

[Transcript] The Daily / The Sunday Read: 'The Kidnapped Child Who Became a Poet'

My name is Wyatt Mason, and I'm a contributing writer for The New York Times magazine. This week's Sunday Read is my recent article for the magazine about the 48-year-old American poet Shane McCrae.

Since 2009, McCrae has published 13 collections a verse, some 800 pages of supremely accomplished work.

He writes deeply about race, about marriage, and about sin and purgation.

Through it all, he's been exploring the complexities of his biography, an exploration which prompts this latest piece of mine on the occasion of his just published memoir, Pulling the Chariot of the Son.

McCrae explores the extraordinary events of his childhood when he was kidnapped at age 3 from his black father by his white maternal grandparents.

They took him from Salem, Oregon to just outside of Austin, Texas, raising him under the premise that his father had abandoned him before he was born.

They also tried to keep McCrae's racial identity from him, raising this black kid with the understanding that he was a white kid who just tanned easily.

He was brought up in this brutal, racist household by a grandfather who beat him and lied to him, and by a grandmother who, as much as she showed him love, was also a wildly manipulative influence, brutal in her own way.

McCrae's personal history was a nightmare from which he doubted he could awake.

McCrae's memoir is a very complicated piece of prose.

Some episodes are told many times, attempts by McCrae to understand what might have happened.

My story for the magazine explores all of that, but it also goes to another place that was unexpected for me as a writer.

There was a different burden on my part from when I write about novelists.

I needed, in a basic way, to fact-check the story, not out of a sense of suspicion so much as due diligence.

I needed to speak with any of the people who were implicated in or involved with his kidnapping.

Just to say, the first people I thought of were the grandparents, but they were dead.

So I asked McCrae how he would feel if I were to reach out to his parents, both of whom are alive, neither of whom had really spoken to the other in a quarter of a century.

McCrae expressed some hesitation, but ultimately he said yes.

I ended up speaking with each of his parents many times over the course of a month, attempting to reconcile differing accounts by McCrae's mother, Denise, and his father, Stanley, of events that happened more than forty years ago.

McCrae's memoir works towards a moment, late in the book, of extraordinary synchronicity, when as a teenager he realized that poetry was going to be the thing he would spend his life doing.

It's a thrilling sequence of events, movingly told, that I won't spoil here.

But what's particularly amazing is McCrae's clear-sightedness, even as a teen, about what it was going to take for him to learn what a poet can do.

He recognized that he was going to need to read compulsively, exhaustively, and so one of the things that distinguishes McCrae is how clearly his artistry is a hard-won consequence not of his biography, but of his work ethic.

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Beginning when he was a teenager, he kept to a rigorous course of autodidacticism, reading eight books at a time, twenty-five pages from each, two hundred pages a day.

He needed to take all that in, he understood, if he was going to be able to write his way to where he wanted to go.

In reporting this story, I learned once again that a great artist isn't somebody who sits there waiting for inspiration to happen, rather they find a way, their own way, to work tirelessly. McCrae's path to poetry is unique, however, and his memoir charts his movement through the years of despair and drift that began when he was kidnapped from his father, taken essentially because his white grandparents didn't want him to be raised by a black man as a black man.

To survive all that and to thrive after it, what would it take and where as a poet would it take him?

So here's my article, *The Kidnapped Child Who Became a Poet*, read by Prentice Onayemi.

The weird thing about growing up kidnapped, Shane McCrae, the forty-seven-year-old American poet told me in his melodious, reedy voice one rainy afternoon in May, is if it happens early enough, there's a way in which you kind of don't know.

There was no reason for McCrae to have known.

What unfolded in McCrae's childhood, between a June day in 1979 when his white grandmother took him from his black father and disappeared, and another day, thirteen years later, when McCrae opened a phone book in Salem, Oregon, found a name he hoped was his father's and placed a call, is both an unambiguous story of abduction and a convoluted story of complicity.

