

FROM FOSTER CARE TO MILLIONAIRE

A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR'S STORY OF
TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH

CODY MCLAIN



Copyright © 2018 by Cody McLain

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

If you would like permission to use material from the book, please contact me@codymclain.com.

Version 1.3 (March, 2019)

Cover Design by Gergely Tóth

ISBN 978-0578410524

PREFACE

When I was in middle school, I started an audio journal. There are six entries. The first is only a few seconds long: “My life started in the town of Oakland, California, on April 20, 1990.” I pronounce the sentence formally, clearly reading from a script. My voice has deepened and evened since the previous year, but I can still hear the ghost of my childhood speech impediment, the Rs over-annunciated to make sure I don’t swallow them. After that, there are thirty seconds on my early childhood with my parents and my years in Florida with my grandparents, then a minute for the death of my dad and another for the death of my maternal grandmother. I don’t seem to know quite what to say about this string of loss, except to wonder who will leave me next, a line that’s somehow melodramatic, insensitive, and pragmatic all at once.

The final section, the longest one, is on bicycling. “Instead of spending more boring hours in front of the computer,” I say, “I have been able to find something like this to accomplish feats.” *Accomplish feats*. The phrase sounds young, a product of a time when the words didn’t seem at all too lofty to describe biking to Xenia, Ohio.

I’m less grandiose about my other project that summer. At the very end of that entry, just the last nine seconds, I add that I’ve started a

web hosting business which has “been able to take up my time.” I describe it like some people might describe a crossword puzzle or cell phone game: just a way to pass idle hours.

That’s as far as I got. I had planned to record every noteworthy detail of my life so that one day, an eager audience would understand what it meant to be Cody McLain, but there’s nothing after August 2004. I don’t remember exactly why I stopped, but I can imagine listening to the entries a few weeks later and, with all the scathing clarity of adolescence, deciding they were stupid. Who would want to listen to this story? I’d have thought. Who’d ever care about my life?

I kept thinking that for another decade. To be honest, I still worry about it. This isn’t, after all, the book I set out to write last year. I’m an entrepreneur, a businessperson; naturally, I thought, I’ll write a business book. The hosting company that was a footnote in my audio journal eventually led me from poverty and loss to success and fulfillment. My book, I reasoned, should share with others the tips and strategies that I’d had to find on my own—how to maximize productivity, streamline processes, delegate responsibilities. Business words for a business book.

For the first six months of the writing process, I tried to muscle my logical, practical “business book” into being. I focused on collecting anecdotes on time management and risk assessment, decision outsourcing and work-life balance. I know a lot about those things, and I learned them mostly by failing at them as a high school kid at the helm of his own company. If I could just lay out those principles—do this, don’t do that—then readers would know exactly how to grasp for themselves the success I’d wrenched from blundering inexperience.

But my fourteen-year-old self was more persistent than I realized. The more I tried to hush the younger voice, the more often it appeared, insisting that I tell my story, send it out into the world to see what it might do for someone else. Every time I tried to write strictly about business, I’d find elements of my life intruding. Each business concept that I tried to illustrate led to a spiral of causation, a cascade of experiences that had taught me that lesson. How I became a successful entrepreneur, it turned out, wasn’t separable from how I became who I am.

So I started writing, not quite from the beginning, but at an early point of change, when I was still young enough to be carried by the current of adult decisions but old enough to start wondering about the direction. I stuck as closely as possible to the truth as I remember it, changing only a few names and other identifying details to preserve anonymity or protect myself. As I wrote, I found that my memory was uneven, as perhaps everyone's is. I remembered some details with shocking clarity: the exact timbre of the chime of the clock in my grandparents' hallway, the smell of the upholstery in my parents' car. But at other points, even times that were by all objective measures significant, my recollections are hazy and indistinct. For those, I've relied on others' memories, as well as on email threads, legal documents, saved voicemail messages—I've always been a careful archivist. A few conversations stuck out to me in memory, but most are reconstructed from salvaged pieces and imagined new parts: how can I convey that wry tone of voice my sister always used? When would my grandfather have told his favorite science joke?

Thinking differently about my story led me to think differently about my readers, too. When I started writing, I thought of my audience as "users." That's simply the framework that has defined most of my interactions since I signed up for my first reseller hosting account: I provide a service or make a product that will have the greatest utility to my customers. A book could work that way, too: manuals or workbooks tell you exactly what you need to know and do. They have users. But if my book were to tell my story, share not just my knowledge but my experience, my *self*, the term no longer made sense. How could a story have a user? You don't *use* a story; you *read* it. It wasn't until my mid 20s that I learned I had Asperger Syndrome, and I share that with you here to help offer context for much of my misunderstood behavior throughout this story. I have learned so much about myself through writing this book, and it has helped me see my life and story through a lens that empowers rather than not. This has been a gift.

A good story does more than teach a skill or provide content; it becomes part of you. That connection, I realized, is what I want. I hope my book finds its way to a reader who needs it. Someone who isn't sure whether to pursue a passion or who isn't sure what her passion is.

Someone who hasn't done all he wants to do but worries he isn't capable of anything else. Someone who has a job and a family and is content with her life but is beginning to sense that she has a bigger ambition: a hobby that's becoming a calling, a childhood vision that's insisting on realization. Or a kid like me, whose fractured family photos and lackluster school transcripts point to burned-out, addicted, nobody, but who wants more, knows he can do more, and only needs some evidence that more is possible.

To those readers, to you, I offer my story. There are no tidy aphorisms to live by here, no mnemonic devices for customer satisfaction, no lists, no acronyms, no metrics, no laws. It's only me, only what I've seen and done and learned. I hope that it reaches you and gives you what you need: encouragement, support, a rebuttal for every excuse, a gentle but uncompromising shove in the right direction, whatever direction that may be.



I don't know if I planned the last sentence of my audio journal. I've just described my business with seeming dismissal: it's the thing that fills up my summer days. But then, at the end of the line, I stop abruptly. It seems that I've run out of script, but not out of ideas, and the barreling momentum drags me to a few stuttering fill words. There's a pause, a silence in which I seem to consider if what I've said is enough, decide it isn't. I take an audible breath and add, "My life's already shaping."

It still is.

PROLOGUE

WHOEVER IS at my front door isn't knocking anymore—they're pounding. I can hear them all the way in the basement. Whatever they want can't be as important as what I'm doing, but the increase in volume is making it hard to focus. My server has been down for hours. If it's down any longer, I'm going to start losing customers. Daniel, the guy who runs the data center, doesn't seem to get how much of my company is riding on his server—or more likely, he gets it; he just doesn't care. I've been sending him emails from angry customers all morning, hoping to get him to respond, but no matter how many times I hit "refresh," there's nothing from him in my inbox.

