

Six Things You Didn't Know About Translation's John Norman

His Dream Job Turned Out to Be not
so Dreamy

By [Malika Toure](#). Published on August 15, 2014

Industry veteran John Norman joined the Translation team earlier this year as chief creative officer.

Mr. Norman proved his creative chops working in-house at Benetton, and leading celebrated campaigns such as Coca-Cola's "Happiness Factory" franchise and Nike's "Joga Bonita" out of Wieden & Kennedy, as well as HP's "+HP" campaign out of Goodby, Silverstein & Partners. Prior to Translation, he served in chief creative roles at both The Martin Agency and TBWA/Chiat/Day, L.A. At the latter, he oversaw work on Gatorade as well as Adidas' campaign for the World Cup this year.



John Norman

But there's more to Mr. Norman than experience leading creative for brands like Nike, Coca-Cola and Gatorade -- you'll find out in this week's edition of Six Things.

1. He was born in the Texas state psychiatric hospital. John came from a broken family, his mother suffered from mental illness and he was raised as an only child by his grandmother in South Dallas on government welfare services. As a result, he believes that a lot of creativity comes from being poor. "With a deck of cards or dominoes I'd make crazy house models. In an open field I'd make believe I was in an army," he said.

2. His last name on his birth certificate is Eisenberg. John was adopted his senior year by his grade-school basketball coach, Ralph Norman, and legally changed his name after high school.

3. His worst job was supposed to be his best job. In his ninth grade summer, John took a job at a cheerleading-uniform manufacturer because he thought there would be cheerleaders working there. He ended up being sent to work in the thread cage to hand out industrial spools of thread to elderly seamstresses. The ladies had him draw pictures for them all day. Popular requests were animals and replicas of their homes based on pictures they would bring in.

4. He worked as a construction worker to pay for college and his specialty was carpentry. "I love the finish work, the detail work. I love building a house, but the thing I really look forward to is the wood trim and the cabinetry," he said. He also believes that you can tell a lot about a man by how he handles a hammer. In his own words: "If it takes him 20 whacks, chances are he's afraid of something, if he

misses on his first whack and puts a dent in the wood, he's too aggressive. It should take three whacks max to get a nail in."

5. He took up road cycling while living in Amsterdam and rode on the Nike amateur team. He tackled two of the hardest stages in the Tour de France -- L'Alpe d'Huez and Le Col du Tourmalet -- finishing both times, but not without crying. "It was like riding on the moon," he said, "the fog was so thick you were basically in a cloud. When the cloud would clear, the snow had made Mother Earth raw, like everything was brought down to its primordial phase."

6. His family lives on a horse farm in Manakin-Sabot, Virginia. John plays basketball with his two sons, watches his two girls ride horses competitively -- the family owns three -- and he occasionally hammers a fence board or two. John once told his daughters that horses are "like land dolphins in their gracefulness" and they will never let him forget it.