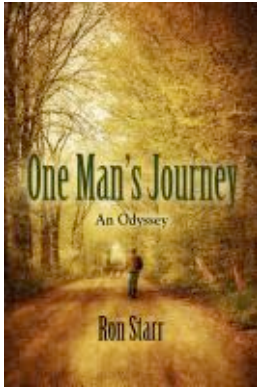


A photograph of a man walking away from the viewer down a dirt path in a forest. The trees are covered in vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. The path is covered with fallen leaves and leads into the distance where a small clearing is visible. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

One Man's Journey

An Odyssey

Ron Starr



For most humans, life is an odyssey following a map prescribed by their deity. But what of a narcissist driven only by an inflated sense of self, a man defined by contempt for the weak - and the strong - if they challenged him. One Man's Journey is the story of a narcissist who loses his family, his business, his wealth, his power, his prestige, his identity, and his life-at birth.

One Man's Journey

An Odyssey

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/5825.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

YOUR FREE EXCERPT APPEARS BELOW. ENJOY!

ONE MAN's JOURNEY

Copyright © 2011 Ron Starr

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-61434-716-3

Paperback ISBN 978-1-61434-717-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the author's prior written permission.

Printed in the United States of America

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons living or dead is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2011

1

Born and nurtured during a childhood scarred by extreme suffering and anger, youthful rage demanded reentry into G.W.'s REM sleep.

Weakened by intense dread that he would once again fail to repel the nighttime invader threatening to reawaken fury he had buried years before, G.W. cried out for his mother, the one person he hoped would save him.

His mother remained as silent as her grave at midnight.

G.W. fought to regain control, banish the interloper threatening to add insult to injury by interrupting the hushed darkness protecting his sleep.

He failed.

G.W.'s breathing and heart rate increased at a brisk pace as he fell deeper and deeper into the second of his five nightly REM stages. His large voluntary muscles paralyzed, G.W.'s face, his fingers, and especially his eyes, twitched in a show of rebellion at their forced master/slave relationship to his superior muscle group. Racing towards an ultimate coupling with the source of his youthful rage,

RON STARR

G.W.'s brain activity forced perspiration to erupt, soak his sheet and pillow.

Finally, G.W. relented, allowed the nightmare to consume his sleep.

As in all previous dreams, the strident ringing of his uncle's phone in the middle of the night heralded the intruder's arrival, the death of G.W.'s mother, and the end of his childhood.

"Yes?" his uncle whispered into the receiver.

G.W. knew who was on the other end, the doctor at the cramped and dingy public health clinic serving only those in Miami that society considered the dregs, humans relegated to steerage-class status. In his dream state, G.W. listened to his uncle's words, words issued in hushed tones, but words G.W. easily extracted from the depths of his memory.

"Doctor Albers? How's my sister?"

G.W.'s uncle's face drooped like overheated candle wax as he listened to the doctor's response. "I'm sorry. Your sister passed away from surgical complications. We did our best."

"I understand," G.W.'s uncle said. "God bless you for trying."

As in previous dream reruns, G.W. screamed, "Nooooo!" Tears flowing, he buried his face in his pillow until his uncle approached, attempted to comfort him. "George?" His uncle said. "They tried but couldn't save her. She's in God's hands."

G.W. leaped from his bed. Pounding on his uncle's chest, "There is no God for us!" he screamed. "He let her die! If she'd been white or rich she'd still be alive! I hate all white people!" Sobs racking his young body, G.W. collapsed on his bed.

The dream evaporated as G.W. cried out in an unintelligible plea for his mother's life. As his cry disappeared into the moist air floating through his window from Puget Sound to the west of his modest three-bedroom West Seattle home, he heard his wife's voice. "George! The phone! Answer it!"

Aroused by his wife's demand but not yet awake, G.W. blinked once and glanced at the digital clock across the room. Like a lady of the night offering her wares in a Kellogg or Wallace, Idaho red light district, the oversized numbers flashed 1:02. The deadly late hour,

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

heightened by a deep foreboding of what unknown tragedy awaited him if he answered the incessant and shrill ringing of his bedside phone, G.W. hesitated. Fear clutched his heart in a manner he hadn't experienced since the night of his mother's death.

G.W. chastised himself, tried to ignore the potential reality behind a middle-of-the-night call. "It's probably a wrong number," he said to his wife.

The effort to assign the call to other than unexpected death, however, failed miserably.

Hand shaking, G.W. reached for the phone sitting like a sentry poised to wake the dead, but deliver news only the dead need not fear. G.W. pushed thoughts of his mother aside and struggled to shake the last remnants of sleep from his mind. He fumbled with the handset and nearly dropped it on the floor. He recovered. "Hello?" he said in a thick voice.

