

**THE CALL OF THE**  
**MILD**

**TORRY & DOUG**  
**MARTIN PETERSON**



**HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
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The stories you are about to read are true...for the most part. Some names, places, and details have been changed in an effort to prolong my life.

## **THE CALL OF THE MILD**

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*From Torry*

*To my amazing parents, Billy and Verna Martin*

*For all that you've done for me, you should have 100 books dedicated to you, and at least 99 of them should be manuals on how to raise a difficult child. The other one should be How to Work with What You've Got. I love you both.*

*And to my best friend, Robert Browning*

*I know I dedicated the last book to you, but... "Whatever."*

*From Doug*

*To Scott Irwin*

*I am speechless. I am without speech. Thank you for being a wise and wonderful friend. In the immortal words of Kramer, "Yo-Yo Ma."*

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First of all, I need to acknowledge that I nearly drove Rob crazy while writing this book. So thank you, Rob, for everything you do. Without you, this book would not exist. You are my biggest blessing.

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I take full credit for any lapses in grammar. Terry, Gene, Marshal, and Doug all allowed me to put the book in my own voice, even at the expense of grammatical accuracy. Any grammar deficiencies are not a reflection on any of them.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge *The Chicago Manual of Style* and how *very* much I despise you. Every time I tried to use "like" as in "like I'm stupid," you would change "like" to "as if."

Like I even care.

As if!

***Torry Martin***

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# FOREWORD

BY TOSCA LEE

**T**he first time Torry Martin and I met, we were both on staff at a conference on the campus of Villanova University. We sat down at an outdoor table and talked for hours like old friends, delving into matters of God and faith as we made our way through a small vat of coffee. We also talked about writing, living with OCD, and how he'd almost wrecked a washing machine while cleaning shotgun shells for the Christmas lights he was making to accompany his moose-dropping garlands (which *definitely* don't go in the washer).

Technically, that was the second time we met. I don't remember the first, but it happened at a trade show where he lined up for a copy of my latest novel. Torry was exercising his secret superpower of encouraging and supporting the work of others who may not even know him yet. He was doing what he does best: investing in lives with the gift of his time (while nabbing a free novel of exceptional quality, of course). It's something he regularly does, tithing time to the growth of others who may not be aware that he's working on their behalf, doing good behind their backs.

Today, Torry is the kind of friend I shriek happily upon seeing and then say loudly, "Oh my gosh, is that Torry Martin? I've seen

his movies!” (This probably embarrasses him, but how many friends have *you* seen on the Hallmark Channel?) Then we hug before diving into discussion as deeply as time allows—preferably over a sandwich and with a few goofy selfies.

Torry is the kind of person you can be your serious and nerdy self with. He’s someone with whom you can discuss spiritual matters and the (equally crucial) best way to organize a silverware drawer and the pivotal Tupperware bin, which he and I may or may not have discussed with an exchange of photographic evidence on more than one occasion.

As a creative, Torry is a prolific mind with more ideas than he’ll ever have time to produce, write, or act—each of them as funny as they are deep. A true gift to a world longing for both meaning and much-needed levity.

Most of all, he’s a friend with a gift for making others feel seen and full of the potential they may not recognize in themselves. A man full of adventure with a heart for each being he finds in his path, fueled by his keen desire for God.

Each of these qualities shines through in *The Call of the Mild*—every chapter a glimpse into the man himself: hilarious, heartwarming, and wise. I pray these stories lift your spirits and encourage you as they have me.

If you’ve never met, heard, or read him before, I am so honored to introduce my friend Torry Martin.

***Tosca Lee***

*New York Times* bestselling author





**K**NOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

The police officer tapped on my window. “I noticed you swerving,” he said. “Could you please step out of the car, sir?”

“Okay,” I replied, “but that could be a little tricky.”

I tried to act as natural as possible. But as I opened my door and put my left foot out of the car, the upside-down hoodie sweatshirt I was wearing as a pair of pants started to slip down. I was holding it up with one hand, but as I stood, I felt the zipper in back starting to pull apart.

I was afraid the hoodie would fall to my feet and I would be left standing in front of McDonald’s in my SpongeBob boxer shorts with a Japanese family of three watching from inside the restaurant—a bizarre dinner theater show to accompany their Big Macs.