The pounding at the front door fades to the background, white noise as I try calling Daniel again. He doesn't pick up; I suspect he's ignoring my calls. I'm not too surprised: when we talked earlier, I kind of lost it on him, calling him an idiot and a few other things I won't mention. But the customers who've been calling me non-stop since three a.m. have said much worse, and it's hard not to turn that anger on someone else.

In between checking my email and glancing at my phone, I'm trying to get some work done. I noticed earlier that a competitor in the hosting business was having a sale, so I thought I'd offer one, too. If

the deal is good enough, it might be enough to lure in some new customers despite all the shit people have said about me on the hosting forums. I've just opened Adobe Fireworks and started creating a banner that screams, "SALE! 30% OFF!" when I hear the knocking again. I can't risk missing an email from Daniel, so I do my best to ignore it. If it keeps up, someone else will eventually get the door. It takes me a minute to remember there is no one else. Mom's only been gone for three days, but Stefanie's been gone for months.

For another few minutes, I consider just staying in the basement until whoever's there gives up. It's probably just some kid selling candy for a school program, maybe a guy who wants to mow our lawn for a few bucks. My company is what's important.

While the knocking continues, I check my email again—nothing—and mess with the font on the sale banner a bit, changing it to red, making it bigger, smaller, bigger again. Suddenly, the hammering stops, and I hear something different. It's hard to tell from down here, but I think the person is calling out, and when I strain my ears, it starts to sound like my name. Who could it be? I hit "save" three times in a row, just in case, as I run a quick analysis: the only person who would come over without an invitation is my grandfather, and the voice I heard was a woman's. It can't be my sister. Stefanie has a key, but she wouldn't be here anyway: she's made her decision about our family. Mom wouldn't be knocking, and besides, she's not supposed to be back for at least another week.

I check my email one last time, then shove my phone into my pocket and head upstairs. I step over the piles of laundry and the trash littering the kitchen floor that I keep telling myself I'll deal with before Mom gets home. In the front hall, I kick the bills and flyers away from the threshold under the mail slot where they've been accumulating. Then I peer through the peephole. Standing there is a woman in a bright pink blazer and jeans, a tote bag full of papers over her shoulder. She's frowning as she squints into the front window, looking for signs of life.

I turn the deadbolt and pull open the door.

"Hi, Saundra."

"Cody!" Saundra's serious expression breaks into a wide smile.

“Good to see you! I thought at first you might not be home, but then I remembered that you work in the basement, so I thought maybe you just couldn’t hear me.”

“I could hear you. I just didn’t think it was important. Stuff’s kind of a mess with the business today.” I stand in the doorway, my arms hanging at my sides, still not understanding why she’s smiling.

Saundra nods; she’s used to my bluntness by now. “I totally get it; when I’m in a groove with work, I hate to be disturbed.” She hoists her bag higher on her shoulder. “Can I come in? I’d like to talk to you for a minute, if that’s okay.”

“Sure,” I say, realizing I probably should have invited her in myself. It’s the kind of thing my mom would remind me to do.

Though I’m a little nervous about Saundra showing up unannounced—usually she makes appointments—I’m not unhappy to see her. I know a lot of people have a negative impression of social workers—that they’re interfering or burnt out or don’t really care about the people they work with—but I’ve always liked Saundra. At least, I believe that all she really wants to do is help us. She always sat down with me and Stefanie and Mom at our kitchen table, the corner of which was broken off from a time I’d smashed my fist on it in the middle of an argument, and gave us each a chance to talk without being interrupted or corrected. She asked about what was going well—Mom had promised not to drink before five, I was acing computer class because it helped me with my business—and what wasn’t—Mom had broken her promise the day after she made it, I wasn’t doing any schoolwork because I was too focused on my business—and how she could help us make changes. And she really did try to help. It’s not her fault the way things have turned out.

We make our way into the kitchen. Quickly, I grab the jumble of fast food wrappers and energy drink cans off the table, depositing them with a clatter on the counter, and we sit down. I know I should offer Saundra something to drink, but the fridge is empty except for a couple of Red Bulls and some shriveled limes.

Saundra puts her bag on the table and folds her hands in front of her.

"Well, Cody," she says. "I heard your mom went to rehab this week."

My chest tightens and my breathing, shallower. I hadn't thought about it, but of course Sandra would know about my mom leaving. She's our caseworker; it's her job to know.

"Yeah, my grandfather had her court ordered." It's beginning to dawn on me that Sandra's worried about me, which makes sense: most kids in my situation would be freaking out. I'm not upset, though. Mom's been struggling hard lately, and it seems logical to me that she should go get the help she needs. Plus, I'm more than old enough to fend for myself. Nevertheless, I feel like I need to say something else, something positive and uplifting that will satisfy Sandra that I'm handling this just fine and that she can leave. It's been at least another five minutes; maybe Daniel's emailed me by now. I tried not to let my eyes stare toward the basement door.

"I think it'll help her. And she won't be gone that long, anyway."

Sandra pulls off the cap of a pen that says "Ohio Works First!" in a curly script that makes the words hard to read. I make a mental note about font readability; it makes a big difference in attracting customers.

"I heard it would be at least two weeks, probably more," she says. "And having you here alone all that time—"

"I'm doing fine," I offer before she can finish her sentence. "Really. I don't need anything. I mean, I love my mom, but you know how she is, it's not like she does a whole lot when she's here anyway. I'm fine."

Sandra smiles. "I know you're a self-sufficient kid, Cody, but we can't let you stay here by yourself. You're only fifteen. The state mandates . . ."

She keeps talking, but I zone out. I start listing as many of my current customers as I can think of off the top of my head. How many was it before the server crash? At last count, 112, I think. I cross out the ones that have already dropped me and try to tally the ones I'm most in danger of losing, a calculation that brings me down a couple dozen customers. The thought depresses me, so I try to name the customers who've been supportive. This list is much shorter.

I sneak my hand into my pocket, attempting to turn up the volume on my phone without Sandra noticing. I don't want to miss Daniel's

call. I'm feeling for the up volume button when something Sandra says catches my attention.

"What was that?" I ask.

"I was just saying that I know foster care sounds scary, but it'll be temporary, just—"

I cut her off. "Foster care?" Before I can stop myself, I'm careening through a thousand possible scenarios. "Wait, why? That doesn't make sense. I have a mom. Where is it? Who's the family? Where do they live? How many other kids are there? Is this your idea? Did your supervisor tell you to do this? Or is this just state policy? Hold on, is it like a group home? I don't want to go live in a group home. I don't need to go to foster care. This isn't serious, is it? It's not. It can't be."

