

TEXAS Tainted Dreams is an action-packed adventure of one man's search for his dream and his struggle to overcome loss on the Texas frontier.

TEXAS Tainted Dreams

By Vivian McCullough

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TEXAS

Tainted Dreams



*One man's search for his
dream, and his struggle
to overcome loss*

Vivian McCullough

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CHAPTER ONE

June 1846

Waiting is the hardest part. Time slows down to a crawl, days seem to last for years, and your mind thinks up everything that could go wrong. When you're a teenager and your best friend, who is also your brother, is out fighting, you find yourself watching the road for any sign of his return rather than concentrating on chores.

It had been over three months since fourteen-year-old William Riley Gotcher had received any news about James. It was disappointing to hear that he had extended his tour of duty with the Texas Rangers. Those months were now up and waiting for James to come home, or God forbid, a rider coming to tell him James would never be home again, was agonizing. Sometimes, the feelings of being separated from James would hit him without warning and he would remember when he was separated from him and his sister as a Pawnee captive. His brow would wrinkle, and his hands become clammy when he remembered his parents

being killed and scalped. His heart would race and move into his throat at the thought that it could happen to James. Anxiety would radiate through him, and he would tremble until something finally calmed inside and he realized it wasn't nine years ago.

"Go fishing, Will!" said Charles Spalding, breaking Riley's thoughts. Charles was frustrated that the dark-headed boy with ruffled hair, long eyelashes and well-worn cotton clothes was sitting on the porch with his eyes to the road far more than he should. "If you aren't going to help around here, go fishing. Do something!"

Riley stood, giving Charles a frown, as he moved down the steps to the yard. "Quit calling me Will," he muttered.

"I'll call you Mud if you talk back to me again," said Charles.

Riley kicked at the dirt and stuck his hands in the pockets of his dusty, worn brown trousers that had grown too short for him in the past three months. He meandered to the side of the house to watch for James, out of sight of his brother-in-law.

He had decided more than two years earlier that he wanted to be called Riley. Not William and not Will. "There are too many people with that name. I want to be different. Besides, that was my name back *then*. I want to be called Riley, now," he insisted to his sister. But getting family to change their habit was harder than he expected.

Riley took another look toward the road, before picking up a bucket and heading to the barn. Calling his aging dog, who came bounding in from the field with the other dogs, Riley rubbed behind its ears and patted his back. "You understand, don't you, Ranger. It's time for James to come home. Right? Yes, it's time we are all back together."

James Gotcher woke with a start, searching for his rifle and trying to remember where he was. The stench of vomit and feces was overwhelming as he looked at the rows of men laying on blankets inside the tent. The flurry of activity around him brought him back to the reality that he was some 300 miles south of his Bastrop home, among a large contingent of Texas Rangers and army regulars at the Rio Grande.

The vivid dream that woke him so violently still had him gasping for air, and his heart still pounded like a thousand drums in his chest. The dream had taken him back to the rock cliff. He could see the Comanche Indian trying to climb to the top, above his head. The 40-man company of Texas Rangers were all around him firing at attackers and dodging bullets and arrows that came one after another in rapid order. He saw the Indian stop and point his bow toward the Major. Quickly pulling his rifle to his shoulder, he shot the warrior in the chest before he could let loose an arrow. The dead Indian fell to within three feet of him. He jumped and aimed his rifle at the man, looking for any movement. Realizing he was dead, anger overwhelmed him. He pulled his Bowie knife from his belt and cut a two-inch wide piece of flesh from the head of the black-haired warrior. Raising the scalp over his head, he gave a loud whooping cry. Suddenly, the hair of the scalp changed to long blonde strands, and the people around him were Pawnee warriors dancing around a bonfire in a victory dance. He screamed and dropped the scalp and woke from the dream.

James was drenched in sweat as his eyes focused again on his surroundings. The army doctor came to his bedside, nodding approval that the fever had finally broken.

“You’re one of the lucky ones, Private. You’re going to make it. There are plenty here that didn’t.” He pointed out the tent door toward his right to two men digging a hole and three bodies wrapped in blankets lying nearby.

“Drink your water,” the doctor continued. “It’s been boiled and safe to drink. You need all you can manage to keep down if you’re going to regain some strength. We’re going to send you back to San Antonio as soon as you can travel.”