It loops through the American landscape, from Oregon to Texas to California to Oregon again, and even now, wends through the vaster emotional country of a child and his parents.

And because so much of what happened to McCrae happened in homes where he was beaten and lied to and threatened, where he was made to understand that black people were inferior to whites, where he was taught to hail Hitler, where he was told that his dark skin meant he tanned easily, but no, not that he was black.

It's a story that's been hard for McCrae to piece together.

My grandparents, McCrae explained in a somewhat gloomy book-laden office at Columbia University where he teaches poetry in its MFA program, were so actively keeping my father away from me, they didn't want me to investigate him at all.

It was just normal.

Normal, McCrae explained, because the story he had been told by his grandparents was that McCrae's father, whose name he didn't even know, abandoned him before he was born.

They had been doing it my whole life, McCrae said matter-of-factly.

I didn't think of it as, oh, this is pretty strange.

McCrae paused.

The after-effects of all that, he continued, it took me until to really understand that I had been a kidnapped child.

Probably my early forties, when it finally started to make sense and I really got it, and I was like, oh, this is a big deal.

I had used the phrase before, growing up kidnapped, but somehow used it without it really sinking in.

It was a thing that I was aware of as this is technically true, but without really understanding

what that means.

McCrae's new book, *The Memoir, pulling the chariot of the sun*, it is being released on August 1st, is his attempt to construct, at a remove of four decades, an understanding of what happened and what it has come to mean.

The memoir takes the reader through McCrae's childhood, from his earliest memories after being taken from his father, to when, at sixteen, he found him again.

Like many accomplished memoirs that have followed from St. Augustine's pioneering confessions, McCrae's explores memories on certain contours, but like few memoirs before it, *pulling the chariot of the sun* offers the experience in prose of that uncertainty.

It's essentially a 250-page avant-garde prose poem that has more in common with Virginia Woolf's excellent, difficult novel, *The Waves*, than with Hwasoo's excellent, not difficult memoir, *Stay True*, or any memoir you might name.

McCrae's sentences are constantly stating and retracting, moving forward and retreating, establishing a perimeter around an event while trying to penetrate it, to enter the chalk outline drawn around a body long buried, that of the boy McCrae was before he was taken. At first, the mode can be off-putting.

Decisions and revisions that a minute can reverse, the reader left to wonder why the same story, McCrae's birth, say, as it was reported to him, is told multiple times.

But it's not long before the initial aesthetic perplexity resolves for the reader into the recognition that this is how a mind works with the past.

Eternal return, compulsive attempts to make something hold over which you have no control.

And then the reader begins to welcome, need, in fact, McCrae's multiplicities.

Unstraining for resolution.

The memoir accumulates a hugeness of feeling that puts a lie to the idea that difficulty and a piece of writing is necessarily cold or aloof, or incompatible with the kind of intense emotion that McCrae's narrative uncommonly yields.

Until I was thirteen, I slept with the light on.

McCrae writes midway through the memoir.

The main light in my bedroom, the light in the ceiling, sometimes still wearing the clothes I had worn that day.

Sometimes even wearing my shoes.

Most of my childhood, I felt I had to be prepared to be taken from my life at any moment.

Pulling the chariot of the sun is the story of an undoing, but it is no less a story of becoming.

McCrae takes the reader to the house where he was made to live with his grandparents, documents how he was thrown at age three into a wall by his grandfather because he was crying for his father, how he was knocked unconscious, how the beatings continued as McCrae matured, until his grandmother divorced the grandfather when McCrae was fourteen.

There are visits from his mother and his brief failed period living with her as a teenager.

Time at multiple schools, three and ninth grade alone, where he sat at the backs of rooms, a middling student, largely friendless.

But there is also the freedom and pleasure he experienced skateboarding, at which he excelled enough to be able to see vividly the fine line that separated his skills from those of skaters who became pros.

