

# **ONA, CLOUD RIDER**

**The Chapter Book Version**



**By Stuart Baum**

**Illustrations by Molly Baum**

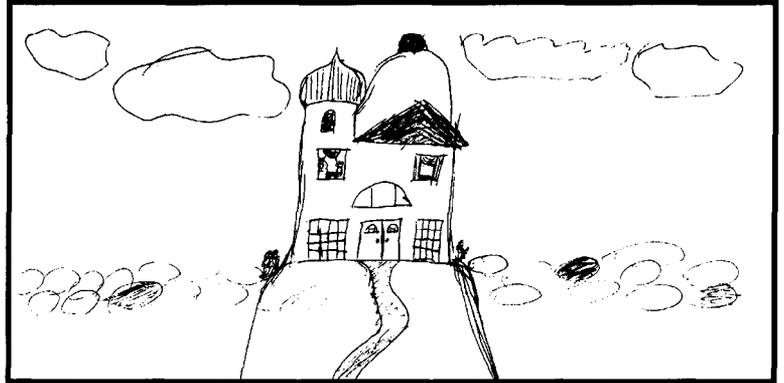
**for**  
**CAMILLA,**  
**who is never anything but.**



(Except when she's being a tiger or a dragon.)

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**WE MEET ONA.**

**O**na lived on the top of a small hill in Utah. She was only three years old, though her mother would often say that Ona wasn't 'only' anything.



To Ona, the hill she lived on was very tall. It was a long way down, even by car. It was a longer way up.

On very cloudy days, the clouds would come and visit. They would come right up to Ona's front door.

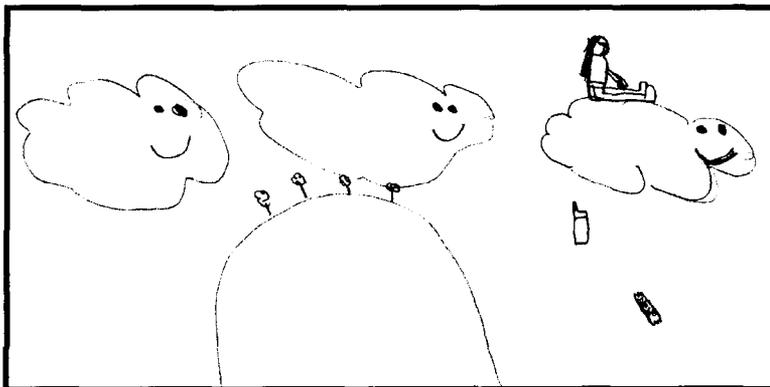
It was a beautiful sight, looking out the front window and seeing the white and gray-edged quilt that expanded from the house's front door to the horizon.

Ona's Mom and Dad would sit on the front steps and stare out into the distance for what seemed, to Ona, to be hours and hours and hours.

Nothing was more boring to Ona.

Instead of sitting on the front steps, Ona would grab a large spill-proof cup of juice (one of the many her Mom would leave ready in the fridge) and a granola bar. She would walk out the back door, find a small and friendly cloud, and go for a ride.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**WHERE THE CUPS WENT.**



**A**t first Ona couldn't control where the clouds went and was often afraid they wouldn't take her back home. But they always did.

Once she learned to drive the clouds, she would float them over to a nearby hill and reach down and pick

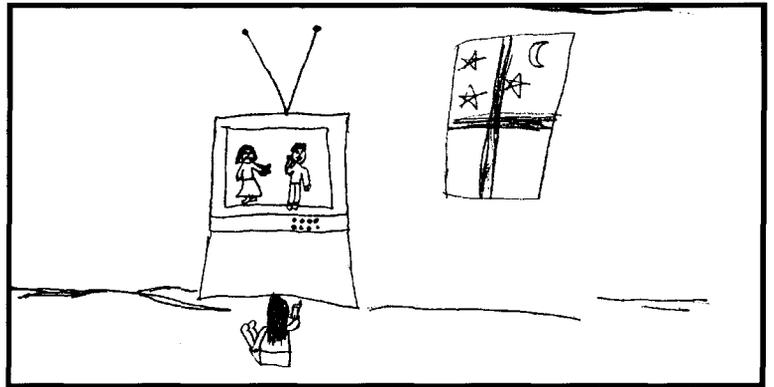
flowers or just look around while she ate her granola bar. She wasn't able to do much until she ate her granola bar because she needed both hands. If she put the granola bar down onto the cloud it would fall through. The lost granola bars were not so bad since she could go home and get more, but the lost cups often caused her Mom to scold her.

