

Norman Mclean's A River Runs Through It

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Norman Mclean's *A River Runs Through It* explores many feelings and experiences of one "turn of the century" family in Missoula, Montana. In both the movie, directed by Robert Redford, and the original work of fiction we follow the Mcleans through their joys and sorrows. However, the names of the characters and places are not purely coincidental. These are the same people and places known by Norman Mclean as he was growing up. In a sense, *A River Runs Through It* is Mclean's autobiography. Although these [autobiographical](#) influences are quite evident throughout the course of the story they have deeper roots in the later life of the author as he copes with his life's hardships.

The characters in the movie and book are taken straight from Mclean's life. From the hard working, soft centered, minister father, to the [drunken](#), "down on his luck", brother-in-law, Neil. The character of Paul appears to be the most true to life member of Norman's family. The audience quickly becomes familiar with Paul and his quick-tempered, always ready for anything attitude. This is evident in the beginning of the story with Paul's frequent phrase "...with a bet on the to make things interesting (Mclean 6)." "It was almost funny and sometimes not so funny to see a boy always wanting to bet on himself and almost [sure](#) to win (Mclean 5)." Unlike Norman who was rigorously home schooled every morning, while Paul seemed to escape this torment. The boys would spend their

afternoons frolicking in the woods and fishing the Big Blackfoot River. The differences that developed between Paul's and Norman's fishing styles become evident in the published versions of Mclean's life as well as his real life. Norman followed the traditional style taught by their preacher-father, ten and two in a four -count rhythm, like a metronome.

The four-count rhythm, of course, is functional. The one count takes the line, leader, and fly off the water; the two count tosses them seemingly straight into the sky; the three count was my father's way of saying that at the top the leader and fly have to be given a little beat of time to get behind the line as it is starting forward; the four count means put on the power and throw the line into the rod until you reach ten o'clock-then check-cast, let the fly and leader get ahead of the line, and coast to a soft and perfect landing (Mclean 4).

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