

Crazy for the Storm: A Memoir of Survival (P.S.)

By Norman Ollestad

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“Breathtaking....*Crazy for the Storm* will keep you up late into the night.”
—*Washington Post Book World*<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

Norman Olstead’s *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Crazy for the Storm* is the story of the harrowing plane crash the author miraculously survived at age eleven, framed by the moving tale of his complicated relationship with his charismatic, adrenaline-addicted father. Destined to stand with other classic true stories of man against nature—*Into Thin Air* and *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer; Sebastian Junger’s *The Perfect Storm*—it is a literary triumph that novelist Russell Banks (*Affliction*) calls, “A heart-stopping story beautifully told....Norman Olstead has written a book that may well be read for generations.”

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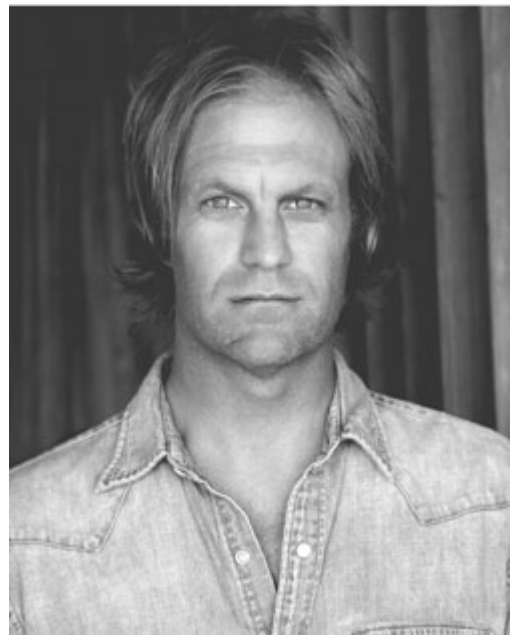
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, June 2009: The story itself could take your breath away: an 11-year-old boy, the only survivor of a small-plane crash in the San Gabriel Mountains in 1979, makes his way to safety down an icy mountain face in a blizzard, using the skills and determination he learned from his father. But it's the way that Norman Ollestad tells his tale that makes *Crazy for the Storm* a memoir that will last. He almost has too much to tell: a way-larger-than-life father--former child actor, FBI man (who took on Hoover in a controversial book), and surfer who drove his son to test his limits in the surf and on the slopes; a youth spent in the short-lived counterculture paradise of Topanga Canyon; a stepfather who could give Tobias Wolff's a run for his money; and of course the crash. But writing 30 years later, Ollestad is wise and talented enough to focus his story on the essentials, cutting elegantly back and forth between a moment-by-moment account of the crash and his memories of the difficult but often idyllic year leading up to it. More than a story of survival, it's a time-tempered reckoning with what it means to be a father and a son. --*Tom Nissley*

Amazon Exclusive Essay: *It Starts With a Good Story* by Norman Ollestad



It was time for my eight-year old son, Noah, to read before bed. "Eh," he groaned. "Reading is so boring. It sucks." He'd been reciting this same mantra for months. I was resting beside him in his bed and I saw his whole life crumble--a slew of poor report cards and father-son arguments, ending in long term unemployment. "What about Dr. Seuss?" I reasoned. He glared at me with his brown eyes. "It's okay," he mumbled. I opened the book he was reading for his class and handed it to him. He stared at it, mute. "Noah," I said from my lowest register. He proceeded to read at a snail's pace and I pointed out that it would take him twice as long as usual to get through the required five pages. So he ran the words together, not even stopping at periods. I grabbed the book and told him we'd be reading all weekend to make up for his lack of cooperation. For months I coerced him like that, urging him past his lazy monotone, trying to get him to connect with the story. It was a long few months.

When I was Noah's age I also disliked reading. I just wanted to hear the story without having to work for it. I had wished my dad could work the same kind of magic he did with surfing: he'd push me into the waves so that I could simply enjoy the ride, eliminating the most arduous, frustrating part of surfing--paddling for the wave.

My father was always asking my mother, who was a grade-school teacher, why I wasn't a better reader. She advocated patience, and encouraged me by tirelessly pointing out things in each story that I might relate to. My father was killed when I was eleven, so he never got to witness my eventual love of reading.

In order to help Noah find that love, I searched for a seminal moment in my past that had transformed me. There was no single thing. But during my reminiscences I flashed on Dad reading aloud my grandparents' monthly letters from Mexico. They had retired to Puerto Vallarta and their letters were filled with stories. Stories about an inland village where Grandpa went twice a week to buy ice for their fridge, to keep their food cold. Stories about helping a Mexican family after a hurricane hit Puerto Vallarta. Stories of secret waterfalls and secluded isthmuses that Grandpa and Grandma had discovered around Vallarta. And that's when it hit me--it was very simple: the essence of my love for reading really emanates from my love for stories.

"How about I tell you a story tonight," I whispered with great zeal to Noah. His eyes lit up and he smiled. "What kind of story?"

"Any kind," I said.

"A story about a magic skateboard would be cool," he suggested. As I spun the impromptu tale, he rolled onto his side and stared at me, totally focused. The following night I made a bargain with him: "First read five pages, then I'll work up a story about whatever you want." Before I got myself nestled beside him, he was halfway through the first page. Progressively, Noah's topics became more elaborate, and soon he was giving me outlines for stories. Somewhere along the line his reading voice changed--he was gobbling up the sentences, his voice alive with inflection. He'd broken through. Noah was hooked on stories, like I got hooked on riding waves. Once he'd experienced the pleasure of going on that narrative ride, reading became second nature, like paddling for a wave. It all starts with a good story.

Photographs from *Crazy For the Storm*

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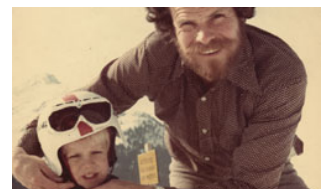
My first surfboard, Topanga Beach, 1968



Mom, Dad, and Me, Topanga Beach, 1968



Dad in St. Anton, Austria, Early 1970's



St. Anton with Dad



Me, Ski racing



Skiing with Dad



Puerto Vallarta, 1975



Three generations of Normans, 1977

From Publishers Weekly

In a spare, brisk prose, Ollestad tells the tragic story of the pivotal event of his life, an airplane crash into the side of a mountain that cost three lives, including his father's, in 1979. Only 11 years old at the time, he alone survived, using the athletic skills he learned in competitive downhill skiing, amid the twisted wreckage, the bodies and the bone-chilling cold of the blizzard atop the 8,600-foot mountain. Although the narrative core of the memoir remains the horrifying plane crackup into the San Gabriel Mountains, its warm, complex soul is conveyed by the loving relationship between the former FBI agent father and his son, affectionately called the Boy Wonder, during the golden childhood years spent in wild, freewheeling Malibu and Mexico in the late 1970s. Ollestad's unyielding concentration on the themes of courage, love and endurance seep into every character portrait, every scene, making this book an inspiring, fascinating read. (*May*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Crazy for the Storm works on one level in the genre of "how-not-to." Passages recounting young Norman Ollestad's relationship with his father will make today's doting, attentive parents cringe. But those anecdotes neatly alternate with the author's death-defying descent that, by most accounts, he shouldn't have survived. Ollestad's memory of the tragedy is engaging and disquieting, even if the book's organization suffers from "the familiarity of the [memoir] format" (*New York Times*) and some questionable memories. Such lapses seem forgivable, given what Ollestad accomplishes here. In the end, he has much to say about fathers and sons, and his honesty -- though he reaches a bit of closure, he doesn't overreach for any sort of happy ending -- rings true.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ismael Black:

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