

THE AUTHOR THAT CARES



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A conversation with **JOHN CLAY** Author of *The Invisible Trap*



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Please tell us about yourself? Who is John Clay?

I grew up in a rural town in North Carolina. I enjoyed being creative and also playing sports. I played guitar, painted, and played 5 sports growing up. In college I studied primarily religion and math. I started my professional career as a financial advisor. After struggling through the financial crisis in 2007, I eventually joined the US Army in 2011. I served for 11 years. I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division and then I joined a Special Missions Unit. I’ve had 3 combat tours to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

I’m married with 3 daughters and my military service impacted me in various ways. Certainly it gave me discipline and a sense of purpose, but it also had some negative effects on me. Being a father helped me realize how important it is to work through how I felt in order to make sure I was there for my family in the best capacity I could be.

As a result of some of the trauma from my military career, it led me to do a lot of self-reflection and seek help with mental health experts. That’s when I wrote *The Invisible Trap* because it was the result of a lot of work I put in to understand what was going on with me emotionally. Originally I wrote my book without the intent to publish it. However, after working through my own trauma, I realized a lot of people could proactively go to work developing the tools necessary to process and regulate their emotions.

I left the military in 2022 and now work in tech. I published my

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book in early 2023 and am still getting used to the reality that I put something very personal out there for the world to judge. Imposter syndrome is real! Regardless, I'm excited to see where it goes and continue to work on new children's books on emotional intelligence. The next one is titled *The Monster Behind the Curtain* and I expect it to be published in May or June of 2023.

How does it feel being a first time author?

Answer: I feel like an imposter to be honest. I never set out to be an author, yet, I found myself with a manuscript and I felt like it could help people. So, I decided to work towards publishing it. I'm approaching it from the perspective that it's a prototype and each iteration/new book I publish will be one step closer to refining my own self-help genre for children. So, I welcome criticism and appreciate feedback. I think it's important to make yourself vulnerable and allow people to "trample" on what I believe is important. It allows me to see what actually has value, and that's what I'm looking for.

Augustine once said that "the Gospel of John is deep enough for an elephant to swim and shallow enough for a child not to drown." This quote also resonated with me because I feel like that's what my book does. Adults can appreciate it for the deeper meaning, yet, children can grasp the story in a way that hopefully enables them to process their limiting beliefs and overcome them.

What made you choose to write a children's book over a different genre?

Answer: I think there is a lot of ambiguity in children's literature and that's important for this concept. The idea of limiting beliefs being *Invisible Traps* made sense to me. I felt like I could use that lens to modify what I believed about a situation. Instead of someone being bad or evil, I could identify their limiting beliefs in order to gain a much more complete picture of their narrative. Children are in a better position to shape their modes of thought. Children pick up concepts rapidly and I think they understand more than we give them credit for. The goal is to help children learn to process their emotions in positive ways so that they develop the tools necessary to process trauma as it comes. I think my book is unique in the sense that it simplifies a difficult concept

in a way that children can grasp. It seems like we try to prevent children from exploring deep emotional concepts today. Instead, we hope they learn these skills along the way somehow.

Which writers — working today do you admire most?

Answer: Stephen King primarily. I love Cormac McCarthy, Joshua Gayou, Orson Scott Card... However, I think Stephen King's body of work, the consistency, and the length of time he's been actively writing is incredible. I recently heard a quote that said "Perfection is the enemy of good enough" and I think that's a very important concept when it comes to writing. King talks about being a professional writer. He sits down and writes a certain amount of words each day. I got the sense that he was very humble in his approach. His writing doesn't have to be perfect and we can see with each iteration, his wisdom and experience is carried over into new ideas. While he is certainly well known, I think he's still under-appreciated.

What moves you most in a work of literature?

Answer: I'm most moved by villains who are well thought out and are rooted in truth. I think we tend to focus on the heroes of stories and identify with their positive attributes. However, well thought out villains embrace the human element that is most often neglected. They move me because they force us to engage "the shadow" which is an archetype Carl Jung defines. Cormac McCarthy is very effective at creating villains. Anton Chigurh and the Judge come to mind. Chigurh represents someone with unwavering principles, which I typically identify as admirable, yet, his character demonstrates the utter disregard for anything outside of those principles. Religion can have that impact on people and I believe it's one of the main reasons people are becoming less religious. The Judge represents similarly admirable attributes like intelligence and wisdom, yet, in the hands of a man who has no regard for others outside of how they may be able to benefit him, he is an absolute monster. Well thought out villains force us to embrace the nuances of where our highly valued attributes and principles intersect. I think we tend to focus on the specs in other people's eyes when we have a plank in our own we ignore. By identifying with the villain, it helps me see the plank in my own eye and that concept has had a major impact on me.

Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine?

Answer: Samwise Gamgee from *The Lord of the Rings*. I think it's because he represents something that is often overlooked. Consistency, loyalty, and focus are the first things that come to mind. Samwise may be the only character who touched the

ring who wasn't consumed by it. I think he represents a well-balanced set of principles that gives him the unique ability to not get caught up in the big picture but more so, the day to day choices that allow us to keep moving forward. Frodo is focused on the big picture and that is a heavy burden to bear. The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Sam represents the attributes that allow us to be present here and now, to take one day at a time, and the ability to not



forget that the big picture often comes at the expense of the individual.

Which writer would you want to write your life story?

Answer: Cormac McCarthy. I think the grittiest parts of our lives that show our humanity is what we should emphasize. Stories are powerful and I think we tend to focus on the stories that portray us in the most positive tones. I don't want that for me. I'm complicated. I've experienced war. I've been the good guy and the villain at times.

The Invisible Trap is autobiographical in a way because it's the narrative I came up with to help me reconcile my own demons. I think McCarthy would be able to communicate my life in an unfiltered way that told a complete story. To be human is to accept the good with the bad. Sometimes "bad" things are thrust upon us and become a part of us. Battling with one's own self is where I believe we learn the most. We can't successfully deny how we feel and if we try, we only grow more bitter, jaded, and isolated. That's what was happening to me when I tried to deny that how I felt was out of my control and was the result of other people's toxicity, neglect, or maliciousness. That belief was the primary "Invisible Trap" I had to escape from.

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