

A man in a black tank top is performing a handstand against a blue sky with white clouds. His arms are spread wide, and his legs are also spread wide, forming a star-like shape. The man's head is at the bottom, and his feet are at the top.

DAN MILLMAN

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE FROM LIONSGATE

WAY OF THE
PEACEFUL WARRIOR

A BOOK THAT CHANGES LIVES

Preface

An extraordinary series of events took place in my life, beginning in December 1966, during my junior year at the University of California at Berkeley. It all began at 3:20 A.M., when I first stumbled upon Socrates in an all-night gas station. (He didn't volunteer his real name, but after spending time with him that first night, I named him on impulse after the ancient Greek sage; he liked the name, so it stuck.) That chance encounter and the adventures that followed were to transform my life.

The years prior to 1966 had smiled upon me. Raised by loving parents in a secure environment, I was later to win the World Trampoline Championship in London, travel through Europe, and receive many honors. Life brought rewards, but no lasting peace or satisfaction.

Now I realize that I had, in a sense, been sleeping all those years and just dreaming I was awake—until I met Socrates, who came to be my mentor and friend. Before that time, I'd always believed that a life of quality, enjoyment, and wisdom were my human birthright and would be automatically bestowed upon me as time passed. I neva suspected that I would have to learn how to live—that there were specific

disciplines and ways of seeing the world I had to master before I could awaken to a simple happy, uncomplicated life.

Socrates showed me the error of my ways by contrasting them with his way, the Way of the Peaceful Warrior. He constantly poked fun at my own serious, concerned, problematic life, until I came to see through his eyes of wisdom, compassion, and humor. And he never let up until I discovered what it means to live as a warrior.

Often I sat with him far into the early morning hours—listening to him, arguing with him, and, in spite of myself, laughing with him. This story is based on my adventure, but it is a novel. The man I called Socrates did, in fact, exist. Yet he had a way of blending into the world, so it's been difficult at times to tell where he left off and other teachers and life experiences began. I have taken liberties with the dialogue and with some time sequences and have sprinkled anecdotes and metaphors into the story to highlight the lessons Socrates would want me to convey.

Life is not a private affair. A story and its lessons are only made useful if shared. So I've chosen to honor my teacher by sharing his piercing wisdom and humor with you.

The Gas Station at Rainbow's End

Life begins," I thought, as I waved goodbye to mom and dad and pulled away from the curb in my reliable old Valiant, its faded white body stuffed with the belongings I'd packed for my first year at college. I felt strong, independent, ready for anything.

Singing to myself above the radio's music, I sped North across the freeways of Los Angeles, then up and over the Grapevine, connecting with Route 99, which carried me through the green agricultural flatlands stretching to the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Just before dusk, my winding descent through the Oakland hills brought me a shimmering view of San Francisco Bay. My excitement grew as I neared the Berkeley campus.

After finding my dormitory, I unpacked and gazed out the window at the Golden Gate Bridge and the lights of San Francisco sparkling in the darkness.

Five minutes later I was walking along Telegraph Avenue, looking in shop windows, breathing the fresh Northern California air, savoring the

smells drifting out of tiny cafés. Overwhelmed by it all, I walked the beautifully landscaped paths of the campus until after midnight.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, I walked down to Harmon Gymnasium, where I'd be training six days a week, four muscle-straining, somersaulting, sweaty hours each day, pursuing my dreams of becoming a champion.

Two days passed, I was already drowning in a sea of people, papers, and class schedules. Soon the months blended together, passing and changing softly, like the mild California seasons. In my classes I survived; in the gym, I thrived. A friend once told me I was born to be an acrobat. I certainly looked the part; clean cut, short brown hair, a lean, wiry body. I'd always had a penchant for daredevil stunts; even as a child I enjoyed playing on the edge of fear. The gymnastics room had become my sanctuary, where I found excitement, challenge, and a measure of satisfaction.

By the end of my first two years I had flown to Europe representing the U.S. Gymnastics Federation. I won the World Trampoline Championship; my gymnastics trophies piled up in the corner of my room; my picture appeared in the *Daily Californian* with such regularity

that people seemed to recognize me. Susie, a savory friend with short blond hair and a toothpaste smile, paid me amorous visits. Even my studies were going well. Life was good.

But in the early autumn of 1966, my junior year, something dark and intangible began to take shape. By then I'd moved out of the dorm and was living alone in a small studio behind my landlord's house. During this time I felt a growing melancholy, even in the midst of all my achievements. Shortly thereafter, the nightmares started. Nearly every night I jerked awake, sweating. Almost always, the dream was the same:

I walk along a dark dirty street; tall buildings without doors or windows loom at me through a dark swirling mist.

A towering shape cloaked in black strides toward me. I feel rather than see a chilling specter, a gleaming white skull with black eye sockets that stare at me in deathly silence. A finger of white bone points at me; the white knucklebones curl into a beckoning claw. I freeze.