And there is McCrae's revelation, as a tenth grader who would go on to repeat the year, that a standardized test put his writing at an eighth grade level, the metrics of the world reporting that he was, contrary to his sense of himself, stupid.

Created within that plausible sadness and loneliness and horror and hopelessness is the story of the strange concatenation of events that produced the moment when McCrae found his path to poetry, first as anchor to life and then as avenue to himself.

His memoir is therefore, and perhaps most memorably, a building's roman, a portrait of a poet as a young black man, a boy raised in a particular crucible of capture that, as part of its power, enacts the American story of seizure and captivity of black people by white tormentors.

McCrae dropped out of high school and got an equivalency diploma.

By nineteen he was on his own, married, father of a daughter, but without a clear path forward, only a clear ambition to write poetry.

Through that period he kept to a strict regimen of reading two hundred pages a day, eight books at once in rotation, twenty-five pages from each, absorbing writing from every era, understanding that beyond his need to make it, he knew nothing about poetry.

What he did know, having been an excellent skateboarder, was that if you wanted to land a reverse ollie, you needed your ten thousand hours to get there.

He entered community college at twenty-one.

After transferring twice, he graduated from a good local college, Linfield, at twenty-six, with an acceptance letter from the premier MFA program in the world, the Iowa Writers Workshop.

Graduating in 2004, he went straight to Harvard Law School to get a JD, thinking that he would briefly support himself as a lawyer.

McCrae didn't like law school, but completed it, and as he was doing so, because he could take courses elsewhere at the university, he applied for a place in the poetry workshop of a poet he had been reading for years, Jory Graham.

It seemed at the start that he didn't know if he should be there.

If he wanted to be there, Graham wrote to me.

But as we say, he had an ear.

He wrote a slightly conventional poem, and his heart was tight, and his natural voice was through clenched teeth.

I felt anger on his page, repressed anger.

I felt he had been beaten down by some great force, some injustice beyond the injustice of being black in America, but I could not break through to it.

At some point, he came to me in my office with a strange draft where a few lines broke apart at what would have been prosodical caesuras.

And as we spoke, he shared a great personal grief and burden, and I remember this vividly.

I looked back and forth, from his broad, open, suddenly vulnerable face, to the lines broken open by a kind of stuttering breath, or a breath taken to squelch a sob.

And I thought, here it is, here we go.

His ear is released.

The next week, he had a handful of poems in that form.

The form worked because it correlated to the griefs he was undergoing.

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Since 2009, McCray has published 13 books of poetry, hundreds of pages of supremely accomplished verse.

He has written autobiographically on the dissolution of marriage and the challenges of fatherhood, on the reality of racism as he has encountered it, and as American history has fostered it, and on sin and its pre-emption and transcendence, not in some abstract mode, but from a decidedly Christian perspective.

McCray is a practicing Episcopalian.

But these are just themes.

Every poet has them, and they say nothing about what might make verse notable, durable. It is McCray's own deep knowledge and use of the history of poetic form that has marked his work and made it identifiably his own.

McCray has written scores of sonnets with the form's standard 14 lines and its characteristic meter of iambic pentameter, and yet a reader encountering these poems for the first time on the page, where they do not look like sonnets.

The lines are ruptured, gapped, slashed, broken at the wrong places, would be hard-pressed to see a sonnet's shape hiding there in plain sight.

But as you not so much push through them as are pulled along by the currents in them, a freight of feeling accumulates and by the end of his best poems detonates in final lines that are often so aggressively felt that you hardly notice the rigor of the meter that has gotten you there.

I tend to think that poems, McCray told me, they're smarter than the people who write them and they're smarter than the people that read them.

A poem that is successful is a poem that you can never entirely possess.

It will always resist you through its sort of fathomless difficulty, that there's always going to be some new thing with the poem because you haven't gotten the whole thing.

Many of McCray's poems have addressed the pain in his own biography.

