

## On the subject of...

# A Skyhook for Christmas

by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

# The Aberdeen Advocate

There are certain inevitabilities in life. Here are two: 1) in any group of human men gathered together for more than a few hours, a prankster will emerge; 2) that prankster will eventually misplace his skyhook.

Since the beginning of time, men have been grappling with skyhook trouble. Cavemen lived in caves primarily because they could not find a skyhook to assist them with the building of a real house. If a lucky cave family actually owned their own skyhook, it is almost certain that Gork lost the darned thing or loaned it to his buddy Gakk. Gakk, being the irresponsible Neanderthal he was, had probably left it outside to rust.

The Israelites who toiled as slaves to build Pharaoh's pyramids had the same kinds of issues. Immediately upon the arrival of the new slave, he would be sent to fetch the skyhook old Joshua borrowed last week. Seth, not understanding the wicked glimmer in Ishmael's eye, would go dutifully forth in search of the thing. He

would be found wandering from work-group to work-group innocently asking if his fellow slaves had seen Ishmael's skyhook. Naturally, young Seth would return to Ishmael having failed at his first task. He would also, quite naturally, wonder why all the other slaves were giggling and snickering at him.

It is popularly held that Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel while lying on his back at the top of scaffolding. This is absolutely true. If you were able to ask the monks who were there at the time, they would shake their heads sadly and say, "Yes., Master Michelangelo wanted a skyhook, but we could not find one for him. We looked everywhere in Rome." Roman men were also prone to snicker at monks searching for skyhooks.

Not far from Rome, in Pisa, the tower leans because the builder's apprentice, young Antonio, was dispatched to locate a missing skyhook and failed most miserably.

In case you are a very young female, or a male who has not yet been inducted into the Fraternal Order of Manly Mischief, I should let you know that skyhooks, like left-handed monkey wrenches, do not exist. There is no magic hook to hang in thin air in order to help you hold things up and/or move things around, but impish men have been using the skyhook scam to initiate the new-guy for centuries. It is an old and venerated custom – a rite of passage.

Over at the Aberdeen Public Utilities Department the prankster of record is one David Brock. Lineman Brock is known to be at the middle of most practical jokes inflicted upon unsuspecting others at the Electric Department. (You've seen Brock on Halloween wearing a wild-haired skeleton mask while driving his Harley Davidson around town.) He occasionally branches out.

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## Leading by Example

By Contributing Editor Don Rowe

During the past year or so, *Advocate* founder and editor Viki Mason has provided me a forum to vent each week on various topics of interest of mine (but maybe not yours). During that span, however, I have diligently avoided voicing an opinion on the local political scene (other than the school system) because that area is Viki's domain and I didn't want to intrude on her little bailiwick.

But, after reading an article in the *Aberdeen Excuse*

(*Examiner*) a few weeks back, I must admit I'm going to make an exception to that rule. The article in question was published Nov. 28 and the headline read: "Alderman wants leaves out of gutters." Right under the main headline was a sub-head which stated: "Garth says he saw people raking them into gutters and storm drains."

The article goes on to say: "Cloyd Garth wants the

city to find a way to monitor people's (sic) raking their leaves into the gutters.

"I've seen a lot of people working in their yards this week and they are raking their leaves into the gutters," he said at the November 20 board meeting. "I drove around and saw a lot of gutters filled with leaves and saw seven or eight people raking them into storm drains."

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# A Skyhook for Christmas

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It was several months ago that Brock wandered into our store at the end of his workday to obtain a diet coke from our vending machine. He stuck his head into my office to tell me and the several others gathered there that the new employee (we'll just call Joe for the sake of shielding him from further snickers and snorts) had had a very tough day.

Brock went on to tell us that first thing that morning he had dispatched Joe to fetch the skyhook from Mayor Belle who borrowed it earlier in the week to hang a basketball goal on his garage door. When Joe entered the Mayor's office, His Honor confessed that he had taken the skyhook over to his mortuary that very morning and his son Jeremy would return it to the Electric Department as soon as he was finished with it.

Joe, being determined to succeed in his first assignment, took it upon himself to visit the mortuary thinking, perhaps, Jeremy had finished with the tool. He was indeed. He was so finished, in fact, that he had already returned it to the Electric Department office.

At the Electric office, Adrian Garth assured poor Joe that the skyhook had NOT been returned, but Joe would be held personally responsible for its disappearance if it were not found in short order.

Poor Joe.

