

# The Journey Continues

An Interview with

Dan Millman

By Donna Strong

A gifted storyteller, Dan Millman has been a best selling author for twenty-five years. His work is now available in twenty-eight languages around the globe. From the peak of his world champion beginnings, Dan did not rest on his laurels. He has translated the mastery of his athletic acumen into a body of wisdom on self-mastery, and has become a well-regarded speaker providing a unique synthesis on how to walk a spiritual path in an inviting, down-to-earth form.

***Awareness: For twenty five years, since its initial publication, you have been a champion of the “Way of the Peaceful Warrior” Your work with Socrates and the peaceful warrior philosophy is very focused on developing the strength to bring forth good works and express positive outcomes, despite turmoil and difficulties. The strength that comes from self-mastery is very important; it has the capacity to promote peace. For those who aren’t familiar with your philosophy, how would you describe it?***

Dan: What I call ‘the peaceful warrior’s way’ is a blend of principles, perspectives and practices that embrace and integrate East and West, female and male, flesh and spirit, inner and outer — living a spiritual life in the material realm. To do so, we need to recognize that we live in two worlds — the conventional and the transcendent, each with their truths. As peaceful warriors — living with a peaceful heart and warrior spirit — we keep our head in the clouds, but our feet planted firmly on the ground.

***Awareness: In this newest book you continue on with Socrates, known in life as Sergei Ivanov, this time looking back, to trace his beginnings. What is the purpose of “The Journeys of Socrates?”***

Dan: While “Way of the Peaceful Warrior” contains elements of “magical realism” with Socrates jumping up on rooftops, sending me off on inner journeys and such, this new story goes into the heart and spirit. I wrote “The Journeys of Socrates” first of all, to share another kind of spiritual odyssey, born not of fantastical metaphysical notions, but grounded in the real challenges and dramas of life.

***Awareness: Dan, although the book won’t be available for another month, what can you reveal about “The Journeys of Socrates?”***

Dan: In a sense, it is how the “Way of the Peaceful Warrior” begins. For those readers who don’t know, “Way of the Peaceful Warrior” describes my adventures with a mysterious old service station attendant I called Socrates. This new book is a long-awaited story about an odyssey that forged the character and tempered the spirit of my mentor, Socrates. It contains many themes — or stories within the story — a search for family and for belonging, finding one’s place in the world, and the blessing of having mentors who appear at the right time... but mostly it tells the story of how Socrates became a warrior and how he found peace.

***Awareness: Can you tell us a bit about the background out of which Socrates’ story is woven?***

Dan: I can say this: In nineteenth century Tsarist Russia, an orphaned child born of Jewish and Cossack blood, grew up in a land of wealthy aristocrats, struggling peasants, and growing discontent. Sent to an elite

military academy at the tender age of four, Sergei came of age training to protect a way of life he didn't understand. When a sudden death forced Ser-gei to flee, he escaped into the wilderness.

With nothing to cling to but the memory of his grandfather and the promise of a gift buried near St. Petersburg, Sergei journeyed across the harsh land seeking his place in the world. The odyssey that unfolds is not about revolutions in history, but about the revolution in one man's heart. During his travels, he encounters mentors and masters who reveal secrets about the arts of war and ultimately, the path to peace.

***Awareness: With the publication of this work, you have indicated that you will be talking about mentoring. Can you say something more about its importance in your work?***

Dan: From legends of King Arthur to Lord of the Rings, the history of life and literature overflows with the tradition of mentor and student. Arthur had Merlin, Frodo had Gandalf; Mitch had Morrie; Mark Salzman had martial arts master Pan. Carlos Castaneda had the brujo Don Juan. And in "Way of the Peaceful Warrior," Dan Millman had his Socrates.

With the publication of "The Journeys of Socrates," I explore deeper themes of mentorship. The man I called Socrates matured as a man through his relationship with four different mentors. When I travel on tour, I plan to reveal, for the first time, the four mentors and masters who influenced my writing and my life. I'll also point to the importance of mentoring in our own lives—those who have helped to inspire or shape us.

***Awareness: You have a great quote from Rabbi Hillel: "There are three mysteries in the world—air to the birds, water to the fish, and humanity to itself." Please comment upon the ability of a mentor to act as a catalyst and mirror to see more clearly and to awaken.***

Dan: Let me first say that there are no "best" teachers — only the best one(s) for each individual at a given time. We are each and all mentors, teaching by example. In this, wise and compassionate action is a key. It all comes down to that. Meantime, we learn and prepare ourselves so we can find the wisdom to know when and how to act, and when to be still.