The first poem, *The Cardinal is the Marriage Bird*, in his first major book, *Mule*, ends with the word, WOMED.

A suite of poems follows in which McCray takes on the role of the book's title animal, sired black, damned white, poems set in the Texas to which he was taken, among them three different poems all called *mulatto*, a word the Spanish root of which means young, me mule, capturing a boy's awareness of the rupture at the center of his nature, or *niggers on TV*, a harrowing but also strangely tender poem that captures the effects of his grandfather's racism.

On a little boy who liked to dance along with the huckstables when the *Cosby* show came on, with his grandmother, I only ever saw her dance with me, which not at all incidentally dances along in iambic pentameter, a complicated act of love nesting within the horror.

Over the years, McCray has burrowed into the ugliness of how whites have treated blacks, imagining the voices of historical figures like Jim Limber, a mixed race orphan adopted by the family of Jefferson Davis at the end of his time as president of the Confederacy, irreconcilable depictions of violence and love.

All the while, McCray has nudged closer to exploring the grotesquery of his own treatment, earlier poems using the word *taken* before the newer poems incorporated finally the word that McCray knows to be true, *kidnapped*.

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I wondered why McCray felt he needed now to approach this history, already glimpsed in his mature work through narrative.

Up until that point, McCray told me, I wrote stuff that I figured one would write.

Being as how I was kidnapped, what is the sort of thing a person who was kidnapped would say?

In a lot of my poems, that's the way I was thinking about it.

But it wasn't until I wrote the memoir that I started to understand that it wasn't like being kidnapped was someone running up to you every day and shouting, hey, you're kidnapped. Which is what the moment of the poem kind of feels like, a dramatization.

Being kidnapped is just, you're living your life and no one is telling you what the premise is.

I used to think that there was something wrong with my emotional life, McCray told me later. Because I had difficulty conjuring up feelings about, like, when my grandmother died, from complications of Alzheimer's while he was in law school.

I was like, okay, well, here's something I'm supposed to feel, and I couldn't.

I was aware that being taken from my father when I was, and my subsequent experiences, really broke something in my ability to connect with family that is generationally before me.

What I feel is the absence of feeling things that I should.

As I sought to fill in McCray's early years, I felt I needed to speak with his mother and father.

He expressed some hesitation, however, and before he ultimately said it would be fine with him and with them if I did, I spoke with one of McCray's high school teachers, who shifted those conversations in an unexpected direction.

The day after we spoke, she texted yearbook photos from when McCray would have been in 9th and 10th grade.

There he was.

In two adolescent shots a year apart, his name was listed not as McCray, but as Baker.

Oh yes, that's right, Denise Baker, McCray's mom, told me on the phone from her home in Portland, Oregon.

Baker was Shane's last name.

Baker was the name of her stepfather, Morris, whom everyone called Maury, and whom Denise called during our conversations, the monster.

He was her mother's fifth and final husband.

They married when Denise was five.

Denise says that when she was still small, he kicked her down a hallway so hard that it felt as if he broke her tailbone.

When she became a teenager, they fought outright.

He was a racist, and she had black friends.

Things got bad.

Her mom and Maury called her fat, worthless, stupid.

She repeatedly ran away.

When she was around 14, her parents told the state that she was out of control, and she was remanded to juvenile detention for a year.