Sandra doesn't seem at all overwhelmed by my questions, just sets about answering each of them, starting with the last.

"Not exactly a group home. You'll be with a family, a couple who lives not too far from here. They have a nice three-story home, and there's one other boy there right now. He's about your age, I believe, so you'll have someone to connect with."

I shake my head. "No, sorry, I can't do that. I can't just leave. What about my company? It's already a freaking mess—the server's been down for hours, the idiots at the data center won't talk to me to fix it, I have customers emailing me totally pissed. No," I repeat. "I can't go. I can't. I won't. I can't, and I won't."

Sandra maintains her steady smile; it's a talent of hers I always kind of admired whenever she mediated our family disputes and she's doing it now, although I have no idea why. "I'm sorry, Cody, but you don't have a choice here. You're a minor, you have a case open with the state, and you don't have a guardian—"

"You don't understand." My voice is getting louder and my face getting hotter and redder with each word. "I *own* a company. I have customers who depend on my services. If I don't take care of this, I'm going to lose them, and then that's it. The company's dead."

"I don't know what to tell you. I know your work is important to you, but we simply can't let you stay here by yourself. It's illegal, and more importantly, it's not safe. I promise, as soon as your mom gets out of rehab, you can come right home."

I notice my leg is bouncing up and down. I would try and stop it, but somehow it makes me feel better to fidget. "What if I run away?"

Saundra shrugs. "You could do that. There would be nothing I could physically do to stop you. But," she continues, tilting her head to the side. "Then I would have to call the police, and I really don't think you want to get them involved. Trust me."

I try to keep the skepticism those last two words produce from showing on my face. I don't try that hard. Adults have been telling me to trust them for as long as I can remember, and in my experience, the ones who insist on trust the loudest are also the ones who make the flimsiest promises. Then again, I have to admit that Saundra is different from most of the adults in my life. She's never lied to us, never made empty threats, never tried to make anything seem better than it was.

I take a second to weigh the pros and cons of bolting. On the one hand, running means freedom. No strange house, no weird-smelling bed, no concerned people I have to explain myself to. On the other hand, where would I go? I can't sleep on the street. And how would I run my business? I wouldn't even have an outlet to charge my phone. .

After a moment, I realize that Saundra is studying my face.

"You're actually thinking it over, aren't you?" She shakes her head, her expression a mixture of exasperation and amusement. "Well, ultimately, it's up to you, Cody. But I think you know what the right decision is."

There's a long silence.

Finally I sigh. "Okay. Can you give me ten minutes? I need to get some stuff together."

Saundra nods. "But just ten."

Instead of going to my room to pack, I hurry back downstairs. With my eyes darting to the computer clock every few seconds, I bang out emails to anyone I think might be able to help deal with the server—all the data center representatives I've ever talked to, the customers I've had the since I started Xeserve almost two years ago, even my old business partner and sort-of friend, Calvin, though I know he doesn't give a shit about this stuff anymore, if he ever did. Nine and a half minutes pass before I shut down the computer, grab a plastic Save-A-

Lot bag, and throw in some t-shirts and jeans from the dirty laundry pile. I hope I'll be allowed to use the washing machine in foster care.

In the car, I'm relieved that Sandra doesn't want to make me talk. She just turns the radio to an R and B station and keeps her eyes on the road. Her car is nicer than I would have expected for a social worker—a brand new Ford Fusion, red with grey interior. I've never ridden in one before, so I take a quick look around. I notice that there's a touch-screen pad on the dash that controls the GPS and the sound system. Smart, I think. Everything's going to be touch screen in a few years. Outside the window, the neighborhood gets seedier, restaurants and playgrounds turning into convenience stores and strip joints. It's not like the area near my house is all that great; it's just that this is worse.

BUT I DON'T WASTE much time before I'm back on my phone. I still need to fix the server issue, but to do that I need to get myself out of this situation. If I could get someone to let me stay with them until my mom gets back, I could fix the server problem, smooth things over with my customers, and be back on track to the fifty percent growth I'm hoping to achieve before school starts in August. I scan my contact list. Grandpa John is already out; he'd probably let me stay, but his new girlfriend and I don't exactly see eye-to-eye. I call Calvin. He says his mother is out of town and probably wouldn't want me coming over when she's gone. Then I call four other kids I know from school. I don't know if I could call them "friends," but I figure at least one of them has to care enough to let me stay with them. Two of them don't answer. Richard says he can't because he's going on vacation and sounds honestly sorry about it. Abe just says no; he doesn't even bother to give me an excuse. As a last resort, I call Stefanie. I try her three times—maybe the teacher she's staying with will convince her to let go of her grudge for a few days—but she never picks up.

That's fine, I think. I didn't really expect her to talk to me. I go back to my contact list and scroll through it. I can feel Sandra look over toward me regularly as I aggressively poke the scroll down button with my stylus. When I get to the end, I start over again, looking at

every entry. It takes another few rounds of this before it sinks in that I've called everyone I can. There's no one left. A heaviness starts to settle on my shoulders, pushing me down into the passenger seat. I stare out the window, watching empty lots and liquor stores rush past, everything looking parched and barren in the July heat. We hit a pothole and my head bumps against the glass. The contact shakes my mind, snaps me back to attention, back to what matters. I pull out my phone again and dial the number for the data center one more time.

1

MAD WORLD

AS THE PLANE ROSE, I pressed my forehead against the window, watching the palms and lagoons shrink to dots and then disappear when we slipped between the clouds. I stared at the clouds for a while before I turned away. I checked my watch, the black one my grandparents had given me for Christmas the year before when I asked for a Nintendo 64. How much longer did we have? I tried to remember what the pilot had said about our arrival, but when he was talking, I'd been flipping through the in-flight magazine and inspecting the laminated safety instructions to find out what kind of plane I was in—a Boeing 737, nothing new— and watching the ground crew wave their glowing orange batons at the luggage trucks—basically, not paying attention.

I glanced at Stefanie out of the corner of my eye. Still reading. She'd opened a book as soon as we sat down on the plane, scrunching down in her seat so I could hardly see her head over the cover. I weighed my options. Bothering Stefanie while she was reading was dicey: she could get angry if you interrupted her in the middle of a chapter. But I was bored, and plus, Stefanie was reading the third *Harry Potter*. It was probably the only book I'd read that she hadn't.

"Hey, Stef," I whispered. "What part are you at?"