Her Mom would say, "I don't know where you could possibly misplace so many sipping cups." And then there'd be no cups for a few days and that made Ona sad.

So she was very careful not to put her cups down when she rode around on the clouds.

### **CHAPTER THREE:** **ONA MAKES IT** **RAIN FROGS.**

One day, Ona brought two small frogs with her onto the cloud. They were so wiggly and wriggly she had to put them down. Like the granola bars and the cups, they fell through. Ona watched them fall towards the ground, but they soon disappeared from view. She decided that she was going to fly back to her hill and climb down and look for the frogs on the ground. On her way back, however, she saw a hill covered with hundreds of bright blue flowers and forgot all about the frogs.



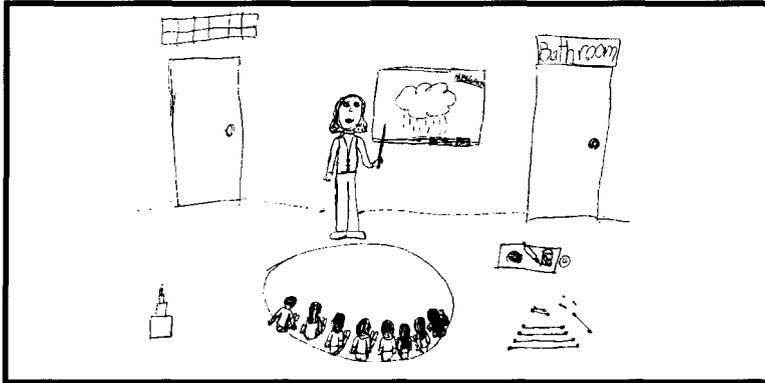
On the television news that night, there was a story of a woman who said it rained frogs on her lawn party. She held up two frogs as proof. The two frogs wiggled and wriggled around in her hand, trying to escape.

Ona smiled. "I'm glad they're okay," she said.

Her Mom hugged her. "You're a very compassionate little girl," said her Mom. Ona didn't know what 'compassionate' meant, but she enjoyed the hug. Then she frowned at her Mom, declaring with a pout, "I'm a big little girl!"

Her Mom hugged her again. "You certainly are," she agreed.

Ona was content.



## **CHAPTER FOUR:** **MISS GREEN** **TEACHES THE** **CLASS ABOUT** **CLOUDS.**

**O**ne day at preschool, the class was learning about clouds.

Miss Green, the teacher, told the class that clouds were water vapor, which she explained is rain before it falls to the ground.

Ona nodded. That explained why her butt was always a little wet after she returned.

When Miss Green held up a picture of different kinds of clouds, one of the other children asked if people could stand on them.

The teacher said, "No."

Ona said, "Yes".

Everyone in the class looked at Ona, since she had the more interesting answer. She explained, "But once they start moving you have to sit down or you'll fall off."

Miss Green laughed, but none of the children thought Ona was joking.

"Really?" another child asked Ona.

"Really," said Ona.

"Not really," said Miss Green. Miss Green smiled at Ona, but Ona returned the smile with a pout. Miss Green added, sweetly, "But it would be fun if it were true."

"It *is* fun," said Ona to herself.



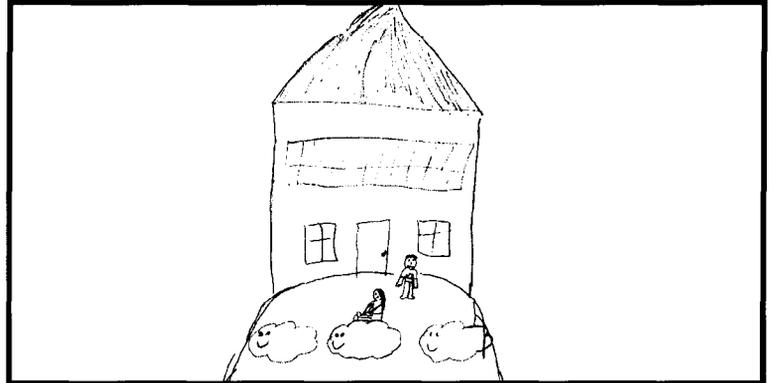
Later, during 'open works', Michael B. came over to Ona and asked, "Have you ridden on clouds?"