That was when I decided to act on the weirdest thought I ever had.  
*I should tap dance!*



It all started two days earlier when my dogs went missing. We have three dogs—Bear, Willow, and our newest miracle dog, Samantha. I

must confess that I tend to obsess over my dogs more than the average person. That's largely due to the fact that my best friend, Rob, and I are two single Christian men sharing a house, and these dogs are our only source of physical affection. It's either hug the dogs, hug each other, or hug my poster of Gal Gadot. His beard is scratchy, and she'd give me a paper cut, so I choose the dogs.

Rob and I live in rural Tennessee, surrounded by fields and forests—plenty of space for dogs to get lost. So when Samantha and Willow went missing, Rob and I spent the next two days in our cars driving up and down country roads, calling out for them. Looking for them was exhausting, especially with so little sleep. My overactive imagination kept me awake as I feared the worst. *What if they've been stolen? What if the two dogs were separated? What if they never bring the McRib back? What if they make McRibs out of dogs?*

As if there wasn't already enough stress in my life, I had to leave that day to attend a media conference. I planned to leave at noon, but it was now four in the afternoon, and I was so busy searching for my dogs that I hadn't even packed my car for the trip yet.

I reluctantly concluded that I couldn't put off my trip any longer. So I returned home, quickly packed my car, and began a worry-filled drive at five o'clock, the time I had originally hoped to arrive at the conference.

I was only 20 miles away from home when the exclamation mark on my dashboard suddenly lit up. Either it was just as surprised as I was to be leaving so late, or it could be something else. *But what? I suppose I could dig out the manual to see what it means, but who needs a manual when you have a Rob?*

"It means your tire pressure is low," Rob explained when I phoned him. "Where'd you get your tires?"

"Sam's Club. They're under warranty."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm just nearing the exit for Sam's Club."

“Well, take that exit, go to Sam’s Club, and get your tires fixed. They’ll do it for free if they’re under warranty.”

See what I mean? The guy is brilliant.

After I waited an hour and a half at Sam’s Club, they discovered a screw embedded in the tire, so they patched it up and gave me my car back. I quickly called Rob again to tell him the car was fixed, but I was now six and a half hours behind schedule. Rob, however, being Rob, had a solution.

“There’s another road you can take—Celina Highway. It’ll take you 40 minutes out of your way, but it’ll save you an hour and a half in the long run.”

I drove to a nearby Pilot station and pulled up to the middle of three gas pumps, just behind another car. While my car was fueling, I decided to dash inside to get a cup of coffee—and two large Red Bulls in case the coffee didn’t work.

Then I climbed back into my car and discovered an immediate problem: two cup holders, three drinks. I have an extreme case of obsessive compulsive disorder, and my OCD mind noted that the Red Bulls matched each other, so they got the cup holders and the coffee went between my legs.

There was still a vehicle in front of me, so, already energized by a few swigs of coffee and impatient because of the time, I hurriedly put the car in reverse and prepared to go around him. But that was much easier said than done. I couldn’t see out my back window, which was blocked by my five-piece luggage set with four boxes of books perilously perched on top.

I would’ve put some of this stuff in my trunk, but there wasn’t enough room. It was already packed full with enough supplies to survive any potential crisis, including the apocalypse, whenever it comes—pre, mid, or post. I’ve got ’em all covered. My trunk carried my first-aid kit, winter weather safety kit, emergency bathroom supplies, a box of MREs (meals ready to eat—and I’m always ready to

eat), an ice chest, and a collapsible director's chair with matching sun umbrella, just in case my car breaks down and I have to sit on the side of the road. (I have very fair skin and don't tan. I turn either a bright red or a light pink, neither of which goes with my wardrobe. Pale white goes with everything.)

I'm probably leaving something out, but I'm afraid to open my trunk to take an inventory. That would require a four-person search party, high-powered floodlights, and one of those underwater robot cameras like they used in *Titanic*.

Basically, I'm an overweight, overworrying, overpacker. I told you, it's an extreme case of OCD. Weren't you listening? Yeesh.

Anyway, I was blinded by the—wait! I also have an extreme case of ADHD. I meant to tell you earlier but got distracted. Starting again...

Blinded by the piles of luggage in the backseat, I was going to have to back up by faith. It was my Honda trust fall.

Unaware that another car had pulled up to the pump behind me, I started to back up...

