full control over ALL of it.

A favorite scripture comes to mind to bear witness to this fact. We all know the beginning...  
Isaiah 53:

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Yahweh hath laid on him the iniquity of us all....”*

That passage always comes to me with a sense of foreboding...as if I hear the sound of a bass cello, and the sun has set upon us, and we are *lost*. But it continues, and then the tone suddenly changes:

*“Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, **he shall see his seed**, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”*

Christ also has an eternal reward—HE SHALL see His children for whom He suffered and died. All of them. He will be *satiated*; satisfied for his work...

*“ **He SHALL see of the travail of his soul**, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

***Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;** because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

Our God who called the worlds into existence with the power of His voice has not forgotten us; that we are weak. He will deliver us from deception, and He will deliver us from evil. And we will share in the spoils of this war with Him forever.

*“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they SHALL see God.”*