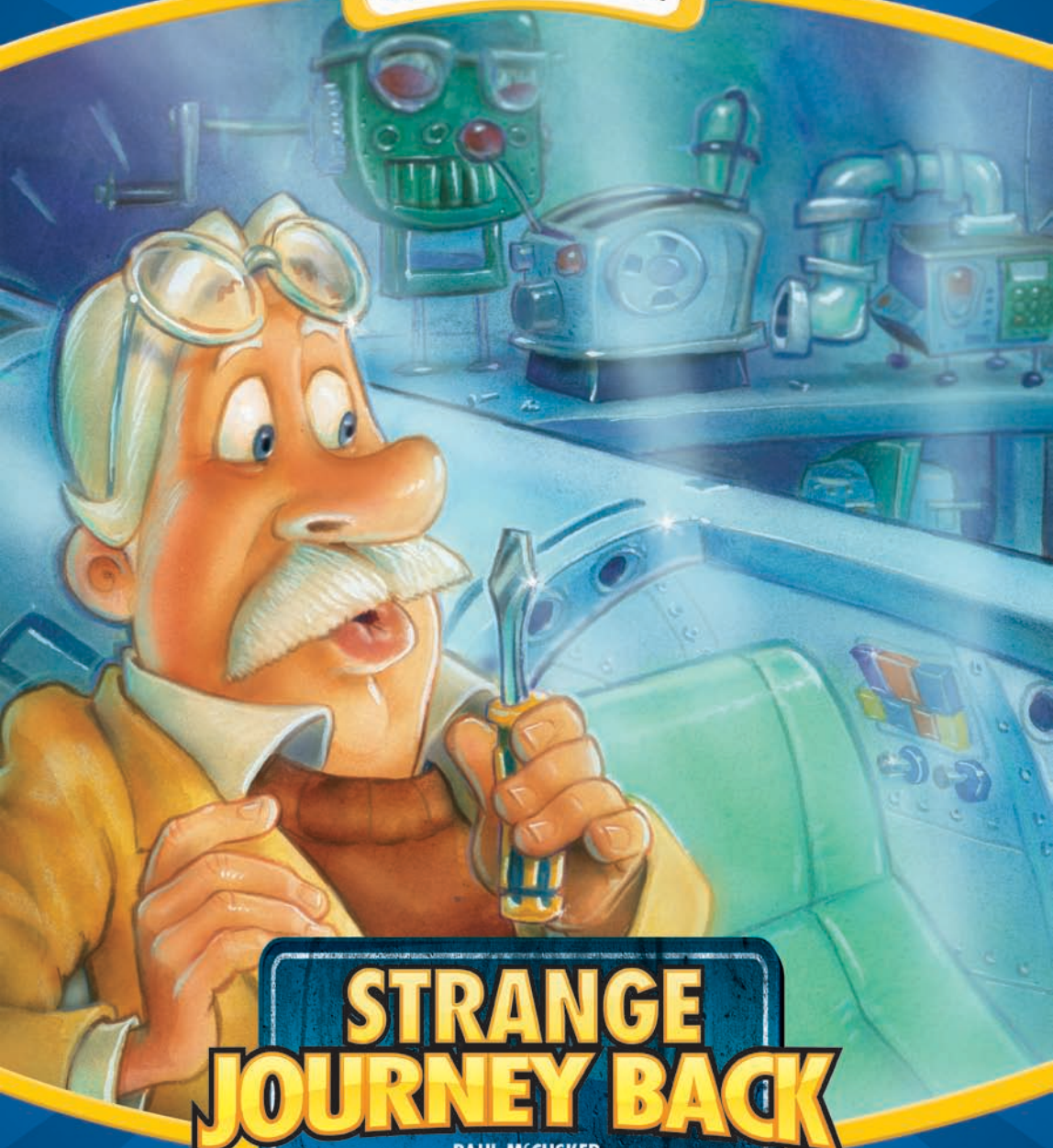


FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

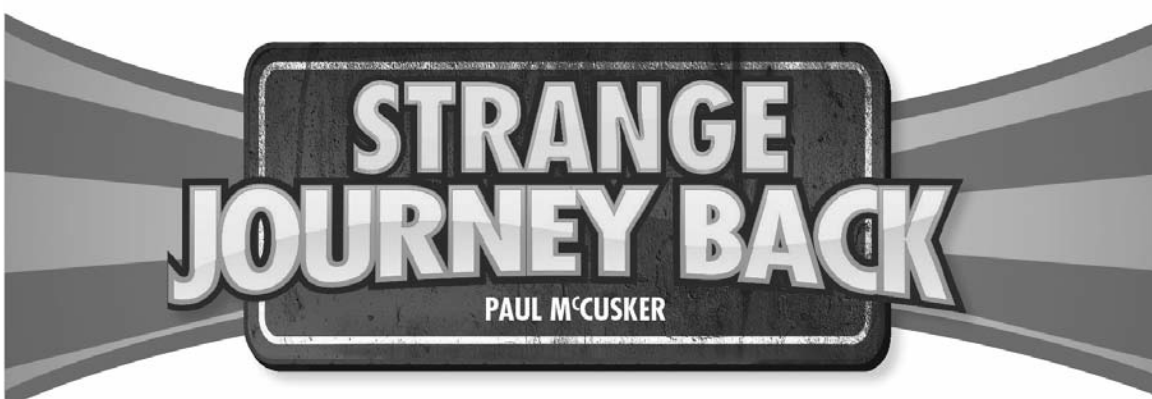
**4 BOOKS**  
IN ONE VOLUME

*Adventures in*  
**ODYSSEY**



**STRANGE  
JOURNEY BACK**

PAUL McCUSKER



**STRANGE  
JOURNEY BACK**

PAUL M'CUSKER



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

The title "STRANGE JOURNEY BACK" is centered within a dark, rounded rectangular box that has a subtle texture and a drop shadow. The box is set against a background of several curved, perspective lines that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a tunnel or a path. The text "STRANGE" is in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font, while "JOURNEY BACK" is in a much larger, bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, the author's name "PAUL McCUSKER" is written in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font.

**STRANGE  
JOURNEY BACK**  
PAUL McCUSKER



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois

*Strange Journey Back*

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A note to readers: The Adventures in Odyssey novels take place in a time period prior to the beginning of the audio or video series. That is why some of the characters from those audio and video episodes don't appear in these stories—they don't exist yet.

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Book  
One



*Strange  
Journey  
Back*







## Chapter One

MARK PRESCOTT WALKED DOWN the sidewalk with grim determination. In his hand, he clutched an envelope. In his heart, he carried a single desire: More than anything else, he wanted things to be the way they used to be.

He wanted things to be the way they were earlier in the spring before his dad left them; before Mark and his mom moved from his neighborhood and friends in Washington, D.C.; before they came to this little town called Odyssey; before . . . before, well, before everything went wrong.

No matter what Mark was doing or thinking about, that one desire stayed with him—to change things back.

He didn't have time for the hot June day or the gentle breeze that whispered the first secrets of summer. He was on a mission. He had written a letter to his father, and he had to get it mailed.