A white-haired man appears from behind the hooded terror; his face is calm and unlined. His footsteps make no sound. I sense somehow,

that he is my only hope of escape; he has the power to save me, but he doesn't see me and I can't call to him.

Mocking my fear, the black-hooded Death whirls around to face the white-haired man, who laughs in his face. Stunned, I watch. Death furiously makes a grab for him. The next moment the specter is hurtling toward me, as the old man seizes him by his cloak and tosses him into the air.

Suddenly the Grim Reaper vanishes. The man with the shining white hair looks at me and holds out his hands in a gesture of welcome. I walk toward him, then directly into him, dissolving into his body. When I look down at myself, I see that I'm wearing a black robe. I raise my hands and see bleached white, gnarled bones, come together in prayer.

I'd wake up with a gasp.

One night, early in December, I lay in bed listening to the howling wind driving through a small crack in the window of my apartment. Sleepless, I got up and threw on my faded Levis, a T-shirt, sneakers, and down jacket, and walked out into the night. It was 3:05 A.M.

I walked aimlessly, inhaling deeply the moist, chilly air, looking up into the star-lit sky, listening for a rare sound in the silent streets. The cold made me hungry, so I headed for an all-night gas station to buy some cookies and a soft drink. Hands in my pockets, I hurried across campus, past sleeping houses, before I came to the lights of the service station. It was a bright fluorescent oasis in a darkened wilderness of closed food joints, shops, and movie theaters.

Rounding the corner of the garage adjoining the station, I nearly fell over a man sitting in the shadows, leaning his chair back against the red tile station's wall. Startled, I retreated. He was wearing a red wool cap, grey corduroy pants, white socks, and Japanese sandals. He seemed comfortable enough in a light windbreaker though the wall thermometer by his head registered 38 degrees.

Without looking up, he said in a strong, almost musical voice, "Sorry if I frightened you."

"Oh, uh, that's okay. Do you have any soda pop?"

"Only have fruit juice here. And don't call me 'Pop'!" He turned toward me and with a half smile removed his cap, revealing shining white hair. The he laughed.

That laugh. I stared blankly at him for one more moment. He was the old man in my dream. The white hair, the clear, unlined face, a tall slim man of fifty or sixty years old. He laughed again. In my confusion I somehow found my way to the door marked "Office" and pushed it open. Along the office door, I had felt another door opening to another dimension. I collapsed onto an old couch, and shivered, wondering what might come screaming through that door into my orderly world. My dread was mixed with a strange fascination that I couldn't fathom. I sat, breathing shallowly, trying to regain my previous hold on the ordinary world.

I looked around the office. It was so different from the sterility and disarray of the usual gas station. The couch I was sitting on was covered by a faded but colorful Mexican blanket. To my left, near the entryway, stood a case of neatly organized traveler's aids: maps, fuses, sun glasses, and so on. Behind a small, dark brown walnut desk was an earth-colored, corduroy-upholstered chair. A spring water

dispenser guarded a door marked "Private." Near me was second door that led to the garage.

What struck me most of all was the homelike atmosphere of the room. A bright yellow shag rug ran its length, stopping just short of the welcome mat at the entry. The walls had recently been painted white, and a few landscape paintings lent them color. The soft incandescent glow of the lights calmed me, It was a relaxing contrast to the fluorescent glare outside. Overall, the room felt warm, orderly, and secure.

How could I have known that it was to be a place of unpredictable adventure, magic terror, and romance? I only thought then, "A fireplace would fit in nicely here."

Soon my breathing had relaxed, and my mind, if not content, had at least stopped whirling. This white-haired man's resemblance to the man in my dream was surely a coincidence. With a sigh, I stood, zipped up my jacket, and sallied forth in the chill air.

He was still sitting there. As I walked past and stole a last quick look at his face, a glimmer in his eyes caught mine. His eyes were like none

I'd seen before. At first they seemed to have tears in them, ready to spill over; then the tears turned to a twinkle, like a reflection of the starlight. I was drawn deeper into his gaze until the stars themselves became only a reflection of his eyes. I was lost for a time, seeing nothing but those eyes, the unyielding and curious eyes of an infant.

I don't know how long I stood there; it could have been seconds or minutes—maybe longer. With a start, I became aware of where I was. Mumbling a goodnight, feeling off balance, I hurried toward the corner.

When I reached the curb, I stopped. My neck tingled; I felt that he was watching me. I glanced back. No more than fifteen seconds had passed. But there he was, *standing on the roof*, his arms crossed, looking up at the starry sky! I gaped at the empty chair still leaning back against the wall, then up again. It was impossible! If he had been changing a wheel on a carriage made from a giant pumpkin drawn by huge mice, the effect couldn't have been any more startling.

In the stillness of the night, I stared up at his lean shape, an imposing presence, even at a distance. I heard the stars chime like bells singing in the wind. Suddenly, he snapped his head around and stared directly into my eyes. He was about sixty feet away, but I could almost feel his

breath on my face. I shivered, but not from the cold. That doorway, where reality dissolved into dreams, cracked open again.