James sat up. His stomach had never cramped so much in all his life as it had the last week. It had felt as if someone was dragging a knife through his gut. He remembered getting sick, along with several others in his unit under Capt. Gillespie. He wondered who the dead were that were wrapped for burial, then realized he didn’t really want to know. This illness, this dysentery, was an opponent they couldn’t fight with guns and knives. It attacked with vengeance and brought you to your knees. Some said it came from the water in Mexico. Many had gotten sick, even among the regulars under Gen. Taylor. Whoever the dead were, they didn’t deserve this kind of death after what they had been through.

He thought again about the dream he had. Everything in it had been true, but his delirium had merged two separate incidents into one. He laid down again, trying to forget both. Something he would never really be able to do.

The ride to San Antonio was slow, with a few incidents of men vomiting off the side of the wagon, but the four of them made

it and were taken to the doctor there for follow up and rest. All James could think about was getting home.

The Texas Mounted Rangers were known for their skillful horseback riding, fast horses, and their ability to shoot while riding. James was one of them. A private under Captain Robert “Ad” Gillespie, James and his horse Sunny Day were among the best of the company.

Twenty-year-old James joined Major Jack Hays’ battalion of Rangers in San Antonio, Texas nine months earlier and became part of the San Antonio Mounted Rangers that was formed under Capt. Gillespie.

James and Riley’s oldest brother, Samuel, had been a Texas Ranger ten years earlier and had helped protect the settlements against Indian raiding parties. Samuel had also been the one to teach James how to recognize certain tribes of Indians and their leaders, knowledge that came in helpful when the Pawnee raiding party attacked the Gotcher family work camp, killing his parents and three brothers. James, Riley, their sister Jane and her daughter, was taken captive by Standing Bear and his war party.

James had been treated harshly by the Pawnee, but he also learned about horses. His primary duty was to care for them. He watched the young Indian braves training and calming their stolen and wild horses. He watched and learned. Befriending a stolen racehorse he named Firefly, James was later given her colt after seeing her return to her rightful owner. The colt he named Sunny Day became James’ most prized possession.

It was a week later when James finally returned home from his tour of duty with the Rangers, a little thinner and a lot smarter than when he left. The new-fangled syrup to help settle the

aggravation of dysentery had worked but he was still trying to regain his strength.

Riley was feeding the hogs, his boots caked in mud, when he saw James riding up on Sunny. Quickly calling for the family, he barely waited for James to make it all the way to the house before grabbing the bridle and leading his brother's horse to the nearest tree and practically pulling him down. Charles Spalding, the man who had found them as captives among the Pawnee in Indian Territory, came from behind the house, wiping sweat from his brow with the old rag he had tucked in his hip pocket. Everyone was outside by the time James was off his horse. Even the family dogs remembered him and were jumping all over him, nipping at his hands and licking any bit of flesh they could reach.

After an abundance of hugs from his sister Jane and his nephews, James pulled his brother Riley to him and gave his head a knuckle rub before pointing to the muddy boots and shaking his head. The two had been close, especially after what they had gone through during captivity. James was glad to be back home.

"We are sure happy to see you home safe," said Jane.

"I'm home. I wasn't sure I'd make it, but here I am."

James scratched at his thick beard and ran his fingers through his long, haphazardly cut hair. He had taken a bath the day before, but his clothes had about worn through, and he suddenly worried they had a rancid smell to them that the whole family could sense.

A hearty home cooked meal, some whiskey, and a smoke, and James was ready to begin his tale of service in the Rangers, and the family was more than ready to hear it. They sat outside in the shade of one of the many elm and oak trees that surrounded the homestead. Jane and her eleven-year-old daughter Maggie sat

on the porch step while eight-month-old James, named after his uncle, slept in just a cloth diaper on a homemade patchwork quilt near the door. It was hot, but the shade was nice and there was a breeze on this particular early evening.

Jane's other children, six-year-old John and five-year-old George, sat at James' feet listening intently to their uncle, while two-year-old Charlie sat in Maggie's lap, playing with a wooden horse that his father had carved for him. Charles sat in his favorite rocker pulled beneath the tree, while Riley sat on a stool next to his brother. They listened intently to every word.

James told them how their commander, Major Jack Hays, was as knowledgeable a man as he had ever seen. He believed him to be the bravest and best leader the Rangers could have had. Capt. Gillespie was smart but had a temper that bothered James sometimes, especially if he had one too many shots of liquor.

