

PRAISE FOR IMAGINE THE GREAT FLOOD

“I couldn’t be more proud of Guild alum, Matt Koceich! He had a dream, persevered, and would not be denied. Enjoy this result, and may it be only the first of many.”

—Jerry Jenkins, Novelist & Biographer, Owner,
The Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild

“Matt Koceich’s *Imagine. . .The Great Flood* is some of the best biblical historical fiction I’ve read. The story takes us from modern-day America to Ancient Mesopotamia. . .and ties together neatly the link between faith in God and trust in people we love, regardless of apparent circumstance. I look forward to the next installment.”

—Kaci Hill, screenplay writer and Ted Dekker’s
coauthor of *Lunatic* and *Elyon*

“Matt Koceich does a masterful job of lifting readers out of the boredom of everyday life, dropping them head-first into a fast-paced, action-packed world of Bible adventure.”

—Phil A. Smouse, author and illustrator of over fifty books for kids including *Jesus Wants All of Me*, the children’s adaptation of Oswald Chambers’ classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*

“*Imagine. . . The Great Flood* is nonstop action in an epic Bible adventure! A well-known story like Noah’s Ark comes to life through the eyes of 10-year-old Corey Max with all the wonder of God’s creation and the evil forces that want to stop God’s plans. (Spoiler alert: God wins!) Boys and girls who like the *I Survived* books will love this action-packed tale.”

—Annie Tipton, author of the Diary of a Real Payne series, including the award-winning title *True Story*

IMAGINE

THE GREAT FLOOD

Matt
Koceich

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THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO

The ocean swirled around the boy and pulled him down with unrelenting power. Heavy water churned and tugged at his flailing body like unseen hands yanking him into the watery depths. The fight was finally over. Even though he'd tried to stand up to the enemy, the waves were about to swallow him whole.

Only minutes before, ten-year-old Corey Max had been standing on the side of a hill high over the valley's edge. After a futile struggle with a vicious giant bent on destruction, Corey couldn't hold on anymore. He'd gripped the staff he'd been given and felt the superhuman pick him up and toss him into the raging sea.

His body had hit the crashing waves.

It felt like he had hit a brick wall.

Back up on the hill, hundreds of local villagers had gathered to watch the unmatched boy battle the superhuman man. They joined the giant in cheering for Corey's demise.

And now, in the clutches of the churning water, the boy was fighting a new battle. He was fighting for his life.

CHAPTER 1

PRESENT DAY

TEXAS

Corey held Molly's leash with a firm grip as his German shepherd pulled him down the sidewalk. Corey's mother alternated between a skip and a slow jog to keep up with both son and dog. Good thing the park was only a block away.

Corey turned around and stared at the eighteen-wheeler parked in front of their house.

It represented everything that was making Corey upset. *New city. New school. New everything.* He turned back and tried to seem upbeat, but his mother caught the sadness etched onto Corey's face.

"Son, I think it's time you try to understand where your father is coming from."

Clouds darkened overhead, even though it hadn't

rained in weeks. Molly pulled against the leash, harder now. The dog couldn't wait to play catch.

“Mom, I've had the same friends for the last seven years. I don't understand why Dad can't find another job here. Why Florida?”

For the past two months, Corey couldn't stop replaying the scene when his father had come home from work and dropped the bomb. He made it sound like Corey and his mother had a say in the decision, but that really wasn't the case. Truth was, the Max family was headed to a new place and leaving everything familiar behind.

“Now Corey, be honest. Our new home is one block from the beach. Clearwater is beautiful. And we'll make sure we go to Disney World over the summers. Can't beat that!”

The neighborhood park came into view. A green plastic slide and three swings with black rubber seats rose up from a circular pit of mulch chips.

Corey didn't respond to his mother's comment. Instead, he unhooked Molly's leash from her collar and told the dog to fly and be free. He thought if he were the

dog, maybe the move wouldn't be so bad. Molly didn't have friends to miss and never see again. If only he could be like the dog and just eat and sleep.

"Yes, Mom, the beach sounds cool. But, we've got Galveston here. And Disney World sounds even cooler, but that place is *ex-pen-sive*."

Mom smiled. "You're sounding like a grown-up. Since when did you start worrying about finances?"

Molly was sniffing the grass around the swings, lost in her own world of doggy smells.

Corey ignored his mother's question. "Mom, can you honestly tell me that you want to leave here and move halfway across the country?"

"Well," she said, "sometimes things change. But God never changes, so we rely on Him."

Corey wanted to believe what his mother was saying. He'd heard the Bible stories. He'd read them, too. David and Goliath. Moses and the Pharaoh. Noah and the ark.

Now he would be able to write his own story: *Corey and the Move*.

"Are you listening, son?"

“Yes, ma’am.” Listening and understanding were totally different things, though. Corey heard his mother’s words, but believing that God was in control of everything was something entirely opposite of hearing.