I looked up at him. "Yes?" he said. "Can I help you?" Prophetic words! "Excuse me, but ..."

"You are excused," he smiled, I felt my face flush; this was starting to irritate me. He was playing a game with me, but I didn't know the rules.

"All right, how did you get up on the roof?"

"Get up on the roof?" he queried, looking innocent and puzzled.

"Yes. How did you get from that chair," I pointed, "up to that roof, in less than twenty seconds? You were leaning back against the wall, right there. I turned, walked over to the corner, and you ..."

"I know exactly what *I* was doing," his voice boomed. "There is no need to describe it to me. The question is, do you know what *you* were doing?"

"Of course I know what I was doing!" I was getting angry now; I wasn't some child to be lectured to! But I desperately wanted to find out the old man's gimmick, so I held my temper and requested politely, "Please, sir, tell me how you got up on the roof."

He just stared down at me in silence until the back of my neck began to get prickly. Finally he replied, "Used a ladder. It's around back." Then, ignoring me, he looked upward again.

I walked quickly around back. Sure enough, there was an old ladder, leaning crookedly against the back wall. But the ladder's top was at least five feet short of the roof's edge; even if he could have used it—which was highly doubtful—that wouldn't explain how he got up there in a few seconds.

Something landed on my shoulder in the darkness. I gasped, and whirled around to see his hand. Somehow, he'd gotten *off* the roof and crept up on me. Then I guessed the only possible answer. He had a twin! They obviously got their kicks scaring the wits out of innocent visitors. I accused him immediately.

"All right, Mister, where's your twin? I'm nobody's fool." I couldn't believe the nerve of this guy.

"We're all fools together," he replied. "It's just that some people know it; others don't. You seem to be one of the latter types. Hand me that three-sixteenths wrench, will you?"

I handed him his damn wrench and started to leave. Before I left, though, I had to know. "Please, tell me, how did you get up to the roof so fast? I'm really puzzled."

He handed me back the wrench, saying, "The world's a puzzle; no need to make sense out of it." He pointed to the shelf behind me. "I'll need the hammer and the screwdriver now, over there."

Frustrated, I watched him for another minute, trying to figure out how to get him to tell me what I wanted to know, but he seemed oblivious to my presence.

I gave up and started toward the door when I heard him say, "Stick around and make yourself useful." Deftly removing the carburetor like a surgeon in the middle of a heart transplant. He set it down carefully,

and turned to face me. "Here," he said, handing me the carburetor. "Take this apart and put the pieces in that can to soak. It will take your mind off your questions."

My frustration dissolved into laughter. This old man could be offensive, but he was interesting, too. I decided to be sociable.

"My name's Dan," I said, reaching out to shake his hand, smiling insincerely. "What's yours?"

He placed a screwdriver in my outstretched hand. "My name doesn't matter; neither does yours. What *is* important is what lies beyond names and beyond questions. Now, you will need this screwdriver to take apart that carburetor," he pointed.

"Nothing lies beyond questions," I retorted. "Like how did you fly up on that rooftop?"

"I didn't fly—I jumped," was his poker-faced reply. It's not magic, so don't get your hopes up. In your case, however, I may have to perform some very difficult magic. It looks as if I'm going to have to transform a jackass into a human being."

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I am a warrior!" he snapped. "Beyond that, who I am depends on who you want me to be."

"Can't you just answer a straight question?" I attacked the carburetor with a vengeance.

"Ask me one and I'll try," he said, smiling innocently. The screwdriver slipped and I skinned my finger. "Damn!" I yelled, going to the sink to wash the cut. Socrates handed me a Band-Aid.

"All right then. Here is a straight question." I determined to keep my voice patient. "How can you be useful to me?"

"I have already been useful to you," he replied, pointing to the bandage on my finger.

That did it. "Look, I can't waste my time here any longer. I need to get some sleep." I put the carburetor down and got ready to leave.

"How do you know you haven't been asleep your whole life? How do you know you're not asleep right now?" he intoned, a twinkle in his eye.

"Whatever you say." I was too tired to argue anymore. "One thing, though. Before I leave, will you tell me how you pulled off that stunt earlier?"

"Tomorrow, Dan, tomorrow." He smiled warmly, and all my earlier fear and frustration were washed away. My hand, my arm, then my whole body started to tingle. He added, "It's been pleasant seeing you again."

"What do you mean 'again'?" I began, then caught myself; "I know, tomorrow, tomorrow." We both laughed. I walked to the door, stopped, turned, stared at him, then said, "Good-bye—*Socrates*." He looked bewildered, then shrugged good-naturedly. I think he liked the name. I left without another word.

I slept through my eight o'clock class the next morning. By the time my afternoon gymnastic workout started, I was awake and ready to go.

After running up and down the bleacher stairs, Rick, Sid, and I, along with our teammates, lay on the floor, sweating and panting, stretching our legs, shoulders, and backs. Usually I was silent during this ritual, but today I felt like telling them about last night. All I could say was, "I met this unusual guy at a gas station last night."