Most of the volunteer Rangers fought with a chip on their shoulder. They had signed up because the Texas Convention in July '45 started the state toward annexation to the U.S. and help was going to be needed. But they all just wanted revenge. They hadn't forgotten about the Indian attacks that killed or captured someone they knew. Nor had they forgotten about the Mexican army that killed some family member or another at the Alamo or Goliad or burned and destroyed homes and towns afterwards. And everyone knew about the black beans and the Mier Expedition. They hated Mexico as much as they hated raiding war parties. The Rangers fought with passion, and they took no prisoners.

"When I joined the Rangers in September, I didn't need much training in the skill of riding. Me and Sunny understand each other, and he knows what I want before I do, sometimes. You

know yourself that Sunny is fast. Well, I'm telling you he was the fastest in the Company, probably as fast as Major Hays' horse. Everybody kept wanting to trade for him, even offering a fair price. I just laughed. No one gets Sunny away from me. They kept asking me why I called him Sunny Day, saying I should have called him Sunny *Bay* because of his brown and black coloring. I just let them talk. They wouldn't understand that to me the name meant the opposite of the Indian "Dark Cloud" that was my captor.

"Anyway, shooting and fighting while riding took me a little longer to learn but I caught on without too much difficulty. Each of us carried two five-shot Colt Paterson revolvers in our belt, along with one kind of rifle or another, and a Bowie knife always at the ready."

He showed them one of his revolvers, turning it over a couple of times in his palm, before brandishing the knife he had bought in San Antonio when he enlisted.

"How can you use all of those at once?" asked his nephew John.

"You don't, but each one has their purpose," explained James. "Rifles can shoot further distances than the Mexican's guns or Indian's arrows. So, we used those first to try to kill off the leader, like the chief or commander. Once you take out a leader, the army or raiding party becomes chaotic, and they don't know what to do next. Then if they get close enough, we use our revolvers. The knife is your last line of defense before retreating to reload. We were often outnumbered and had to be strategic in our battles."

“Whoa. That’s incredible!” said Riley, eyes wide with excitement.

“It’s scary, if you ask me,” said Jane, shaking her head.

“We practiced cutting ourselves out of lassoes because the captain warned us that’s what was used a lot by the Mexicans. That’s why a knife is always good to have. We also practiced covering each other during retreats to reload.

“Maj. Hays took some time with us at first, telling us the rules and what was expected. We were told the government wanted us to be scouts and not to disturb Mexican settlements this side of the Rio Grande. They said we were not to provoke them to fight, but the Major knew, and we all knew, we can’t be anywhere around Mexicans without wanting to fight them. We all had some reason or another for revenge, and the Major knew it. He just told us what the government said and left it at that.

“At first, we were just sent on patrols west of San Antonio. We made our camp on the Medina River. There had been some Indian councils and treaties so there wasn’t a lot of problem in the area we were assigned. Not at first, anyway. We were told that we were just to watch and report back. With all the annexation talk, we needed peace from attacks on settlements.

“We were divided into small groups, and each had a certain territory. We were not to chase after Indians, just report as quick as we could on what we saw. Then the message would get relayed to the folks that stood in the most danger. With it as quiet as it was, we began to get bored. At first, the only Indians we saw were hunting and there were only a few at a time so we left them alone.

“Then we began to hear that there was a big party of Comanche in the area stealing horses. We tried to find them, but

they kept eluding us. We knew they were out there, we saw some tracks, but we didn't see them."

Charles broke in, "We heard rumor that a bunch of Comanche further north of y'all got in a shootout with some Rangers a few months ago. It wasn't you, was it?"

James looked into Charles' eyes and kept silent for a moment, then turned his gaze at the children sitting at his feet, and then to his sister, Jane, who was watching him intently. Charles began to get the feeling that James knew about the shootout but wasn't saying anything. Charles' eyes got wide, and he looked at Jane who was frowning. What wasn't James saying?

James shifted in his seat. He didn't want to scare the little tykes listening to his every word. The siege at the painted rocks would have to be told when little ears were not nearby. The Rangers had been the victor, but it was a close call and would be too frightening an experience to relay to children.

"We had a skirmish or two with the Comanche, but nothing we couldn't handle," was all he would say for now.

"After that," James continued, "our Company was ordered to go to the southern border on reconnaissance. We were to watch for signs the Mexican army was crossing the Rio Grande. Someone said Major Hays had spies among the Mexican army and sent back their plans. I'm not sure if that's true or not, but I wouldn't doubt it.

"We saw a few men once who I think were scouting the area, but they never got a chance to report their findings." James stopped a moment and lit a cigar he had brought back from the border and handed one to Charles to enjoy with him.

