

Why It's Not Always Such a Good Idea to Admire the Rich and Famous!

By Peter J. Fogel

As you might have read in the papers, or heard on the news, Eric Douglas, son of Kirk Douglas and brother to Michael, died a lone in his apartment last week.

And that's the way the media always described Eric: Son of Kirk and brother to Michael. That was his legacy. Although having gotten to know Eric in the 90's... he desperately wanted to be known as 'his own man.'

Perhaps that was his problem—living in the shadow of two men who achieved unparalleled greatness through grit and hard work... and on their own terms.

You'd think being born into this family that Eric would have it easy. But it wasn't. His whole life he'd been plagued by mental illness and substance abuse problems. (which is how he probably died)

When I met him his career was going no where and like some actors who want to jump start their careers and get noticed—he turned to stand-up comedy for that purpose.

I wrote jokes and bits for him that would help him creatively and hopefully be therapeutic for him on stage.

One self-deprecating line that always got a good audience response and was his signature line, was one you might've heard. Eric would bound the stage and immediately his face and voice would be recognized. He'd tell the audience of his recent arrest and say, "That's right... my father is Kirk and my brother is Michael. I'm the 'Fredo' of the Douglas Clan."

The next twenty minutes he'd perform different variations of that theme. He desperately wanted his own identity... but would always fall back on using his family resemblance and connections on stage. (and in life) It's all he knew... it's what people expected and demanded of him.

And he always obliged us. As a society we love anything having to do with 'tabloids', don't we? Audiences would listen and laugh as one of the "Douglases" —our royalty--- would spin some Hollywood tales for our amusement and at his own expense.

Eric had a "funny bone" but he wasn't a true comedian. He was an actor playing the role of a comic. (there's a difference)

Lifestyles of The Rich and 'Infamous'

Most shows the audience would politely laugh not knowing if the pain he was telling them about was actually true. But they didn't care, they laughed... he was the son and brother of legends and a "mini" celebrity... who is why I perhaps hung out with him.

I wanted to see the world he came from... be a part of it... for just a brief instant in time. I met Kirk and would always then look at Eric in astonishment and think:

"You have it all... you've been blessed with talent, come from great blood lines, and have every opportunity to achieve greatness that other mortals might never get."

On the occasions I'd experience his bizarre behavior first hand, I'd get angry in my head at him and want to shake him:

"Why can't you be normal?! Why can't you take advantage of the "gift" you've been given?!... Why do you give your family so much grief? Can't you shape up and help yourself... after what all these people who care for you have tried to do for you? Don't you owe it to yourself and them--- at least THAT much?"

Again, it's hard to us to relate to Eric's life. We've never lived it... or walked in his shoes. We just know that we'd act differently if we were in his situation. (Ever notice how we can sometimes diagnose others misfortunes... better than our own? ☺)

Well, for brief instances in his life, Eric would get "his act together." And after we all thought he'd turn the corner... he'd be back to being o'l self-destructive Eric who always seemed comfortable in his own pain. (sound familiar?)

His m.o. was being hooked on his pills and blaming others for his misfortune.

It was everyone's else's fault that he was arrested for picking fights on airlines with flight attendants or being thrown in jail numerous times for disturbing the peace or drug possession.

Two Halves Don't Always Make A Whole

He once told me he went to Michael and begged for assistance. "Michael" he'd plead, " you're my brother... help me with my career!" Michael would respond, "I'm your half-brother."

Eric was extremely volatile and could snap like a twig on a cold winter morning... at any time.

I once made a casually remark to him in my car and he pounded my dashboard like he was trying to resuscitate a heart attack victim

Why... do... people... treat... me ... this way!"

I calmly responded, "Could it be perhaps they think you're out of your mind?" And then he turned to me, possessed with rage in his eyes... and... immediately broke out laughing. Why? Because it was the truth and he knew it was.

I said, "Eric, my man, you got more problems than a math book!" which made him laugh even harder." Whew! I sighed to myself... I had diffused a ticking bomb (at least for now.) He then asked what I really wanted from him:

I said, "For you to hit me... so I can sue your ass and get your Mercedes." More LAUGHTER from the Son of Spartacus!

Humor Can Be As Soothing As AloeVera On a Sunburned Face

For a brief moment Eric had found the humor in "his" situation. Humor and the truth – and pardon me for using this cliché---- can really set you free. It makes you see the absurdity of any situation. It takes away the bee stings that life zaps you with. It can be as soothing as aloe vera on a sun burned face.

Humor if used correctly can help you put into perspective any difficult situation you're in. It cuts through the b.s. we put ourselves through and hopefully wake you up to take positive action

Action that can get you out of a self-destructive cycle that returns very little to the quality of your life.

It's unfortunate that Eric just couldn't learn to "just let go" and find the humor in his life and laugh more. I wish he could've experienced it when he was straight and not on drugs and booze. And that's because the laughter that comes from humor...is the most "natural" altered state for us to be in.

It can help you find your true essence and draw others to you. It can attract ...instead of detract from what you want to achieve

I hope Eric has finally found the peace that he truly deserves. And here's hoping folks like Courtney Love wake up and do the same—*before it's too late*. No, my friend... never envy the rich and famous. They don't always have it so good, now do they?

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