Molly finished her canine investigations. She returned to Corey’s feet. Time for fetching. Corey took a tennis ball from his pocket and tossed it over the swing set. The dog took off like a bolt of lightning. Once the ball was securely trapped in the dog’s slobbery mouth, Molly returned it to Corey for another round.

“Corey, sometimes God calls us to places even though we aren’t sure what will happen when we get there.”

Corey yanked the ball from Molly’s mouth and threw it farther this time. It landed by the tree line. The faint sound of thunder echoed in the distance. Molly stopped in her tracks and turned to look at Corey.

“It’s okay. Get the ball, girl!”

Corey’s voice reassured the dog. Molly snatched her target and brought it back to him. This time his

mother reached for the ball.

“Corey, I love you. I’m sorry this move is scary. We’re all wondering how it’s going to work out. But, what I do know is that God’s in charge.”

Corey’s mother launched the ball, sending the shepherd off on another mission.

Watching his dog run toward the unknown darkness of the woods without a care in the world made Corey see a connection to his own situation.

“Molly trusts us.”

The dog disappeared into the trees.

A flash of lightning arced across the sky. Thunder boomed in the distance.

“Yes, honey. She does. We need to do the same thing with God. We need to trust Him with the move. He knows where we’re going. He goes before us. God’s not going to let us go alone.”

Another round of thunder and lightning ripped through the clouds.

Molly, still in the woods, started barking.

“I’ll get her,” Corey said.

“Hurry! We need to get back before the flood hits.”

Corey gave his mom the thumbs-up sign, knowing that Texas storms did come in biblical proportions. He ran after Molly. Her barking got louder the closer he got to the trees. Something was bothering the dog.

Just as Corey reached the woods, he jumped to avoid a log. His right foot caught on the bark, sending him facedown on the ground. Corey's head hit something hard. Pain stabbed behind his eyes, like bolts of lightning.

Molly's barking got louder and more intense.

Corey blinked and tried to get his bearings.

Molly was about twenty feet deeper into the woods. It looked she was barking at someone.

"Molly, come here, girl!"

But the dog kept barking.

Corey couldn't tell if the person was a man or a woman, or if anyone was there at all. It was most likely just his eyes playing tricks because of the fall.

"Molly! Come on!"

Rain started dropping through the treetops and splattered over Corey. He turned and saw his mother

coming to help. He tried to get up, but his legs didn't obey his brain.

“Open his eyes,” was the last thing Corey thought he heard before the world as he knew it disappeared.

CHAPTER 2

2400 B.C.

MESOPOTAMIA

It was like an invisible hand pulled back the woods from around Corey. The trees and park were like wrapping paper being ripped away to reveal a gift underneath. The world Corey knew was gone. Molly and his mother just disappeared.

What happened next would be something Corey could never explain. For when the woods were pulled back, an entirely different scene took their place.

In a blink of an eye, the ground underneath Corey's feet changed from leaves, twigs, and branches to gravel. He looked down and saw that he was standing on the side of a hill. The sky here in this new place was crystal clear, and a brilliant yellow-orange sun lit up the land.

Corey turned around, trying to find where his mother

and Molly went. *What just happened?*

“Mom? MOLLY?”

Corey couldn't run through the trees to find his mother because there were none. He turned around in a complete circle. His mother had vanished. Wherever Corey was now, it wasn't in the Texas park. Tendrils of panic began to creep their way through Corey's brain. How was he going to find his mother?

He didn't have time to worry for long. When Corey turned in a circle a second time, he saw a lion standing in front of him. A real, huge lion. The last time Corey was this close to a wild animal was at the Fort Worth Zoo, and there was a thick glass barrier between them.

The majestic beast considered Corey and padded closer.

Corey turned to run but found a second lion staring at him! This one didn't have the flowing mane. Female. She inched closer, her dark eyes fixed on her prey.

Corey was trapped between two vicious beasts. He didn't want to die out here. Wherever “here” was. Corey closed his eyes and asked God for mercy as he waited to be devoured.

“They won’t hurt you.”

Corey opened his eyes and saw a man with brown skin and a thick black beard standing next to the male lion. He wore a robe like Obi-Wan Kenobi. He held a shepherd’s staff in his right hand and a long leather strap in the other.

“He’s gentle.”

Corey felt fur rub against his leg. He tried to scream, but his mouth wouldn’t open. He looked down and saw the male lion was now rubbing his side against Corey’s leg, like a child seeking affection.

“See, I told you. They’re harmless,” the stranger said. “As long as I hold this staff, the animals obey.”

Corey had to get out of here and find his mother. “Do you know where my mom is? She has brown hair that comes down to her shoulders. She’s wearing a pink shirt and jeans.”

“No, but my name is Shem. And you are?”

“Corey. Corey Max. Where are we? How come the lions aren’t eating us?”

“Coreymax, things are different here.”

“Uh, just Corey. Just call me Core-y.”

The man with the odd name considered his request. “Okay, Core-y. Will you help me get these two creatures onto my father’s ark?” Shem pointed toward the horizon.

Unreal.

