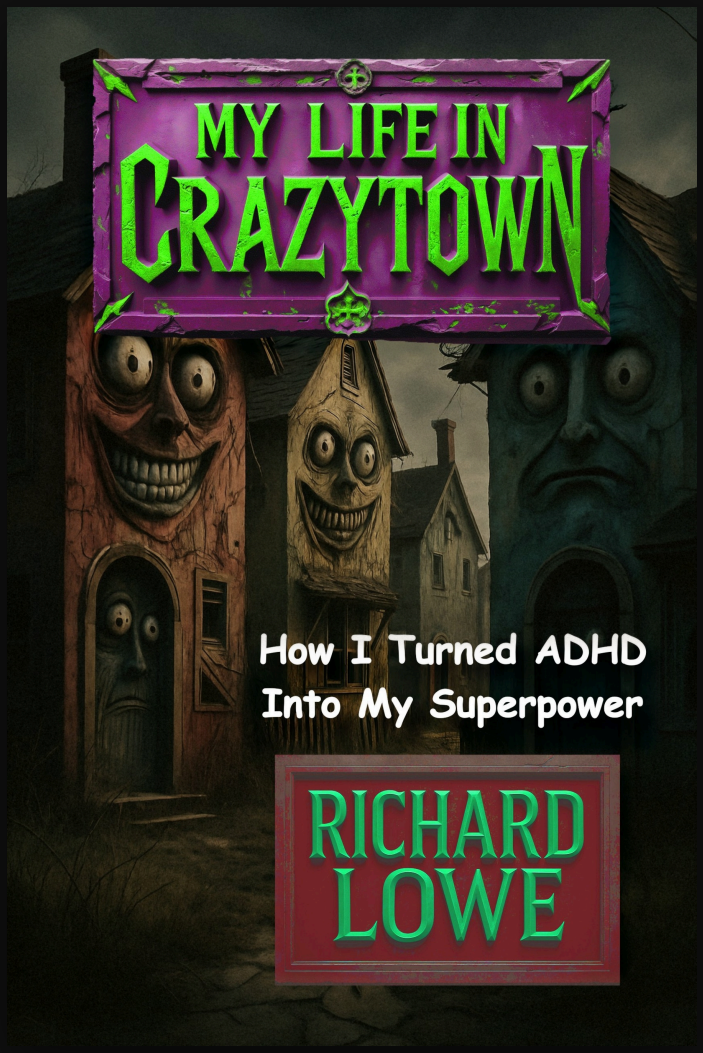
A FREE COMPANION TO MY LIFE IN CRAZYTOWN

Refuges and Exits

A reader's companion to My Life in Crazytown: the timeline, the places, the people who helped, and a worksheet for turning your own survival habits into tools.



RICHARD LOWE

How to Use This Companion

For readers, book clubs, and anyone who grew up in a house like this one.

My Life in Crazytown is Richard Lowe's account of his first nineteen years in a violent, chaotic household in Rialto, San Bernardino and the mountains above them, in the 1960s and 1970s. It has no forgiveness arc and no redemption story. Richard writes that he was never broken. The watchfulness, the hunt for patterns and the long hours of focus that kept a child safe became the working tools of a career.

This companion follows that thread. The book states the abuse directly, and this companion leaves it there. Here you'll find the timeline, the places, the people who helped, the refuges a child built, and the habits that became skills. Then the question comes to you.

> *What looked like damage was raw material.*

Part 1: The Timeline

Ages and dates are as the book gives them.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
Birth	Born blue at Travis Air Force Base. Doctors replace his blood within minutes.
Early years	The first homes in Rialto. Library trips with spider stamps for every book read. Fishing and rock flipping at Seccombe Lake. Kindergarten, finger paints and a teacher who made the rules make sense.
Age 6	The Saturday that, as the book puts it, ended his trust in both parents. He starts mapping the house: where the danger lives and how fast it moves.
Second grade	The family settles on Stoddard Avenue, closer to the San Bernardino Mountains. Best friend David lives across the street.
Age 8	Packs his rocks and books to run away, gets a few blocks, and turns back so his little sister Belinda won't be alone.
Age 10	Sees something wrong at church, tells his father, and is called a liar. A police officer later dismisses what he saw in the street. He starts watching what people do instead of what they say.
Fifth grade	The family art business begins: weekend shows, A-frames, the station wagon.
Age 12, 1972	An eight-hundred-mile drive to Alamogordo, New Mexico, when his grandfather Lowe is dying.
Junior high	Shandin Hills, at the foot of Little Mountain. A fossil fern split from shale. Refuses to work in the Blue Jay shop unpaid.

