

CHANNEL 57

Written by

Dick Hartley

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**FADE IN:**

**EXT. LOCAL CABLE ACCESS TV BUILDING - DAY**

It's a small, nondescript, building on an equally nondescript street. Screams irrelevant.

**INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

NORM, late 30's, thin and frazzled-looking, sits at his desk, staring a computer screen. A box of Chinese food sits next to an open soda.

NORM (V.O.)  
I'm doing research for shows or guests to book on our little local access channel here in Ogallala, Nebraska. It's exhausting work.

**C/U OF COMPUTER SCREEN**

He's actually shopping on Amazon.

**INTERVIEW -- NORM**

SUPER: "NORM NEUHAUS - MANAGER - OGALALA, NEBRASKA, LOCAL CABLE TV ACCESS CHANNEL"

NORM  
I'm the manager of Channel 57, Ogallala's only local public access TV. Not as impressive as it sounds. Not much happening here in this part of the world. And since streaming came along, no one watches us, which makes my job even more difficult. You know what it's like trying to find enough people to fill a full day of programming?

Norm looks away, sighs.

**MONTAGE OF BAD PAST SHOWS**

-- A heavy set man plays "Stairway to Heaven," badly, on an accordion, bass drum and kazoo. Norm, standing nearby, visibly cringes with each off note.

-- A little girl tap dances, badly, to "Proud to be an American", knocks over a flagpole in the process.

-- An elderly woman tries to get a cat to bat at a feather with its paw. Instead the cat leaps at Norm and clings on his pants as Norm tries to furiously shake it away.

**INTERVIEW -- NORM**

NORM  
Had to get twelve stitches and five rabies shots for that one.

**INT. OGALLALA CITY HALL - NIGHT**

Norm stands next to a camera trained on the MAYOR and two other COUNCILMEN as they discuss city business. One elderly WOMAN sits to the side and takes notes. The rest of the room is empty.

NORM (V.O.)  
The FCC requires us to show the local government meetings, which at least fills part of my schedule. It's not exactly riveting TV.

The Mayor reads from a piece of paper.

MAYOR  
All in favor of requiring septic tanks in the city limits to be cleaned at least once every twenty years, say 'aye.'

COUNCILMEN  
Aye.

NORM  
(to camera)  
I guess someone raised a stink about that.

MAYOR (O.S.)  
You have something to add to this here meeting?

NORM  
Um... no.

MAYOR (O.S.)  
Any more outbursts like that and we'll clear the chambers.

Norm turns from the camera, embarrassed.

**INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY**

Norm is on the phone.

NORM

Let me make sure I understand. You swallow live frogs while twirling flaming batons?

(pause)

Need to check if our insurance covers us on that. Get back to you.

Norm hangs up, buries his face in his hands.

**INTERVIEW -- NORM**

NORM (CONT'D)

Running a local access cable channel is like building an experimental plane. You have to make sure the propeller works and the flaps lift and the engine is dependable before you take it out for a test flight, and if you get one little rivet wrong, it will go into a nose dive and explode in a fiery crash.

Awkward beat.

NORM (CONT'D)

It's lots of fun.

**INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

JOSEPH, big beard, early 20's, pokes his head in Norm's office. Joseph is wearing a coat and tie, and looks overdressed compared to Norm's jeans and t-shirt look.

JOSEPH

Okay if I take off an hour early?

NORM

What's with the fancy clothes? You going to a funeral?

JOSEPH

No, I'm going to see my great-great-Uncle Adam Applebaum.

NORM

And he makes you get dressed up? Who does he think he is, the Pope?

JOSEPH

No, he's Jewish. Like me.

NORM

You're Jewish? Seriously? Would have never guessed.

JOSEPH

Yeah. And he's one of the last surviving prisoners from Auschwitz.

A look of amazement on Norm's face.

NORM

Wow. Wow.

(pause)

Is that the place Sean Connery escaped from?

Joseph stares awkwardly at the camera.

JOSEPH

That's Alcatraz. Auschwitz was a Nazi death camp for Jews. So a pretty awful thing. He's only in town a couple of days and I want to spend as much time as...

NORM

Wait a second... Do you think he would do an interview with me for the channel? Would be better than anything else we could put on.

JOSEPH

That's not a great idea.

NORM

C'mon, man! You see what I'm working with here? The talent is thin! This guy probably has some fun stories to share!

JOSEPH

I don't think "fun" is the word you're going for.

NORM

Fun, interesting, exciting. Who cares? It's better than a god-awful tap-dancing five year old!