My friends were more involved with the stretching pain in their legs than in my little stories.

After dinner, I quickly read through my history and psychology assignments, wrote a rough draft of an English paper, and raced out of the apartment. It was 11:00 P.M. Doubts began to plague me as I neared the station. Did he really want to see me again? What could I say to impress upon him the fact that I was a highly intelligent person?

He was there, standing in the doorway. He bowed, and with a wave of his arm welcomed me into his office. "Please, remove your shoes—a custom of mine."

I sat down on the couch and put my shoes nearby, in case I wanted to make a hasty exit. I still didn't trust this mysterious stranger.

It was starting to rain outside. The color and warmth of the office was a comfortable contrast to the dark night and ominous clouds outside. I started to feel at ease. Leaning back, I said, "You know, Socrates, I've been having this dream, and I think you were in it."

"I've been in many people's dreams; so have you. Tell me about your dream."

I told him, in as much detail as I could remember. The room seemed to darken as the terrible scenes became vivid in my mind, and my familiar world began to recede.

After I finished, he said, "Yes, a very good dream." Before I could ask him what he meant by that, the station bell clanged, and clanged again. He put on a poncho and went outside into the wet night. I stared out the window, watching him.

It was a busy time of evening: the Friday-night rush. Things got pretty hectic, with one customer driving in after another. Some of the people were in a party mood, laughing loudly and blaring their radios while we waited on them. Socrates laughed right along with them. One or two

customers were sullen, putting forth a special effort to be unpleasant, but Socrates treated one and all with the same courtesy—as if each person were his personal guest.

After midnight, the cars and customers became more scarce. The cool air seemed unnaturally still after having been filled with raucous noise and activity. As we entered the office, Socrates thanked me for my assistance. I shrugged it off but was pleased that he'd noticed. It had been a long time since I'd helped anyone with anything.

Once inside the warm office, I remembered our unfinished business. I started talking as soon as I flopped onto the couch. "Socrates, I have a couple of questions."

He held his hands in a gesture of prayer, looking upwards to the office ceiling as if asking for divine guidance—or divine patience.

"What," he sighed, "are your questions?"

"Well, I still want to know about the roof, and why you said, 'I'm pleased to see you *again*,' and I want to know what I can do for you and how you can be useful to me. *And*, I want to know how old you are."

"Let's take the easiest one, for now. I'm ninety-six years old, by your time." He was not ninety-six. Fifty-six, maybe; sixty-six at the outside; seventy-six, possible but amazing. But *ninety-six*? He was lying—but why would he lie? And I had to find about the other thing he had let slip, too.

"Socrates, what do you mean 'by your time'? Are you on Eastern Standard Time or are you," I joked feebly, "from outer space?" "Isn't everyone?" he replied. By then, I had already considered that as a distinct possibility.

"I still want to know what we can do for each other."

"Just this: I wouldn't mind having one last student, and you obviously need a teacher."

"I have enough teachers," I said too quickly.

He paused and draw a deep breath. "Whether you have a proper teacher or not depends upon what you want to learn." He rose lightly

from his chair and walked to the door. "Come with me. I want to show you something."

We walked to the corner, from where we could see down the avenue to the lights of the business district and beyond them to the lights of San Francisco.

"The world out there," he said, waving his arm across the horizon, "is a school, Dan. Life is the only real teacher. It offers many experiences, and if experience alone brought wisdom and fulfillment, then elderly people would all be happy, enlightened masters. But the lessons of experience are hidden. I can help you learn from experience to see the world clearly, and clarity is something you desperately need right now. You know this is true, but your mind rebels; you haven't yet turned knowledge into wisdom."

"I don't know about that, Socrates. I mean, I wouldn't go that far."

"No, Dan, you don't know about it yet, but you will. And you will go that far and beyond; I can assure you."

We headed back for the office just as a shiny red Toyota pulled in. Socrates continued talking as he opened the gas tank. "Like most people, you've been taught to gather information from outside yourself; from books, magazines, experts." He stuck the gas nozzle into the tank. "Like this care, you open up and let the facts pour in. Sometimes the information is premium and sometimes it's low octane. You buy your knowledge at the current market rates, much like you buy gasoline."

"Hey, thanks for reminding me. My tuition check for next quarter is due in two days."

Socrates nodded and continued to fill the customer's tank. When the tank was full, Socrates kept pumping gas, until fuel started overflowing the tank and pouring down onto the ground. A flood of gasoline ran across the pavement.

"Socrates! The tank is full—watch what you're doing!"

Ignoring me, he let the flood continue—saying, "Dan, like this gas tank, you are overflowing with preconceptions; full of useless knowledge. You hold many facts and opinions, yet know little of

yourself. Before you can learn, you'll have to first empty your tank."

He grinned at me, winked, and turning the pump off with a click, added, "Clean up the mess, will you?"