"Yes," said Ona.

"Next time, can I come?" asked Michael B.

"Yes," said Ona. And then, trying to sound like a grown-up, she added, "That would be pleasant."

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**ONA TEACHES**  
**MICHAEL B. HOW**  
**TO RIDE CLOUDS.**



The next cloudy day, Michael B. came to visit.

The two Moms sat on the front stairs and talked, which is what grown-ups always did. Ona and Michael B. went out the back door to ride the clouds.



“First,” said Ona using her ‘explaining’ voice, “we need to find a friendly cloud to make sure we get back.”

Michael B. was nervous. “Do they go up very far?” he asked.

“Nope”, said Ona, “the clouds always go straight.” Then she pointed at a gap in the clouds to the forest far below. “But the ground goes down.”

This only made Michael B. more nervous.

“It’s easy,” said Ona. “Just get on the cloud”, and she did this as she spoke. “Then sit down.” She did. “Then lean forward.” Ona leaned forward slightly and the cloud moved away from the side of the hill. It stopped after a few feet. Though she was still very close to Michael B., Ona yelled, “You need to lean back if you want to stop or go backwards!” Her cloud came back to the hill, stopping right in front of Michael B.

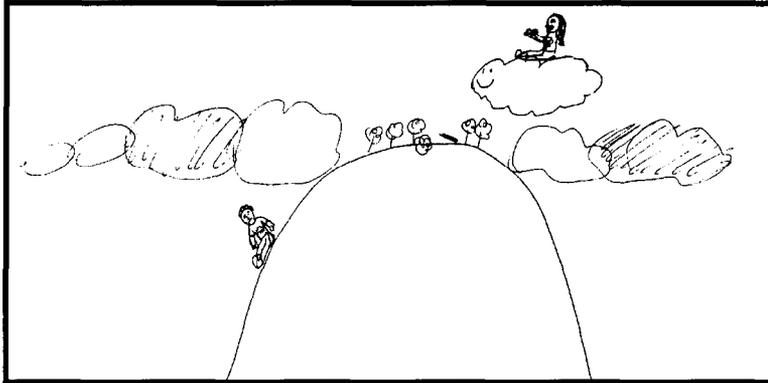
Ona commanded, “Now, get on a cloud.”

Michael B. said quickly, “I’ll ride with you.” He got on her cloud and was surprised that it felt like a slightly wet pillow. He held onto Ona tightly.

Ona asked, “Do you want a g’anola bar?”

Michael B. just shook his head, too afraid to talk. He managed two words: “go” and “slow.”

As if Michael B. should already have known this, Ona said, “That’s all clouds go.”



## **CHAPTER SIX:** **THE TRIP TO** **MOUNT** **DANDELION.**

Ona pointed off into the distance. “We’re going to *that* hill,” she said. Michael B. looked and saw that there were many hilltops poking through the cloud cover.

“Which one?” he asked.

“The yellow one,” Ona said. “It’s called Mount Danny Lion.” Both Ona and Michael B. wondered who ‘Danny’ was.

The two children leaned forward and the cloud began to move. Most of the clouds were going the same direction as they were, but their cloud was going slightly faster. It moved directly through some, bumped others aside, and went around still others, like cloud bumper cars.

“See, it’s easy,” said Ona.

Michael B. agreed, nodding, but he did not loosen his grip on Ona.

Halfway across, their cloud moved out from the crowd of clouds and into the open space. Michael B. tried very hard not to look down. He failed.

“It’s very f-f-far down,” he stammered. “What if we f-fall?”

“Clouds don’t fall,” explained Ona. It wasn’t quite what Michael B. meant, but he was too afraid to ask again.