“The border city of Laredo had become a capital city of its own territory with folks mostly loyal to Mexico. There was also a contingent of Mexican soldiers around town. We were ordered to seize the town. In most of the conflicts we were in, we were outnumbered. Sometimes three to one, sometimes more. We had a fight on our hands, but our training was superior to theirs and it was no time before we raised the U.S. flag over the city. We lost one good man, but they lost more. I was so excited to have finally gotten a good fight against both the Indians and Mexicans that I immediately told Capt. Ad - that’s what we called him - that I wanted to continue my service into June.”

“We got word that you were staying put,” said Charles. “Then we heard the regular army was moving toward Matamoros and we didn’t know if you were going there or not.”

“We headed that way, but we were ordered to meet up at Camargo in Mexico. It’s a small village, really, but right on the San Juan River and about a mile from the Rio Grande. Gen. Taylor wanted to use that location as his base and build up our supplies there before moving on to Monterrey.

“We followed the Rio Grande from Laredo, watching for the Mexican army all the way and crossed into Mexico not far from Mier. We spent time looking for clean water and hunting for food, but we always had men patrolling ahead and looking for trouble. Thing is, once we got into Mexico territory, we started having one after another get sick. Gen. Taylor had to leave half his army behind once he went into Matamoros. I think it’s the water. You can’t drink that stuff, even if it looks clean. You’ll get sick every time. I thought I was doing ok, but come the first of June, I came down with dysentery like several others. Some of the men never

made it home. They were buried right on the banks of the Rio Grande. They put me on furlough but by the time it was up, my duty to the Rangers was over. I never made it to Monterrey. I really wanted to, but I was pretty sick, and my time was up, so I decided to come home.”

Jane sat listening to the stories her brother told. She was so proud of him and how far he had come since their captivity among the Pawnee nine years earlier. He had been called Little Cloud by the Pawnee. They didn’t think of him as a threat, but that was then. If they could see him now, they would more likely call him Thunderbolt. He had been strong for her during their journey north of the Red River as captives, and he had helped her with William Riley when they got home with Charles Spalding who had rescued them. James was a mixture of her strong-willed father, Jim, and oldest brother, Samuel, and had the tenderheartedness of her brother Nathaniel. William Riley had always had a fight inside him, but James was proving he did too. Riley was a confident, strong young man, and James was the bravest man she could think of. She knew their folks were smiling down from Heaven. How could they not be?

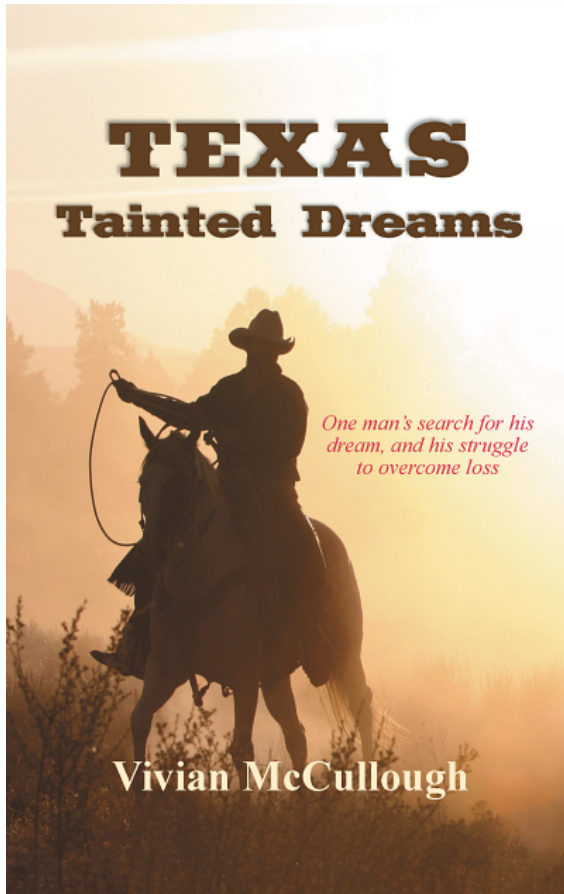
“Time for bed, young’uns,” said Jane, to which came groans and complaints.

“Do as your mother says,” said Charles. He wanted to hear what James had not said. The story of the Indians he had omitted. He knew there was more, and he couldn’t wait to hear it.

As Jane herded the children to bed, she looked back at James. She, too, knew there was something he wasn’t saying. Good or bad, she intended to find out what it was.

Other related works by this author include:

**Pawnee Prisoner:
The Story of Jane Gotcher Crawford**



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