As Brock was relating this story to the people in my office (including myself, two building contractors and Kimberly, our esteemed manager who is both female and young) most folks were grinning gleefully as would any full fledged member of the Order. Kimberly, on the other hand, was getting huffy.

"Wait a minute here," she growled. "You mean to tell me the Mayor has been using the taxpayer's skyhook at his home? And THEN he had the nerve to use it at his business?"

The rest of us were overcome with delight – the trap snapped shut.

"Oh, he does it all the time." Brock told her in that matter-of-fact tone perfected only by the consummate prankster. "Come to think of it, most city employees have used it at one time or another."

"Ok. This really ticks me off!" Kimberly spluttered.

"Well, we've lost several in the past three years," Brock said. "That's why I came over. You need to order us a new one."

"Order you a new one? Are you kidding me?" Now she was really fuming. "This is how you use MY tax dollars?"

"Yeah. We need a new one and I can't find the model number for the one we lost, so you'll have to look it up in your records so you can order one just like it. It was the best one we've ever had," Brock said sorrowfully.

"Ok. I'm writing a letter to the editor." She said grinding her teeth.

"You'll need to call Brian Sanders – he'll give you the specifications for it."

It was at this point that I tried to save poor Kimberly from her folly. (Okay, I didn't try too hard.) I looked her in the eye and said, "Kimberly, settle down."

"Oh! I should settle down, huh? Who taught me to be on the lookout for this kind of corruption in the first place?" she demanded. "You, of all people! And YOU think this is funny?"



Kimberly was glowering and muttering obscenities under her breath as she dialed the telephone.

"Ok. Brian, I'm livid," she said, "Why on earth are you loaning city property and tools to city employees to use for their personal projects? I thought you were more responsible than that!" The rest of us were holding our collective breath – which is to say we were all attempting to keep our explosive laughter contained by clapping at least one hand over our mouths.

"The skyhook, of course," she spat into the phone.

Kimberly suddenly stopped speaking and began to stare at the ceiling. The color had drained from her face as she listened to the voice on the phone. A new look came over her – one eyebrow

shot up nearly to her hairline.

"Oh, really?" she asked, "Really?"

"No such thing, you say? Well alrighty, then," she said as she hung up the phone.

It is extraordinarily undignified for a grown woman to be seen rolling around on the floor in fits of hysterical laughter. I try never to engage in such activities. Nevertheless, on this occasion I could not help myself—nor could the others in my company that afternoon. We were all helplessly caught up in the mirthful moment which came at the expense of Kimberly's exquisite innocence.

Now, I'm sure you'd like to know what kind of friend I am to tattle so shamelessly on a co-worker who is guilty only of gullibility. Well, you see our Kimberly has secured a new position and shall be working elsewhere after the first of the year. This unexpected career move will make it impossible for me to repay her for the several wicked pranks she gleefully perpetrated upon my own sweet self during her tenure at East Mississippi Lumber Company. I, therefore, take this opportunity to send a lusty GOTCHA your way Kimberly!

Oh, and best wishes for a prosperous future, my friend. We will miss you more than you'll ever know.

### Your Municipal Employees

**Cecil Belle, Mayor**

**369-4165**

**Ward 1 Alderman Alonzo Sykes**

**369-7705**

**Ward 2 Alderman Cloyd Garth**

**369-5734**

**Ward 3 (Seat Vacant)**

**Ward 4 Alderman Brunson Odom**

**369-2246**

**Ward 5 Alderman Jim Buffington**

**369-4985**



**Becka's Burger Shack**

**North Hwy. 45**

**369-4275**

**Monday thru Wednesday 5 am – 2 pm**

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# Leading by Example

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“He said leaves are supposed to be bagged. ‘We need a way to monitor and enforce this,’ said Garth, Ward 2 alderman.”

What the article doesn’t say, however, is that Garth has had a running dispute with several of his neighbors over the years on this very subject. Only this time, the guilty party has been none other than the esteemed alderman himself who has the nasty habit of either dumping or allowing his hired hands to dispose of his leaves, tree branches and other yard clippings into the drainage ditch across the street from his house. More recently, Garth’s dumping practices led to a nasty confrontation at City Hall following a board meeting in which the alderman was quite abusive to the son of one of his constituents.

Now, in light of Garth’s actual practices, if his official statements as a representative of the City don’t smack of hypocrisy, nothing does. (For those with inquiring minds, the word “hypocrisy” is defined as: “a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles that one does not really possess.” A “hypocrite” is a person “who pretends to be something he really isn’t,” and, by extension, is someone who says, “Do as I say and not as I do.”)