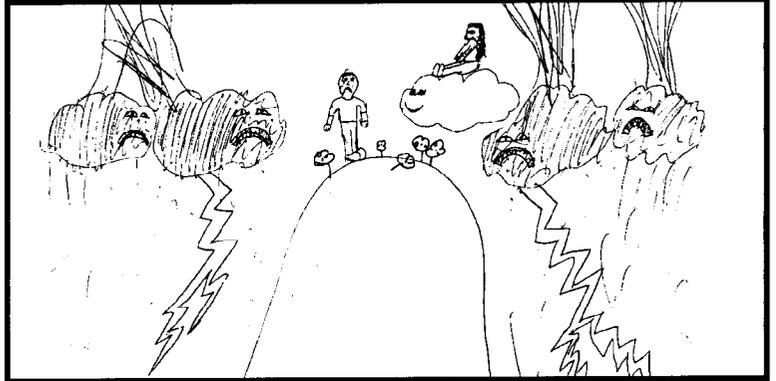
To Michael B.’s relief, they made it to the other hill and he quickly jumped off.

“Get back on, silly!” said Ona. “If you want to pick flowers, just reach down and grab them.” She demonstrated by pulling up a big, yellow dandelion.

Ona sang, “Momma had a baby but its head popped off!” She tried to snap off the flower’s top with one hand but couldn’t manage it, so she ripped it off with the other hand and threw it to the ground. She noticed her fingers were now yellow. She tried to rub off the yellow, but ended up getting yellow over both of her hands.

“Look!” she said excitedly, “I’m yellow!” She put up her hands, palms forward, to show them to Michael B., but Michael B. was gone!

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:** **A LIGHTNING** **STORM.**



“**M**ichael B.!” Ona yelled.  
“Michael B.!” He was nowhere to be seen.

Finally, she saw him sitting in a patch of tall dandelions, just a little way down the hill.

Ona was afraid to get off her cloud since all the other clouds were dark and angry looking. She also saw that the top layer of clouds had moved closer and in some places was touching the lower level, like when you pull Silly Putty apart.

“Michael B.! You had better hurry!” she yelled. “It’s going to storm! Bad!”  
Michael B. refused to get on the cloud. He turned away from Ona, folded his arms against his chest, and shook his head.

The first drops of rain began to fall.

Ona steered the cloud in front of Michael B. Since the cloud would not go any lower, she hovered a few inches above his head. Ona saw that Michael B. was crying.

“Don’t cry,” said Ona softly. “It’ll be okay. We just-”

“I am *not* crying!” snapped Michael B. He didn’t want to cry in front of a little girl. He was supposed to be the brave one. “It’s the rain,” he said. “It dripped down my eyes is all.” He drew lines from his eyes to his cheeks with his fingers, to demonstrate.

Ona wanted to argue, but she didn’t think there was time. Her Mom would be very mad if she were out in the rain. She was trying to think of a way to get Michael B. back on the cloud when-

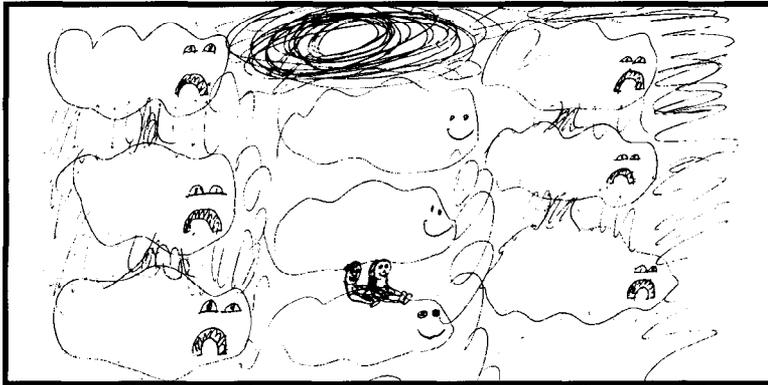
“Craa-ack!” Both children looked in the direction of the noise and caught the last glow from the lightning. It came down right between the hill they were on and the hill where Ona’s house sat.

The rain, as if it were scared out of the upper clouds by the lightning, started coming down much harder and much colder.

