



## Journey to Riverbend

*Henry McLaughlin*

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## **Journey to Riverbend** Henry McLaughlin

Michael Archer is nothing if not a man of his word. Though he was unable to save Ben Carstairs, Michael is determined to carry out Ben's dying wish: to be reconciled with his father. Unfortunately, Sam Carstairs, one of the most ruthless businessmen on the frontier, has no use for his own son, much less a man of God seeking reconciliation. Soon after arriving in Riverbend, Michael meets and falls for the stunning Rachel Stone while waiting for Sam to return from a business trip. Beautiful yet guarded, Rachel seems to be running from a past as dark as Michael's. When word reaches town that Sam has been kidnapped on the stagecoach home, Michael offers to join the search party formed by the local sheriff. With a budding romance behind him and a dangerous rescue ahead of him, he sets out on the trail, determined to complete his journey no matter the cost.

## **Journey to Riverbend Details**

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Author : Henry McLaughlin

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## From Reader Review Journey to Riverbend for online ebook

### Jo says

[ (hide spoiler)]

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### Victor Gentile says

Henry McLaughlin in his new book, "Journey To Riverbend" published by Tyndale House Publishers takes us to the town of Riverbend in 1878.

Michael Archer is a jail chaplain who makes a promise of delivering a message to the father of Ben Carstairs, a prisoner, who is being hung, although he is innocent. So Michael makes the journey to Riverbend to see Sam Carstairs. He discovers that Carstairs is not a well liked man, it seems he treats people with disdain, using them for his own gain.

While waiting for an opportunity to meet Carstairs Michael meets the attractive Rachel Stone and the two are drawn to each other. Then the unthinkable happens: Sam has been kidnapped on the stagecoach home by someone who seeks revenge. Now Michael joins the rescue posse which is not going to be easy as the kidnapper begins to play with them.

Henry McLaughlin has written a compelling Western adventure filled with action, gun-battles and romance. "Journey To Riverbend" is a book that will draw you in as you seek to answer the questions: why must Michael find Sam? why was Sam really kidnapped? will Sam accept the message Michael has to deliver? And will the lovely Rachel forgive herself? I highly recommend it and am looking forward to more from Henry McLaughlin.

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To listen to 24 hours non-stop Christian music please visit our internet radio station  
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### Carly says

If you are a regular reader of my reviews, you will have heard this from me many times. I love debut novels. I will pretty much read any debut novel regardless of what it is about. I do particularly like a good western every now and then. All of these things combined to create a strong desire in me to read Journey to Riverbend. And, once again, a debut novel has captured my heart with a wonderful story of faith, love and

the importance of having a forgiving heart.

This story of Journey to Riverbend was a complex and interesting one with characters who must face their past and their sins. This is not your typical, run-of-the-mill romances. There is a depth to the characters and to this story that you just don't see in every book. I think it makes a difference that this book was written by a man because that gives it a slightly different take on the themes presented here. It is also exceptionally well written. This story moved very quickly and managed to hold my attention even through some of the more dramatic moments. Overall, Journey to Riverbend is a very well-rounded debut novel. I always have very high expectations for debut novels and this one exceeded those expectations. The story is good, the writing is excellent, and the Christian message is solid and meaningful. I am already looking forward to seeing what Henry McLaughlin writes next.

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### **Natalie Vellacott says**

I found this book boring and very long. After reading the first half thoroughly I realised it wasn't going to get any better so I skim read to the end just to see if the ending improved things; it didn't.

The book is advertised as Christian historical fiction, there is a half-hearted romance between two people that have both just become Christians having lived immoral lives in the past. They unrealistically fall for each other straight away before their characters even develop and before they have even had any conversations. There is therefore no chemistry between them and the match is not believable. The rest of the book reads like a western with gun battles, kidnappings and such like. It is violent with various murders (by throat slitting!) and an attempted rape.

At times, it seems that the author is trying to use the book for evangelism as he details various people coming to faith. However, some of these fall short of true saving faith so if evangelism is the purpose the mark was missed. An example of this is where one character decides he is interested in Christianity but says that he has many sins and is not sure that he's sorry for all of them. The other Christian character basically tells him that it's okay and that he is the same. He then leads him in a "sinner's prayer." Clearly if the man is not sorry for his sins he has not understood the offence his sin is before a holy God. I realise this is fiction but these types of details are important to ensure the nature of true saving faith isn't misrepresented. It would be better not to include it than to get it wrong like this.

