



The Road Runner: An American Odyssey (The Road Runner Anthologies) (Volume 1)

John H. Stover

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The Road Runner / An American Odyssey The Road Runner is a memoir detailing the life, loves and times of John Stover. The story is loosely based on Homer's Odyssey entailing the search described by Homer almost 2,700 years ago. The themes are similar-the quest for identity, the search for love, the value of hearth and family and the continual challenge of being true to one's values and ideals. Many of the temptations encountered by Odysseus are placed before the title character. He meets the one-eyed Cyclops, is tempted by Circe and Calypso and walks among the lotus-eaters. The story begins with painfully descriptive details of the author's harsh home life. Mr. Stover, the fourth of seven children, describes the family dynamics and how they play out as dysfunction slowly and easily manifests itself in its various forms in all the children. His father, a self-made man, is also an alcoholic, sexual compulsive and rage-a-holic. The author, through his revelations, points out sexual dysfunction as a Stover family legacy, passed from generation to generation. Tracing the family genealogy back to the infamous triangle of John Alden and Priscilla-the very woman who snubbed Governor Miles Standish's amorous advances, the author recounts what may well be the beginnings of the Stover family's sexual dysfunction. Tales of other, closer relatives running afoul of the law as a result of their sexual compulsions are also chronicled in great detail. The author introduces us to his brother, who he calls Thor, the god of Thunder and Gloom. The brother six years older, tortures, beats and molests the author. Thor is six years older, locking the youngster for hours at a time in a dark closet. The younger brother has his arm broken three times before age fifteen. Mr. Stover spent his youth working at his father's hotel; the West Elm Hotel, in Brockton, Massachusetts, where he observed men from the Brockton VA Hospital. His writing is culled from these dysfunctional men. Several stories tell of the seven, eight and nine-year-old author finding men at the hotel who've died as a result of an overdose, accidental death or suicide. The author found his first corpse at age seven. He also relates a hilarious tale of an elderly mother who kills her daughter only to hide out at the hotel where the Brockton Police apprehend her. The Hotel years are similar to a page from Police Gazette pulp magazines, the very same fodder that his father was so fond of reading. The author attended Boston University, where he majored in pre-med, and the University of California at Los Angeles, where he concentrated on English literature and writing. He was forced to leave Boston University after waking up restrained in a hospital strait jacket, having run naked through the winter streets of Boston on Christmas Eve, while on a bad LSD trip. This episode pretty much ended any thoughts of an academic or medical career. In 1974, Mr. Stover spent a year hitch-hiking around the south, working at various odd jobs, as well as hopping freight cars, guessing astrological signs for money, selling blood in addition to working for local moonshiners and drug dealers. The author gives a lesson in "instant rapport," a skill developed during his journeys as a professional hitchhiker. There are many touching and humorous scenes as the author encounters some very kind, some incredibly sick but mostly dangerous drivers and rides. In six months Mr. Stover logged over 20,000 miles on his thumb, sleeping under bridges, accepting the hospitality of strangers and living by his wits. Today, this living situation would be described as homeless. In 1974, it was merely living "On the Road." In 1998, recovering from his personal crisis, he sold everything he owned to concentrate on his first love, writing. He chronicles the fight back to regain sobriety and usefulness. Slowly, as a result of dedication to his abstinence, the author reclaims his life and body.

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Maria Kraus:

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