

Charles Michael Norton Eulogy

By Charles W. Bone

I am thankful and humbled to be here today as a part of this service. This is a great church! I have admired your presence on this campus for years, and in recent years, much because of Mike and Susan, come to know your church as the soul of Nashville. Like others, I love Becca as your leader, and I am so thankful for the wonderful work you have done on this campus, on the streets of Nashville with the Magdalene Ministry and your outreach through Thistle Farms among others. What you have done and are doing has been a tremendous source of pride and joy for Mike, and I know for all of you who have been a part of this church.

This is not easy today – while I am honored to be asked by Mike and Susan to speak, I am challenged to make these few minutes as meaningful as our 36 years with Mike have been. I will try to contain my emotions, but so many of you know, and as Mike knew well, my ability to hide my feelings at any moment is very limited. Mike was so good at containing his inner feelings (and many thoughts of just how crazy Bone can be), but often with me the rawest of feelings boil over in all directions and Mike on so many occasions provided the filter and the restraint.

Many of you know pieces of the genius of the life of Charles Michael Norton – My challenge is to try to put the beautiful pieces of this glorious puzzle together in a very few minutes.

Mac, Vicki, Renee and I joined with Mike and Jayne Ann Woods to form the law firm of Bone & Woods on September 5, 1978. Jayne Ann had worked with Mike at the Department of Revenue while she was Commissioner. She was very impressed by the intelligence and work ethic of this Vanderbilt Law, University of Tennessee undergrad from McMinnville. Jayne Ann said Mike would be a great lawyer to be a part of a startup law firm in downtown Nashville in the old Noel Hotel, then a bank office building at 4th & Church.

Of course I thought due diligence on Norton was necessary, so we called our friends in McMinnville. The results were unanimous. Mike Norton was the smartest boy to ever come out of McMinnville (this news, often reported, comes to the chagrin of Bill Ramsey and the Pirtle boys, who think they should have been included). Let me just say that any calls to Gallatin residents would have never resulted in a similar response about Charles Bone.

Mike and I were different in many ways but alike in some significant ways.

Our parents were products of the rural south and members of the Greatest Generation.

Our fathers were veterans of WW II. At one point Mike wrote:

Both my parents were born in the early 1920s, each living on a rural Mississippi farm. Some of the qualities they acquired and passed along were self-reliance, a tendency to be cautious, unquestioning patriotism, a strong religious faith, and the importance of family.

(Thank you Mr. Norton)

We were high school nerds! We played in the band. He edited the paper, and I edited the yearbook. We made good grades, were in our senior plays as the lead – the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder’s classic *Our Town*.

We both developed a real interest in politics, opposed the Vietnam War, embraced Civil Rights and were devastated by the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.

Importantly to those of you who knew Mike well his early life was impacted by two movies (*Lawrence of Arabia* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*).

Mike Norton Lawyer

With this background, allow me to tell you what a brilliant lawyer Mike Norton was and how I came to depend on him every hour of every day for all these years.

We started with four lawyers in 1978 and as the principal rainmaker in the group, my job emboldened by the personality of our largest client and best friend Frank Woods was to convince clients and prospective clients that there was nothing we couldn't do – no task we couldn't conquer – no case we couldn't win!

So when bankers wanted to open, merge, develop E-S-O-P's, create stock options, fire directors or presidents – Mike Norton did the work – He preferred to stay in the office, do the work and give me the credit, especially after the night we flew together on a small plane to East Tennessee to fire a bank director and upon our return to Nashville, learned that the pilot was circling the tower because he couldn't really decide if the landing gear was down – After that Mike really preferred for sure that I go and that he stayed.

When cities or counties needed tax-exempt bonds, Mike learned and became a nationally recognized bond lawyer.

When clients wanted to acquire radio and TV stations, Mike learned all of the laws and regulations relating to the FCC and did the work.

When J.D. Clinton decided he wanted to acquire a broke company in Knoxville named Shop At Home, Mike did the securities work to take us to the NASDAQ, worked to acquire 10 TV stations from L.A. to Boston and helped the company with funding exceeding \$100M. Then 10 years later. he led the team as we sold Shop At Home to the E.W. Scripps Company in Cincinnati.

There are literally thousands of examples of legal work where I promised expert legal work and Mike Norton delivered.