High school	The move to Lake Arrowhead and Rim of the World High. Mr. Nicholas, Mr. Moore, Mr. Farrell and fencing with Mr. Golding.
Age 17	Hears his grandfather Hoeffer's war story for the first time. First jobs. Walks five miles through a snowstorm to keep one. Buys a car.
Senior year	A Christmas Day canyon hike that nearly kills him. Belinda, their mother and a forest ranger named Curt find him on the trail after dark.
College	Commutes down the mountain to San Bernardino. Signs up for a computer class on a whim and finds the lab. MACRO assembly, DECUS.
Age 19	His friend Don calls about a programming job. Richard rents an apartment in Garden Grove and moves out with a U-Haul and a note on the kitchen table.
Age 20	Vice President of Consulting at Software Techniques, managing eight people.
Later	Beck Computer Systems. Twenty years keeping the computers running at Trader Joe's. Marriage to Claudia, and her death in 2005.
After 2005	Hiking every park in the Southwest, Joshua Tree fifty-two times. Photographing Renaissance faires and the belly dance community.
2013 and after	Leaves corporate work, moves to Florida, becomes a ghostwriter. Learns late in life that he has ADHD and autism.

Part 2: The Places

Check each one as it turns up in the book.

- [ ] **Rialto.** The hidden field behind the first apartment, and the footlocker by the swamp cooler at the next house.
- [ ] **Seccombe Lake, San Bernardino.** "small enough to understand and alive enough never to be boring."
- [ ] **Stoddard Avenue.** Lola's cactus garden on the corner, Hund's Market, the traffic light at the edge of the known world.
- [ ] **Art's Bookstore and the library.** Science fiction, Jack Vance, ten books at a time.
- [ ] **The San Bernardino Sun-Telegram.** The field trip, and a piece of linotype he still has.
- [ ] **Little Mountain and Shandin Hills Junior High.** Shale, fossils, and a seat near the door.
- [ ] **Blue Jay and Lake Arrowhead.** The gallery, the house on the hill, the liquor store, the market.
- [ ] **Rim of the World High School.** The classrooms that opened doors.
- [ ] **The canyon off Route 18.** The waterfall, the shale slope, the long climb out.
- [ ] **Garden Grove.** The first apartment of his own.

Part 3: The People Who Helped

The book is honest about the adults who failed him. It's just as careful to name the ones who didn't.

WHO	WHAT THEY GAVE HIM
The librarian	A cookie, a seat on the counter, and spider stamps for every book read. Proof that someone valued what he loved.
The kindergarten teacher	Finger paints, a story, and rules that made sense. “Use the whole page.”
Lola	The neighbor with the cacti and the rock collection. The only adult he counted as a real friend in childhood.
Belinda	His sister and best friend from the day she was born. “Small and steady.” Later a scientist. She was there with the ranger the night he came out of the canyon.
David	His best friend across the street, whose family's display case showed him that a collection can say what you value.
Barry	The older neighbor whose board of painted miniatures showed him what patience could build.
Grandfather Hoeffer	The family member he respected. A prisoner of war who told his story to a seventeen-year-old who asked. (His account is the book Behind the Wire.)
Uncle Frank	His mother's brother in San Francisco. Their conversations became lifelines.
Mr. Nicholas	History through board war games. Richard took every class he taught.
Mr. Moore	Mythology, science fiction and grammar taught as craftsmanship.
Mr. Farrell	Ecology in the field. “What you can count, you can protect.”
Mr. Golding	Fencing, taught with real passion, by a teacher he liked from the first day.
His boss at the liquor store	Drove him home after the snowstorm shift and told his father off. “Wow. An adult had stood up for me.”
Curt	The forest ranger who answered the call on Christmas night.
Dr. Young	Western Civilization taught as thinking, not memorizing.
Bob and Dan	College friends. Bob shared his love of collecting and games. Dan, in the lab, taught him clean code, clear documentation and elegant solutions.
Rick and Don	Rick taught MACRO and hired him. Don made the call that got him out.
Steve Davis	The one manager in his career who took the time to be a real mentor.
Claudia and Marjhani	His wife of twelve and a half years. And the dancer who welcomed him into the belly dance community with a hug.

Look down the list. Most of them did one small thing at the right moment. A seat on a counter. A phone call. A front row seat.

Part 4: The Refuges

"Books didn't yell at me. Model kits didn't hit me. Rocks didn't change the rules without warning."

REFUGE	WHAT IT GAVE A CHILD WHO NEEDED ORDER
Books	Worlds where problems had solutions. Ballantine war books where strategy mattered. Stranger in a Strange Land, read twelve times.
Stamps	A pound bag for a dollar, sorted like archaeology. The Tonga set he still has.
Comics	Universes with consistent rules and characters who developed over time.
Models and the railroad	Something he could build, where patience paid and mistakes could be fixed.
Rocks and fossils	Time you could hold. Lola's sandstone layers, a fern in shale.
Seccombe Lake	Learning to watch the line and see the bite before you feel it.
Field trips	Proof that the world ran on systems adults could explain.
Cats	Company that never turned affection into a weapon.
Fencing	The one sport he enjoyed as a teenager, with a friend beside him on the strip.
The computer lab	For the first time, rules that made sense, and a future that was his.

