

Karlton Booger

by [Peter Glassman](#) (May 2025)



Men Drinking (Edvard Munch, 1906)

Dr. Paul Norman's alarm sounded at 5 AM. It woke his wife, Barbara.

"Oh, Paul, you're not due at the Urgent Care until eight."

"I want to see the sun rise out of the ocean. What's the good of having a resort condo like The Capri, facing the ocean? I love our place in Ocean City."

She went back to sleep.

Norman went to the balcony with his camera. As he slid back the massive glass door, the waves crashing on the beach were like music to his ears. The black star-studded sky and golden half-moon were about to begin a fade to the arrival of a new dawn.

He set his camera on video as the horizon sharpened and the moon went from yellow to soft white. The sun appeared as a brilliant yellow dot, seemingly stuck in the ocean.

For ten years, Norman and his family had visited the Maryland resort city every three-day Memorial Day weekend. When he became an addictionologist, he was recruited to help staff the Oceanside Drug and Alcohol Urgent Care Unit, which was located five miles from the shoreline.

Norman smiled as the ambient noise of the crashing waves was now in competition with the Harleys and other motorcycles awakening to the emerging sunlight. This holiday weekend had been the Annual Atlantic Motorcycle Convention site for the last seven years. He shut the large glass door to allow his family a deserved sleep-in. His gaze spanned 180 degrees from the watery coast to Coastal Highway. The roar of the bikes was deafening. He watched as the small groups and individual bikers targeted their favorite breakfast spots. One biker from the parking lot of his condo saw him on the balcony and waved his fist. Norman returned the clenched biker greeting and laughed.

He spoke to the roaring atmosphere, "I hope none of you will need the Urgent Care Center." He went back inside and began making breakfast. His seven-year-old, Tracy, appeared in bright orange pajamas, rubbing her eyes from sleep.

"Daddy, after breakfast, are you going to that emergency room place again this year?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"Do you think you'll see that Boogerman again this year?"

Norman laughed, "His name is Karlton Booger. He's one of those bikers who come to Ocean City every Memorial Day weekend."

"He broke his leg last year and the same thing on Memorial Day before that."

"Well, this year may be different. He's been going to AA for the past year and told me he hadn't had an alcoholic drink since he last saw us. Karlton has been calling me once a month since then. He was invited to speak at today's Biker AA meeting at the Urgency Clinic center."

Tracy smiled and grabbed a piece of bacon. "Can I come?"

"Last year, you said Karlton was scary looking."

"Yes, but he's funny when he talks about getting drunk and riding his motorcycle. Is he going to have dinner with us again like last year?"

Norman smiled as his wife Barbara emerged in a yellow bathrobe. "Your cooking smelled so good I couldn't sleep." She sat next to Tracy. "I heard the name Karlton Booger mentioned by you two. What's up with him?"

Norman repeated the discourse he had with Tracy.

Barbara smiled at her daughter, "Tracy, you can't go with Daddy to the Clinic. You'll be stuck there all day. Don't you want to go to the beach and the Capri's pool?"

Tracy's brow furrowed in thought, "Yes, but I want to hear the Boogerman talk. Daddy said ... Karlton ... is giving a speech at the AA meeting."

Norman spread cream cheese on the toasted bagels. "You know, it would be a good idea if you came to the clinic. It would

give Karlton a sense of support for staying sober for a year."

Barbara responded, "Honestly, do you think he'll show up without slurring and falling from too much booze this year? What gives you the idea he'll be different today?"

Norman spread the breakfast items on the center of the glass table. "Last year, I posed a challenge to Karlton. He was to go to AA meetings for the whole year and call me once a month until this Memorial Day weekend, reporting his abstinence from alcohol. He even got a sponsor at his AA group."

Tracy grabbed a bagel. "What does absensssss mean?"

Barbara answered, "It means to stop doing something."

"Oh," Tracy bit into her bagel with some white cream cheese remaining on her upper lip. "I still want to go."

Barbara sipped her black coffee, "Okay, we can compromise. Norman, I'll take Tracy and the boys to the clinic just for Karlton's talk. They'll learn a lesson if he's sober and a different one if he's drunk."

The Oceanside Drug, Alcohol, and Urgent Care Center was once a Chinese restaurant. It was open 24/7 and was the only emergency medical facility for the beach resort peninsula town. Today, the parking lot was mostly filled with motorcycles. Inside the large center space, bikers from multiple States occupied the tables once used for restaurant customers. The temperature was mild, and most bikers wore black leather jackets. Many outfits included silver studs along the cuffs and had motorcycle club logos in various themes on their backs.