"George Martin?" an unfamiliar man asked.

Fear erupted like a locomotive bearing down on a damsel in distress. Only his wife referred to G.W. as George. "Ye...yes?"

"This is Detective Ambrose. I'm with..."

G.W. shot into a sitting position. "Detective?"

"Yes, sir. Detective Ambrose. I'm with the Seattle Police Department."

G.W.'s mind cleared in an instant. He pressed the receiver to his ear. "Police? I...I don't understand."

"George?" he heard Maria say. "What's wrong?"

He shushed her with a wave of his hand and concentrated on the detective's next statement.

"I'm investigating a robbery and attempted homicide, sir. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

G.W.'s mind raced with possibilities but failed to land on any reason for the call. "Who...? I mean, why are you calling me?"

"Do you know a man named...?" The detective paused as if searching for a name. G.W. heard him shout to another man. "Tim. Hey, Tim. What's the name on the ID?"

G.W. couldn't hear Tim's response.

RON STARR

"His ID says his name's Malcolm McCloud," the detective said. "We found a note in his room. It's addressed to you at the number I called. It's signed, Colt. Are you George Martin?"

G.W.'s mind crumbled. He remained silent.

"Sir, do you know Mr. McCloud?"

G.W.'s head and neck collapsed into his shoulders. His mind raged with questions. Colt? Robbery and attempted homicide? It can't be Colt. He'd never...

"Mr. Martin. Did you hear me?"

G.W. cleared the diminishing cobwebs of sleep inhibiting his mind. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, attempted to quiet his raging thoughts. He returned to the detective. "I heard you, but Colt wouldn't hurt a fly. You must be mistaken."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Martin. I didn't make myself clear. Mr. McCloud was the victim, not the perpetrator. He intervened after some thugs tried to rob a woman. She's in the hospital but she'll survive."

"The victim? Then...then Colt's not in jail? He's okay?"

"I'm afraid not. Mr. McCloud. I'm sorry to be the one to inform you, but Mr. McCloud is in a coma and near death. He's not expected to live beyond..."

"Beyond what?"

Recognizing the intense grief in G.W.'s voice the detective stopped, rethought his response. "I'm sorry, sir. Mr. McCloud's hanging on by...well, just understand he's not expected to see another sunset. I have no idea why he's alive. By all rights he should be dead."

Stunned by the detective's words both because of the picture they evoked and the man's seeming immunity to such a tragic event, G.W. remained quiet until he sensed Maria tugging at his arm. "What's going on?" she said. "Has something happened to Colt?"

G.W. shook her question off with a wave.

"Are you a relative, sir?" the detective asked.

"No...no. A good...his best friend."

"Do you know how we might contact a relative, parents, siblings, anyone?"

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

"Colt...uh...Colt didn't have any I know of."

"I guess you'll have to do, sir."

"Do?"

"Sorry, sir. Procedures."

G.W. listened to the detective's words without grasping their meaning. His mind raced with thoughts of his friend, a man hanging onto life by a thread.

"Mr. Martin?" G.W. heard over the phone.

Shocked out of his reverie, "Yes. Yes, I'm here. Can I see him?"

"He's in intensive care at Harborview."

"I'll be there in thirty minutes."

"When you get here, ask for me. Someone will direct you."

G.W. mumbled a few unintelligible words. He started to hang up when he heard the detective offer a final comment. "A word of caution, Mr. Martin, your friend's not a pretty sight." He disconnected.

G.W. sat in bed with the phone cradled to his ear as he tried to grasp all he'd heard.

"George?" Maria said. "What's going on?"

G.W. laid the receiver in its cradle and turned to his wife. A light mist covered his eyes. "It's Colt...he...he's in the hospital, in a coma, not expected to live." G.W. paused. He felt himself plunging down a slippery mountain slope leading to a pit filled only with despair. His mind searched deep for something to grab onto. He found his wife, clung to her.

"What happened?" Maria said after she felt her husband's shoulders relax. "We just saw Colt. They must be mistaken."

G.W. relayed everything he'd heard from Detective Ambrose.

Maria remained silent as she tried to comprehend G.W.'s words.

G.W. dabbed a final tear. "I need to see him before he dies. Maybe it's not him. Maybe...I don't know but I need to go."

Maria touched her husband's cheek. "You dress. I'll get Amora up. Maybe I can help."

