

On the Death of Faron Young
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Faron Young was a country music star from the late 1950s to the 1980s, a honky-tonk singer and entertainer in the mold of Hank Williams. By the mid-1990s, alcoholism had taken its toll, his marriage had ended, he was estranged from his children, his career was over, and he lived alone, 64 years old. These are excerpts from the last pages of his biography by Diane Dickman, *Live Fast, Love Hard: The Faron Young Story* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).

“Bob Lowe, take the money [on the nightstand] and diamond ring is for you—thanks to you and Shirley for loveing [sic] me all these years. The time is 11:40. Dec - 9 -1996.”

Faron had fired two rounds with a 38-caliber pistol. One bullet went into the headboard, and the other went through his head and landed by the window.

Robyn [a son] rushed to the hospital. Faron lay in an emergency room bed, a turban of bandages wrapped around his head and to the tip of his nose. A respirator assisted his breathing. An intern showed Robyn the x-rays and pointed out the entrance and exit wounds.

A nurse told Faron to take a deep breath and he obeyed.

Michael Frazier [a friend] informed the hospital of Faron’s living will and that he did not want to be kept alive by artificial means.

Faron was moved to intensive care, where a neurosurgeon cleaned his wounds and removed the respirator, yet he continued to breathe. Although totally paralyzed on the left side of his body, he could move his right side.

The neurosurgeon explained to Robyn that he could close off blood vessels, try to repair damaged tissue, and install plates to seal the wound. Because of the massive damage, he estimated a 10 to 15% chance of survival, and that would include paralysis and blindness.

He explained that the natural course of death from a gunshot wound—easy breathing, a temperature increase that indicates the kidneys shutting down, the skin turning yellow, the fever breaking, and then, several hours later, labored breathing. The neurosurgeon told Robyn that he believed that hearing would be the last sense lost before death.

“Dad,” Robyn said, “I don’t know whether you like me being here or not. I know you and me haven’t spoke to each other in a long time, and I just want you to know I’ve never stopped loving you.” Faron squeezed his hand.

Hilda [his former wife] picked up the phone to call their other children. She hadn’t seen Faron since the divorce.

The natural progression of death occurred exactly as the neurosurgeon had described. Hilda and their four children were with him. Robyn stood with his hand on Faron’s chest, feeling it rise and fall. Faron took a breath, let it out, and his chest did not rise again. The only sound in the room came from crying.

Four years later, in 2000, Faron Young was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.