But the most significant work of his career would be his work with Stacey Garrett, John Branham, David Briley and others on behalf of Fisk University. In my opinion, Fisk would not be alive today if we had not prevailed on its behalf in the sale of an interest in its art in a battle with the Attorney General of Tennessee and others for seven years.

Let me pause here and provide a profound thought which came to me at 2:30 one morning this week.

“Whatever Mike Norton Loved, He Mastered”

He spared no amount of intellect and energy when he grasped something or someone really important to him. Time does not permit me to describe all of his delights but allow me to provide a list with comments. My guess is that each of you know about one or two or three of his passions, but few of us knew them all – The law and being a lawyer. I list it first because it came ahead of all others in time although not in importance.

(SUSAN AND THE CHILDREN)

You all know his love and devotion for his family – Susan, the children and grandchildren. I was privileged to be there with them when they married in 1989 at Cheekwood. I was the only witness. I was the maid of honor and the best man. What an honor! As Susan said last week at Alive Hospice, his family is what made him tick.

The Nortons and the Bones, like the McAllesters and the Scruggs and the Meadors and the Garretts and the Blankenships and the list goes on where time does not

permit me to mention all of us—because we didn't just work together, we lived together. Our lives have been intertwined by great events and hard times too.

Marriages (and divorces)

Births (and deaths)

Picnics and Parties

Halloween

Music

Movies

Politics

Charity Walks

Bananas Foster By Mike

MACaritas by Mac

From 1989 until 2001, we tried law and life at two larger firms. We just didn't fit in.

So in 2002, Mac, Mike, Stacey and others agreed that we were destined to have a place with a different vision and purpose. Mike actually wrote several years ago of his pride in our new firm:

“A group of us decided to start over and build a law firm from the ground up, taking all we had learned over the years, throwing out all the customs and existing models and doing it our way. We formed Bone McAllester Norton PLLC with a small group of lawyers, and we thrive today. I spend about half my time practicing law and about half the time with managing partner duties. The firm was profitable from the first day and has grown each year since.”

“The creation and development of our firm is what I consider the most significant development of my career. We threw out the partner-associate model, and every lawyer is treated as a partner. We embraced state-of-the-art technology, hired the best staff at premium salaries, and aggressively pursued diversity.”

Now The Renaissance Man_ –I can't even spell it without looking at the hotel from my window.

But all of us agree when you know Mike Norton you know a Renaissance Man. He loved, he mastered:

The Law

Movies

Music

Technology

Management

Accounting

Post Cards

Postage Stamps

Art

NY Yankees

Cooking/Food

The wonderful obituary authored by Susan, the family and others captures the incredible pieces of his life that he loved and mastered.

Mike's Faith

The final topic – maybe the most important one for Mike—was his faith, fostered early by his parents but re-kindled by Susan as a part of this church.

Again he loved, thus mastered. He not only completed the Education for Ministry classes of this church, he mastered them by becoming a teacher/trainer for many classes and a source of strength not just as a teacher but as a man who practiced his faith!

Mike really suffered these last few years, especially these last 18 months. Many of us lived his pain and suffering with him, but none of us can really appreciate what he and Susan have endured.

Mike and I both learned in later years that one of our favorite quotes was used by Bobby Kennedy on April 4, 1968, when he spoke to a large crowd in Indianapolis and announced the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. These lines from a Greek writer seem really appropriate again today.

“He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against

our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.”

The Apostle Paul offers peace and hope in Romans 5, verses 1-5.

Peace and Hope

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love had been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Also all of us here today who believe as Mike believed know the truth we find in Revelation 21:4

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

I told you earlier that Mike and I both played the role of stage manager as high school seniors in *Our Town*. We only learned this coincidence 10 years ago.

So allow me to conclude these remarks with the commentary of the stage manager in the cemetery scene in Act III of *Our Town*:

“Now there are some things we all know but we don’t take ’m out and look at ’m very often.

We all know that something is eternal.

And it ain’t houses and it ain’t names, and it ain’t earth, and it ain’t even the stars – everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that that something has to do with human beings.

All the greatest people who ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you’d be surprised how people are always letting go of that fact.

There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

Mike Norton is Eternal and
to the Eternal God & Savior of Us All
We Commend His Spirit As
Our Dearly Beloved
Our Friend
A Father & Especially a Grandfather
A Lawyer's Lawyer
And a Renaissance Man
Who Loved & Mastered Us All –
Charles Michael Norton
Law – Life – Passion