G.W. stood before she finished. "Don't wake her. She needs her sleep. Remember what the doctor said. I shouldn't be long." He

RON STARR

slipped out of bed, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt. He inhaled multiple times to calm a rapidly beating heart threatening to annihilate the blood vessels coursing through his temples. The effort helped. He leaned over and kissed Maria on the cheek. "Back soon."

"I love you George. Call me if you need anything."

His mind consumed with swirling thoughts of, 'What' and 'Why,' questions he failed to answer, G.W. gave Maria a weak smile and walked from the bedroom.

G.W. drove through darkened streets wet from an earlier drizzle. His mind's eye rolled in reverse until he came to the day he first met Malcolm 'Colt' McCloud, a day marked by comments and attitudes reflecting distrust and extreme dislike between two strangers forced to share a cab. G. W. knew he and Colt survived their initial clash of personalities only by the grace of a power neither expected to intervene.

Twelve months prior and nearing 3:00 p.m., G.W. rolled his cab up to the head of the line waiting for fares at SeaTac International Airport. The rain had stopped but the thick clouds made it appear that dusk had already arrived. G.W. followed his usual routine. He said a quiet prayer for a passenger needing a ride well outside the fifty to seventy-five dollar range, plus tip. After five hours and three fares G.W. realized his total income for the day barely covered expenses.

G.W. stopped his cab at the curb in front of his next fare. He heard the back passenger door creak open. He glanced in the

RON STARR

rearview mirror and watched as a man tossed a briefcase through the door, dove into the backseat, and without waiting for the door to close, said, "59 Magnolia. It's in Towering Cedars. You know the gated community in Redmond?"

G.W. gave his best impression of Rochester, Jack Benny's gregarious sidekick. "Yes, sir! Driven people there a few times. It's magnificent, a place I hope to afford some day."

The fare scowled. "Can the small talk. Just drive this piece of crap. And don't take I-5 and 520. I need to think. I can't do that on freeways."

Confused by the minor affront, G.W. maintained his pleasant attitude. "How about back roads to Issaquah and up East Lake Sammamish Parkway. That okay?"

"What the hell else would I mean?"

Mildly distressed by his passenger's lack of even basic civility, G.W. ignored the snide comment. He'd driven many haggard and gruff travelers, people who for whatever reason took out their frustrations on the innocent people around them. G.W. decided to keep the air light in the cab. He relied on the fact that most of his fares appreciated the opportunity to share small talk with a stranger who flitted in and out of their lives without asking for anything other than a decent tip. "Lots of excitement today," G.W. said. "Were you on the plane from Portland?"

"What didn't you understand about canning the small talk?" the passenger said in a voice dripping sarcasm.

Well versed in dealing with people of all stripes and personalities, G.W. decided this particular fare would rank at the bottom of his 'shithead' list. He remained silent, placed his cab in gear, and pulled away from the curb. Before leaving the airport proper, however, G.W. glanced in the rearview mirror and watched his latest fare. He saw an agitated man who continually drummed his fingers on G.W.'s shabby vinyl door panels while staring out the side window at the baggage claim level swimming by. G.W. couldn't judge his fare's age, height, or size exactly, but after thousands of such passengers he guessed early forties, six-two to six-three, and two-fifteen to two-twenty. G.W. ventured a silent guess that the man

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

worked out on a regular basis but found as he aged, the belly fat refused to stop its slow but steady growth. The man wore his disheveled blond hair cut short. Something about him seemed familiar but G.W. couldn't place him. As G.W. watched, the man reached up, scratched his chiseled chin, and using his fingers, combed through his silken hair.

G.W. was normally a poor judge of men's fine threads since his usual clothes included secondhand jeans, Dockers, and sweatshirts in various weights, all bought at St. Vincent DePaul's. But glancing at his current fare, G.W. guessed that he wore either Armani or Brioni, suits G.W. salivated over in year-old GQ magazines during his frequent visits to the medical specialists treating his daughter, Amora.

In pouring rain, G.W. pulled off I-405 onto the NE Park Drive exit. At the light he turned right on a route taking him to Issaquah and onto East Lake Sammamish Parkway. As he waited behind a line of cars at a second traffic light he ventured another glance at his passenger. He found his fare staring at the posted livery license that allowed G.W. to earn a meager living.

The man raised his eyes. "George Washington Martin? That's your name? Can't you people ever decide who you are?"

Stunned by the accusatory comment and tone, G.W. said nothing.

The man continued. "First you people were Negroes or colored people, then you were Blacks, then you were African-Americans, all named after powder-wigged presidents or African jungle bunnies with names not even you can pronounce."