Stefanie looked up, and for a second I couldn't tell if she was mad. Then she smiled. "He just got the Marauder's Map."

"Oh, yeah! That part's awesome!" I blurted out. The people across the aisle glared over at me, and only then did I realize I wasn't whispering anymore. I turned my voice back down. "It's really useful later on when—"

Stefanie's eyes flashed, and she raised the book at me like a weapon. "Cody, if you spoil one thing for me, I will kill you with this book."

"I wasn't going to say anything, just that Lupin—"

Stefanie whacked my arm. It was the hardcover copy, so it kind of hurt.

"Okay, okay!" I said. I rubbed the place where she'd hit me. "I think you actually *could* kill me with that thing." We both grinned.

"The fourth one just came out, you know," I said. "I really want to read it. Do you think Mom and Dad would buy it for us?"

Stefanie's face closed up. She kept her eyes on her book, pretending I hadn't said anything. That's how things were with Stefanie. Sometimes we'd talk about school or a book we'd both read or how much we hated our grandmother's cooking. She could kind of be like a friend. But then other times she'd ignore me or I'd take my frustrations out on her and there would be long periods where we barely even talked, just edged by each other in the hallway on the way to and from the bathroom we shared.

And our parents were a tricky subject. She was much more upset than I was about leaving Florida to go live with them in Ohio. I didn't really want to go, either—not because I didn't want to be with my parents or because I particularly loved living with my grandparents. It was just that our life in Plant City was comfortable enough, and I didn't see any reason to change. We had had enough of that already.

A few years ago, when our parents had sent my sister and me to live with our grandparents, my dad's parents, they never really explained to us why and assumed, I guess, we'd never ask. But even though we were young, we weren't stupid. We saw the bottles in the trash, heard the screaming fights at night, wondered where our father

was when he disappeared for days at a time and came home dirty and irritable, mumbling about bad luck at the slots.

But not long after we moved to Florida, Mom and Dad parents had gotten things together—or at least, that’s what they told us—and decided they wanted us back. The custody battle had been ugly and long, long enough that my parents had moved into a trailer near Tampa so they could be close to us and deal with the legal issues. Almost every weekend they had taken us on outings. The best ones were the trips to Busch Gardens. We were there when the park opened and stayed until it closed and they bought us treats and toys pretty often; Stefanie and I didn’t want to leave, and my parents wanted to get their money’s worth.

Now, after months, the judge had ruled that we were my parents’ responsibility again. So my sister and I were off to Cincinnati, where my mother had grown up, where her father still lived, where, they said, we’d be a family again.

WE SAT IN SILENCE. Stefanie read. I tried to entertain myself by looking at the *SkyMall* magazine. I wonder who would actually order something from this magazine; is there anyone who’d decide they just can’t live without a Darth Vader toaster or an armadillo beer can holder?

As I get to the final pages of the magazine, Stefanie lifts her head, “I don’t know if they’ll buy the book for us, but we should ask. I want to read it, too.”

And for the moment, at least, it felt like we were together.

WHEN THE PLANE LANDED, our parents were waiting for us at the gate. They looked the same as they always did: Mom’s brown hair was short and a little messy, and she was wearing a baggy red sweater she’d had for as long as I could remember; Dad had a slightly bushier mustache and a grin on his round, ruddy face. Mom hugged me gently, like she wasn’t certain how close she was allowed to get, and she teared up a little as she told us how happy she was to have us back with her. Dad,

the collar of his rumpled polo half turned up, wasn't a hugger; he shook my hand and said I looked like I'd grown. That probably wasn't true.

We piled all our bags into my parents' silver Ford Taurus and climbed in. Mom drove, as always, and Dad took his usual place in the passenger seat. Stefanie and I sat in the back, where the air stuck in my throat like wet wool. Everything smelled of cigarettes—I guessed my mother hadn't quit like she'd said she would—but under that smell was something else, a sour smell I had associated with my father since I was a little kid and that I was old enough now to know was alcohol. Stefanie's face looked stiff, and I could tell she was holding her breath.

My mom chattered as she pulled out of the airport parking deck.

"Well, we have you both all registered for school and your grandfather even offered to pay for your tuition. The school is St. James, and you both start Monday. You'll like it there; everyone has been so nice, helping us get you set for your classes. It's a little far from the house, but the bus can pick you up just down the road."

"Why don't we swing by?" my dad suggested. Though it was chilly outside, he'd rolled down the window and draped his elbow over the ledge. Sometimes he'd extend his hand out over the street, moving it gently up and down like his palm was riding the air currents. My mother glanced at the dashboard and frowned a little. "Do we have enough gas? We can't refill until the end of the week."

My dad waved her off. "It'll be fine. The school's not too far out of the way. The kids should see it!" After a minute, he said softly, "John said he would give us more starting this month. You know, now that the kids are here."

It took me a minute to realize that they were talking about my mother's father. I knew he lived here and was a professor at a college. He'd been diagnosed with cancer a few years ago, and though I never knew what kind of cancer it was, I knew that the treatment had been successful. He was in remission now, and Mom wanted to be closer to him. Beyond that, I didn't know much about my grandfather. I'd met him back when we lived in California, but I'd been a baby then, and too little to remember. Now it seemed like he was giving my parents

money. I glanced at Stefanie to see what she thought of this, but her head was already buried back in her book.

She looked up when we drove by St. James. Of course, I thought, rolling my eyes as she peered out the window. Stefanie loved school. It didn't make any sense, but it was true. I, like every sensible ten-year-old, thought school was stupid. The day was so long, and then my grandmother had to stand behind my chair at the kitchen table, pointing to each vocabulary question and division problem until I did it. And when I was done with work from school, edging toward the border of freedom, Grandma would slap the paperback *Hooked on Phonics* workbook on the table, slot the tape into the cassette player, and while the tape started its drone about vowel sounds, she'd fold her arms until I opened to the page where we'd left off last time. Stefanie, on the other hand, went right to her room as soon as we got home, did her homework, and then read until our grandmother made her come to dinner.

Twenty minutes later, we turned off the highway and started down a long road. I kept my eyes out for our new home. Each time we approached a driveway, I was sure we'd gotten there, and then Dad would keep driving. Finally, we pulled into the parking lot of an apartment complex, but instead of finding a parking spot, Dad drove around to the back and down a rutted road.

"Here we are!" Dad said as he wrenched the car into park. "Home sweet home!"

I looked out the window. There wasn't much to see. The apartment complex was a series of connected townhome-style units, alternating between brick and vinyl sided. The grass in the yards was mostly neatly clipped, but there were few trees and no flower gardens, just weedy patches of mulch with a few scrubby bushes.

