

A Woman Screams

by [Peter Glassman](#) (October 2024)



Die Hoffnung II (Hope II) (Gustav Klimt, 1907-8)

Dr. Paul Norman had been a civilian for fifteen years. The news highlighted a Mailman delivering a baby on a DOJO floor mat at a local karate school. Norman folded his arms and faced

his wife, "Barbara, I think some citizens are in high-risk positions to be like the mailman delivering a baby ... I mean, while going about their daily business."

Barbara smiled, "You say this every time a police officer, fireman, soldier, or other non-medical person does this."

Norman sat back at the dinner table, "On my first day of Internship, we were all told that our combination of medical and surgical training is a needed baseline for society."

Barbara laughed, "Oh yeah, you're going to tell me about the time you delivered a baby during a snowstorm in a helicopter."

"Well, yes, I was in the Navy, and we lived in Long Island, New York. Kennedy Airport was snowed in, and a lady went into labor. St. Albans Naval Hospital was the only hospital with a functional heliport."

She signaled a time out with her hands, "All right then, for once, why don't you write to the newspaper and champion a solution to your imagined problem?"

Norman looked at his watch. "I have to go to the hospital and see my pre-op patients on tomorrow's schedule."

"I hate it when you have anesthesia call on Sundays like this, Paul. The patients don't check in until late afternoon, which cuts into family life."

"Look, dear, this is normal life for an anesthesiologist." Norman pushed himself from the table, "...and I will start to make noise about birthing outside of medical facilities."

Norman parked his car in the MD lot and entered Fullbright General Hospital via the emergency room entrance. He scanned the ER patients waiting to be evaluated and checked in with the ER doctor. "Hello, I'm Dr. Norman, anesthesiologist on

call today. Do you have any possibilities for the OR?"

"Hi, I'm Louis Finkle. Not really, mostly just the worried-well having a tough domestic Sunday."

"Okay, I'll be in the hospital making pre-op rounds for tomorrow's OR cases. Nice to meet you."

Finkle smiled, "Sundays are usually quiet. I'm the only MD in the place."

"I don't recognize your name. Are you new to the regular staff at Fullbright?"

"I'm a psychiatric resident at the City Hospital ... a moonlighter."

"Psychiatry? That's a stretch from ER patients."

"It's okay. Anything I can't handle, I call one of the specialists."

Norman raised his eyebrows, "Does the hospital cover your malpractice insurance?"

"Absolutely."

Norman left and felt resolved to write a letter to the medical society about the need for all doctors and certain civilians to have a few fundamental hands-on medical skills.

Norman looked at the OR list. He had six patients admitted today for surgery tomorrow. The rest were outpatient day-cases for invasive diagnostic procedures or operations like a hernia repair, a D&C, and removal of an orthopedic screw from a healed long bone.

After examining and reassuring his last pre-op patient, his belt-clipped beeper sounded off. The device left a message for

him to call home immediately.

Norman feared pages from home. He always imagined the worst-case scenario of his wife or one of his children in a severe accident. He called, and Barbara answered on the first ring.

“Barb, what’s wrong?”

“Oh, nothing life-threatening. Remember the toilet in the second bedroom? You were going to replace the flushing mechanism. Well, you have to do it now. To avoid a flood, I had to shut the water off to the bathroom toilet.”

“Your message said call right away.”

“Well, this is an urgent problem. So please stop by Home Depot on your way home and get the needed replacement stuff.”

Norman’s anxiety disappeared. He felt relieved. “Okay, I’m almost through at the hospital. See you later.”

His tranquility was short-lived. The hospital’s PA system barked an urgent plea, “Will any doctor please go to the X-ray department STAT?”

Norman was the only MD other than the psychiatrist running the ER. He rushed to the X-ray department. Four nurses and an X-ray technician were holding down an obese woman lying on the X-ray table. “We’re only providing restraints to take a readable X-ray,” a nurse said.

Norman looked at the X-ray table. It was soaking wet with blood-tinged fluid. Dr. Finkle arrived.

Norman tried to speak to the patient, whose screams were non-stop. Finkle moved next to Norman. “Dr. Norman, she came into the ER complaining of belly pain. I just sent her to X-ray. What do you think?”