Mark walked quickly, glancing from one side to the other. The tarred street to his left looked like a steaming black river. To his right, the last Victorian house slipped away like the last car on a long train. Odyssey Elementary School slid into view. It would be Mark's school in the fall, if he were still living in Odyssey, if he couldn't make things the way they used to be.

He was looking ahead when his attention was suddenly

drawn to the playground. Two kids were wrestling on the grass. Next to them, a couple of bikes lay like crippled horses that had fallen to the ground.

“Ouch,” cried one of the wrestlers.

“Cut it out,” hollered the second kid.

The one with sandy hair, dirty jeans, and T-shirt sat triumphantly on the chest of the darker-haired one.

“Say you’re sorry,” the victor kept shouting.

“Ow! Get off!” the dark-haired kid whined.

Mark felt sorry for the kid on the bottom. He knew what it was like to be bullied. One time Cliff Atkinson sat on Mark’s chest at recess and tried to take his lunch money. Just as Mark was about to give in, Lee Brooks grabbed Cliff and pulled him off so Mark could defend himself. Lee did crazy things like that. From then on, Lee had become his best friend.

Remembering how Lee had rescued him, Mark started across the field toward the fighters. Maybe he could help. Maybe he would make a new friend like Lee Brooks. His pace quickened to a run as he shoved the letter into his back pocket.

“Say you’re sorry,” the sandy-haired kid shouted again.

“Let me go!” the darker-haired kid on the bottom cried.

Mark locked his arms around the one on top and pulled hard.

“Hey, stop it!” the kid cried out with surprise.

The one on the bottom jumped up like a freed animal. His dark hair was matted to his sweaty forehead; his face was dirty and streaked with tears. A drop of blood bubbled out of his nose. He was taller than any of them.

“Hah,” the boy shouted, as if he had gotten free without any help. “You’re in big trouble. I’m going to get you for this!”

The boy pulled his bike upright, climbed on it, and pedaled off without even saying thanks to Mark.

The sandy-haired kid broke loose from Mark's grip and turned on him. Bright blue eyes shone with fury, and the face contorted into an expression that could have withered houseplants.

Mark gave a startled gasping sound and exclaimed, "You're a girl!"