"It's nothing fancy," my mom said, sounding nervous. "But there are a lot of kids in the neighborhood and we're not too far from your grandfather's house . . ." She trailed off.

I knew Stefanie wasn't going to say anything, and it seemed like someone needed to.

"I think it'll be good," I said. "I like the color of the door."

My dad beamed. "That's the spirit, Cody! Let's get inside, and I'll give you the grand tour."

We went to Stefanie's room first. Everything was pink: the rug, the bedspread, the curtains. All that pink made me feel queasy, but it was Stefanie's favorite color and she loved it. Inside two minutes, she'd opened her backpack and started loading her books on to the bookshelf.

My room was across the hall. The walls were white and slightly dingy but the quilt on the bed had a bright pattern of interlocking squares in shades of blue. There was no bookshelf, but there was a small desk under the window with a sky blue desk lamp on an extendable arm. On the corner was a tiny television, no bigger than one of those plastic lunch boxes with cartoon character decals.

My mom stood just behind me while I looked at it from the doorway.

"I hope it's okay. I remembered that your favorite color was blue when you were little, but I didn't know if things had changed. We can always redecorate if you don't like it."

"No," I said, walking into the room and letting my hand brush over the soft ridges of the quilt. "It's still my favorite."

I looked at my mother, and she was smiling.

Dad showed us around the rest of the house, using his game show announcer voice and showing off every room with a big sweep of his hand. I remembered some things from our first house in California, before we moved to Florida—the scuffed kitchen table with the wobbly leg; the plaid recliner my dad fell asleep in while watching baseball; my mother's collection of framed Ansel Adams prints—and they gave me the impression, but not the feeling, of coming home. In the living room, my mother cleared the laundry off the sofa while my dad went to the kitchen to get us sodas. I glanced around the room, taking in the bare walls and water-stained rug. My dad returned with a can of Pepsi in each hand and a beer under his arm. He tossed the sodas to Stefanie and me, then cracked open the beer. He took a long drink, long enough that I had time to hear the silence in the house and notice the thump of heavy bass coming from the adjacent unit. Finally, he sighed and gestured to me with the hand holding the can.

“Cody, what do you like to do for fun these days?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. Play video games, I guess. My friend has a Nintendo, and he lets me come over and play it sometimes.”

“I heard you wanted some video game thing for Christmas.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t get it. I got this watch instead.” Then, thinking about what my grandmother would say, I added, “Which is really nice and probably more useful. I mean, I always know what time it is now.”

My dad nodded slowly. “Well, Cody, will you go over there and open the TV cabinet? I want to make sure the VCR’s turned off.”

I glanced at my mother, my forehead wrinkled, but she inclined her head in the direction of the cabinet. “Go ahead.”

In the cabinet, on the shelf under the VCR, were a slim black box and a grey three-pronged controller.

“Nintendo 64!” I whipped around to face my parents. “Is this mine?”

“I certainly didn’t get it for your mother and me.” A smile twitched under my dad’s mustache.

I barreled across the room and threw my arms around first my father, then my mother. “Thank you! Thank you! This is the best present I’ve ever gotten!”

As my mom hugged me, she said, “Your Grandpa John gave it to you, too. Make sure you thank him when we see him.”

Stefanie got presents, too—books and a new collectible Barbie in a bullfighter’s outfit—but I didn’t pay much attention to those. My dad and I set up the Nintendo, and, after getting himself another drink, he even played me in *James Bond 007*. I beat him three times.

I fell asleep thinking of all the ways my life would be better now: my parents wouldn’t fight; Stefanie would hang out with me; I’d have a million friends at school; and no one would tell me what to do.

But after a few weeks of my new life, I discovered that Ohio was just like everywhere else. My parents maintained a healthy stream of bickering—money and my father’s drinking were popular topics—that sometimes erupted into shouting matches accompanied by the sound of slammed doors. Stefanie and I walked to and from the bus stop together, but when we were on board, we sat apart, each drifting into separate imagined worlds. And kids at St. James didn’t like me any

more than the kids at Walden Lake Elementary had; they thought I was at best a little strange and at worst an annoying freak.

Stefanie and I went from having every moment of our lives scheduled and monitored to having no one paying much attention to anything we did. It had been this way in California when we were little, but during the years we'd lived with our grandparents, I'd forgotten what that felt like. Mostly, I liked the freedom: I spent a lot of time playing video games and tromping around in the woods near our house, and I did my homework only when I felt like it, which wasn't very often.

I noticed the difference especially at dinnertime. At my grandparents' house, I had to make sure the table was set by six p.m. sharp. If I didn't eat every scrap of food on my plate, I was guaranteed a spanking when my grandfather got home from his truck route. This rule had transformed me from stick-limbed and knobby-kneed to pudgy, soft, and uncomfortable in my skin. So in some ways I was glad my parents didn't eat dinner together. In their house, when you were hungry, you just went to the fridge. That meant I could choose what I ate, and the control felt good. I tried to put together healthy meals for myself, though often as not, the only things in the fridge were Budweiser and leftover pizza.

Sometimes the freedom felt like something else, though: inattention or indifference. Or maybe it was just distraction. My father had always been a heavy drinker. In all my memories of him, he has a beer in his hand, like the can grew out of his palm. I'd never really thought about it as a problem before. But as we settled into our new home, I started to see his drinking differently. I wasn't worried, exactly, but I was curious because after living with my grandparents for the last two years, I knew enough to know that my dad's behavior wasn't what most people called "normal." Usually Stefanie and I would come downstairs to find him passed out on the couch, crushed empties scattered on the rug just out of reach of his dangling fingers. When we returned from school, he'd often just be waking up, his eyes bloodshot, face crumpled and loose as a deflated balloon. Most days, he'd smile and ruffle my hair. Some days, he could manage a game of catch, the two of us standing in the front yard tossing a ball back and forth while we chat-

ted, me missing it more often than not. Other days, it seemed like it took everything he had to keep his head up. He didn't do much around the house. He didn't come to school events. And though he had great stories from work he'd done years ago—he'd trucked military supplies to an army base on the northern tip of San Francisco, even briefly played backup keyboard for the Eagles in the '80s—now he didn't have a job. He didn't seem interested in finding one, either.



My dad preferred the outdoors, with a beer in hand of course.

