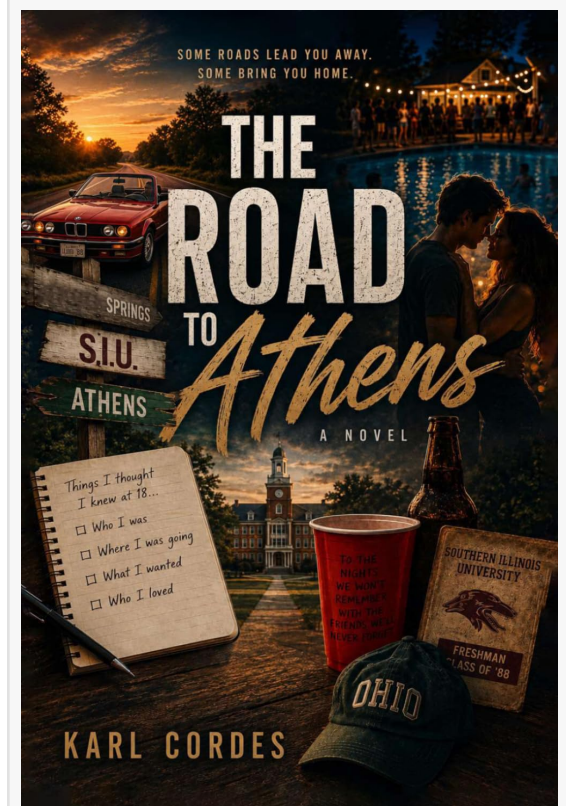


The Road to Athens Turns One Life-Changing Mistake Into a Journey Toward Redemption

Karl Cordes evokes American college life in 1988 through a coming-of-age story about love, friendship, faith, accountability, forgiveness, and second chances.

NEW YORK CITY, NY, UNITED STATES, August 26, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Author Karl Cordes explores the difficult passage from adolescence into adulthood in *The Road to Athens*, a coming-of-age romantic drama set against American college life in 1988.

The novel follows eighteen-year-old Ethan Brooks as he leaves suburban Chicago for Southern Illinois University, convinced that college will become the adventure of a lifetime. He expects freedom, friendship, parties, romance, and the opportunity to reinvent himself away from the expectations of home. Instead, one reckless decision produces consequences he cannot escape, forcing him to confront guilt, heartbreak, loss, and the growing realization that adulthood requires more than simply leaving childhood behind.



The Road to Athens by Karl Cordes

As Ethan's familiar world begins to fracture, he meets Jessica McCormick. Intelligent, emotionally perceptive, and shaped by a world of wealth, influence, and complicated expectations, Jessica becomes much more than a romantic interest. Their unexpected relationship forms the emotional heart of the story, challenging both of them to choose honesty, responsibility, and commitment when circumstances give them reasons to walk away.

Ethan's journey eventually leads from Southern Illinois University toward an unexpected opportunity at Ohio University. The physical road to Athens parallels his internal movement away from shame, fear, and uncertainty and toward responsibility, forgiveness, faith, and hope. Athens becomes more than a destination. It represents the possibility of rebuilding after the recognizable pieces of a life have fallen apart—and the possibility of becoming someone shaped by accountability rather than permanently defined by one mistake.

Set before cell phones, social media, GPS, and instant access to other people's lives, *The Road to Athens* captures the distinctive atmosphere of the late 1980s. Friendships developed face to face. Long-distance telephone calls carried emotional weight. Rumors traveled through people instead of screens, and relationships depended upon conversation, trust, patience, and physically showing up. Music, cars, dorm rooms, crowded bars, winter roads, and college traditions provide more than nostalgic decoration; they create the emotional world in which Ethan and his friends discover that freedom and consequence often arrive together.

Against that backdrop, the novel explores first love, enduring friendship, family loyalty, temptation, race, class, privilege, violence, and institutional responsibility. Its characters inhabit a world that can be funny, romantic, reckless, frightening, and deeply moving—sometimes within the same night.

While nostalgia gives the story warmth and immediacy, Cordes does not use the past as an escape from consequence. Instead, he asks what the experiences people remember most fondly may also have demanded from them.

"I wrote *The Road to Athens* for anyone who has wondered whether one painful decision permanently determined the rest of their life," Cordes said. "Ethan cannot undo what happened, and he cannot control every outcome. What he can do is accept responsibility, receive forgiveness, and decide what kind of man he will become."

Two chapters hold particular importance to the novel's message. In "He Never Left," Ethan confronts his guilt, failures, fears, and uncertainty while learning that accepting responsibility does not mean believing he controls every event or consequence. Later, "The Wilderness Is Not Your Destination" presents hardship as a season of transition rather than a permanent identity.

"The wilderness may be part of a person's journey, but it does not have to become the destination," Cordes said. "Failure can be a place where transformation begins rather than the place where someone's story ends."

The novel is intended for readers carrying regret or wondering whether a difficult decision has permanently determined their future. Its themes may also resonate with young adults navigating identity and relationships, parents seeking insight into the pressures surrounding emerging adulthood, readers nostalgic for the music and culture of the late 1980s, and people of faith experiencing difficult seasons.

At its center, *The Road to Athens* is a story of redemption. Ethan begins his journey searching for freedom and discovers that genuine freedom cannot be separated from responsibility. He experiences friendship, love, temptation, fear, and loss before realizing that moving forward does not require denying the past. It requires confronting it honestly and refusing to let it become his permanent identity.

Through Ethan's story, Cordes preserves the exhilarating uncertainty of being eighteen in another era while exploring experiences that remain timeless. The novel's lasting message is that a person's worst decision need not become a final definition, difficult seasons do not have to become permanent destinations, and even an unexpected road can lead toward healing, hope, and home.

Karl Cordes is an American author whose fiction explores the uncertain passage from adolescence into adulthood. His professional life began in radio broadcasting and later continued in technology and enterprise software sales. Drawing upon his Midwestern perspective, experience in communication, and enduring interest in music, place, and memory, Cordes writes character-driven fiction about love, accountability, reinvention, and human connection. *The Road to Athens* is his debut novel.

The Road to Athens was published by Visionary Book Publishers and is now available in print and digital editions.

The book is available at:
<https://a.co/d/02ZM1CP8>

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