*HONK! HONK!*

I slammed on my brakes, and the coffee went flying, immediately giving me coffee crotch. But there was no way I could change out of my now soaked shorts because my clothes were in the very bottom suitcase of my Leaning Tower of Luggage. *My next car is definitely going to have one of those fancy backup cameras.*

Frustrated but not defeated, I decided I wasn't going to allow myself to be delayed one second longer, so I got back on the road with soggy shorts and a sagging spirit. My damp shorts didn't bother me at first, but ten miles later I began to experience the first stages of driver's chafe. My plan was to pull over and change clothes once I got on Celina Highway, but you can imagine my surprise when I finally reached the road to find it completely closed down.

That's when my two GPS systems started bickering. I have a terrible sense of direction, so I always have a backup. Second opinions are

always nice. The GPS on my phone had a woman's voice, the GPS in the car had a man's voice, and they couldn't agree on anything.

"In 500 feet, turn right on Madison Road," said Mrs. GPS.

"In 1,000 feet, turn left on Juniper Street," said Mr. GPS.

"Turn right on Madison Road," insisted Mrs. GPS.

"Madison Road is a school zone," Mr. GPS pointed out. "Take Juniper."

"He doesn't know what he's talking about. Take Madison!" she said.

"She always does this. She never listens to me! Take Juniper!" he said.

"Maybe I would listen to you if you showed me the courtesy of taking out the trash when I ask you to!"

"Trash day is Thursday! Why would I take it out today?"

"Today *is* Thursday!"

Pause. "Route recalculation."

Frustrated by my feuding GPS systems, I pulled to the side of the road to call Rob. "Follow the signs to Birdstown," he said.

Sitting there, still suffering from driver's chafe, I had an idea. I slipped off my gym shorts in the front seat—no easy trick for a big man. Then, contorting my body, I reached way back behind me, pushed a couple of boxes aside, lowered the backseat window, and carefully draped my shorts over it. Then I powered the window back up and wedged the shorts securely in place, giving new meaning to the word "wedgie." I made sure about three inches remained inside the car to secure them, and I left the rest of the soggy shorts outside to flap in the breeze so they could get good and dry. I was pretty impressed that I could do all of this in the cramped confines of my car. I felt like Houdini in a Honda.

I spotted the sign for Birdstown and started to follow it to the left. But 20 minutes later it started sprinkling. Realizing that I needed to get my shorts back in before they got drenched, I quickly pulled over, reached for the back window, and saw that my shorts had disappeared!

Completely vanished. And here I thought *I* was Houdini. No time to send out a search and rescue team for my shorts. I was already running late.

Then my phone rang. It was Rob, calling to check on my progress. I told him I was near Birdstown.

“I just wanted to warn you about the police,” he said. “They’re everywhere on those country roads, so use your cruise control.”

Now I had a new worry: getting stopped for speeding by the police. If there really were cops around, I didn’t want to be caught with my pants down—or off, for that matter.

The only other piece of clothing I had handy was my black hoodie on the passenger seat. This inspired a brilliant idea. I realized that if I flipped the hoodie sweatshirt upside down with the zipper facing backward and put my legs through the sleeves, I could wear it as a pair of pants. Sitting in the car, I’d look just like I was wearing black sweats.

I took off my shoes, slipped my legs through the armholes, put my shoes back on, placed my feet on the gas and brake pedals, and voila! Turns out *I’m* the genius. Who needs Rob? The sweatshirt’s hood dangled between my feet, but that was a minor problem. I figured I could use it as a crumb catcher when I stopped for donuts.

So with complete confidence, off I drove in my hoodie pants, following the directions from Mr. GPS. I turned off Mrs. GPS because I already had enough voices in my head. I could squeeze in one more voice, but definitely not two. Besides, it was distracting.

“In three-quarters of a mile, turn right on Happy Valley Road,” said Mr. GPS.

*Happy Valley? That’s gotta be a good sign.* I turned right, set the cruise control, and took my foot off the pedal, relaxing it. It was now dark as I comfortably cruised down the road. Unfortunately, I’d only gone a few miles when I spied a sign indicating that the speed limit was reduced from 65 to 55. I tried to tap my brakes to disengage the cruise control, but while my foot had been relaxing, somehow it had become caught in the hood of my upside-down sweatshirt, and now

I couldn't shake it loose. As I struggled to free my foot, I saw that the speed limit was reduced again to 45, but I was still racing along at 65 miles per hour, unable to slow down!

“OH! EEK! AAAAH!”

When translated from scream-speak, this means, “My foot's stuck! HELLLLLP!”