“This is very, very, very bad!” declared Ona. Using her ‘serious’ voice, Ona said, “Michael B. We have to go. Right. Now.”

Michael B. quickly climbed up behind Ona. He held on tightly and closed his eyes. "Hurry," he said softly. "I'm not afraid to go fast anymore."

Ona could not stop from explaining, "Clouds don't go fast."



## **CHAPTER EIGHT:** **MICHAEL B.** **FINDS A CLOUD** **ESCALATOR.**

**O**na looked left and right and saw that the storm was all around them.

She looked straight forward and could just barely see her house through the rain and taffy clouds. Ona started driving the friendly cloud directly towards her house.

"Craa-ack!" Another bolt of lightning. The lightning came through the top layer of clouds, streaked through the now thin empty area between the two layers, and shot through the bottom layer.

Ona hoped the tea party lady had brought the frogs inside, where they'd be safe.

Suddenly, Ona started to cry. Michael B. felt her body shake as she sobbed. It was his turn to be strong.

"Let's go up!" he yelled over the roar of the storm.

Now angry with Michael B., Ona yelled back, "Clouds don't go up!" She didn't think he was listening to her.

Michael B. pointed to their left. Ona looked and saw a line of small, friendly clouds slowly moving upwards, as if they were on a cloud escalator.

Ona steered the cloud to the back of the line. Once they edged behind the last cloud in line, they felt safe.

In the upper layer of clouds, there was a hole through which the friendly clouds were going. Ona and Michael B. watched as the clouds, one at a time, zoomed upwards and then popped through the hole.

Ona said, "This must be where friendly clouds go when there is a storm." The line moved

quickly and soon it was their turn. The trip was fast, but not at all bumpy.

Up, up, up they went and then – pop! – they hopped through the hole in the clouds.

They were now above the storm clouds and felt the warming rays of the sun on their cold, wet clothes and skin. Ona turned around and hugged Michael B.

Michael B. returned the hug, saying, “See? Clouds *do* go up.” He was happy to be right.

## **CHAPTER NINE:** **THE JOURNEY** **ABOVE THE** **CLOUDS.**



**T**he upper layer looked especially angry from above. It was dark gray, rumbling, and there was lightning running through it like fish swimming around in a pond.

Ona said, “Sit down.” Michael B., who did not realize he was standing up, sat down quickly. They both leaned forward to make the cloud move as fast as it could, which was not very fast. Ona steered the cloud towards her hill.



On the very top of the Ona’s hill was a rock. This rock was as tall as Ona and about as wide as their kitchen table. Ona and her Dad would climb up to this rock every Sunday.

She and Foey, her dog (named after the horse in one of Ona’s favorite stories), would play on the rock as her Dad sat with his back against it, drinking coffee and reading the Sunday paper. Every now and then Ona’s Dad would wake suddenly, exclaiming loudly, “I wasn’t sleeping. I was just resting my eyes for a bit.” It always made Ona laugh.

Ona stopped the cloud about five feet above the rock. Only the very tip of the rock was jutting through the clouds.

Before Ona could explain her plan, Michael B. declared, “I am *not* going to jump down onto that rock! We’ll crack our skulls open like pumpkins.” He imagined the seeds spilling out of his broken head, just as he always did when his mother gave the same warning.

Ona pushed at him gently, saying, “Don’t be a silly. We’re going to jump onto that fluffy

cloud right next to the rock. And then walk to the rock.” She pointed to the cloud next to the rock.

It still looked to far to Michael B., so he asked, “Why don’t we stay here for a bit? It’s nice up here.”

Ona looked up at the bright sun. She turned her still yellow palms upwards and felt the sun’s warmth on them.

“It *is* nice up here,” she agreed. “But we must get down. Anyway, it’s time for you to go home.” Ona was tired from the adventure and wanted to cuddle with her Mom, alone.

“We are going to jump,” Ona declared. “I will show you how,” she said bravely. It would be a very brave jump, even braver than jumping off the edge of a swimming pool.



## **CHAPTER TEN:** **BACK ON THE HILL** **... WITH A THUMP.**

**A**ll of a sudden, there was a large growling rumble and the clouds below them began to roll upwards and downwards, like waves on an ocean. Then there was a bright blast of light and the loudest “Cra-raa-raa-aRack!” of all. As if scared, their friendly cloud tipped on its side dumping Ona and Michael B. off.