Tracy whispered, "The Boogerman has a Flamingo on his jacket. I don't see him here."

Barbara spoke softly, "Your father has a table reserved for us up front. They're going to introduce Karlton." She mussed Tracy's hair. "And don't call him Boogerman. At AA, they only use first names and last initials."

The chairperson for the AA meeting stood up to introduce the keynote speaker for the meeting. "It gives me great pleasure to present our guest speaker at our annual Memorial Day meeting. Dr. Paul Norman had to be called to tend to our guest's broken leg last year and the year before that. This year is different, as you'll hear from Karlton B. from the Flamingo Riders Club in Foster, Michigan. Let's give Karlton a warm welcome."

Thunderous applause lured Karlton to the chairman's center table.

Tracy pointed at him, "He still looks scary."

Karlton wore black jeans tucked into black engineer boots. His open black leather jacket revealed a bare chest with a bright pink flamingo tattoo on its center. He rubbed his black, stubbled, unshaven face, removed his black visored biker hat, and waved it at the applauding crowd. The chairman banged his gavel for quiet to resume.

Karlton remained standing. He looked around and waved his right hand at the Normans' table, where Paul Norman had joined his family.

Norman and Tracy waved back. Norman's wife and two teenage boys looked at each other and remained quiet.

Karlton took a deep breath, "My story is one I've heard at AA meetings, but never recognized it was like mine. My drinking story is the same as every other biker and every other alcoholic. Alcoholism is a disease, and thus, the symptoms are

always identical. And yes, some details of life disruption, medical consequences, trouble with the law, loss of jobs, and even loss of family may differ. Still, the causality is always from some form of ethyl alcohol."

Karlton continued to present how his story was different yet the same. He commented on how identifying with other AA members kept him sober for the past year. He walked off-center to the chairman's table and stopped before the Norman family. "The event that got me focused on the causality of my life's dysfunction was coming here and meeting Dr. Paul Norman. For two years in a row, I came to this meeting with a broken bone in my lower right leg. Dr. Norman asked me how I got the injury. I said I didn't know. Last year, after he set my fracture and put a plaster cast on it, he took me into his home for the last two days of the Memorial Day weekend. I didn't drink during those days. On the last day, he and his family talked plainly to me. His daughter, Tracy..." Karlton pointed to Tracy, who straightened her posture and looked at her father, "...Little Tracy over here asked me a simple question. She asked, 'How come you break the same bone each time you come to Ocean City?'"

Karlton waved down the laughter, "For some reason, I had clarity of thought. I answered that it was because of my Harley Motorcycle."

More laughter ensued, and Karlton continued, "Tracy was persistent. She asked how a motorcycle breaks the same bone and why you should keep riding the motorcycle if it does that."

Karlton waved his palms up, "It was then that I knew the answer, and here it is. The same thing happened to my right leg both times. I was loaded to the gills with booze and stopped for a red light not far from this meeting place. Most bikers know that when you stop the bike, you put your legs out touching the ground so the bike stays up. I stopped the bike,

but didn't do that. My motorcycle fell to the right and landed on the side of my leg, which was still in a riding position. My fibula bone cracked each time."

The gavel again silenced laughter and applause. Karlton smiled, "And why did I not stretch my legs to the ground at the stoplight? It wasn't because of any failure of my Harley. It was because of my drinking. That realization was my eureka moment of clarity from a higher power. All of my life's craziness and my broken bones were from booze."

The crowd responded with wild applause. "Now I go to AA meetings sober. I call my sponsor when I think of a drink, and I call Dr. Norman once a month. And I say to all of you today, the only way to treat addiction to alcohol is not to drink. My higher power got me to stop, and recovering alcoholics in AA have kept me stopped. So remember, get those legs on pavement when you stop the bike, don't drink, and go to meetings. Thank you all and have a good time at the beach, everyone."

Karlton was again a guest for dinner the remainder of the holiday weekend. He became a regular every Memorial Day weekend. One such weekend, Tracy asked him about his own family.

"Tracy, I don't have living parents or any brothers or sisters. Those people at AA and your family are my family."

Tracy smiled, "Okay, that's great. Can you come to my high school graduation?"

Barbara spoke, "Before you answer, Karlton, it doesn't matter if you dress like a biker from Hell's Angels or not."

Karlton smiled at the Normans, "I only dress like this for biker club meetings and when I ride the Harley. Remember, I told you guys my job for the past few years has been a

consultant psychologist to the Michigan Police Department, where I live. I shave, put on a suit, and wear wingtip shoes. I drive a Ford SUV and am engaged to a high school principal. I'll attend your graduation if you all attend my wedding."

The Normans responded with a resounding "YES!"

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