In my panic, I didn't think to push the button that turns off the cruise control. Instead, with my right hand, I reached down and tried to free my foot, giving my left hand full control of the steering wheel, which pulled the car hard left. I brought my right hand up and yanked the steering wheel hard right in a desperate struggle to bring the vehicle under control. *This isn't Happy Valley. It's Death Valley!*

“Lord, help!”

Once again, I tried to shake my foot loose, and once again I swerved...

Sirens! Flashing red lights!

I wanted to slow down, but I was unable to extract my foot from the hoodie and continued whizzing along at 65 miles per hour. I was inadvertently involved in a high-speed chase! *The police will just have to keep up. Maybe they can pull alongside me and pass the speeding ticket through the window.* I went a full mile before I finally got my foot free and was able to tap my brakes to slow down.

There was no place to pull over until I sensed a McDonald's in the distance. I can smell their fries from 20 miles away and their apple pies from 30.

After pulling into McDonald's with the police car right behind, I parked across three empty spaces. I knew the officers wouldn't be happy with me, but I wasn't happy either. The only thing happy here was...

*Hmm...a Happy Meal sounds good, and we're already here anyway. I wonder if they'll give me time to—*

**KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!**

The police officer tapped on my window.

While the officer checked my proof of insurance and registration and ran my driver's license, I sat in my car and prayed an ADHD-enhanced, anxiety-ridden, Red-Bull-influenced prayer of panic. *Father, please don't let me get a ticket. Just bring my dogs home. I don't want to go to jail. Unless I can bring my dogs to jail. Maybe they can join the police academy. I hear they take dogs. I want my dogs!*

"What seems to be the problem?" the officer asked, interrupting my thoughts.

"My dogs are missing!" I blurted out without thinking.

"Sooo, that's why you were swerving? You were looking for your dogs?"

"No," I quickly said. "I was swerving 'cuz my foot caught on the hoodie and my shorts blew out."

Those words made complete sense to me but obviously not to the policeman.

"Have you been drinking, sir?"

"Yes!" I responded. "I had two 18-ounce Red Bulls. They're the big ones."

"Anything else?"

"A cup of coffee, black, no creamer. I'm a diabetic. But I only had a couple sips." (My OCD makes me provide excruciatingly painful details.)

"Could you please step out of the car, sir?"

"Okay," I said, "but that could be a little tricky."

And it turns out I was right. I still didn't want to reveal that I was wearing hoodie pants, so I tried to step out while acting as natural as possible. But as I put my left foot on the ground, the hoodie started to slip down.

I grabbed the front with my right hand to keep it from slipping further, but as I stood, I felt the zipper in back start to pull apart. So I used my left hand to keep the zipper from separating further. I looked like I was riding an imaginary horse, and I felt ridiculous, but getting booked in my SpongeBob boxers would be worse.



There were two officers. I didn't catch their names, so I'll just call them Starsky and Hutch.

"Step forward," said Officer Starsky, taking me aside to perform the first of a three-step DUI test.

"Follow my finger," he added as he slowly moved it side to side.

"You can move your finger faster," I said. "The Red Bulls kicked in, and right now I could follow a hyperactive hummingbird."

Noticing my dilated pupils, he moved on to the next step. "Now stand on one leg for as long as you can."

"O...kay."

That's when I realized that hoodies aren't designed to be worn as pants. There just isn't enough fabric between the legs/sleeves to raise one's foot properly. I tried my hardest to raise one foot, but I started to wobble and stumble. I immediately put my foot back down to regain my balance.

Officer Hutch looked at me suspiciously. I could tell he thought I was drunk. "Do you mind if we search your car?"

"Sure, go ahead," I said, giving my consent. "Let me know if you find some sunglasses. I was looking for them earlier." I gave the officer a smile. He didn't smile back. *Well, at least I know HE's sober.*

Meanwhile, my audience was growing. In addition to the Japanese family inside the McDonald's, two more people had now gathered outside to watch the show.

"Okay, sir, can you please walk a straight line, placing one foot directly in front of the other?" Officer Starsky said.

It sounded easy enough, but the hood kept tripping me, so I reached down to lift it up. But that released my grip on the "waistband," and my upside-down hoodie crashed down to my ankles like the Sweatshirt of Jericho. Realizing I was now fully exposed in my boxers, I fully committed to it. I kicked my shoes off, pulled the hoodie off my feet, and threw it triumphantly to the ground.