The hill they were on ran down into a wide-open plain where a massive wooden boat loomed over the landscape. The wooden structure had to be at least two football fields long and at least five stories tall.

“That looks like Noah’s ark,” Corey said.

“It *is* Noah’s ark. Do you know my father?” Shem asked.

“Yes. Well, no not really. I know *of* him.”

Shem just smiled like this was the first time he had heard what Corey said. “Okay, here. Take this and help me get these lions onto the ark.” The man handed Corey the leather strap. It turned out to be a primitive leash that resembled a belt. “Loop it around her neck.”

Corey wrapped the strap around the female lion’s neck. He was blown away that the wild cat didn’t move or resist. Corey also realized he wasn’t afraid anymore. He missed his mother and Molly. He wanted to know they were okay, but something about the man

named Shem and the lions made Corey feel strangely peaceful.

“Come on, Corey.” Shem was using his staff to nudge the male lion along.

As they made their way down the rocky outcropping, Corey couldn’t believe the lions followed them without resisting. They obeyed like this was the way things were supposed to be.

After a handful of minutes passed, Corey and Shem reached the valley floor. The ark seemed to grow and become even more colossal. From the east, more animals approached. Now Corey could make out two elephants and two horses.

This was just like the story of Noah and the flood from the Bible. But that wasn’t possible, because that happened four thousand years ago.

“Shem?”

“Yes, Corey.” The man stopped and so did the male lion. “What troubles you?”

“Where are we going with the lions? And how come there are elephants and horses over there?”

Shem smiled. “Come here, Corey.”

Corey led his lion over to Shem. The four stood side by side.

“Not too long ago, the Lord commanded my father to build that boat because soon, raging waters are going to cover this land.”

Corey shook his head. How was he here? How was this happening?

Shem continued, “The Lord also commanded that we gather the animals so that they will be saved from the coming flood.”

The great flood? Noah's ark? Impossible!

Corey looked over and saw two men walking with the elephants and horses. “Are those your brothers?”

“Yes. Ham is the one with the elephants, and Japheth is the man leading the horses. Come! We need to hurry. The Nephilim will surely try to stop us.” Shem took off again toward the ark.

Corey started walking, and his lion dutifully followed. He tried to recall what the Nephilim were.

He didn't have to wonder much longer. They hadn't gone twenty paces when Corey saw them. To the west, towering forms lumbered in their direction.

The men had to be at least ten feet tall. Corey counted three men total, with powerful muscles greater than any gym could produce. Huge hands the size of his mother's frying pans. The giants looked like the Hulk minus the green skin. One of the superhumans held some kind of sword that gleamed in the sunlight. The thing looked like a silver surfboard.

He broke from the pack and started running straight for Corey.

CHAPTER 3

Reality stunned Corey like the big bucket of ice water his buddy dumped over his head last summer. He was soaked in panic as he stared at the leviathan coming toward him.

“Start running!” Shem urged. “Don’t fear, brother! The Lord is our shield.”

Corey turned around one last time just to make sure his mother and Molly weren’t here. They were nowhere in sight. And Corey was still being hunted by a giant man swinging a deadly sword.

Corey started running after Shem and was amazed that the two lions did the same.

The sword-bearing giant closed the gap. He roared some words that Corey didn’t understand. Then he

boomed, "I WILL DESTROY YOU!"

Even though Corey and Shem were running full speed, there was no way they were going to make it to the boat before the giant predator caught them. And then what? Corey couldn't imagine.

The other two giants joined in the pursuit, running at an angle to cut off Shem and Corey before they reached the ark.

They were trapped.

Shem must have had the same thought. "Stop!"

Corey put on the brakes. The other man and the two lions did the same.

The giant caught up to them and skidded to a halt. The ground quaked. He raised his sword high in the air and brought it down inches away from Corey. The blade pierced the ground all the way to the golden hilt. The other two giants bent down and put their hands on their knees. They stared at their prey with evil eyes.

Both lions began baring their fangs and growling.

"CALM YOUR ANIMALS OR ALL OF YOU GET THE SWORD," the first giant threatened.

Corey watched as Shem stepped forward, in between

the lions and the giant.

“The Lord has commanded that we fill our father’s ark with the animals,” Noah’s son said. “You and your friends can’t stop us.”

Corey couldn’t believe the confidence Shem showed in the face of this crazy situation. He was standing up to a human giant who could pulverize both of them with one hand.

And just like that, one of those hands grabbed Corey and lifted him high in the air. It was like being on a zip line but in reverse. He dangled in the air like a toy in the giant’s hand.

That’s when he could hear his mother’s voice, clear as though she were dangling from the giant’s left hand, up in the sky with her boy, high above this bizarre scene.

“Rely on God. Rely on Him, Corey. He never changes.”

Now was the time to start relying.

“God, please help me!”

Hanging there, Corey noticed that the female lion was inching her body closer to the giant. Then the male lion moved closer. Each crept low, ready to pounce.

“CALL THEM OFF NOW OR—”