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GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

BY CLEM BOYD



Photo by Delly Carr



Freshman year is a whirlwind for most students. New routines. New schedule. New friends. But Grace Norman '20 faced a freshman-year adjustment of Olympic proportions.

On September 10, 2016, Norman won the gold medal in the PT4 Triathlon at the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She followed that outstanding performance with a bronze-medal finish in the 400-meter sprint, which she clocked at 1:01.83 seconds.

What followed was a victory lap that started back home in Cedarville and took her all the way to the White House. She received numerous media requests for interviews, lots of engagement on social media, and plenty of opportunities to share her story with schoolchildren, business people, Rotarians, Kiwanians, and fellow collegians. Her golden moment has created a golden opportunity for the Gospel.

“REGULAR” ROUTINE

“Things have settled down since Rio with the press and all the excitement over winning gold,” she explained during lunch at the Stevens Student Center dining hall, fondly known as Chuck’s. “It’s allowed me to get in a routine with training and being a regular college student. It feels good!”

Even then, Norman’s freshman experience has been exceptional. She runs the 1,500-meter and 5,000-meter distance for Cedarville track & field. “I’ve been running really well, hitting some good times during indoor and outdoor season,” she said.

Her dad, Timothy, is a Professor of Mechanical and Biomedical Engineering at Cedarville, so competing for the Yellow Jackets has been a lifelong dream.

“I’ve looked forward to running for Cedarville most of my life,” she shared. “To finally be on the team, it’s very exciting.”

GOD’S PLAN

Norman was born without her left foot and ankle and her right big toe due to an amniotic band disorder. Because of the condition, fetal parts in the womb, such as fingers, toes, and limbs, are caught in fibrous bands, and amputated.

A team of her dad’s engineering students developed an early swim foot prosthetic for Norman when she was 9 years old. Since then, she has graduated to prosthetic limbs that have propelled her beyond laps in a pool to the gold medal stand.

“I’m very grateful for my prosthetic,” Norman affirmed. “If I would have not been born like this, I probably wouldn’t have been given these opportunities to compete on a world stage and share my faith with others. God had this plan for my life all along.”

Hard work and dedication are integral to an athlete’s life. For Norman, she has the extra motivation of knowing this is God’s course. “He has a reason and plan for me,” she said, “and I have to trust that His plan is perfect for my life.”

INSPIRING EXAMPLE

While Norman understands the gravity of what she accomplished in Rio, she was also a little stunned by the response. “I’ve definitely been surprised,” she offered. “I knew a lot of people were supporting me, but the amount of congratulatory feedback has been amazing, whether it was just my hometown, my teammates, or people I don’t even know who were touched by my achievement.”

Little girls have approached Norman and told her she has encouraged them to run cross country. Others have been inspired to face their own challenges. And her counsel to them? “Don’t let anything in life stop you, whether disabilities, or circumstances,” she said. “God placed those in your life to grow you and challenge you, not to stop you.”

RAISED PLATFORM

Since her accomplishments in Rio, her platform to share Christ has grown exponentially. It started with innumerable newspaper, online, and television reports, and continued with

Facebook and Instagram. “I give glory to God in my social media posts,” Norman said.

And there was that invitation to the nation’s capital. On September 29, 2016, Norman, along with other U.S. Olympic and Paralympic medalists, was invited to the White House where she was congratulated personally by the president and first lady.

Back home in Ohio, and also in Utah, where she trains, doors opened for her to speak with elementary and high school students. “Sometimes I’ll focus more on my work ethic, and sometimes more on the actual race in Rio,” she



said. “But it’s also been a really good way for me to share my faith. I attribute my strength to the Lord and acknowledge His working through me.”

POWERFUL STORY

And she’s shared that hope at a neighboring university as well. On February 24, 2017, Wright State University, located in nearby Fairborn, Ohio, honored Norman during halftime of a Wright State Raiders basketball game. Norman shared her experience in Rio and honored God in a Cedarville video that

played on the center court jumbotron.

She signed autographs during and after the game, where tracts were available that explained her relationship with Christ.

On May 4, the Public Relations Society of America, Dayton Chapter, honored Norman with its Newsmaker of the Year Award. And what a newsworthy story, by the power and grace of God, Grace Norman has to share.

Clem Boyd is Managing Editor of Cedarville Magazine.