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After she got out, she was emancipated from her parents.
They didn't want to have to take care of me anymore, Denise told me.
Denise talked about meeting McCray's father, Stanley, about which McCray writes in the memoir, how his eventual father approached her slowly from an impossible distance, somehow both in and beyond the Kmart, dressed, she would say, like Superfly.
She would have been 15.
He was most likely 17 or 18.
She never told me what he ordered.
She never told me what they talked about.
As to why, three years later, Shane was born a baker and not a McCray, as Denise tells it.
A hospital staff member said that because she and Stanley weren't married, he wouldn't be able to put his name on the form.
If he wanted to claim paternity, he could within six months if he filed a formal application.
Soon after she was released from the hospital, she and Shane joined Stanley and Salem.
We hung out and talked, Stanley told me from his home in San Diego.
I'm like, when do I need to sign the birth certificate?
And she was like, well, actually, I wanted to talk to you about that because my dad, Mory, can't have kids.
And he was saying that if you let him put Shane in the baker name, when he passes, everything he has will go to Shane.
And I'm like, really?
Because I'm not a rich man.
She said yes.
And I'm like, okay, he can be in the baker name.
When he gets older, if he wants to change it, he can change it.
So this is, to me, where the story began.
All of a sudden, he's in the baker name.
It wasn't long after the birth that Denise and Stanley were no longer in a romantic relationship.
Shane was initially with Denise in Portland.
Sometimes she stayed with her parents who were living there.
By the time McCray was nearing three, Denise began to feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent, afraid that she was going to be abusive to Shane the way her parents had been to her.
Not long after, Stanley took Shane to Salem to live with him.
On June 2, 1979, Stanley's grandfather died.
He told Denise he wanted to take Shane to the funeral in Arizona.
Denise said that was fine.
Probably that same day, Stanley recalled, the grandmother came over.
I had bought Shane this little tricycle, and he just loved it.
We were outside playing, he's riding on the tricycle.
The grandmother pulls up and says, I'd like to see him before he leaves.
I'm like, yeah, absolutely.
We're not leaving for a couple of days, and she says, well, can he spend the night?

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I'm like, no problem, no problem.

And she's like, I'll bring him back tomorrow.

I thought nothing at all.

But then the next day came, and he wasn't back.

That morning, that evening.

And I'm like, what the heck?

She knows that I'm leaving.

So I went over to her house.

Now, I hadn't been to her house in several years, but I knew where she lived, and I went to the house, and the house was empty.

The house is up for sale.

I asked Denise about the house, a detail that didn't make sense to me, and she explained that her parents had moved before Shane was born to a house in Portland where Stanley had never been.

Naturally, I wanted to know what Stanley did when he saw the empty house.

He said that he called Denise, and that she said she told her mother that Stanley was taking Shane to Arizona for a funeral, but that she had not told her mother to take Shane. Stanley was in touch with Denise for a week by phone, but nothing became clearer to him about where Shane was, only that Denise said he must be with them.

And then, along with the grandparents and Shane, she disappeared.

Here's the part of the story that no one can clarify, but it seems that the essential sadness and horror is this.

Denise's parents convinced her that they could give Shane a better life, and absolutely a better life than he would have with Stanley.

At some point, Denise agreed that her parents could take him to Texas, where Maury had a new job, and that once she got herself together, she would come get Shane.

Precisely when they moved and precisely what degree of involvement Denise had in that move, it's clear that she didn't tell Stanley what was happening.

I don't know what I was thinking, Denise told me clearly in tears on several calls.

I was so young, I was not ready to be a mom, and I will regret that for the rest of my life.

Denise did try to take custody of Shane a year after her mother and stepfather moved to Texas.

When she went down, Maury threatened her.

Well, if you try to take Shane, Denise told me Maury said, we'll take him to Mexico, and you'll never see him again.

Denise believed him.

I was just scared to death, she said, but I have no idea why I didn't just take him.

I asked Stanley what he did to try to find Shane.

You know, at that particular time, back in the 80s, I'm in Salem, Oregon, which is basically white, under 2% black.

I was black, and his name was Baker.

Stanley continued, the stuff I had been through with police in my life, I didn't trust police.

Stanley said he did speak with one white officer he knew, who said that without his son having his name, there wasn't going to be any chance of getting him back.

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It felt like a stupid question, but I asked Stanley how he felt after Shane disappeared. Shane was my world, Stanley said.

