

VOICE
AGENCY
COMICS



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#1

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VOICE AGENCY COMICS PRESENTS

THE GEORGE STORIES

ISSUE #1 — GEORGE THE MIDDLE

by GORDON ATKINSON

"I will ask
the Father
and he will
send the
Comforter to
you, the very
breath of God."
— John 14:16

"Most deacons
don't hit the
pipe, but
George had
need."

LOVE
MERCY
WALK
HUMBLY
MICAH 6:8

SAN ANTONIO
EST. 1718



A REAL LIVE
PREACHER STORY

If I told you the story of how dope-smoking George became a Christian while eating a sandwich with me at Subway and how he later came to be a deacon in our church, you would laugh to beat the band. You would. I might do it too – tell that story. If I do I'll call it "George the Beginning". If I feel up to it, I might write "George the End". I don't know.



I always change the names of the people in my stories, but not this time. George is dead so I don't think he'll mind, and it feels real nice to be using his name again.



When I met George, his T-cell count was at zero, and it seemed that AIDS had won the war. He started the new Protease Inhibitor drugs in '97, but it was too late for him. The treatment prolonged his life, but made him wish he were dead. He started smoking marijuana again. It was the only thing that helped the pain. He had a ceramic water pipe shaped like a winged horse that he lovingly called "Pegasus". Most deacons don't hit the pipe, but George had need, and we kept it our little secret.

I remember the night George told me he was stopping the treatments. We were sitting in my yard, watching the stars, drinking beer, and praying. Well, George was praying. I was just drinking and listening.

George liked to pray out loud and called God, "Dad". His own father had been a real asshole. The nicest thing he ever did was die young.



"It's just not worth it", he said. "I've reached the place where I want the pain to go away more than I want to live."



I cried a little, he waited for me to finish, and that was that. We spent some time planning his funeral, and I took notes to make sure I would remember everything when the time came.

I had no idea how fast he would go down. That very Sunday he showed up for church in a wheelchair. During the service he felt something burning in his pants and tried to take them off. Dementia was starting to set in.

After that, coming to church was too hard for George, so we had a final communion service at his home. There were four of us with George that afternoon: me, a former-Pentecostal guy named Don who brought his guitar, and a fourth grader with her mom.





We were a rag-tag bunch of pilgrims to be sure. And we were the body of Christ. Somehow both of those were true, thanks be to God.

Christians understand communion in different ways, and I've certainly got my own ideas about it. Whatever your opinions on this ancient rite, you can imagine how important this worship service was for those of us who were present. I put it in the top ten most meaningful moments in my twenty years as the pastor of that church.

We brought the wine, the bread, and Don's guitar to George's house. Don was about a third of the way through his Jesus songs when George started feeling the pain. He reached behind his chair, pulled out Pegasus, and proceeded to take two HUGE hits, complete





with the classic “hold it... hold it” exhalation drama.

I’d been in a lot of worship services, and I’d seen some strange things happen. Once a kid farted while I was baptizing him and cracked up the entire congregation. But I had never seen anyone whip out a bong right in the middle of communion. No sir, I had not seen that. And I can promise you the good Christians with me on this mission of mercy had never seen it either.

The Jesus music died, but not sudden-like. It kinda wound down like when you unplug a record player. I could see the 4th grader mouthing, “Mommy, what’s he doing?”

I thought, “Deacon George’s lil’ secret is out now!”

At some point George pulled the pipe away and looked at us as if to say, “Why’d the music stop?”

It was Don who got things going again. He jumped right back into a Jesus song and the rest of the service went without a hitch. We all hugged George on the way out, and he seemed VERY much at peace. Turns out that was the last time I would speak with George. The next time we were together he was in a coma.

~~My Christian tradition does not understand the bread and wine of communion to be actual vehicles of God’s grace. They are symbols and reminders of a great sacrifice and of just how much it costs to set things right.~~

I’ve thought a lot about our last service with George and about that third element he introduced into our communion worship that day. The sustaining breath from Pegasus was a reminder of our high calling



to comfort those who stand in need.

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Jesus said that.



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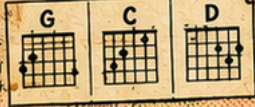
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