Down, down, down they fell! They landed right on the white puffy cloud below them. But instead of holding them up, the cloud pushed them side to side, shaking them like Ona’s dog shakes a towel, and then dropped them onto the muddy hill.

“Ouch!” said Ona.

“Good!” said Michael B., who was very happy to be back on at least somewhat firm ground. They expected it to be pouring rain, but it was barely drizzling.

Ona and Michael B. stood up, the tops of their heads brushing the very bottom of the clouds. Ona ducked, not wanting her head to touch the bad clouds, but Michael B. was suddenly curious. He poked his hands through the cloud layer.

Water from the cloud poured down his arm and soaked his shirt. “Yuck!” said Michael B. “Miss Green was right about the clouds,” he decided. Then, catching Ona’s angry look, added, “Except she was wrong about riding them.”

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN:** **HOME AND DRY.**



**I**t was a long walk from the rock at the top of the hill to Ona's house. Maybe not long for adults, but for two wet and tired three-year olds, it was far enough. It took them almost five whole minutes and by the time they arrived they were very happy to be home.

As soon as they walked in the back door, Ona yelled, "Mom! Michael B. needs to go home now!" Instead of being insulted, Michael B. nodded in agreement.

The two Moms came running towards the back door, each one quickly grabbing her own child up in her arms. "There you are, my sweetie," both Moms said at once. And also at once, they both exclaimed, "Oh my! You're soaked through to the skin!"

Ona's Mom asked, "Where have you been?"

Michael B.'s Mom repeated the question, "Yes, where have you been? I was- we were worried sick!"

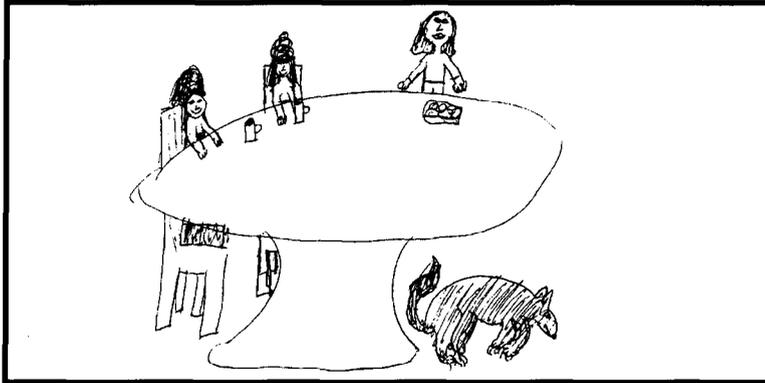
Michael B. looked at Ona, wondering if he should tell the Moms where they went.

Ona didn't think the *where* part was so important. What was important was that she and Michael B. were wet and cold.

"I'm wet and cold," she told her Mom.

"I'm wet and cold, too," Michael B. told his Mom.

The Moms started talking quickly about which of Ona's dry clothes Michael could wear and where the hot chocolate was and who should make it. Ona thought it was odd that they called him 'Michael' and not 'Michael B.' She wondered how they knew which Michael they were talking about, since there were three Michaels at her school and another one at her sitter's. But she didn't have time to ask, since she was quickly whisked away from the back door and into her room to be changed.



**CHAPTER TWELVE:**  
**THE STORY**  
**ENDS WITH HOT**  
**CHOCOLATE.**

**S**oon enough, Ona and Michael

B. were at the breakfast table, sitting in dry clothes, their heads wrapped in towels, their hands holding mugs of hot chocolate. Each cup of hot chocolate had an ice cube in it.

Michael B.'s Mom told them to wait until the ice cubes melted before they took even one sip. Ona kept checking Michael B's ice cube to see if his were melting faster, though she was unsure if this were a good or a bad thing.

Ona's Mom broke the silence. "Kids?" she said to get their attention. They looked up to see her holding a large, clear bag of small, puffy, white objects. "Do either of you want some marshmallows?" she asked.

"Oh no! No, thanks!" both children quickly replied.

**THE END.**



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*No frogs were harmed in the writing of this story.*