I wouldn't recommend this book to Christian readers due to the violent/sexual content and the confused messages about salvation.

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### **Jessica Higgins says**

A Christian western with a lot of gunslingers, kidnappings and much more to enjoy.

After unsuccessfully trying to stop the hanging of a man, Michael Archer has a mission. He promised Ben Carstairs that he would find his father for him and try to reconcile with him, even though he is being hung for a crime he didn't commit. Michael tried to stop it but couldn't get the evidence he needed. Now Michael must travel to the town of Riverbend to find Sam Carstairs, a ruthless business man that kicked his son Ben

out and isn't likely to give Michael the time of day. As he arrives in Riverbend, Michael meets and quickly finds himself attracted to Rachel Stone who is running from her past and is hesitant to start any kind of relationship. Sam Carstairs isn't in town and Michael waits for him. Soon word gets to town that Sam has been kidnapped on his way home and Michael feels led to join the search party to find Sam and bring the news of his son. It is a dangerous road ahead and not everyone will make it home alive.

This was the winner of the Christian Writing Guild's Operation First Novel contest. The writing is well done and the characters are very relatable. I did feel that it had some unneeded content, especially in the last third where the action needed to pick up speed and instead stalled. There were a lot of characters, that is a hard thing to pull off and I think it could have helped to cut out about half of them, especially with the search party scenes. The overall concept of the novel was good, having the characters consider the actions they take and the consequences to their choices. Even though this is a historical novel, these concepts can be applied to everyday life and we can all learn from the characters and how they deal with their actions and the consequences. As a debut novel, this was very well done and I recommend it to lovers of historical fiction with a good message.

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### **Lorraine says**

Journey to Riverbend, book 1 of the Riverbend Sagas, is a debut novel for Henry McLaughlin. If you loved the old TV westerns or western movies, then you will find this a good read. I particularly liked that the hero and heroine, as well as many of the minor characters, were so realistic and definitely had their strengths and weaknesses. Both Michael and Rachel had sins in their past that they were trying to overcome with God's help. This book has a strong faith thread that is used appropriately without feeling as though it was just "inserted." Some people may object to some of the violence depicted in the book which is one reason that I gave it a 4 rather than a 5. But to portray this part of American history when the west was wild would have been difficult especially with the author's thread throughout focusing on good vs. evil.

Favorite Quotes: "It's best to seek God's help. He can bring things together and heal wounded hearts. He cares about what happens to His people in this life as well as how they'll spend eternity, in heaven or hell."

"...when something happens to remind me that my past will always follow me. - It may follow you, but it's not you anymore."

"This crossroad isn't some test from God. It's a tool of the devil to discourage us, divide us, and lead us astray."

"I believe that God does not put sickness and disease on people. Satan does. He does it not only to hurt people, but also to make the ones who love them and have to watch them suffer turn against God. But God doesn't leave us to deal with our suffering alone. God hurts when we hurt and He does show up to help us. He just doesn't always do it in the way we expect."

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### **Audrey Grant says**

This was the first book I have read by Henry McLaughlin. It was a very interesting book. It was not at all

what I would have expected from a male author. I was pretty amazed at how he was able to get into the heart and mind of the female character and what she was thinking and feeling!

He did even a better job of expressing her thoughts from this perspective than a lot of female authors I have read over the years.

While there is violence and unsavory things that are dealt with in this book. Henry does it in a very Christian way that is not offensive but doesn't dance around the subject. I do wish that he had finished up on the story line of the main guy's guilt over his father and let him settle that issue by finding out what had happened after he left, one way or the other. I hate when a very important part of a story line that is mentioned so very many times, never gets an answer by the end and I'm left hanging.

But other than that. I really liked this book and will be keeping my eyes open for more books by Henry McLaughlin!

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### **C.J. Darlington says**

A stellar debut! If Louis L'Amour wrote inspirational fiction, he would write something like this.

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### **Amber Stokes says**

The American West was a rough place to live. In my Literature of the American West class, I've been reminded that as much as the West has been romanticized as a symbol of freedom and grandeur, the realities of those ideals were often gritty and costly.

In Journey to Riverbend, one thing I really admire is McLaughlin's ability to balance hope and faith with the violence and debauchery that was a part of the time and place he chose as the setting for the book. In that sense, the book is not a light-hearted read. McLaughlin walks a fine line between being too "preachy" for some readers and being too "edgy" for others. Depending on the individual reader's preferences, it's possible that the book might go too far in one direction or the other at various times. But overall, I feel that McLaughlin did a good job both of staying true to his message/beliefs and true to the setting.