Joseph looks unconvinced.

NORM (CONT'D)

Will you just ask? He doesn't even have to come here. We'll go to him. Make it very easy. Thirty minutes of this time, tops! Just ask! If he says no, end of story!

**INTERVIEW - JOSEPH**

JOSEPH

Norm is like this puppy dog that won't stop begging no matter how much you feed him. Sometimes you have to feed them though, just to shut them up for a little bit.

**EXT. RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON**

Joseph and Norm approach an old wood frame house in the middle of nowhere. Norm wears a rumpled old suit that fits him poorly.

NORM

Why aren't you wearing your hat?

JOSEPH

My yamaka? I'm not orthodox.

NORM

You can say that again.

Joseph glances awkwardly at the camera.

JOSEPH

Please be respectful.

NORM

Like I could be anything but.

Norm and Joseph enter the residence.

**INT. RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON**

Several FAMILY MEMBERS gather in the living room, including ninety-nine year old ADAM APPLEBAUM. Balding, thin, gaunt. Looks all of his ninety-nine years.

Joseph greets him warmly amidst a lot of conversation and laughter between the family members.

Norm soaks it all in, perhaps even a little jealous.

**INTERVIEW - NORM**

NORM

I'm an only child, and I'm not married, and my parents live in Idaho, so... it's not like I can just have them over to roast marshmallows in my backyard firepit whenever I'm not binge-watching "The Big Bang Theory." Plus, there's a burn ban in effect because of the drought.

Norm reaches out to shake Adam's hand. Adam just stares at him. Norm withdraws his hand.

NORM (CONT'D)

It's an honor to meet you Mr. Applebaum.

Adam just stares dead ahead. No acknowledgement.

NORM (CONT'D)

I'm Joseph's boss. You know what, I don't even like the word boss. I prefer co-worker. Or friend. Best friends, that's who we are.

Joseph glances at the camera at this pronouncement. Rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

NORM (CONT'D)

He tells me you've had a pretty colorful past. Well, maybe not colorful. More like mundane. Would that be the right word?

The family members suddenly start to quiet down as they hear Norm talk. Norm can feel the glares bearing down on him.

NORM (CONT'D)

Well, look I don't want to take up a lot of your time. I mean, you barely have much left as it is.

Audible GASPS from those gathered.

**INTERVIEW - NORM**

NORM (CONT'D)

I'm what they call "a charmer". I can talk the fur right off a snake. And then be great friends with the snake.

(MORE)

NORM (CONT'D)

Some people would say, 'why do you want to be friends with a snake'? Well have you ever seen a snake charmer get bitten by a snake?

**LATER --**

Norm sits in a chair next to Adam.

NORM (CONT'D)

You have a story, a story so big they probably ought to make a movie about it. Starring Nicholas Cage. Probably the greatest actor of our generation. Have you seen "The Wicker Man?" Unbelievable. But we need to record your story for posterity before it's too late. Let the world know what you went through. No one will ever believe what happened over there unless you tell the stories! Can you go to your grave -- God forbid not very soon -- knowing that mankind won't know the history of what happened?

Dead silence in the room. Eyebrows raised all around. Even Adam has a look of disbelief on his face.

JOSEPH

Uncle Adam, I'm so sorry...

Adam raises a hand to silence him. Looks to Norm.

ADAM

You're right. Some people do still need to be educated about this. You come here tomorrow morning. Nine o'clock. We'll talk.

NORM

Thank you. This means a lot. See you bright and early.

**INTERVIEW WITH NORM**

NORM (CONT'D)

I think that went pretty well.

**INTERVIEW WITH ADAM**

ADAM

The guy's a schmuck. But he does need to be educated.



**INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - MORNING**

Norm gathers equipment for the interview. Camera, yellow pad, lighting, sound equipment.

NORM (O.S.)

This may be the big break I've been looking for. Nail this interview and who knows what could happen? Could be headed to a station in the big city.

**INTERVIEW WITH NORM**

NORM (CONT'D)

That's right, Fargo, I'm gunning for you.

Norm makes little gun fingers and pistol noises.

**INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Norm's office phone RINGS just as he readies to leave.

NORM

Norm Neuhaus... oh, hey Joseph...  
What? When? Oh, man...

**INTERVIEW WITH NORM**

NORM (CONT'D)

So Adam died in his sleep last night. Apparently someone left the oven on all night and he died from gas poisoning.

(long pause)

I mean, what are the odds?

FADE OUT