

In Harrison's Words

A conversation between Mason (the writer) and Harrison

Remy [excerpt from the Harrison Story Book]

It had been a long day, Harrison and I met on the back deck of his Michigan cabin for a nice glass of wine. It was a beautiful fall evening with a mild crisp air that only required a light jacket to be comfortable. The sun was setting and Harrison had started a beautiful fire just a few feet from the deck. It was peaceful and relaxing. Harrison always took great strides in making his environment as chaos free as possible. He always said, "Your surroundings represent your mind - if chaos ensues around you, then your mind is chaotic".

Harrison seemed to be at peace, but he also had that blank look in his eyes as if he were seeing something no one else could see - a distance, as if searching for answers. "Mason", Harrison spoke, "Hugo Wolf once said, "I appear at times merry and in good heart, talk, too, before others quite reasonably, and it looks as if I felt, too, God knows how well within my skin. Yet the soul maintains its deathly sleep and the heart bleeds from a thousand wounds". Wolf was an extraordinary composer Mason, stopped dead in his tracks so many times by his disabling depression and mood swings. "yet the soul maintains its deathly sleep and the heart bleeds from a thousand wounds." I struggled for years trying to find a medium or translation to convey what it was like to be stopped in your tracks by depression, I am not sure I ever captured the enormity, severity or realism of it - not even in suicide attempts. Manifesting the emotional and mental pain into the physical did not even seem to bring any light or understanding - it just brought to light circumstances. I have met a lot of balanced minds in my time and I have never met one that had gone through similar or worse circumstances than mine and resorted to taking their own life, but none-the-less, that always seemed to be the public opinion as to why I tried to take mine."

Harrison's ice blue eyes with a shining glaze across them stared intensely into the flames of blue and orange. His words drew me in and I wanted to capture the essence of this man - I look at him from perfectly trimmed hair to his masculine wise face on down to his perfectly tailored Ralph Lauren linen attire - but my eyes were drawn straight back to those eyes... staring as if into another dimension or world. He continued as I anxiously awaited each and every word....

"The heart bleeds from a thousand wounds", Harrison quoted Wolf. "I think he underestimated how many wounds a man can bleed. Maybe that is because he only lived to the age of 43. I am not sure. I am 80 years old Mason, and they never went away - the demons, the wounds, the pain. I reconciled the death of everyone that has died in my life. I never considered death a bad thing - I could not do that. I lost my sister when I was just a child - I had to make death a good thing for that reason. So the death of people close to me was something I could always reconcile and not dwell in. Disappointments, I could reconcile those as well - it is a part of life. Failures I could consume and process - but not the demons, no, no Mason, not the demons, the wounds are their fuel, like pouring gasoline on that very fire - your whole world can be blown up out of your control and every time the fire explodes it leave damage all around it - creating more wounds, more fuel for the demons."

"When I was 18 years old Mason, I left home for college and never considered looking back. I knew my parents would always be a part of my life and come see me. Twenty years later and an adulthood of blown up fires, I realized why. You see Mason, there is reason I am alone and always have been. It is not because I relish solitude or think I am superior to others - it is protection. People have the ability to spark the flame that lights the fire."

I did not say a word, but just stared at Harrison with the intensity that he stared into the flame. For the first time since I met him, I could see the layers of walls built around him. They were not something he loved, but deemed necessary. As I thought about our other conversations and Harrison's lifestyle, I realized to what extremes he had taken to protect himself. What appeared as luxury no longer seemed as a luxury at all, what appeared as peace and solitude was carefully mastered, albeit comfortable prison walls with the highest emotional security. Everything in Harrison's life was built to keep people at a safe distance and with some, to keep completely out. Harrison continued...

"There is a reason I don't live in Ohio any longer Mason, there is a reason I don't see family often and there is a reason I go to a different place every three months. At 37 years old, I made my way back home. It was the most wonderful experience in my life - I was home with my parents, I was safe and I was getting help, the help that I could obtain. It had been nearly 10 years since my initial episode. It only took about three months of being home that I realized, as far as I was concerned - nothing had really changed."

"Somewhere along the line I was able to detach the assaults in prison from those who committed the acts - I forgave them. But the acts transferred in my mind. The voices that constantly reminded me of those experiences and other times of horror would flash me back to those moments. However, the faces changed - the faces became those that encouraged that solution either by not doing or saying anything or by disparaging my character. The assault became an attack of everyone from the judge, prosecutor and then to those that I naively thought were suppose to love me. The slightest word, look or inflection in a voice along with the complete absence of others was and is the gasoline on the fire. No matter how strong willed I was, wise or faithful - the demons have always had the power to expose the wounds straight to the core and due to all the experiences, they had visuals of reality to attached to them. Those visuals are attached to emotions of fear, hurt and pain that I am not sure many could ever relate to. I learned far too clearly that many people simply did not care."

"Whether intended or not, these people that were not in my life through 10 years of hell or were even a negative impact on my life with their uneducated opinions could not be a part of my life. I had to grow even when others could not. My focus had to become protecting in order to prevent others from worsening my illness to a point that I could not reconcile. Many hopes, possibilities and dreams were once again thrown out the window and my own survival was my faith that I had a purpose and my purpose simply had nothing to do with those people regardless of how much I had hoped it would. To say I no longer cared would be incorrect - but the definition of insanity was once defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Well, I had tried in the past and it has always left me with the same hurt results - but by that time in my life, that pain become lethal. I once again closed the door on a life I yearned for in order protect myself - redefining my life."

Harrison continued to stare for a moment and then looked directly into my eyes as he took a sip of wine, I got a chill. Then he said with a smile, "I doubt sometimes whether a quiet & unagitated life would have suited me - yet I sometimes long for it." "That's Byron (and with a big grin on Harrison's face...) now you want to write about an interesting guy - try him out! HA!"

As Harrison walked to the door he turned and looked at the fire, "Mason - put the fire out when you are done - use water - it is always good to know how to put out the flames but that is another topic for another night." and he went in.

I took a deep breath and chuckled but then as I turned, I looked directly into the flames. Searching for answers, I put down my glass and stood up saying to myself as I poured water on the fire, "ya - that is another topic for another night."

From Harrison's Story