

**JOURNEY
OF THE
SON**

By Marcus Santi

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JOURNEY OF THE SON

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AN OPEN LETTER

You hold in your hand the story of my journey. It is the journey of a son—my father’s son, me. We are all on a journey in this life. Some walk a journey that begins easy, idealistic, fairy tale. Others, not so much, instead their journey is filled with pain, betrayal, detours with occasional glimmers of hope. The latter was my journey.

Marcus Santi

Following is a true story I hope will help those searching for answers in their own journey, offer wake-up bells to those allowing their own pain to harm others, and a challenge for those on an easier journey to step out and help your fellow man on his race to the finish.

Marcus Santi

SUPERMAN

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Photo: Dad and I running a 5k race when I was a child

Chapter 1

LIFE IS A RACE WITH HURDLES

July 7, 2007:

My phone rings. I look at the phone; it's my father calling me. At this point in time we would speak about twice each month. I had a hard time trusting my father. Everything I would say to him he would use against me at some point. This particular conversation was unusual. He took me down memory lane. He was telling me stories of the past, asking me if I remembered those times. I did remember those times. He ended the conversation by telling me "I love you a lot, son." I thanked him and told him I loved him too. It was hard for me to accept this comment from him. Why? Because for so many years I had been conditioned to look for what was coming. It's like listening to someone who is telling you to look "over there" because they didn't want you to see the right hook they were about to hit you with.

That is how it was with dad. Somewhere inside of me, I knew what he was telling me was his truth. There wasn't a right hook coming; he was not up to anything malevolent – he was telling me honestly that he loved me. 1985 was the last time I remember feeling these words my father had just spoken to me. Sure he said them after 1985 but it was never the same. On this day; 7/7/07 it was just like what I felt when hearing "I love you son" from 1971-1985.

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I hung up the phone and was a bit shocked. I told the people I was living with: “It is like someone is going to die. It was a complete conversation.” The call is what I called a bookend conversation. It was a completion to our relationship – a relationship that had started off great, experienced its rough stages, and now, by this phone exchange, had been brought back to its beginning. This was the level and type of love I felt from my father for the first 10 years of my life.

Marcus Santi

July 16, 2007:

Whether I know it definitively or not, somewhere in my subconscious is a little boy who still believes dad will catch me in his arms if I jump from the top of the proverbial high stairs. I think this is what hit me the hardest as I looked upon the reality of seeing my “Superman” fight for his life.

My father’s internal suffering had taken the form of extreme external suffering – what a pill to swallow for those who love my Superman. The abuse from his own father, the emotional wounds he never let go of – wounds he couldn’t run from – led him to believe that a bullet to the head would silence his pain. This reality was so stunning that I could not stand as I looked upon my Superman.

I have a dad who hurt so badly that he wanted to end his life. This is a thought and a reality I will live with for the rest of my life.

I feel as though we are again back to where our relationship started when I was a child, but now we had both become adults. I felt like all the baggage was gone, just like when I was a child. The absolute truth is at the core of our relationship and once more was real love. All the anxiety and expectations, met and unmet, disappeared. The love between a father and a son is once again free. This sensation washed over me as I sat next to his hospital bed and read to him.

The feeling of peace filled my heart – the moments in my life when I have had let go of all of my own expectations and have immersed myself in the comfort, peace, and love God has for me.

I have been told by a friend that how I view my earthly father greatly influences how I see my heavenly father.

As a small boy, I saw no blemish on my father, and then changing worlds took another perspective or place inside our relationship.

Twenty-four years have now passed since I have felt free of all

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burdens when in his presence.

As a little boy, I would lie on his chest, look onto his face, and poke at his nose. I would move his cheeks with my fingers and feel the scruff of his beard. Today, as a 35-year-old man, I found myself doing this again as he lay there in bed. All of a sudden, I feel like the little boy, and he feels like my dad. He feels like my Superman.

At 35, I remembered what it was like to emotionally feel like Dad was my Superman once more. I have read that love is the ultimate healer. He needed his son's love. I wanted to give my love. As I look back on the moment, part of the reason why I felt secure is that he was not strong enough to hurt me. Rather, he needed us, his family. He was in no position to be full of pride. The risk of his rejecting my love with his tongue or hand was not there.