Not easily angered, the fare's slashing commentary made G.W.'s blood boil. He seethed. The light changed but he remained stationary. He placed his arm over the back of his seat and faced his unknown passenger. "'You people'? I'm truly sorrowful you used that derogatory term, Massa. Because you're forcing me to ask you politely to leave my cab. I'm confident another one will be along in a few hours, although it wouldn't surprise me if he refused to stop and accept a fare from a lily white cornbread asshole such as your eminence. My people are still pissed off you won your damn war.

RON STARR

The British outlawed slavery thirty years before ya'll found it in your hearts to free us poor Niggers. By the way, my ancestors escaped your hellhole of tyranny before your revolution. They found life saner and safer in the Caribbean Islands. Now, before I evict you forcibly – get the hell out of my cab!"

The passenger didn't move. Instead, he smiled and then broke into laughter. "You've got spunk, George Washington Martin," he said. "I like that. I admire a man who's not afraid to stand up for his beliefs and his ancestors. We Scots have always responded that way." He stuck out his hand. "McCloud, Colt McCloud."

Stunned by the man's words, and his nonchalant attitude when threatened, G.W. remained silent until he heard the bleating horns of cars blocked by his cab. "Shit," he said. He spun the steering wheel and pulled his car into a half-deserted strip mall. Again he turned toward his passenger. "I don't know who you are, mister, but you have a strange way of introducing yourself. And for your information, I wasn't named after a powder-wigged president. My full name is George Washington Carver Martin. My mother named me. She thought I might follow in Mr. Carver's footsteps. My wife calls me George and my friends call me, G.W. You, however, are neither my wife nor my friend. Therefore, assuming I find your behavior and foul mouth properly contrite over the next thirty

RON STARR

seconds, I might allow you to remain in my cab. And assuming I do, I might also allow you to call me Mr. Martin as my students do."

The passenger's smile never faded. "Damn. You truly are a spirited one, Mr. Martin, and a teacher to boot. Good for you. We need more teachers, educators who aren't sheep following the NEA's dictates."

"You're down to twenty seconds."

The passenger heard rain pounding on the cab's roof. He considered his options. He chose discretion. "Sorry. Sometimes I take my frustrations out on the closest person. My rotten day, however, shouldn't concern you. I apologize for my behavior and my, uh, my nasty comments."

G.W. knew the weather as much as his guilty conscience drove the man's apology. But he let him off the hook as Maria would have counseled. Although his days of hating all white people had passed after a few years, it wasn't until he married Maria that he truly understood that people of all colors were equally capable of hating and loving. Whites held only one of many franchises in the world of hate. "I reluctantly...and temporarily, accept your apology," G.W. said. "But I reserve the right to reverse my decision. Besides, if I dumped you here, you'd catch pneumonia and die while waiting for another ride. I'd be forced to live with the guilt for at least ten seconds."

The man laughed and again stuck out his hand. "Thanks."

G.W. gripped his fare's hand the way Father Vasquez had taught him, firm but not crushing. "What'd you say your name was?"

"McCloud, Malcolm McCloud but call me Colt. I prefer it."

"Nicknames are for friends, and you aren't one. Mr. McCloud suggests respect, and you haven't earned it. You're in my cab. I make the rules. So, I'll stick with, Mac."

"You're the boss, at least until the rain stops or I get home."

The comment reinforced G.W.'s opinion that his passenger refused to accept a subordinate role regardless of circumstances. "McCloud?" he said. "You're Scottish?"

"Aye. That I am, second generation and proud of it."

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

"Well, good for you," G.W. said.

Colt ignored G.W.'s mild mockery. "Ever heard of me?" he said.

G.W. paused for a moment. He searched his memory. Nothing clicked. "Sorry. Can't say I have."

"Merlin Systems?"

"The big complex outside Redmond?"

A smug expression crossed Colt's face. "The same. It's mine, and a hundred thousand shareholders. I'm one of two founders and CEO. We're the leading supplier of digital healthcare products and services in the country."

G.W. grinned. "Well ain't that nice."

Colt's beaming expression transformed into a scowl but quickly widened into a grin. "I sense, Mr. Martin, that your words don't match your thoughts?"

"You're very perceptive."

"I like to think so, but forget your sarcastic comment. Do you have the faintest idea what my firm has done for health care in this country?"

"Made it more expensive than anywhere in the world?"

"You want the best, you pay for the best."

G.W. turned and locked eyes with his fare. "And if a person can't afford it?"

"Not my concern."

G.W. slumped in his seat, thought of his daughter's terminal illness and the impossibly expensive treatment demanded by doctors to give her a chance of life beyond her second year. "But it's mine," he said in little more than a whisper. "Without a miracle..."