***Awareness: From this interviewer's perspective, accepting mentoring is a form of self love. We have to believe we deserve in order to allow someone to engage with us in the discovery process that is called up through mentoring. What would you say to this?***

Dan: Ramakrishna, the Indian saint, once said, "An ocean of blessings may rain down from the heavens, but if we only hold up a thimble, that's all we will receive." So, as in any of life's gifts, we must of course be open to receive.

I make one important distinction, however. We don't have to "feel" deserving; we just have to treat ourselves with kindness and respect, and learn to open our arms and say "Yes! Thank you!" In other words, since you use the term "self love," I would again make the distinction that we may not always feel loving toward ourselves or others, but we can nonetheless learn to treat ourselves (and others) with loving kindness. We can then open up to asking "the universe" — others, including mentors — for help. Accepting a mentor is an act of vulnerability and humility. But mentors do not give us anything; they only help us to see the treasure we already possess, and are.

***Awareness: What are some of the qualities of your own real life mentors who were most influential to you?***

Dan: Each of my mentors provided radically different kinds of instruction and example. Each had their strengths and weaknesses, and each represented for me another step in my own evolution and spiritual path. These teachers included a Bolivian master who created the finest spiritual school on Earth; a Great Adept

and Awakener whose behavior offered a striking lesson; a spiritual con man and adventurer who opened doors to my future; and a modest sage who revealed the simplest and highest teaching of all.

Albert Schweitzer once wrote, “In influencing others, example is not the main thing . . . it is the only thing.” Whatever a mentor or master may speak about, and whatever information or experience they may transmit, it is ultimately their example and presence that does the teaching . . . only those who live from the heart and speak with genuine authority based upon what they live will have a real effect.

***Awareness: In terms of accepting the shadow in life, how do you see the ability of our ‘enemies’ as we see them, acting as catalysts to engage our best, to stimulate learning and to act on our truth?***

Dan: There is an old proverb: “We have no friends, we have no enemies; we only have teachers.” Whether or not they intend it, we often learn more about ourselves and develop more in confronting our adversaries, both inner and outer, than hanging out with our friends. When I play tennis, I don’t see an adversary across the net; I see my teacher and my student. We help one another to improve. We’re all villains and heroes, playing our roles perfectly.

***Awareness: Stories are road-maps of understanding. Paradoxically, whether they are fact, fiction or some blend of the two, stories can be compelling and inspiring, lifting us out of the trance of powerlessness. Your stories have certainly struck a chord of truth in millions of people, to wake up. As a writer how do you view your stories?***

Dan: There’s an old saying that I’m fond of: “God invented men and women because God loves stories.” We all have our stories to tell. I try to touch upon our common heart and spirit. So while I seem to be writing the story of Sergei Ivanov, whom I came to call Socrates, I also reached out and wrote about our shared story, our common destiny, as we all learn to become . . . s, and as we all find the way to peace.

***Awareness: On reflection, I am struck by how a man who initially became a world-class athletic champion has since spent his life working as a catalyst to help other people become their own champions, to achieve their personal best. Please leave us with your reflections on an age-old question, whether we surrender to the grand design, or meet it through right use of will and personal initiative?***

Dan: Perhaps it would be best for me to end not with my words, but with an epigraph from Socrates’ journal, which I share in “The Journeys of Socrates.” He wrote:

*When I was young, I believed  
that one day my life might  
unfold in an orderly way,  
according to my hopes and expectations.*

*Now I understand that the  
Way winds like a river, always changing, ever onward, following God’s gravity toward the  
Great Sea of Being.*

*My journeys revealed that the  
Way itself creates the warrior  
that every path leads to peace,  
and every choice to wisdom.*

*And that life has always been,*

*and will always be, arising in Mystery.*

***Donna Strong is a writer and inspirational speaker. Her first book, “Coming Home to Calm,” will be published in 2005. She may be contacted at (714) 235-7346 or [www.donnastrong.com](http://www.donnastrong.com)***

***Published by Harper San Francisco, “The Journeys of Socrates” will be available April 12 at your local bookstores. You can pre-order on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Visit [www.danmillman.com](http://www.danmillman.com) for event and tour information.***

***Dan Millman will be appearing in Southern California at the following locations: San Diego - Warwicks Bookstore, La Jolla, Tues., April 19, 7:30 p.m.; Los Angeles - Bodhi Tree Bookstore, Wed., April 20, 7:30 p.m.; and in Orange County - Learning Light Foundation, Anaheim, Sat., April 23, 7:30 p.m.***

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