I got the feeling he was referring to more than the spilled gas. I hurriedly watered down the pavement. Soc took the driver's money and gave him back some change and a smile. We walked back to the office and settled in.

"What are you going to do, fill me full of *your* facts?" I bristled.

"No, I'm not going to burden you with more facts; I'm going to show you body wisdom.

"What?"

"Everything you'll ever need to know is within you; the secrets of the universe are imprinted on the cells of your body. But you haven't learned inner vision; you don't know how to read the body. Your only recourse has been to read books and listen to experts and hope they are right."

I made an effort not to smirk. This gas station attendant was accusing my professors of ignorance and implying that my college education was pointless! "Oh, sure Socrates, I understand what you mean by this 'body wisdom' idea, but I don't buy it."

"Come with me," Socrates beckoned, leading me toward the door marked "Private." Once inside, we were in total darkness. I started to tense, but then the fear gave way to keen anticipation. I was about to learn my first real secret: body wisdom.

The lights flashed on. We were in a bathroom and Socrates was peeing loudly into the toilet bowl. "This," he said proudly, "is body wisdom." His laughter echoed off the tile walls as I walked out and sat on the couch and glared at the rug.

When he came out, I said, "Socrates, I still want to know ..."

"If you are going to call me 'Socrates'," he interrupted, "you might at least do the name honor by allowing me to ask the questions, on occasion, and you can answer them. How does that sound?"

"Fine!" I responded. "You just asked your question, and I answered it, Now it's my turn. About that flying stunt you pulled the other night ..."

"You are a persistent young man, aren't' you?"

"Yes, I am. I didn't get where I am today without persistence. And that's another question you got a straight answer for. Now, can we deal with some of mine?"

Ignoring me, he asked, "Where are you today, right now?"

Eagerly, I started talking about myself. However, I noticed that I was being sidetracked from getting answers to my questions. Still, I told him about my distant and recent past and about my inexplicable depressions. He listened patiently and intently, as if he had all the time in the world, until I finished several hours later.

"Very well," he said. "But you have still not answered my question about where you are."

"Yes I did, remember? I told you how I got to where I am today: by hard work."

"Where are you?"

"What do you mean, where am I?"

"Where *are* you?" he repeated softly.

"I'm here."

"Where is here?"

"In this office, in this gas station!" I was getting impatient with this game.

"Where is this gas station?"

"In Berkeley?"

"Where is Berkeley?"

"In California?"

"Where is California?"

"In the United States?"

"Where is the United States?"

"On a land mass, one of the continents in the Western Hemisphere.

Socrates, I ..."

"Where are the continents?"

I sighed. "On the earth. Are we done yet?"

"Where is the earth?"

"In the solar system, third planet from the sun. The sun is a small star in the Milky Way galaxy, all right?"

"Where is the Milky Way?"

"Oh, brother," I sighed impatiently, rolling my eyes. "In the Universe."

I sat back and crossed my arms."

"And where," Socrates smiled, "is the Universe?"

"The Universe is, well, there are theories about how it's shaped ..."

"That's not what I asked. Where is it?"

"I don't know—how can I answer that?"

"That is the point. You cannot answer it, and you never will. There is no knowing about it. You are ignorant of where the Universe is, and thus, where you are. In fact, you have no knowledge of where anything is; nor do you know what anything is or how it came to be. It's a mystery.

"My ignorance, Dan, is based on this understanding. Your understanding is based on ignorance. I am a humorous fool; you are a serious jackass."

"Listen," I said, "there are things you should know about me. For one thing, I'm already a warrior of sorts. I'm a damn good gymnast." To punctuate what I'd said and to show him *I* could be spontaneous, I

stood up from the couch and did a standing backward somersault, landing gracefully on the carpet.

"Hey," he said, "that's great. Do it again!"

"Well, it isn't really that terrific, Soc. It's pretty easy for me, in fact." I did my best to keep the condescension out of my voice but was unable to hold back a proud smile. I was used to showing this sort of thing to kids at the beach or the park. They always wanted to see it again, too.

"All right now, Soc, watch closely." I leaped upward and was just turning over when someone or something tossed me through the air. I landed in a heap on the couch. The Mexican blanket from the back of the couch wrapped itself around me, covering me. I poked my head out from the covers quickly, looking for Socrates. He was still sitting across the room, twelve feet away, curled in his chair and smiling mischievously.

"How did you do that?" My confusion was as total as his look of innocence.

"Did you like the ride?" he asked. "Do you want to see it again?" adding, "Don't feel badly about your little slip, Dan; even a great warrior like you can make a boo-boo now and then."

I stood numbly and straightened the couch, tucking the blanket back in. I had to do something with my hands; I needed time to think. How had he done it? Another question that would go unanswered.

Socrates padded softly out of the office to fill the tank of a pickup truck full of household belongings. "Off to cheer up another traveler on his journey," I thought. Then I closed my eyes and pondered Soc's apparent defiance of natural laws, or at least, common sense.

