

The Passionate Love of Mr. Zero

The staff at the State Mental Hospital in Nevada, Missouri called him Fair Day Zero, “Zero” for short. His real name was unknown. The only words he spoke was limited to “fair, day, and zero,” Zero responded to any question with one or a combination of those three words. He nodded his head to answer “yes.” His answer for “no” was a blank, expressionless stare.

Zero was committed by Probate Court in 1977 as “John Doe,” an indigent incapable of taking care of himself. Many other “John Doe's are similarly committed by courts every day. All are soon given a nickname to avoid confusion.

Zero's only possessions were the clothes he was wearing, a three-blade pocket knife and a sharpening stone. His appearance was like most homeless men; dirty clothes, unkempt head and facial hair and in need of bathing. It was guessed he was in his mid forties.

The slumped posture of his gaunt six foot frame was a sign of a beaten, submissive man. He walked in short, hesitant, steps much like a zombie characterization.

The staff psychiatrist diagnosed Zero as an “institutional victim.” That is a term used to describe a person who has spent most of their life in care-giving institutions where most all their physical care decisions are made for them by others. If, or when, they are released they cannot adapt in the outside world, retreating within a self-imposed facsimile of a shell. Zero exhibited all of those traits.

Other than the words fair, day and zero, any other sounds were unintelligible, including the expressi

on“freverday.” The staff was mystified as to what the word meant to him. It pleased him to say it or even hear it repeated. The sound caused him to tearfully smile.

Mr. Zero quickly became a favorite of the staff. One of the nurses remarked he reminded her of a character in the Harvey movie where a man befriendd by a large invisible rabbit. Harvey quickly became his new nickname. “Zero”stood for nothing, he deserved more. He liked his new name.

When Harvey was eventually given outside privileges, he was seen trying to whittle a stick with

a plastic butter knife from the dining hall. It was reported to the psychiatrist who now thought it was now safe to return him his knife and stone.

Harvey was overjoyed. He searched for pieces of wood to carve toys, trinkets and other items as gifts for the staff. He carved with fervor, not ignoring intricate details. Harvey satisfied every request. He seemed happy now, yet there was always a sense of sadness about him.

Years later Harvey was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration, eventually resulting in blindness.. It slowed, but did not stop his carving. He felt the wood and created things from his memory.

When Harvey was in his eighties, a staffer brought him a large block of wood, placing it on a table in his room He ran his hands over it and shouted “foreverday.” With tears flowing, he placed a pillow case over it and began carving with hands underneath the covering. It was his, and his alone to do with as he wished. The loving staff respected his privacy wishes. Harvey spent his last year meticulously carving on the block.

He was smiling when they found him deceased in his bed. His last carving was finished, the pillow case removed. Revealed was a bust carving of a beautiful young woman. On its base was carved, “Forever and a day.”

A local news reporter hearing about Harvey, posted a story. It caught national press attention.

Three days later a middle aged woman came asking to claim the remains of Harvey.

“ I never met him, but he was my father. He disappeared one day, not knowing mother was pregnant. She died last year. They grew up together, marrying in their teens. He was drafted and

served two years as a POW in North Korea, tortured every day. When liberated, he came home broken and changed. It was as if he died over there”

The woman pulled a black and white photograph out of her purse. It showed a young couple cutting a wedding cake. The carved bust was an exact replica of the woman. On the back was written, “I will love you forever and a day,” and signed “Harvey.”

“The daddy I never met was named Harvey Leo Faraday.”