

THURSDAYS WITH NORMIE

By Rick Dolwig

The original book was called *Tuesdays with Morrie*. My book is called *Thursdays with Normie*. Norm Jacobs and I met in 1998 at the Rescue Mission in Santa Barbara. It was Thanksgiving and Newcomers had arranged for a group of us to help serve a meal and then eat and hang out with the people. When it was over I was walking to my car when Norm fell in next to me, we hit it off and have been walking together for the past 16 years. Every Thursday morning from 9 am to 1pm we would meet and hike and then eat. We hiked every trail in the low country and most of those on top and walked the beach from Refugio to the Carpinteria Bluffs many times. But the real activity was exploring the frontiers of intimacy between two men, a psychologist and a lawyer, 20 years apart in age, traveling the inward journey to consciousness and spirituality. It never ceased to amaze me how many Big Questions there were to talk about with no limits as to what we shared about ourselves and our lives. We frequently disagreed on the answers but loved and respected each other enough to enjoy the journey to understanding our differences and learning from them.

Over the years we went from a hike, to a walk, to a stroll, to an amble and finally to a saunter. Norm died July 1st at age 89. I am so grateful; that we had so much time together, that he was my friend so deeply for so long and that he died on his own terms.

In 1999 Norm started a Men's Group that met once a month for lunch for 2 -3 hours. We rotated leadership of the group. The leader chose the topic a week ahead and of course they always involved the Big Questions. (Love, death, life, growing old, relationships, beliefs, experiences) The pending question for this week was "if you could create your own afterlife, guaranteed, what would it be (describe in detail)?" We talked about it on our last saunter. Without hesitation Norm said that he wanted to hang around like a spirit and see how it all turns out. He wanted to see how his grandchildren grew up and what they did, how his children worked their way through their lives, how Marilyn moved on through her life and what his friends did. He wanted to know what happened with the political and world situation. When I asked him if he wanted to be able to communicate to them, he said that he did not. He just wanted to observe because he really cared about them and all of it. No mansion in the sky, no 72 virgins – this was his version of heaven – and until now, he was able to create it for himself here on earth. In my book, it doesn't get much better than that.

Norm was curious about everything, loved people and never said a negative thing about another person to me. He always focused on whatever was good. His biggest frustration though was that he judged that he was not able to feel and experience loving positive emotions deep within himself and express those emotions to those he truly loved. We talked a lot about this. And I speak now to his family and to Marilyn. If I could say or do one final thing on behalf of Norm it would be this; Norm would want me to say to each of his family and to Marilyn as though he were looking you in the eye and holding your hand - - "I want each of you to know now and forever that I deeply and truly love you, I always have and I always will."

In closing, I know that Norm would not want me to let his death pass without taking the occasion to discuss an issue which was recurring in our discussions. The following passage is from *The Untethered Soul – the journey beyond yourself* by Michael Singer:

“Let’s say you’re living life without the thought of death, and the Angel of Death comes to you and says, ‘Come, it’s time to go.’ You say, ‘But no. You’re supposed to give me a warning so I can decide what I want to do with my last week. I’m supposed to get one more week.’ Do you know what Death will say to you? He’ll say, ‘My goodness, I gave you fifty-two weeks this past year alone. And look at all the other weeks I’ve given you. Why would you need one more? What did you do with all those?’ If asked that, what are you going to say? How will you answer? ‘I wasn’t paying attention . . . I didn’t think it mattered.’ That’s a pretty amazing thing to say about your life.

Take a moment to look at the things you think you need. Look at how much time and energy you put into various activities. Imagine if you knew you were going to die within a week. How would that change things? How would your priorities change? How would your thoughts change? Think honestly about what you would do with your last week. . . (pause) . . . What a wonderful thought to contemplate. Then ponder this question: If that’s really what you would do with your last week, what are you doing with the rest of your time? Wasting it? Throwing it away? Treating it like it is not something precious? What are you doing with life? That is what death asks you.

Death is the great equalizer because it instantly makes us all the same. Upon your death every single thing will be taken from you. You will leave behind all of your possessions, your loved ones, and all your hopes and dreams for this life.”

Norm knew that the beauty of embracing deep truths is that you don’t have to change your life; you just change how you live your life. It’s not what you’re doing; it’s how much of you is doing it.

My friend Norm did not believe in a god or an afterlife. He knew that no one was keeping track and that no one cared outside his loved ones and friends. He believed he lived on through our memories of him. So he lived each day as though it was his last – creating memories for us. He did not need another week.

Namaste my friend