"Would you like to learn some secrets?" I hadn't even heard him come in. He was seated in his chair, his legs crossed.

I crossed my legs, too, and leaned forward eagerly. Misjudging the softness of the couch, I leaned a little bit too far and tipped over. Before I could untangle my legs, I found myself sprawled face down on the rug.

Socrates was beside himself with laughter. I sat up quickly, ramrod straight. One look at my stolid expression almost made Soc completely helpless with mirth. More accustomed to applause than to ridicule, I leaped to my feet in shame and anger. Soc cut himself short; his face and voice were charged with authority.

"Sit down!" he commanded, pointing to the couch. I sat. "I asked you if you wanted to hear a secret."

"I do—about rooftops."

"*You* get to choose whether or not you want to hear a secret. *I* choose what it is about."

"Why do we always have to play by your rules?"

"Because it's my station, that's why." Soc spoke with exaggerated petulance, possibly mocking me further. "Now pay close attention. By the way, are you comfortable and, uh, stable?" he winked. Then he came over to me and knelt down at my side, saying, "You, put me back together? Maybe you will have that chance someday. But for now, you should understand the difference between us." He poked me

in the ribs, then poked me again and again, saying, "The warrior acts ..."

"Damn it, stop that!" I yelled. "You're getting on my nerves!"

"... and the fool only reacts."

"Well what do you expect?"

"I poke you and you get irritable; I insult you and you react with pride and anger; I slip on a banana peel and ..." He took two steps away from me and slipped, landing with a thud on the carpet. I couldn't hold it in. I bellowed.

He sat up on the floor and turned to face me, making a final point.

"Your feelings and reactions, Dan, are automatic and predictable; mine are not. I create my life spontaneously; yours is determined by your past."

"How can you assume all this about me, about my past?"

"Because, I've been watching you for years."

"Sure you have," I said, waiting for the joke. None came.

It was getting late, and I had a lot to think about. I felt burdened by a new obligation, one I wasn't sure I could fulfill. Socrates came in, wiped his hands, and filled his mug with spring water. As he sipped slowly, I said, "I've got to go now, Soc. It's late and I have a lot of important schoolwork to do."

"You had better reconsider your 'importances' if you are to have even a chance of becoming a warrior. Right now, you have the intelligence of a jackass; your spirit is mush. You do have a great deal of important work to do but in a different classroom than you now imagine."

I had been staring at the floor. I snapped my head up to face him, but I couldn't look him in the eye. I turned away.

"To survive the lessons ahead," he continued, "you're going to need far more energy than ever before. beliefs, and open your heart to kindness."

"Soc, I'd better explain my time schedule. I want you to understand how busy I am. I'd like to visit with you often, but I have so little time."

He looked at me with somber eyes. "You have even less time than you might imagine."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind that now," he said. "Go on."

"Well, I have these goals. I want to be a champion gymnast. I want our team to win the national championships. I want to graduate in good standing, and that means books to read and papers to write. What you seem to be offering me instead is staying up half the night in a gas station, listening to—I hope you won't take this as an insult—a very strange man who wants to draw me into his fantasy world. It's crazy!"

"Yes," he smiled sadly, "It is crazy." Socrates sat back in his chair and looked down at the floor. My mind rebelled at his helpless-old-man ploy, but my heart was drawn to this robust old eccentric who claimed

to be some kind of "warrior." I took my jacket off, removed my shoes, and sat back down. Then a story that my grandfather had told me came to mind:

There was once a beloved king whose castle was on a high hill, overlooking his shire. He was so popular that the nearby townspeople sent him gifts daily, and his birthday celebration was enjoyed throughout the kingdom. The people loved him for his renowned wisdom and fair judgments.

One day, tragedy struck the town. The water supply was polluted, and every man, woman, and child went insane. Only the king, who had a private spring, was spared.

Soon after the tragedy, the mad townspeople began speaking of how the king was acting "strangely" and how his judgments were poor and his wisdom a sham. Many even went so far as to say that the king had gone crazy. His popularity soon vanished. No longer did the people bring him gifts or celebrate his birthday.

The lonely king, high on the hill, had no company at all. One day he decided to leave the hill and pay a visit to the town. It was a warm day, and so he drank from the village fountain.

That night there was a great celebration. The people rejoiced, for their beloved king had "regained his sanity."

I realized then that the crazy world that Socrates had referred to was not his world at all, but mine.

I stood, ready to leave. "Socrates, you've told me to listen to my own body intuition and not depend upon what I read or what people tell me. Why, then, should I sit quietly and listen to what you tell me?"

"Because I speak to you from my own experience; I am not relating abstract theories I read in a book or heard second-hand from an expert. I am one who truly knows his own body and mind, and therefore, knows others' as well. Besides," he smiled, "how do you know that I'm not your body intuition, speaking to you now?" He turned to his desk and picked up some paperwork. I had been dismissed for the evening. My whirling thoughts carried me into the night.

