

Let This Death Not Be In Vain

Written by Michael Woods
Tuesday, 28 July 2009 19:00

Virtually every human being deserves the benefit of the doubt upon their passing. As we ponder a man's time upon this plane, we try to err on the side of generosity as we assess his time on Earth, and his accomplishments, if for no other reason than we ourselves would like the same treatment afforded to us. Also, most folks leave behind kin and friends who are grieving the loss of their son, daughter, mother, father, pal. Those left behind don't deserve to read a merciless evaluation laying out every misstep, every wrong road taken.

Even Richard Nixon earned a gentle appraisal upon his exit, didn't he?

With this in mind, let me state for the record that by all accounts, Vernon Forrest was a solid citizen. As an athlete, he performed at a rarified level for two decades, represented his nation at the 1992 Olympic Games, which is in itself a laurel one could rest upon for a lifetime. He twice won welterweight crowns, and two times won junior middleweight titles. Arm and shoulder injuries lessened his legacy, but in the end, he will be recalled as a top-flight pugilist, maybe a Hall of Fame-level talent. More importantly even, he used his celebrity to advance the cause of the mentally and physically challenged. Forrest and partners started Destiny's Child Inc. in 1997, after Forrest, visiting a pal who worked with developmentally disabled kids, was put off by the sight of an autistic boy struggling for an hour to tie his shoes.

Think you can do better, Vernon, defensive care-givers challenged Forrest. Go ahead.

So he did.

He opened up a house in suburban Atlanta which featured the sort of caregivers and sort of care you'd want if your own family-member was born mentally and/or physically challenged, and needed extra attention and tutoring.

The boxer deftly managed two personas, that of an in-ring banger who wasn't afraid to put away a floundering opponent, and giant-hearted philanthropist who gave time and money to an underserved segment of society.

"I been mean all my life, I'm a mean person, I know how to turn it on and off, like a light switch," he told HBO before his July 20, 2002 rematch with Shane Mosley. He said that with a chuckle, and while wearing one of the winningest smiles in the sport.

Bottom line, based on what he did with Destiny's Child, concentrating on a group of people treated with contempt at worst, and indifference at best by too many of us, Vernon Forrest did more with his life and his acclaim than 99% of homo sapiens. And this is the primary reason why I was so disturbed to hear that Forrest made such an imperfect choice on the night of July 25, when he chose to chase the man who mugged him, and attempt to apprehend the criminal, or exert revenge on the miscreant who had robbed him of his wallet at a gas station. Forrest chased the man while carrying a firearm, and authorities say he engaged in a shootout with the

Let This Death Not Be In Vain

Written by Michael Woods
Tuesday, 28 July 2009 19:00

mugger. Twenty to 24 shots were fired between Forrest and the criminal, who hasn't been apprehended. Such a shame that Forrest, who was accompanied by his godson, just 11 years old, chose retaliation, as he might in the ring, instead of acceptance.

A wallet can be replaced. So can cash, and credit cards. Vernon Forrest, by all accounts a good man with an abnormally selfless nature, cannot and will not be replaced.

I cannot ask Vernon's permission. But I am hoping he might accept that we use his death as a powerful message, and that moving forward, in situations such as the one Forrest found himself in, his death reminds us that the wiser choice is to practice acceptance.

As hard as it is, let the wallet go. Let the cops do their job. Leave the firearms to the professionals, who are trained in marksmanship, and in situational strategy.

Personally, I am violently opposed* to the proliferation of handguns available in the United States, and believe that our nation's founders didn't foresee the world we live in today, where too many of us worship consumption, and acquisitiveness over a spirit of sharing, and caring, when they included the right to bear arms in the Constitution. With firearms so readily obtainable on the black market, so easily procured by deviant and desperate souls with nothing too lose, why our nation adheres so stubbornly to laws which were formulated when colonists were intent on maintaining freedom from the tyranny of British rule leaves me bewildered and saddened. The sadness is that much more grave when a good man gets taken out by a reckless robber. My informed guess is that someone under the thumb of a heavy drug habit, wielding a handgun likely manufactured by a corporation whose purpose is to accrue revenue, while the corporation's lobbyists maintain that their products are sold for "personal safety and protection," took down Forrest. That gun didn't make Forrest safer on July 25th. Instead, it made him a stat—he is one of the estimated 30,000 Americans taken down by a gun in a murder, suicide, or accident annually. It didn't protect him, which is the primary reason for most firearm owners to purchase handguns. In fact, the gun quite possibly encouraged him to take the law into his own hands, and he paid the ultimate price.

And think about it for a moment—remove guns from the equation on that fateful evening in Atlanta...that bad guy would have been mano a mano with Forrest. I like Forrest's chances in that scrap.

I don't write this too demean Vernon Forrest, or degrade his memory; I write this to attempt to convince just one person who might be tempted to act as Forrest did, and look to take down a perp themselves, to think again.

As a cayenne-blooded male who has once or twice chosen to battle on principle, and put myself in harm's way instead of shrugging off a slight or backing down from a clash of wills, I truly identify with Forrest's desire to right a wrong himself on July 25th. With unemployment in Georgia at 10%, with more people at the end of their proverbial rope, hopeless and broke, there will be more muggings, and more choices for others like Forrest to make—swallow my pride, and go to the station house and look at mugshot books, or try to play cop.

Let This Death Not Be In Vain

Written by Michael Woods
Tuesday, 28 July 2009 19:00

To that one person who might be prone to play law enforcement officer with a gun in hand, in this dangerous age, don't do it.

Let the wallet go.

Let the sad soul take it. He evidently needs it more than you do. He has nothing to lose, if we can judge by his ruthless disregard for law and order, he doesn't much care if he takes one or more citizens down with him. For those who might believe I am one of those "bleeding heart liberals" who is incapable of blaming the criminal, let me assure you that in my mind, that murderer is a vile creature, and deserves to be punished to the full extent of the law. But we can all agree that too many of these heartless thugs are out and about---so why do we make it easier, with drive-thru windows for firearm purchases, and woeful background checks, for them to maximize their mayhem?

Defenders of the right of non-professionals to bear arms huff and puff that guns don't kill people, people kill people. Well, until it is proven that humans own the requisite faculties that prove they deserve the right to handle a deadly weapon, which can remove a decent man like Vernon Forrest from this Earth in the blink of an eye, then what say we adjust our ideals, and our laws, and we do the right thing, and repeal the Second Amendment. People with guns are killing too many people—how many more Vernon Forrest's will be taken from us before we do the obvious thing, the right thing?

*---my views on this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of this website, its publisher, or my colleagues