From Survival Habit to Working Tool

The book's central claim, in its own terms.

WHAT KEPT THE CHILD SAFE	WHAT IT BECAME AT WORK
Hypervigilance, reading his father's moods	Reading complex systems, and project management
Predicting explosions before they happened	Designing software
Emotional distance	Objectivity as an editor and ghostwriter
Hyperfocus for hours on one thing	Deep expertise, aimed on purpose
Pattern recognition	System design, and decoding what clients need when they can't say it
Organizing collections	Database architecture
Emotional intensity	Leadership presence
"I don't work for free"	A working life built on getting paid for the work

> *It taught me that if you pay attention, a complete universe will open under a single stone.*

Part 5: Your Own Inventory

The book offers no recovery program, and this page doesn't try to be one. Use it to take stock, if you want to.

Richard's argument is that the habits you built to get through a hard place are still yours, and some of them may be your best tools. Write down what you built. Nobody else needs to see this page.

My refuges

WHERE I WENT OR WHAT I DID	WHAT IT GAVE ME

My habits and where they could go

A HABIT I BUILT TO COPE	WHERE IT ALREADY HELPS ME, OR COULD

The people who helped me

WHO	THE ONE THING THEY DID

My exit

What was, or will be, the phone call, the job, the car, the plan that gets you out of the house you need to leave?

If this page brings up more than you expected, talk to someone you trust or a qualified professional.

Part 6: Questions for Discussion

For book clubs, classrooms, and readers who want to think it through.

1. **Recognition, not redemption.** Richard writes that he was never broken and that this isn't a forgiveness story. How does that change the way you read the book?

2. **Riva.** The introduction opens with a deaf mediator from Star Trek who turns his difference into his method. Why start a childhood memoir there?

3. **The map of the house.** By six he knew where the danger lived and how fast it moved. Where else in the book do you see him mapping exits?

4. **Institutions.** A minister, a father who called him a liar, a police officer who said kids don't see clearly. Each time he told the truth, an adult chose not to see it. What did the boy learn from that, and what did it cost him?

5. **Small kindnesses.** A librarian's cookie, Lola's rocks, a liquor store owner who drove him home. Why do such small acts matter so much here?

6. **Belinda.** At eight he turned around so she wouldn't be alone. How does she change the story each time she appears?

7. **Getting paid.** A lesson learned drying dishes as a small boy became "I don't work for free." Where did that rule help him, and where does he say it held him back?

8. **The purge.** He threw out his rock collection, keeping only the pieces that hadn't come from his father. Have you ever let go of something you loved because of where it came from?

9. **The good teachers and the bad ones.** What separated Mr. Nicholas, Mr. Moore and Mr. Farrell from the teachers who closed doors?

10. **The canyon.** What changed in him on the climb out that Christmas night?

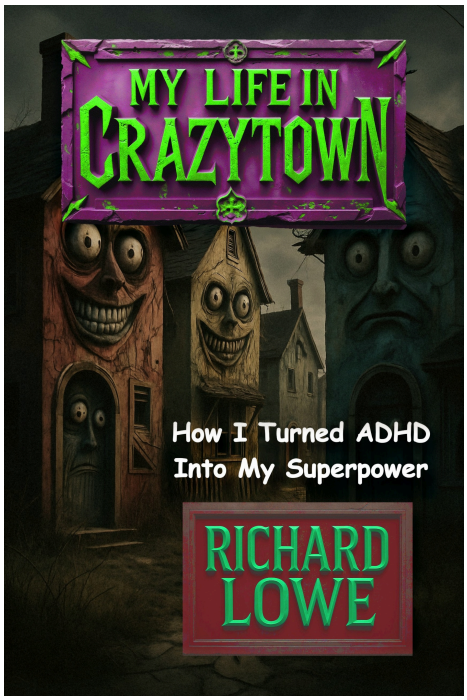
11. **The note on the table.** "Moved out today. Starting my new job Monday." Why do you think he left that way?

12. **The label.** Late in life he learned he has ADHD and autism. How does knowing that change the way he looks back, and the way you read the earlier chapters?

> *Welcome to Crazytown. The exit is closer than you think.*

The Whole Story

This companion follows the refuges and the way out. My Life in Crazytown tells the whole story plainly: nineteen years in a violent house, what a child built to survive it, and how those habits became the working tools of a career.



My Life in Crazytown:
How I Turned ADHD Into My Superpower
True Lives

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