Norman put on sterile gloves and probed the woman's obese belly. More bloody fluid exuded from between her legs. He changed gloves and examined her pelvis. "Get an obstetric nurse down here and a baby isolette STAT. This lady is pregnant, and we're about to have a baby."

The patient heard his words, "Pregnant, I can't be." She screamed with a contraction and added, "I hardly ever have sex."

As the obstetric nurse arrived, Norman donned a mask, sterile gown, and gloves. "Get ready for the placenta and an umbilical cord clamp."

The obstetric team pushed the others aside and assisted Norman. He delivered a screaming baby girl.

After stabilizing the situation, starting an IV on the mother, and appropriate medications given, the baby was whisked off to the newborn nursery.

Norman walked with Finkle back to the ER, "Dr. Finkle, you should have some basic general medicine skills before you claim to be an emergency room physician. Did you see today's news ... a Mailman delivered a baby while on his job."

Before Finkle could reply, Norman looked at his watch and remembered he had to stop at Home Depot on his way home. Finkle just stared at him, open-mouthed and speechless, watching Norman leave the hospital.

At the Home Depot, Norman was directed to the plumbing aisle, where bathroom items abound. A large book at the beginning of the aisle guided him to the correct hardware he needed for his home toilet. As he waited in the check-out line, he thought again that the need for some general medical experiences should be in the hands of some civilians and all MDs.

As Norman walked toward his car in the parking lot, his attention was diverted to a small crowd surrounding a Lexus SUV. Female screams were coming from the rear of the vehicle.

A troubled man was sweating and searching the crowd with bulging eyes. "My wife is having a baby. Can anyone please help? Is there a doctor here?"

"I'm a doctor." Norman pushed aside several voyeurs and found the woman lying on her back.

Norman pointed to a lady with a cell phone, "You with the phone, call 911 and tell them to send an EMT team to tend to a newborn baby. Please give them our location and stay with me for further instructions."

The woman complied.

Norman asked the husband, "How many pregnancies has she had?"

The man felt relieved that a doctor was in charge, "This is number three."

Norman motioned him to come closer, "Did she have any problems with past deliveries?"

"No, the husband swallowed hard and watched as Norman applied a glob of the hand sanitizer he always carried to his and the man's hands.

Norman scanned the crowd, "Okay, we need a clean blanket to keep the baby warm."

His assigned assistant grabbed a recently purchased blanket offered by someone and handed it to Norman.

A pink screaming baby girl was in Norman's arms within two minutes. "I need some newspaper or, better still, a plastic bag from someone's shopping for the afterbirth."

A Police car dispersed the crowd as the EMT vehicle arrived. Norman was clutching the umbilical cord. He addressed the female medic, "I need to clamp and cut the umbilical cord now."

The Medic smiled, "I have everything we need. We can take over now."

Norman checked the new mother for any lacerations or complications, "Okay, she's in good shape."

Norman arrived home with his toilet repair kit, "Barb, I'll get right to the bathroom and install this stuff."

She looked at her watch, "It took you long enough to get home from the hospital."

He smiled, "Remember our discussion this morning." Norman told her of his two deliveries. "So, I'm writing a letter to the Surgeon General and the State Medical Board about putting the delivery of a baby on the 'Good Samaritan List.' The lady and baby might've had some complications if I hadn't happened by at the Home Depot parking lot. I mean, there were about a dozen people just standing around listening to the poor woman's screams."

Six weeks later, a letter from the Surgeon General arrived. Barbara prodded him to read it aloud.

Norman stood up, "Dear Dr. Norman, your concern would be well-founded twenty years ago. However, we live in more streamlined times. Almost everyone, even children, has a cell phone. In addition, our EMT vehicles have equipment and staff to handle such maternity emergencies. More importantly, the legal liability of tending to CPR and obstetrical situations protects anyone in a first aid calamity from getting sued. Our

current system works. Every state has also been tuned to update the system as progress occurs. Police Departments, Urgent Care facilities, Fire Departments, and the medical corps of the military, including the National Guard units, are also taught some fundamentals of birthing. I thank you for your actions and Good Samaritan attitude, and I will use your experiences to help the government continue to fund such important healthcare concerns.”

Barbara looked at her husband, “Well, that should ease your mind.”

He smiled, “Yes, maybe now I’ll stop having dreams of seeing and hearing a woman scream in labor in public places.”

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