Colt failed to hear G.W.'s comment but noticed his distant expression. "I'm sorry, but what'd you say?"

G.W.'s mind returned to the cab. "Nothing. Nothing. But tell me, Mac. What've you done to help ensure the poorest of the poor receive adequate health care?"

"I pay exorbitant taxes, personal and corporate. Much of which goes to Medicaid."

"How's that working out for those without health insurance?"

RON STARR

"Not my concern."

"That's the second time you've used that phrase. It's also what some Christians said as the German SS hauled their Jewish neighbors off to the death camps."

Colt's face turned from deep pink to crimson as he fought the desire to attack an argument he felt positive he'd win. Instead, he calmed before saying, "Fewer than seventy percent of eligible people sign up for Medicaid. It's not my fault they're too dumb to take advantage of another taxpayer handout."

"Or have too much pride?"

"Maybe. But either way, why blame me or millions of other hardworking taxpayers?"

"I don't," G.W. said. "And I don't pretend to have the answers. But the richest country in the world should be able to treat its sick citizens, insurance or not."

Colt leaned forward. "So, you're advocating government run health care where everyone gets lousy service and the dead pile up, especially the elderly who don't meet some bureaucratic cost-benefit analysis."

"I'm not advocating anything. I just think..."

"Think what?"

"I think health care is a right."

Colt grabbed G.W.'s headrest. "A right? What right? And where's this supposed right mentioned in our Constitution? Or is it like the right to privacy our distinguished Supreme Court wove from thin air in their mistaken belief the federal government would follow through and provide free abortion clinics so the elites could rid the country of all the unwanted dregs in the ghettos?"

"That's ridiculous!"

"Is it? Read some of the Black Robe's later writings. Instead of empty ghettos, however, they created an unintended war that still threatens to tear our country apart. If they'd just left the issue alone, the people of this country would've eventually reached a consensus."

"And which consensus would that be?"

"I don't know. The Court never gave us the opportunity to discuss it outside angry exchanges between extremists."

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

"And which side of the debate do you fall on?"

Colt considered the question for a few seconds. "Ambivalence," he said.

"That's not a side, Mac. It's a fence you're straddling either because you have no strong beliefs, or because you're afraid of the consequences if you express your beliefs to the wrong person."

Colt stared out the cab as he considered G.W.'s words. He shook off the slap. "I've never been afraid to express my opinions to anyone. But forget me, Mr. Martin, which side has your support?"

"Like most people in this country, I don't believe in abortion. I believe each child is a gift from God, a gift to be nurtured and loved."

"And a woman's right to privacy if she doesn't agree with you?"

G.W. didn't hesitate. "A right to privacy isn't mentioned in the Constitution, although it's been noted in Supreme Court decisions that limited government intrusion in private affairs. The 4th and 5th amendments are perfect examples."

Colt stared at G.W. and considered the answer he'd heard. He never expected a simple cabdriver to provide well-constructed arguments to support his beliefs on complex subjects, especially arguments requiring a combination of facts, force, and nuance. "Setting abortion aside, Mr. Martin, where do the rights of people in this country end?" he said. "I live in a six-bedroom house and drive a car costing more than the average cabdriver, no insult intended, makes in three, hell, five years. Should we all live in comparable houses and drive comparable cars? If so, we'd all be living in mud huts and driving a Yugo."

"Now you truly are being ridiculous."

"I don't disagree, but forget Yugos and mud huts. What about people who sneak across our border, you know, illegal aliens? Should we line them up and shoot them as the Iranians do? Or maybe jail them as the Mexicans and other countries do? Or should we give them all the rights of citizens, including as you say, taxpayer provided health care at no cost?"

G.W. refused to cower. "We're all humans. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity."

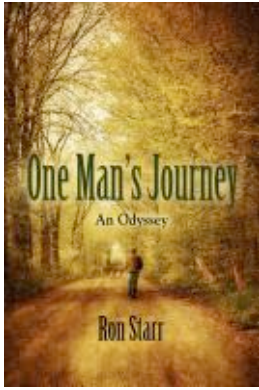
RON STARR

"If your argument wins the day this country will sink into oblivion."

"Have faith. God takes care of those who take care of their brothers."

"I have faith in no one but myself."

"You've made that perfectly clear," G.W. said.



For most humans, life is an odyssey following a map prescribed by their deity. But what of a narcissist driven only by an inflated sense of self, a man defined by contempt for the weak - and the strong - if they challenged him. One Man's Journey is the story of a narcissist who loses his family, his business, his wealth, his power, his prestige, his identity, and his life-at birth.

One Man's Journey

An Odyssey

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/5825.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**