The next day I found a note in my mailbox. All it said was, "Rooftop secrets." When Socrates arrived that night, I was already sitting on the station steps, waiting for him. I'd come early to question the day attendants about Socrates—to find out his real name, maybe even where he lived—but they didn't know anything about him. "Who cares anyway?" one yawned. "He's just some old geezer who likes the night shift."

Soc removed his windbreaker, "Well?" I pounced. "Are you finally going to tell me how you got up on the roof?"

"Yes, I am; I think you're ready to hear it," he said seriously.

"In ancient Japan, there existed an elite group of warrior assassins."

He said the last word with a hissing sound, making me acutely aware of the dark silence lurking outside. My neck started to get that prickly feeling again.

"These warriors," he continued, "were named *ninja*. The legends and reputation surrounding them were fearful. It was said that they could

change themselves into animals; it was even said that they could fly—for short distances only, of course.”

“Of course,” I agreed, feeling the door to the dream world blow open with a chill gust. I wondered what he was leading up to, when he beckoned me into the garage where he was working on a Japanese sports car.

“Got to change the plugs,” Socrates said, ducking his head under the sleek hood.

“Yes, but what about the rooftop?” I urged.

“I’ll get to it in a moment, as soon as I change these plugs. Be patient. What I’m about to tell you is worth waiting for, believe me.”

I sat toying with a mallet lying on the work table.

From Socrates’ corner I heard, “You know, this is very amusing work, if you really pay attention to it.” For him it was, perhaps.

Suddenly he put down the plugs, ran over to the light switch, and flicked it. In a darkness so total that I couldn't even see my hands in front of me, I began to get nervous. I never knew what Socrates would do, and after that talk about *ninja*....

"Soc? Soc?"

"Where are you?" he yelled from directly behind me.

I spun around fell onto the hood of a Chevy. "I—I don't know!" I stammered.

"Absolutely right," he said, turning on the lights. "I guess you are getting smarter," he said, with a Cheshire cat grin.

I shook my head at his lunacy and perched myself on the Chevy's fender, glancing under the open hood to find its innards missing.

"Socrates, will you quit clowning and get *on* with it?"

As he deftly screwed in the new plugs, unsnapped the distributor cap, and examined the rotors, he continued: "These *ninja* were not

practitioners of magic. Their secret was the most intense physical and mental training know to man."

"Where is this all leading?"

"To see where something leads, it's best to wait until you reach the end," he replied and continued with the story: "The *ninja* could swim wearing heavy armor; they could climb sheer walls like lizards, using only fingers and toes in tiny cracks. They designed imaginative scaling ropes, dark and nearly invisible, and used clever means of hiding; tricks of distraction, illusion, and escape. The *ninja*," he finally added, "were great jumpers."

"Now we're getting somewhere!" I almost rubbed my hands in anticipation.

"The young warrior, when still a child, would be trained in jumping in the following manner: He was given a corn seed and told to plant it. Just as the stalk was beginning to grow, the young warrior would jump over the small stalk many, many times. Each day the stalk would grow; each day the child would jump. Soon the stalk was higher than the child's head, but that wouldn't stop him. Finally, if he failed to clear the stalk, he would be given a new seed and would begin over.

Eventually, there was no stalk that the young *ninja* could not leap over.”

“Well, then what? What is the secret?” I asked, waiting for the final revelation.

Socrates paused and took a deep breath. “So you see, the young *ninja* practiced with cornstalks. *I* practice with gas stations.”

Silence filled the room. Then, suddenly, Soc’s musical laughter pealed through the station; he was laughing so hard he had to lean against the Datsun he’d been working on.

“So that’s it, huh? That’s what you were going to tell me about rooftops?”

“Dan, that is all you can know until you can *do*,” he answered.

“You mean you’re going to teach me how to jump up on the roof?” I asked, my demeanor suddenly brightening.

"Maybe so, maybe not. Each of us has our own unique talents. You *may* learn to jump up on rooftops," he grinned. "For now, toss me that screwdriver, will you?"

I threw it to him. I swear he grabbed it out of the air while looking in the other direction! He finished with it quickly and tossed it back to me, yelling, "Heads up!" I dropped it and it fell to the floor with a loud clatter. This was exasperating; I didn't know how much more ridicule I could take.

The weeks passed quickly, and my sleepless nights became commonplace. Somehow, I adjusted. And there was another change: I found that my visits with Socrates were becoming even more interesting to me than gymnastics practice.

Soc's style was constantly changing, unorthodox, humorous, and even bizarre. Once he ran screaming after a little white dog that had just peed on the station steps—right in the middle of a lecture he was giving me on the "supreme benefits of an unshakably serene composure."

Another time, about a week later, after we'd stayed up all night, we walked to Strawberry Creek and stood on a bridge, looking down at the stream overflowing with the winter rains.

"I wonder how deep the stream is today?" I casually remarked, gazing absent-mindedly down into the rushing waters. The next thing I knew, I'd splashed into the churning, muddy brown water. He had tossed me off the bridge!