Then again, neither did my mother. She'd worked in the past; when Stefanie and I were little kids, she'd been a computer administrator at the University of California, Berkeley. She was working on the same campus where some projects that contributed to the building of the Internet took place, Dad would brag on her behalf. But since then, it seemed she'd lost whatever ambition she'd had. In the years after Stefanie and I moved to Cincinnati, my mother got several jobs—one as a secretary, one in which she converted digitized records for a law firm—but she could never hold on to them. Sometimes she quit for no clear reason; sometimes she simply stopped going.

We were on welfare, but most of what we wore and ate and played with was paid for by my grandfather. He lived on the other side of town and still worked part-time at Xavier University even though he was in his eighties. Every Friday, he'd pick up Stefanie and me in his

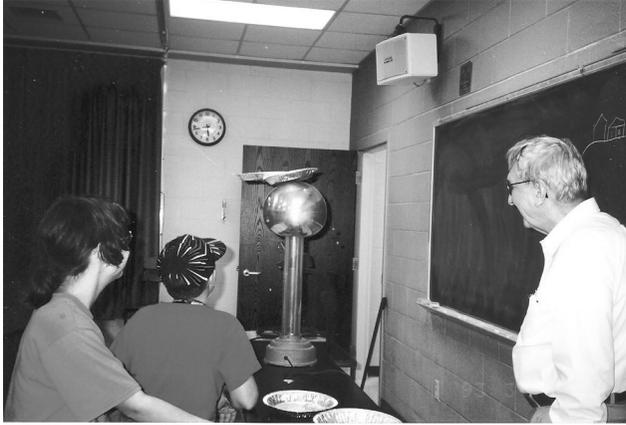
1992 Toyota Camry. It had a big red button on the dash that my grandfather swore was a James Bond-style ejector button. I was pretty sure he was teasing me, but I still didn't push the button. He'd ask us where we wanted to go to dinner, but somehow we generally ended up at Bonefish, his favorite restaurant. He'd order the salmon.

"Full of omega-3 fatty acids," he'd say every time, pointing his fork at the plate. "That's brain food right there."

I didn't really like fish, but I'd order the salmon, too. Grandpa John was smart. He was a physicist and, as he frequently reminded us, had the patent on the so-called "frictionless bearing," which didn't mean anything to me but sounded impressive. People were always saying we looked alike, and I hoped the insides of our heads were similar, too. If Grandpa ate salmon to feed his brain, so would I.

Over dinners, while I swallowed slimy bites, Grandpa would talk. Sometimes I struggled to pay attention to what he said. When he railed against the bureaucracy of academia, I'd try to nod sympathetically despite not understanding what bureaucracy was or why it was so bad. He talked a lot about Verna, his new girlfriend, whom he'd met when a former student of his signed him up for an online dating service. Those monologues I mostly tuned out, too, aware that Verna made Grandpa happy, but unable to care much about the relationship beyond my envy over the trips they went on together. Grandpa never invited *me* to Disney World.

But more often, Grandpa talked about his work and his past, subjects that fascinated me. He'd tell us about his academic work, his side research into hypnosis, the many famous scientists he'd worked with, interesting articles he'd stumbled across. Sometimes he'd talk about his time in the Navy on destroyer escort warships toward the end of World War II, but he didn't say much about the people or the combat; mostly he talked about the ships themselves and their huge complex instrument panels. He loved sharing what he knew about these ships, but all of this bored Stefanie; she preferred her stories and facts to come from books. But I learned better from my grandfather than I ever had from books. Books didn't get excited. Books wouldn't answer your questions. Books didn't laugh so hard they cried at their own science jokes.



Grandpa John teaching us about electromagnetism in his classroom at Xavier University.

The only thing my grandfather didn't like to talk about was my parents. When Stefanie and I mentioned them, he'd press his thin mouth into a line and raise his eyebrows just slightly as he looked down at his plate. If we asked a question, he'd respond in as few syllables as possible. If we made a comment, he wouldn't respond at all, just sit in silence until one of us brought up a different subject. So usually I avoided bringing up my parents with my grandfather. Sometimes, though, there seemed to be no other choice. My grandfather was the only other adult in my life I could talk to, and to me, he knew everything.

One night we were at dinner at a Thai restaurant downtown—a colleague of my grandfather's had recommended it, and he'd decided we should give it a try. It was a few months after we arrived in Cincinnati, toward the end of the school year, and the weather was warm, so we sat on the patio. Throughout dinner, my grandfather would talk about his latest science project, and occasionally crack jokes only a physicist would make. "A neutron walked into a bar and asked, "How much for a gin and tonic?" The bartender smiled wryly and replied, "For you, no charge." My sister never thought any of his jokes were funny, but I kinda smirked at his dry sense of humor. He then started to talk about his time in the navy, but I was only half listening. I had

noticed something the other day, something odd, and I couldn't get it off my mind.

Finally, after the waitress had brought us coconut sticky rice for dessert, I burst out, "Dad's eyes are yellow."

Stefanie scoffed. "No, they're not. They're brown."

"Not the middle part. The outside." I made circles in front of my eyes with my index finger. "The part that's supposed to be white. It's, like, *really* yellow."

Stefanie frowned and we both looked at my grandfather. His eyebrows were furrowed, but he didn't look mad. It was more like he wasn't sure he could find the right words.

He cleared his throat. "It's a symptom of jaundice, Cody. Do you know what that is?"

I shook my head.

"Well, the name comes from the French word *jaune*, meaning 'yellow,' of course. The characteristic discoloration associated with the disease is a result of elevated levels of—well, let's say a chemical, for simplicity's sake—in the blood. You've seen how a bad bruise can be yellow?"

Grandpa always asked us questions we could relate to when he talked; participation, he said, encouraged retention. Stefanie and I nodded.

"That's the same chemical at work. Now, the thing about jaundice is it functions rather like a warning system. The discoloration *itself* isn't dangerous, per se; rather it's what has caused the jaundice that we have to worry about, which is typically hepatitis, cirrhosis—any condition affecting liver function."

My brain felt cloudy; the meaning of my grandfather's words felt just out of reach. I was struggling to form a question when Stefanie spoke up.

"It's because he drinks, isn't it?" She stared at my grandfather, as if challenging him to contradict her. "They told us in health class that drinking is bad for your liver."

He met Stefanie's gaze. "Yes, that's right. Alcohol is essentially a poison. If your liver has to process too much, it can—well, it can stop working. Your father's liver isn't working as well as it used to. The

condition is serious, but if it's managed, the damage can be halted. Then he could live happily and healthily for many years to come."

Stefanie looked relieved, but I was stuck on something.

"What does 'managed' mean?"

"Well, there are certain therapies and medications, but largely, it's up to your father to change his habits."

That I understood. It was what my grandfather said when he meant my father needed to quit drinking.

"And if he doesn't?"

