

# Rosa and Norm

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On March 25 they will be together for the first time ever. A seemingly odd Alabama-Iowa couple, in some ways, they were very similar. They both will be dressed simply, reflecting their humble origins. Both grew up on family farms raised by parents who had emerged from difficult circumstances.

Rosa was born a year before Norm in Tuskegee, Alabama, a town still heavily impacted by the legacy of slavery, but filled with some hope for the future from the newly established Institute created by Booker T. Washington and Iowa educated George Washington Carver.

Norm's parents were the children of Norwegian immigrants who had left their home country due to the great potato famine that ravaged that land as it did Ireland. He was born on a farm in Howard County in northeast Iowa on March 25.

Both had educational setbacks. Due to family hardships, Rosa had to drop out of high school for a year, but eventually returned. Norm was at first denied admission to the University of Minnesota and had to take courses in their general college to demonstrate that he was capable of handling work at that academic level.

They also learned early on traits of character that would stay with them all through their lives and shape their destinies. Among them were persistence, tenacity and a dogged determination in the face of adversity. For Norm he learned this: through laboring on his family farm; on the wrestling mat in high school and college [where his coach drilled into him the "never give up philosophy"], and by coming face-to-face with the devastating hunger and homelessness he encountered on the streets of Minneapolis during the Great Depression.

Rosa had the infinitely more difficult challenges of racism and segregation to confront both growing up and throughout her life. She learned these traits with the chilling threats

of the Ku Klux Klan marches past her home and the thousands of everyday deprecations that Norm never had to endure.

In the 1940s the paths of their lives diverged, but their defining events both came at about the same time: hers in Montgomery Alabama; and his in remote parts of the Mexican province of Sonora. Rosa's powerful moment came on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, when, hardened by a life filled with the evil of segregation and inequality, it all came to a head.

By now, you will have figured out that Rosa is Rosa Parks, whose courage and refusal to give up her seat on that bus marked her as one of the iconic and heroic figures of the American civil rights movement.

Norm is Norman Borlaug, who having obtained his Ph.D. in plant pathology at Minnesota, had gone to Mexico in the 1940s where he would labor among the poorest farmers for two decades. Despite a series of failures, he never gave up and eventually made his breakthrough in developing high yielding, disease resistant "miracle wheat," which lifted farmers out of hunger and poverty.

Norm then took his new approach to agriculture to India and Pakistan in the 1960s, as those countries faced imminent mass starvation. This was the same decade that Rosa Parks' actions helped lead to the single greatest period of modern transformative civil rights advances that swept across America affecting several hundred million people.

Borlaug's transformative agricultural innovations saved hundreds of millions from famine and likely death in South Asia. It was the beginning of the Green Revolution, which would become the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in human history. In 1970, Borlaug was called to his ancestral home in Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, the first agricultural scientist ever so honored

You are probably wondering, however, why these two remarkable persons, so different in so many ways, are being mentioned in the same article. The reason is this: On March 25,

100 years to the day he was born, Norman Borlaug's statue will be unveiled in Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol.

With Iowa governor Terry Branstad's urging, the bipartisan Iowa legislature voted two years ago to bring one of its two statues in the US Capitol home and replace it with one of Borlaug, Iowa's greatest hero and the man of whom it is said, "he saved more lives than any other person who ever lived." The South Dakota artist Benjamin Victor, chosen by the Borlaug Statue Committee I chair, has done a spectacular job in re-creating Norm's appearance right down to his wrinkled work clothes that was so characteristic of him, as he stands notebook in hand in a Mexican wheat field.

Perhaps by chance — or maybe grand design — Borlaug's statue will be unveiled right next to that of Rosa Parks which was installed just a few months ago with President Obama offering powerful remarks. Her statue shows her in her everyday clothes seated, as intransigent in bronze as she was in the flesh on December 1, 1955, when she refused the order to give up her seat and thus helped spark the civil rights revolution that swept our land.

So different in many ways, Rosa Parks and Norman Borlaug share the fact that both have received the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the two highest civilian honors our country can award. On Rosa Parks gold-medal it is written "Mother of the Modern Civil Rights Movement." On the front of the pedestal of Borlaug's statue is inscribed "The Father of the Green Revolution."

It seems so fitting there almost side-by-side in one of the most hallowed spaces of our American democracy will be these two individuals of humble origins, both depicted in their working attire, so different from almost all of the statues of political leaders, usually outfitted in their finest coats, who populate Statuary Hall. These two Americans of diverse backgrounds, who never sought publicity or the limelight for themselves, are now, cast in bronze, together emanating a glow that radiates inspiration to the millions who will come to see them.