"Well, how deep is it?"

"Deep enough," I sputtered, dragging myself and my waterlogged clothes to shore. So much for idle speculation. I made a mental note to keep my mouth shut.

As the days passed I started to notice more and more differences between us. In the office, I'd devour candy bars when I got hungry; Soc munched on a fresh apple or pear or made himself herb tea. I fidgeted around on the couch while he sat serenely still on his chair, like a Buddha. My movements were awkward and noisy compared to the way he softly glided across the floor. And he was an old man, mind you.

There were many small lessons that awaited me each night, even in the early days. One night I made the mistake of complaining about how people at school just didn't seem to act very friendly toward me. Softly, he said, "It is better for you to take responsibility for your life as it is, instead of blaming others, or circumstances, for your predicament. As your eyes open, you'll see that your state of health, happiness, and every circumstance of your life has been, in large part, arranged by you—consciously or unconsciously."

"I don't know what you mean, but I don't think I agree with it."

"Well, here's a story about a guy like you, Dan:

On a construction site in the Midwest, when the lunch whistle blew, all the workers would sit down together to eat. And with singular regularity Sam would open his lunch pail and start to complain.

"Son of a gun!" he'd cry, "not peanut butter and jelly sandwiches again. I hate peanut butter and jelly!"

Sam moaned about his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches day after day after day. Weeks passed, and the other workers were getting irritated by his behavior. Finally, another man on the work crew said,

"Fer crissakes, Sam, if you hate peanut butter and jelly so much, why don't you just tell yer ol' lady to make you something different?"

"What do you mean, my 'ol lady?" Sam replied. "I'm not married. I make my own sandwiches."

Socrates paused, then added, "So you see, we all make our own sandwiches in this life." He handed me a brown bag with two sandwiches in it. "Do you want the cheese and tomato or tomato and cheese?" he asked, grinning.

"Oh, just give me either," I answered.

As we munched, Socrates said, "When you become fully responsible for your life, you can become fully human; once you become human, you may discover what it means to be a warrior."

I put on my jacket and got ready to leave. "I won't be by for a couple of weeks. Finals are coming up. And I also have some hard thinking to do." Before he could comment I waved goodbye and left for home.

I lost myself in the semester's last classes. My hours in the gym were spent in the hardest training I'd ever done. Whenever I stopped

pushing myself, my thoughts and feelings began to stir uneasily. I felt the first signs of what was to become a growing sense of alienation from my everyday world. For the first time in my life, I had a choice between two distinct realities. One was crazy and one was sane—but I didn't know which was which, so I committed myself to neither.

I couldn't shake a growing sense that maybe, just maybe, Socrates was not so eccentric after all. Perhaps his descriptions of my life had been more accurate than I'd imagined. I began to really see how I acted with people, and what I saw began to disturb me. I was sociable enough on the outside, but I was really only concerned about myself.

Bill, one of my best friends, fell from the horse and broke his wrist; Rick learned a full twisting back somersault that he'd been working on for a year. I felt the same emotional response in both cases; nothing. Under the weight of my growing self-knowledge, my self-esteem was sinking fast.

One night, just before finals, I heard a knock at my door. I was surprised and happy to find toothpaste Susie, the blond cheerleader I hadn't seen in weeks.

The next morning I turned over to smell Sue's tousled hair, sweet like summer straw, and to feel her soft breath on my pillow. I should feel good, I thought, but my mood was grey like the fog outside.

Something kept me from telling her about Socrates. He was of another world, a world in which she had no part. How could she understand when I couldn't even fathom what was happening to me?

Finals came and went. I did well, but I didn't care. Susie went home for spring vacation, and I was glad to be alone.

Spring vacation was soon over, and warm winds blew through the littered streets of Berkeley. I knew that it was time to return to the warrior's world, to that strange little gas station—this time perhaps more open and more humble than before. But now I was more sure of one thing. If Socrates cut at me with his sharp wit again, I was going to slash right back.

BOOK ONE: The Winds of Change

Chapter 1: Gusts of Magic

It was late evening. After my workout and dinner, I took a nap. When I awoke it was nearly midnight. I walked slowly through the crisp night air of early spring toward the station. A strong breeze blew from behind me, as if impelling me forward along the campus paths.

As I neared the familiar intersection, I slowed down. A light drizzle had begun, chilling the night. In the glow from the warmly lit office I could see Soc's shape through the misted window, drinking from his mug, and a mixture of anticipation and dread squeezed my lungs and accelerated my heart beat.

I looked down at the pavement as I crossed the street and neared the office door. The wind gusted against the back of my neck. Suddenly chilled, I snapped my head up to see Socrates standing in the doorway, staring at me and sniffing the air like a wolf. He seemed to be looking right through me. Memories of the Grim Reaper returned. I knew this man had within him great warmth and compassion, but I sensed that behind his dark eyes lay a great unknown danger. . .