For a moment, my grandfather looked sad and much older than he usually did. Then he seemed to snap back to himself. "It isn't good to dwell on hypotheticals Cody, not unless you first have supporting evidence." He clapped his hands. "I found that rice mess utterly unappetizing, and I'm in the mood for something sweet. Who wants to go to Graeters for some ice cream?"



MY PARENTS BROUGHT it up a week or two later; the yellow in my dad's eyes was too bright to keep pretending none of us had noticed. We all sat around the kitchen table one afternoon after school, and Dad told us that he was going through a little trouble.

"It's a bit of a rough patch, I'll admit it," he said, folding his hands in front of him. "But it's nothing for you kids to be concerned about. Nothing your mom and I can't take care of."

When my mother spoke, her voice was shaky, but that didn't worry me; she cried at the insurance commercials, the kind where the parents watch the kids grow from babies to college students.

"I just want you to know you can come talk to us if there's anything bothering you, anything you need."

I did an internal eye roll. My parents didn't talk about serious things. We'd been talking for twenty minutes, and no one had mentioned "drinking" or "illness." They seemed to even be avoiding the word "yellow."

"We're all going to be just fine," my dad said and looked over at my mom.

My mother didn't say anything, just stared down at her hands spread out on the table. Her eyes were wide and empty, as if she were looking at something none of the rest of us could see. When the silence went on, she lifted her head, seeming to remember she wasn't alone.

"Yes, of course," she said, her voice jagged and strained. "Just fine."

But nothing changed—at least, nothing that would have made things better. Dad kept drinking his Bud Light throughout the day, and the rest of us kept not talking about the fact that Dad was disappearing to the corner bar more nights than not. His behavior didn't change—he was as gentle and easygoing as ever—but as the summer went on, the yellow seemed to seep out of his eyes and into his skin. It didn't look so bad at first; he could have gotten a bad fake tan, like my grandmother's neighbor in Florida used to do. By August, though, the yellow had strengthened until he looked like a victim of a chemical spill in a comic book. He'd lost some weight, too, but no one would have asked him about his diet or gym routine. There were hollows in his cheeks and his skin looked loose, like it didn't fit him anymore. Mom looked tired, too, and maybe she was: tired of trying to convince Dad to go to the doctor, tired of the anger that pinched her face tighter and tighter with every trip my dad made to the fridge, tired of crying and begging in three a.m. conversations when they thought we were asleep, tired of pretending everything was fine. Neither of my parents talked to us about what was happening, and I was afraid to ask Grandpa John about it, afraid of what he would say or what he would refuse to tell me.

Back in California, we'd gone camping all the time. My parents had taken Stefanie and me as soon as we could walk, sooner even, toting playpens and diaper bags on hikes through Redwood National Forest and around Lake Tahoe. I think my mom liked camping fine, but it was my dad who really loved it. He had an adventurous side. He'd step out on rock ledges or scramble up unmarked paths that my mother refused to try. She'd call out for him to come back and, when that failed, to just be careful.



My dad out adventuring with our dog, a Rhodesian Ridgeback rescue.

We have some home videos that my dad made of those California camping trips, the good old days. Dad would pop the VHS in sometimes if we were all home and bored on a Saturday afternoon. In one, Stefanie and I are barely more than babies: she's close to three, and I'm about two, just starting to walk. Stefanie has impossibly round cheeks and hair that looks like it was curled with an egg-beater. I am all big eyes and wisps of fair hair, tottering around the campsite in overalls making messes.

Halfway through the video, Neil Young filters in through the forest noises from a boombox my parents brought. His voice is crooning about that heart of gold he never seems to find.

In the film my dad points the camera at my mom. "Beautiful, ain't she?" he says, and my mother laughs, seeming embarrassed and pleased.

He turns the camera around for a moment so we see his face, round, healthy, and he waves and calls "hellos" to his audience.

Then he trains the camera on me. He narrates my every move as I inspect some sticks and rocks, peer into a cooler. Neil sings, "I wanna

live / I wanna give” and suddenly I’m off, trundling as fast as my tiny legs can take me towards some unknown point in the distance.

“Bye, Cody! Bye!” my dad says, assuming, I guess, that I won’t get very far. But when I keep going, he starts to call to me. “Cody! Come on back! Come on back! Come on back, Cody!”

And I do.

ONE MORNING two weeks before school started up again, Stefanie and I came downstairs to find my father awake and sitting at the table. Spread before him was an array of maps and brochures, so many they covered nearly the entire table. We both paused on the last stair. I wanted to ask Stefanie what this meant—was it a good sign? a bad one?—but I didn’t want my dad to hear us. Then he leaned back in his chair to see us, tilting it far enough that the two front legs came slightly off the floor, like my mother told us not to.

“Kids!” He sounded more animated than I had heard him in months. “Come down here and take a look at this!”

I looked at Stefanie. She shrugged and went over to the table. I followed her.

“We’re taking a trip! A McLain Family Trip, just like we used to.”

Stefanie craned her neck towards the papers. “Where are we going?”

My dad held up a small booklet. The cover had no text, just a photograph, and at first all I could see was water churning across the page. It looked like a sea during a storm, but sideways.

“Niagara Falls!” my dad crowed when neither of us responded. “I’ve always wanted to go and now we are.”

I’d never particularly wanted to go to Niagara Falls, never really considered it, but my dad sounded so proud of himself, so happy, that I couldn’t help but get a little excited.



The last Family trip we ever had together. My eyes being conveniently closed.

We had fun on the trip, though it wasn't quite like the old ones. Dad got tired faster. We had to stop for breaks when we walked around the gardens in Niagara State Park, and while Mom took us to Marineland, he took a nap at the hotel. But we rode the Maid of the Mist and watched the fireworks from the top of the falls. It was the first time Stefanie and I had been out of the country, so when we crossed the Rainbow Bridge, Mom took us into a little booth where they stamped our passports, even though Dad said technically they didn't need to. The first person I saw on the Canadian side of the bridge was a teenager with electric blue hair gelled into tall spikes. For a second, I thought maybe all Canadians looked that way, until I looked around and realized they looked just like people back home. Dad mostly kept his drinking to a minimum, and Mom seemed relaxed, like she'd put down something heavy she'd been holding for a long time.

On the plane ride home, I sat next to my dad. As the flight attendant read the safety instructions in French, he reached across the armrest and put his hand on my shoulder.

"It was a good trip, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," I said. "Really good."

I felt like this would be a good time to give my dad a hug, but we were both belted into our seats and it was too hard to reach over to him. So I just patted his hand, hoping he knew what I meant.