This book is a challenging read. As I read the conclusion, I wasn't sure what to think. I was caught up in quite a journey in these pages, and in the end I was left wondering if the destination was worth it. Looking back, I think that the question isn't so much "What was left in the end?" but rather "What did this journey teach me?"

My impression of the characters is also ambiguous. I really appreciate how McLaughlin gives multiple points of view throughout the story and shows that each character has his/her good points and bad points. None of the characters are seen as perfect, and yet each character has some quality that makes the reader sympathize with him/her, although for some it's still very hard to like them! However, in regards to the characters I confess that the romance, while sweet, is a bit "hard to swallow" because of the shortness of time the two characters have together before they fall in love.

The Journey to Riverbend is a long, painful journey, but also a very rewarding one. With violence and other edgy content, this book might not be for everyone. But for all those who love Westerns and a good, thought-provoking read, I recommend taking the Journey to Riverbend!

\*With thanks to Tyndale House Publishers for providing me with a copy of this book in exchange for my honest opinion.\*

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### **Misty says**

Truly one of the best books I've read. I'm a speed reader so it's hard to keep my interest (no long, wordy, boring descriptions of things not pertaining to the plot). I took the time to savor this each chapter like the last few bites of my favorite Thanksgiving pie. The characters become alive in such a way that it seems rude to call them "characters". The only negative comment I could have is that the story ended. In my mind, of course, I have imagined the rest of the story. As well as the legacy that was created. Seldom do I read a book that comes to life each time a similar characteristic of a friend or a situation in real life presents itself.

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### **Tim says**

Michael is at the hanging of an innocent man, Ben Carstairs. Right before his death, Ben asks Michael to find his father and give him a message. Michael begins the journey with only one thought in mind. He'll find Mr. Carstairs, give the message and then go on with his life. But his plans aren't even close to reality. A beautiful woman, a manhunt, and death were not on the agenda. But God can bring beauty out of death and pain.

I just couldn't love this book the I wanted to. The cover kept me from even starting the book, but once I did, it didn't get any better. The characters didn't resonate with me. The plot was slow moving and easily predictable. And the ending was left in such a way that there might be a sequel, but I couldn't find any hint that another book was coming. If you like any loose ends tied up, then you won't like the ending. There wasn't anything at all resolved. My summery would be that this is a Christian western with lots of "preaching", quite a bit of violence, scenes not appropriate for children to read, and a good writing style. I'm giving the book such a low rating because I really didn't like the book and can't honestly recommend it to anyone.

I received this book free of charge from Tyndale in exchange for my honest review.

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### **Nicole says**

#### **Rating: 3.5 stars**

I must say I did really like this book, and I struggled whether to give it 3 or 4 stars. I appreciate that the author was unafraid to proclaim the name of Jesus, and I thought the plot was amazing! Some scenes and lines made me laugh out loud til tears came to my eyes!

I think some content (whether romantic or violent) was described in fuller detail than necessary. The villains were definitely evil, and one character is struggling to overcome a past spent in prostitution. Other readers may not mind this content.

Another thing that I found odd was that I enjoyed supporting characters more than I did the principals. That

usually doesn't happen for me. Even when I do really like the sub-characters, I usually admire the hero/heroine more. I tried to understand that the hero was still growing in the Lord, but some things seemed obvious to me that he was not understanding(i.e. God may use His children to bring justice to evil people, and that's not wrong).

Overall, I did really enjoy the book. The shorter chapters made it a super easy read, and I would willingly read another book by this author. I hate giving books such a low rating, especially when I'm not sure, and I feel very tempted to go back and change it to 4 stars (which is what I give most books). For now, though, I'll stick with my original gut-vote. :)

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### **Beverly says**

Journey to Riverbend is one of those books that is a stand alone with potential for much more. This first time author writes such magnetic characters with unique living and breathing voices that I have had the desire to move to Riverbend to get to know its people better. Even the unsavory residents add to the town's charm and vitality. The action is so driving that I couldn't put the book down once I started reading.

The opening scene is the hanging of a gangly young man whom the main character, Michael Archer, is convinced is innocent. Young Ben's final request was to ask Michael to visit his estranged father, Sam Carstairs, to deliver some letters, an item Ben cherished of his mother's, and attempt a post-mortem reconciliation of some sort.