I was raised in church to believe that everybody had good in them. When I lost Shane, I totally turned to God.

I'm like, I've evidently been messing up in my life, and I'm being punished. I became a deacon in the church and would pray on my knees and ask for my kid to show up and for me to be able to find him.

When Shane would have been about eight or nine, Stanley's sister Carol ran into Denise in Salem, and Denise went over to their mother's house to talk.

I'm like, where's Shane?

And she was like, well, he's at my parents, and I'm like, look, I agreed that your dad could use his name because he didn't have anybody carrying on his name, and I'm trying to be a good person.

But now you guys have taken my kid and disappeared.

I want Shane in my name now, and I want him, Stanley paused.

So Denise is like, okay, well, yeah, we can put him in the McCray name. She gave me a phone number for Shane, but it was a wrong number, and that was the last time I heard from Denise.

Some eight years after that, 13 years after his abduction, Shane found his way back to his father.

One day, Stanley recalled, he had been at work, and I was with my now wife of more than 30 years, Candace, and I got to my door and I was like, weird.

And she's like, what?

I'm like, I feel Shane.

His scent seems to be around me.

I haven't had that since he was three years old.

Everybody that I know, Stanley said, I'd always told about Shane.

I mean, he's my first kid.

We did everything together.

We'd be riding down the road, and he'd go, that's a 56 Chevy at three years old.

That's a 57 Chevy.

I'm like, man, look at my smart kid.

I was just so proud of him, watching the way that he grew, and then they just ripped him out of my life.

A couple of weeks after he sensed Shane, Stanley told me.

My wife called me and said, hey, guess what, Shane called.

I'm like, what?

McCray had gotten his father's name from his grandmother a few years earlier, and at a certain point reached a moment in his life when he sought that name in a phone book and dialed the number next to it.

So we made an appointment to pick him up, and when I got to him, I'm like, dude, I told Candace I got your scent.

It seems like you had been at my door.

Some years later, McCray changed his last name to match his father's.

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Some people go through the worst in life, and it destroys them.
Others, no less beset, see it move through them.
Some people think that I am troublingly optimistic, McCray told me back in his office.
I don't know if that's true, but it's rather more that I tend to believe, for reasons I can't fully explain, the good, or at least the least complicated version that would fall on the side of good.
It seems to me that McCray's optimism might be called faith.
I got this tattoo when I was in law school, McCray said, rolling his left forearm over to reveal a large black Latin cross.
When I did my very first reading, my first chapbook, *One Neither One*, from 2009, it's cover a sketch of shackles that can look like a pair of eyes staring at the reader.
I made sure to wear a jacket so nobody would see it, because I was afraid.
Growing up, McCray continued, there was this kind of feeling that if you had a Christian belief, you can't believe in God and be smart.
What was the feeling I got in the circles I ran in?
And I felt really weird about it, really insecure, because I did believe McCray laughed.
So when I was first trying to be a poet, I didn't want anybody to know I was a Christian.
It was a source of worry for a pretty long time.
I'm also really ashamed of how at least the Christians that get attention in America, how a lot of them act.
It fills me with dismay, and I didn't want to be associated with that.
McCray told me how at nineteen, he'd asked God to give him a sign.
If God did, McCray would believe in him.
The next day, McCray went up to the Mount Angel Monastery, a half hour out of Salem, and there was a storm, thunder, and lightning.
And when he was getting ready to leave, the road out was blocked by two fallen trees.
McCray says he didn't feel that God would waste his time knocking down trees so a kid would believe, but he had asked for a sign, and there one was.
McCray tried Islam, Taoism, but eventually came around to Christianity.
He was baptized a Christian at twenty-nine while at Harvard Law School.
He had also been taking classes at the Episcopal Divinity School.
Had imagined, still imagines, another path for himself as a priest.
But after a term, he learned he wasn't eligible to take more.
And yet, since then, the two things, belief in art and faith in God, have come together.
Fractured through McCray's work, then, is what could be read as a very long poem that has appeared in parts through four books.
There's a purgatory, a heaven, and a hell.
McCray is long done with purgatory and heaven, but the hell poem, which first appeared in twenty-nineteen, keeps getting bigger.
A few weeks before I wrote this article, he sent me the whole poem, or rather all of it in minus two sections he has yet to write.
It's harrowing and strange and also extremely funny in moments.
It completes what I can't help seeing as the kind of *Commedia*, written by someone who believes equally in the Word and the Word.