"Your SpongeBob's not very absorbent," Officer Starsky said.

I looked down at my boxers in horror. "It's coffee!" I explained to

the officers. Then I turned to the McDonald's audience. "IT'S COFFEE!" I shouted.

That's when I thought, *This is humiliating. The sooner I can get them to believe I'm sober, the sooner I can get this over with. Wait...I should tap dance.* In my Red Bull-influenced brain, a perfectly executed time step would immediately show them how sober I was.

Hop, step, fa-lap, ball, change! Hop, step, fa-lap, ball, change! And hold!

I'm pretty sure doing a tap dance was not part of the Kentucky field sobriety test, but it should be.

"Could a drunk do that?" I said. "Or how about this?"

*If I can't convince them I'm sober, I can at least convince them I'm a Christian. Maybe one of them is a brother and will let me off the hook.* I then launched into a Jesus cheer that involved some pretty complicated hand motions.

"Jesus is number one! He's big and He's bold and He'll save your soul! UMPH!"

The cheer ended with me standing on one leg, the other leg in the air, and my right arm in the power position. The audience at McDonald's broke into spontaneous applause.

"Thank you!" I said, acknowledging the crowd. I turned back to Officer Starsky, eagerly awaiting his approval.

Officer Starsky studied my face. "I think we're going to need to do the Breathalyzer."

"Yes, please!" I said enthusiastically, knowing it was the one test I would definitely pass.

As I exhaled into the device, I noticed that my audience had expanded to seven, which is God's number, making them holy witnesses. The officer studied the Breathalyzer and turned toward the crowd as if they were game show contestants. "What do you think?" he asked them.

"Sober!" the first person shouted.

"Sober!" the second person shouted.

Pause... “Stupid!” the third person shouted.

“Yes!” I yelled. “That’s our winner!”

The officers nodded. Contestant number three was correct.

The officers had searched my car, and as they moved to put my luggage back in, I stopped them. “Wait! I’ve got clothes in that one, and I’d kinda like to put something on.”

“We’d kinda like that too,” Officer Hutch said with a chuckle. Clearly they were warming up to me—so much so that the officers opened both doors on the driver’s side of the car, creating a little changing stall for me. Hutch also shielded me with his body, standing with his back to me and giving me the privacy to dig through my luggage and change my clothes.

I unzipped the piece of luggage, and as I scanned the contents, my OCD immediately kicked in. Feeling uncertain, I pulled out a pair of shorts and a pair of pants, and while holding them up, I turned to Officer Hutch. “Which do you think?”

The policeman looked at the shorts and at the pants before responding. “Well... the shorts are more casual with the shirt you’re wearing.”

“Yeah, but they’re the wrong color,” I said, noting that the shorts were brown. “Brown never goes with black.”

“Maybe change the shirt?”

“Yes!” I exclaimed, reaching down and grabbing my coordinated brown-checked shirt. As I did, I noticed the fresh, dry, clean underwear. I pulled a pair of fresh boxers out. “Would you guys mind if I—”

“NO!” Hutch said.

“Sir?” added Starsky.

“Sorry,” I responded meekly. I guess even the law had its limits.

Believe it or not, this was only the beginning of what was to become the strangest seven days of my life—and for those who know me, that’s saying a *lot*.



*The Call of the Mild* focuses on our calling from God and the

lessons I've learned as I've tried to follow mine. The lesson I learned from this experience (other than “hoodies don't make good pants” and “don't back up with coffee in your lap”) is that following God's call often involves sacrifice. That may sound like a no-brainer, which happens to be my specialty, but talking about sacrifice and putting it into practice are two entirely different things.

Leaving home for seven days when my dogs were missing was one of the hardest things I've ever done. But I had made a commitment to my calling—and to the people at the conference where I was headed. By sacrificing my desire to keep searching for my dogs, I was being obedient to God, trusting that He would protect my pets while the search continued in Rob's competent hands.

Besides, in Matthew 10:37, Jesus says that anyone who loves their father, mother, son, or daughter more than Him is not worthy of Him. I was pretty sure that applied to lost dogs too.

I'll eventually come back to finish the story of this crazy week, in which so much of what I learned about my calling miraculously came together. But the rest of this story will only make sense to you if you can make sense of me. And to do that, we need to go back to the beginning.

The earth was formed from cooling magma...

Okay, too far back. Let's just go back to high school. Follow me. I'll be the one wearing the dunce cap.