Michael Archer brought along a letter of recommendation from his friend Sheriff Gideon Parsons to take to Riverbend's Sheriff to elicit his assistance in his efforts. Sheriff Caleb Davis was as good as Parsons in reading character, and this lean and tough young man didn't appear to be the typical kind for ministerial duties. It made him curious to know Michael's life story. He knew this task would be difficult because although Sam Carstairs was the town's benefactor, he was ruthless and hard as nails.

In the meantime, Sam Carstairs had traveled to San Francisco for business, an annual event. On the return trip, he received two disturbing threatening notes. Then in the last leg of his journey he was abducted. As soon as news of the kidnapping reached Riverbend, Sheriff Davis organized a search posse and included Michael Archer.

This is one of the best books I have read set in the Old Wild West. The author's descriptive language is powerful. The setting as well as the characters came alive as we follow Michael along his personal, spiritual, and physical journey. The reader realizes that the title of the book is multi-dimensional as the story picks up on Sam Carstairs own harrowing experiences and the baffling behavior of his abductors.

The book is full of the gritty elements of life in the Old Wild West. Evil is honestly portrayed for what it is and well written in contrast to the good seen in the lives of several of the members of the posse and village. Michael is a strong Christian with a mission in mind, but even he has his demons to deal with. I would rate this book at PG13 because of the multiple incidences where evil triumphs momentarily. Yet while this is true, the Gospel message is strong without being preachy. The author manages to balance the two contrasting characteristics in such a manner that neither is overwhelming. If the author were to write 100 more of this type of book, I would read and recommend all.

**However, I can't emphasize enough to parents of teens and pre-teens to exercise caution. There is**

**nothing in the book to compromise the Judeo-Christian values, yet some incidences may be upsetting to those sensitive to brutality. This is a book written for adults, not for children.**

There are several supporting characters in this book just begging for a story of their own, or at least for a bit more resolution. This includes the love interest of the main character, Rachel Stone. I sincerely hope this means the author intends to write more.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received a copy of this book from Tyndale House Publishers. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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### **Elle says**

Journey to Riverbend has a good basis for what could have been a great book. McLaughlin has begun the process of creating characters that are interesting and that you could invest yourself in; however, they never developed into a character that you really wanted to know more about. This book felt very surface level, although it was full of mentions of the characters past it never went into enough details or how each character was coping only enough information was given to know about their background.

I do not usually read historical fiction, and this would have not been my first choice, this book left a lot of questions and never developed fully. The story follows Michael Archer on his quest to help a son apologize to his father and along the way he meets Rachel Stone, a girl relatively new to Riverbend and trying to move beyond her past. I struggled to really get into this book, the story seemed to leap between events happening within the characters life but never really focused on the people only what was happening around them, some of these events and violence that took place was a little to descriptive and was uncalled for.

Journey to Riverbend was an ok book, I would have liked the characters and plot line to be more developed and to really be able to sink into this story.

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### **Nikole Hahn says**

\*Spoiler Alert\*

A romance book written by a man?

Admittingly, I was prejudicial going into the book. But from the first page where he starts Chapter 1 with, "The crowd was small for a hanging. Quieter than usual, as if they all knew justice would not be served today," had me hooked. Would the romance part take backseat to the action? Not when he writes, "The morning light glowed around her. An orb of pale sunshine highlighted her elegant features and brightened her pale yellow dress. Released from the bonnet in her hand, her hair cascaded to her shoulders and framed her face with light brown wisps. Her eyes sparkled. Her lips moved soundlessly. She followed the path to the river."

The story reminded me a little of other western-romances, but Henry McLaughlin takes the story down its different rabbit trails. He introduces us to several characters, but centers around three of them: Michael Archer, Rachel Stone, and Sam Carstairs. Three people who have dark pasts; two that were rescued and introduced to Christ. Sam, however, is a complex character. I didn't expect McLaughlin to develop the

character the way he did, and I made certain assumptions based on past western-romances that I had read by a variety of authors.

A romance book written by a man?

It's possible. He does a fantastic job of bringing the story together. The only confusion was at the end. I didn't know where Michael had come from; one moment Rachel was alone and in the next she found herself in Michael's arms. That confusion didn't detract from a fulfilling happy ending. Book Reviews are always impartial. This book provided by the publisher for review.

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