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I asked McCray about the process by which he came to understand that Christ was God's Son, and how the pain that God allowed to be brought upon Jesus, the wounds inflicted on his body, ended up making sense to him.

In that context, I asked him why we suffer.

It's actually a question that I don't think about all that much, he said, which feels terrible because I'm so often on the verge of tears thinking about the suffering of others. He paused.

It's God's universe.

God can do what God wants, which is kind of what St. Augustine said.

God doesn't owe us happy lives.

Throughout June and into July, I ended up going back and forth between McCray's parents many times, trying to reconcile their individual versions of events.

One day I got a text from Stanley.

Denise contacted me on Facebook a couple hours ago.

We ended up talking on the phone, and she remembers a lot, but just like me, she's forgot a lot.

She does remember how upset she was when her mother lied to me and came and got Shane. I believe she was really hurt regarding that whole situation, and she seems to be struggling with how everything went down.

I called Denise to ask her about the conversation with Stanley.

It's...

It's really painful for me what Shane went through, and I feel extremely at fault.

And it's something that I'll probably deal with forever.

But I wanted to help change part of that.

So I looked up Oregon laws to see if Stanley could get on his birth certificate even now, and it sounds like he could.

So I reached out to Stanley.

As Stanley understood it, the only thing he had agreed to 47 years earlier was that his son would have the Baker name.

He had not known that the birth certificate would make no mention of him as the father. But now he had seen the evidence for himself.

I asked if I could see it.

He texted it along.

The certificate of live birth shows that on September 22, 1975, a child in box one, Shane Alan Baker, was born at 6.59 p.m., to mother in box 6A, Denise Alan Baker.

Box 8A, for father, is blank.

It is as if no such person existed.

Though McCrae says he was kidnapped from his father when he was three, he is, in a way, wrong.

It took place on the day he was born.

I'm glad that's happening, McCrae said of adding Stanley's name to his birth certificate.

Me changing my name to his last name when I was in my very early 20s was really important, and that was very meaningful to me.

The public acknowledgment of him as my father had felt as if I was doing some small thing

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to right a wrong.

It was emotional.

I felt driven to do it, so whatever emotions would go with it were emotions that I already felt decades ago.

On the 1st of July, Stanley and his wife, each on their separate Harley-Davidson's, began the 21-hour ride from San Diego to Oregon.

Stanley wanted to take the forms in himself.

Too much for too long had gone wrong.

He wasn't about to let anything happen now.

If in life, McCrae has met this advent with what might seem like a mildness of feeling.

In art, he has shown a fierce commitment to inventing forms that express significant emotion.

The title of McCrae's memoir, *Pulling the Chariot of the Sun*, alludes to the Greek myth of a son seeking his father, Fayetan, a mortal boy, Helios, a god.

Fayetan had been told that his father was a god but had never met him, so he went on a journey to find them, did, and asked that the god give him proof of his patrimony.

The god said, anything you ask of me, I will grant.

The boy asked to drive the chariot of the sun, the one that Helios drove each day to make the sun rise, pulled by four horses of enormous power.

The god knew that the boy was no match for the task, and yet he had given himself no choice but to say yes.

So Fayetan took the reins at dawn, rose, and of course fell, literally dying to learn that his father's name was his own.

McCrae's version of the story inverts that myth.

At his memoir's end, he finds his father, learns his name, and lives.