

“THE LESSONS I’VE LEARNT”

Norman Reedus

From being hit by a bus to dealing with eagle-eyed fans, as season seven of hit drama *The Walking Dead* returns, the star reveals how hardships led him to success

THE WALKING DEAD (S7B) EXPRESS Mondays from February 13 at 1.30pm, ENCORE at 7.30pm on FX [119] available in the DRAMA pack

I’ve learned what it would take to survive if the zombie apocalypse really happened. You’ve got to surround yourself with people you trust. You could go to an island or stay on top of a building, but sooner or later it’s the people around you that are going to make or break you. It’s like my mantra in life, minus the zombies, although there are some of those out there too!

Playing Daryl has helped me overcome a lot of my own issues. I travelled around a lot as a kid and went to lots of different schools – I was always the new kid. If I found a pack of people that I felt comfortable with, I’d run with them and I’m still very much like that now. So going through my own experience and playing out Daryl’s journey has been really healing. A lot of fans of the show identify with my character because everybody deals with those issues, like, ‘Is it okay to be me?’ I get lots of crying fans approach me everywhere I go and lots of mail telling me Daryl helped them get through chemo or another tough time in their life. The journey of Daryl and the journey of Norman have been very similar to that, coming to this place that it’s okay to be me.

I understand what job security means. It’s such a weird business because it is so up and down with having a job, not having a job or looking for new jobs. I met Jon Voight once, who is in one of my favourite movies of all time – *Midnight Cowboy*. He said even the best actors he’s worked with, no matter how

much they’ve accomplished, when they finish a really good job they always feel lost and worry about their next job. Being on a show this long and a show that I love, with people that I love, has really given me a lot of confidence as a person, a man and a friend.

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Riding motorcycles is more than a hobby, it’s a lifestyle. Living in a rural area outside Atlanta, Georgia making *The Walking Dead* has really changed me as a person. If you like your job it’s not hard to go to work, but it’s also important to have other interests. So to be able to ride motorcycles with my friends in the country is very freeing and liberating. Jeffrey Dean Morgan [who plays Negan] and I may play enemies on the show but we take off on our motorcycles together every chance we get. You have to make your own decisions on the open road and it feels very much like a cowboy kind of life, which suits me.

I’ve learned to be grateful for not being an overnight sensation. When you are a young actor and you are looking for work, and you are hustling, it’s tough. People say, ‘You’re an overnight sensation’, but the truth is I’ve done a million jobs and been rejected a bazillion times. I lived off 12 dollars a month for a long time. Now that I’m playing a role I’m proud of, I’d be happy to keep playing the role until I was 85 if they let me.

I try not to focus on the downside of fame. Everywhere I go – going to the grocery store or being in a parking lot – I know it’s going to be a ‘thing’. I was on a plane once and grabbed a sandwich before I boarded. I started eating it on the plane and I looked around and realised everybody near me was filming me eating! I had to go into the bathroom on the plane to eat it in peace. That can be hard. But I try to remain positive. It’s a small price to pay.

Everything that’s happened to me has led me to this point in my life. Years ago I went to the Berlin International Film Festival and was going to a friend’s concert when I got hit by a bus. I got a titanium eye socket and I was in the German hospital for a long time. When it happened I was supposed to go back to my hotel and meet a director to talk about a movie. Instead, we started this weird email relationship and he ended up making a film about me being trapped in a hospital in Berlin called *Meet Me in Berlin* that won a prize at a Danish film festival. So you have to look on the bright side, right? ■

WORDS: JENNY COONEY CARRILLO. PHOTO: PETER YANG/AUGUST/RAVEN & SNOW