Now this isn’t the first time Garth has been caught talking out both sides of his mouth and I offer as proof, a paper he wrote concerning me in one of his college classes a few years back (see box elsewhere on this page).

For the record, Cloyd and I go back to the early ‘70s when he was a student and I was a teacher and so-called coach here in Aberdeen. Admittedly, I was always fond of Cloyd, as I was of all my students (with the exception of just one or two). My admiration for Cloyd increased

*Here it is another year for football tryouts. My friends and I gear up for the first practice of the year. Each of us is hoping and praying we can perform well enough to secure the positions we have talked about all summer. As boys fourteen years of age and eighth-graders our only desire was to become quarterback, knowing in a white controlled school this would never happen. Why would it? There had never been a black quarterback in the history of the school prior to this time. Little did I know, this year would be a turning point not only in sports in my little town, but also in my life and my perspective about life. This turning point was named Don Rowe.*

*Don Rowe was this short, white man standing about five feet two inches high. However, as I found out later he made up for it in other areas. I thought the man was crazy and hard. But what really knocked me off my feet was his opening statement to us on that day. “I plan to play my best players, whether black or white.” I could not believe my ears. This man not only was going to give a fair shake, but he seemed to have genuine concern for me. I can remember this person following us home to make sure we did not smoke or drink on the way. I can also remember him driving some of the more disadvantaged guys about 13 miles to their homes after practice. Why did he do these things? Why did he stop by the many different homes of the players to see if our homework was done or if we needed help in doing it. After coming to know this man, my friend, I knew this man’s reason was because he had a truly genuine concern for all of us. We were not just objects to win games for him. We, as individuals, were taught by him the importance of a good education. He was one of the best motivators I have ever known. He really fits Bandura’s theory on Social Learning.*

*Don Rowe knew that as poor blacks our exposure to things of the world was very limited. Therefore he took upon himself the task of offering us these things. I vividly remember him wanting to carry us to New Orleans and the school would not give him the money. This would have been a deterrent to most people, however he was not like the so-called “horn” group. I guess he was what sociology labels a deviant. He certainly went against lots of things he deemed wrong. All I can do is applaud (sic) the fact that he was who he was. He would not be defeated, (sic) He raised the money on his own and the trip became a reality to us.*

*You know, had this man not gone miles and miles beyond the call of duty, I would not be in school now finishing up a degree. Don had such a great impact on my life because he was not only my coach but he chose to become my friend. I was just not the football player, I was Cloyd, the human being with needs, wants and feelings. I did become Aberdeen’s first black quarterback. Whenever I put on that uniform it was with the greatest pride an individual could muster. Yes, I know my life would be different had it not been a Don Rowe in it. And to this day he still fills what would have been a void in my life. Guess what? We are still friends and he now respects me as I have always respected (sic) him. He asks me for advice. The right person can make a difference in your life. Hopefully I will be that right person for some kid.*

*Cloyd Garth*

somewhat when, after plugging away under adverse conditions (family, work, etc.) for many years, he finally earned his college degree and then he really made me proud when he became involved in the local political scene in the early ‘90s.

If memory serves me correctly, his first run for alderman ended in defeat at the hands of the late Mary Elizabeth Hamilton in 1992. But he bounced back and won his alderman’s seat by the slimmest of margins in 1996 and has been a fixture on the local political scene ever since.

We parted ways several years ago, however, when I sought a seat on the local school board and enlisted his help in an effort to achieve that goal. During several lengthy visits to his home and to his workplace, I reminded him of his essay and how I supposedly made such an impact on his life and told him I would appreciate his vote at the upcoming board meeting (like he had my vote in his campaign).

Much to my dismay, however, Cloyd chose to go in another direction and voted for a person without a college degree whose resume indicated he was seeking “employment” as a school board member, who listed his “martial” (marital) status as married and who “fudged” on what little college education he did have. That person did have one difference I couldn’t overcome, that being he was black.

That episode and several other ugly incidents in which Cloyd has been involved in recently have left me extremely disappointed in him and his antics and, needless to say, I don’t think I have to tell you what he can do with his college essay!



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*“Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears a very close resemblance to the first.”*

*...Ronald Reagan*

*(And I never even suspected the Gipper had actually visited Aberdeen in an election year!)*