What happens when the curtain is torn? Where do we go? What do we do? What do we think?

At the age of 9, my father struck me for the first time out of anger. It shook me. Then, by the time I was 11, the abuse came more frequently until home became a battle ground. By the time I was 14, the last time I remember feeling my dad's love, it had all but disappeared for me.

I started to feel alone in this world. Questions flooded my mind. You mean to tell me my dad is not Superman? He makes mistakes? The questions answered themselves. He will play a major role in bestowing to me emotional pain. He is not my protector from this world. Instead of my Superman he is now Lex Luthor, my nemesis.

My Name is Marcus. I am a Runner

I am a runner. God blessed me with the ability to run, to sprint. I learned to hurdle by the age of 9. By the time I was 11, I had run one lap around the track in under 60 seconds. Later in my life, I was able to combine those two skills: 400m (meter) running and hurdling. Life itself is a hurdle.

When you line up in the starting blocks of an actual 400mh race you are going to face four constants: 10 hurdles, distance between the hurdles, hurdle height, and the distance of the race.

The 400mh (meter hurdle) race is labeled as the toughest race in track and field; if you can win in this environment you can win in any environment. Let's find out what it takes to become a champion in such circumstances

Here is a game plan laid out for me by the world record holder in the event; this was his game plan as he set the world record in 1992. You treat the first three hurdles like you would a 400m race: no hurdles – you just get them out with aggression and speed. You are going to flatten out your stride a bit and push forward with the hips moving in a flat plain of movement. Think of a line graph – the line is following the hips and there will not be a lot of vacillating movement at the hip. The foot contact is really pushing you forward.

Now after hurdle 3, you are getting “settled in” to the race. You're finding the “groove.” You lighten up on the gas pedal just a bit, conserving energy, though you really aren't losing much speed – you just aren't pushing for additional speed at this phase of the race. You hold this pattern until you get to hurdle 5, then you open up the stride a little bit more. Your stride becomes bouncy, but not too bouncy. You're like an antelope at this stage of the game, real light on your feet. This allows you to regain and prepare for your final push to the finish line. At this stage, you are halfway through the race. You execute this for two hurdles and now after hurdle 7, which is in the middle of the turn on most tracks, you make your charge back into the race.

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You have about 145Mm and you start building your speed up into hurdle 8; this is where the men and the boys are separated. This hurdle tells you a lot about who is going to win and who is going to fold. After hurdle 8, as you are heading into hurdle 9 and 10, it's all about the *want to!* It's about how much guts you have and how well you can manage the pain. The *want to* is your will to win and to finish strong.

At hurdle 8, how do you become strong enough to deal with the rest of the race? What you are really addressing is the question of what happens when the stuff hits the fan in life – when all the distractions are taking you away from your focus. How do you combat this? In the race, it is dependent on what you have done in your preparatory work leading into that moment: **“It is not the will to win; it is the will to prepare to win.”**

In the off-season, how much time in the weight room did you put in? How many of those stadium steps or hills did you run? How many 500m and 600m sprints did you run in practice? And then there is the balance between the pure speed work and the endurance training needed to complete this race. There is still a performance standard an athlete desires to attain. There has to be an appropriate balance of how you train your body. An athlete has to find a way to make weakness into strength. You must find the balance to attain your optimal race – your prescription for an optimal life.

I have found it exhausting: the worry of stressing out over my race game plan. I grew to hate that aspect of the 400mh. I was not allowing myself to just run. I was letting the hurdles dictate the way I ran my race; I couldn't let myself flow and simply race. I became trapped inside the distance between the hurdles. I remember something a teacher/coach would tell me: “You learn all of this so that you can forget it.” She was telling me, let yourself go. Trust that you know it .Let it become instinctive. Live from your insides.

My instincts have led me to triumphs; my ego has led me to downfalls. Over time, I learned what to listen to and what to ignore. I learned where my deficiencies were and then developed