It wasn't long after Niagara that he went to the hospital. No one told Stephanie and me exactly why; Mom just kept saying that Dad needed a little rest, but that everything would be fine. He was there for a week, and we visited him most days after school. He told us that he'd come home good as new, but every time we saw him, he seemed worse. He was yellower than ever, and looked skinny and swollen at the same time. He was often confused and lost-looking. Sometimes, in the middle of a sentence, he'd simply stop and stare off into the distance, as if he'd forgotten not just what he was saying, but that he'd been speaking to begin with.

In the car on the way home from the hospital one night, I let out the question I'd been wanting to ask for weeks.

"Mom, what happens if Dad dies?"

"Cody!" My mom glanced into the backseat, her face furious. "How can you say such a thing?"

"I'm not trying to be mean, Mom, I just want to know, I mean—"

"Your father is going to be just fine. He's going to get better. That's why people go to hospitals: to get better. I don't want to hear you talking like that again."

We spent the rest of the ride in silence, Mom driving too fast and taking the corners so sharply we twice went over the curb.

Two weeks later, Dad was moved to hospice. I had to look up the word. When I read the definition on the computer's dictionary in the school library, I closed the browser and left my seat without even logging out. Almost reflexively, I walked out of the library to the boys' bathroom, where I sat for a long time in the last stall, trying not to think.

A month or two later at the end of the school day. I was in science class, and we'd just finished our lesson on the parts of the cell. Ms. Krumholz told us we could pack up, and as kids chatted and crammed books and loose papers into their backpacks, the afternoon announcements crackled on over the loudspeaker. After the school events and bus order, there were always the students who needed to report to the

front office—their parents were there to pick them up or they need to retrieve forms from the secretaries—so none of my classmates took any notice when the list included me and my sister. But I knew as soon as I heard my name, I knew, deep down, that this was about my father.

I took the longest route I could think of to get to the office, turning down every corridor and making every loop, trying to delay what I sensed had now become a reality. It didn't make any sense, but some part of my brain thought that maybe if I just never got to that front office, if I never actually heard the news, it wouldn't be true. I kept my eyes to the ground even more so now than usual, as I struggled to fight the tears back. In a way though, I wanted somebody to notice the tears on my face, I wanted somebody to feel my pain. As a few years turned into a waterfall, I sniffled my nose and tried to wipe away the tears with my bear hands, but to no avail. As I turned the corner to the front office I saw some motivational posters on the wall, with one saying 'Once you Choose HOPE, anything is possible.'

When I got to the office, I saw Stefanie first. Her back was to me, but I could see that her head was bent and her shoulders were shaking. My mother was behind her, sitting in a chair by a tall plant. She looked up as I came in, her eyes red and swollen, a tissue balled in her fist. She didn't say anything, just crossed the room and held me, pressing my head to her shoulder, rocking us both as we cried. The only thing I heard through my own sobs muffled by my mother's shoulder was when she managed to choke out the phrase that I'd known was coming.

"I'm so sorry, Cody. Tim passed away this morning," Mom said, and we all cried just a little harder at that.



The last family photo, took just two months before his passing.

We stayed in the office for a long time; it just seemed too hard somehow to leave. Teachers and staff kept putting their hands on my forearm, telling me how sorry they were, asking what they could do. I didn't know how to answer that question. What did they think they could do for me? There wasn't anything to do except keep going.

The parking lot was empty by the time we finally left. My mother started the car and the radio came on, tuned to the oldies station my mom liked. A guy was singing about some girl who talked to sailors and wore silver chains. Everything about the song infuriated me. The cheesy voice and the pointless lyrics and the horns in the background—it all felt wrong and somehow insulting to my dad. I reached for the dial to look for something that would match how I felt, even if I couldn't express it myself. Or maybe especially because I couldn't.

"Leave it," Mom snapped as we pulled onto the road. "I want to listen to this."

"Mom, it's a stupid song! We shouldn't be listening to this now!"

"Cody, I'm serious. Put that back on. I want to hear something happy."

“Something happy?” I started crying again. “I’m not happy! I don’t want to hear some happy crap and just pretend everything will be okay when it won’t!” I was almost shouting now, my voice wavering up and down through my tears.

My mom kept her eyes straight ahead, like she was afraid to look at me. Finally, she said, “All right. Put on what you want to hear.”

I turned the dial a few more times until Gary Jules’s cover of “Mad World” came on. It was everywhere that fall; I must have heard it a dozen times in the last week without thinking anything about it. Right now, though, it was exactly what I needed to hear.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Click here to buy on Amazon

Visit my website: www.codymclain.com

“Every day I meditate for my soul, I exercise for my body, and I read for my mind.”

Serial entrepreneur Cody McLain was already grooming himself as quite the business entrepreneur while still in middle school. He found his niche and started his first business, a web hosting company, and continued to grow and expand the company through high school.

However, it would be his unique foresight that would lead to his immense future success. He saw opportunity in a specific area — existing tech startups. Since these existing companies have little to no prior history, an external valuation is necessary to be taken seriously by investors. So, Cody saw opportunity in these existing startups, knowing perfectly well that they already had an external valuation, so his efforts wouldn't be based on theory.

As a result, Cody brings to the table the world's best outsourced support and customer service to these companies. He does his magic through [SupportNinja](#), which currently services many high-profile clients globally. Cody employs a global staff of over 500 employees; the company earns over \$4 million in annual revenue and continues to grow each year.

In addition to his business savvy, Cody has a remarkable altruistic spirit, and there isn't anything that can bring him down. He was born in Oakland, California to alcoholic parents, who eventually lost custody of Cody. He eventually wound up in the foster care system.

After being returned to his parents, Cody suffered another blow — both parents died within a few years.

Never missing a beat, he picked himself right up and kept moving forward, creating his current multi-million dollar global empire, and kept true to his generous nature of service to others. As for the future, Cody is on a mission to work with underprivileged youth by inspiring and motivating them. Motivation and inspiration equal a great future for all of mankind, and that is Cody's life mission.

Cody was also struggling with another challenge; he was born with Asperger's Syndrome, which made him the target for being bullied at school. Cody's inability to understand social cues and the bad intentions of others was the reason Cody lost his first business that he started while still in school.

He has written a book, "**From Foster Care to Millionaire**," which he hopes will inspire others who were dealt a tough hand. He also enjoys encouraging others with his blog, **CodyMcLain.com**. He resides in Austin, Texas and in his free time likes bicycling, traveling, and photography.

 facebook.com/CodyMcLainDotCom

 twitter.com/codymclain

 instagram.com/codyviews