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# Stillwater author pens harrowing memoir of abuse and triumph

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Posted: Thursday, September 8, 2016 12:00 am | Updated: 12:24 am, Thu Sep 8, 2016.

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Alton Carter recounts the first 18 years of his life in his book, "The Boy Who Carried Bricks" (Roadrunner Press, \$18.95), which earlier this year won the Oklahoma Book Award for Young Adult Literature. Courtesy



By James D. Watts Jr. Tulsa World | 0 comments

It's a question Alton Carter is often asked whenever he shares the details of his life story.

By any measure, it is a harrowing tale — one of deprivation and abuse, that led Carter at the age of 11 to walk away from his family and find himself in the state's foster care system, that offered only different kinds of pain and neglect.

"Maybe the question I get asked the most is, 'What's the secret?' " Carter said. "What was it about me that led to my making my way out, when my siblings didn't? Honestly, it was more about other people who got me to believe in myself, who showed me that I did have some value."

Carter recounts the first 18 years of his life in his book, "The Boy Who Carried Bricks" (Roadrunner Press, \$18.95), which earlier this year won the Oklahoma Book Award for Young Adult Literature.

Carter begins with his birth certificate, notable because the space for the name of his father is blank. In spare, matter-of-fact prose, he writes about his mother's slide into depression and drug addiction, the abuses he and his siblings suffered from family members, his journey through a series of

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### Library Event

- Alton Carter will join romance novelist Rosanne Bittner, and thriller writer Alison Gaylin as the featured guests of "Chapters: A Casual Evening of Books, Bards and Bites," which benefits the Tulsa City-County Library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Center.

The event is 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Hardesty Regional Library, 8316 E. 93rd St.

- Tickets are \$50 and will be available at the

door.

• For more information: 918-549-7494.

often abusive foster homes and his time at a boys' home in Perkins, where he was forced to carry bricks until he collapsed.

But during the dark times, Carter said, he frequently encountered people who "saw more than just a broken foster child, who cared about me and were willing to help in whatever way they could."

The encouragement of these mentors helped Carter become the first person in his family to graduate high school. He would go on to attend Oklahoma State University, ultimately graduating in 2009.

Now the director of youth ministries at the First United Methodist Church in Stillwater, Carter said he would often share stories



about his childhood, "and whenever I did, there would always be people — kids and adults — who would come up to me and say they could relate, that they had or were going through similar troubles.

"That was really the reason why I decided to write the book," he said. "There's a whole bunch of people in the world who are still trying to deal with the past, and I wanted to be a voice for all those trying to heal those wounds."

But the process of revisiting his past, and setting it down in details, was far from easy. Out of respect for his mother, Carter did not begin working on the book until after her death in 2013.

"But even so, when I was writing, I felt such a great amount of guilt, that I was betraying members of my family, and that the people who knew me now would judge me and think less of me because of what I'd lived through," Carter said.

What Carter discovered was just the opposite.

"Telling my story led to relationships that I would never had expected to have," he said.

"When my mother died in 2013, even though we never had a great relationship, I was just empty inside when it happened.

"But within just a few weeks, one of the families I go to church with showed up at my door," Carter said. "And they told me they looked at me as if I were their own son. They just took me in. They're like grandparents to my children, they call me 'son' ..."

Carter's voice trailed off for a moment. Then he said, "They loved me for who I was. And that's true of all the people in that congregation. They helped me see that I can't do this — that I can't deal with my past in order to make a better future for my family — on my own, and also to see that I wasn't alone."

James D. Watts Jr.

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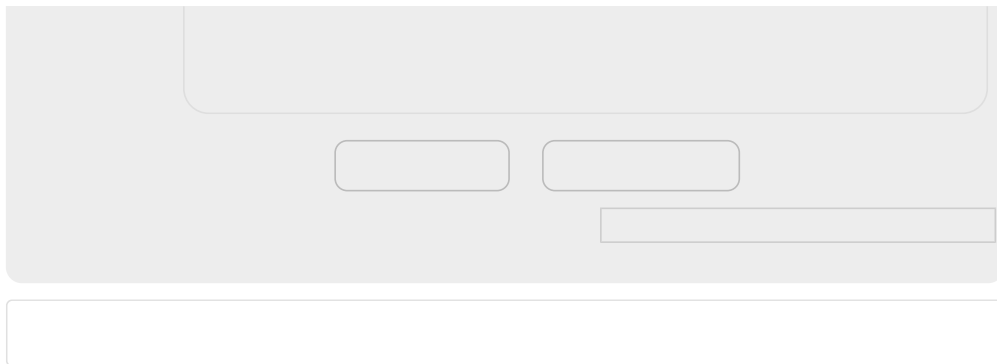
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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2016**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2016**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2016**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2016**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2016**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2016**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2016**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2016**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2016**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2016**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2016**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2016**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2016**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2016**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2016**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2016**

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**MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2016**

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**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2016**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2016**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2016**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2016**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2016**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2016**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2016**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2016**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2016**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2016**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2016**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016**

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2016**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2016**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2016**

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2016**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2016**

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**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2016**

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**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2016**

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**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2016**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2016**

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2016**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2016**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2016**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016**

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2016**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016**

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2016**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2016**

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**MONDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2016**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2016**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2016**

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2016**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2016**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2017**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 3, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 9, 2017**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 13, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 14, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 16, 2017**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 17, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2017**

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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 2017**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2017**

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**FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2017**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2017**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2017**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2017**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017**

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**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2017**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017**

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**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017**

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**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2017**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2017**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2017**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2017**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2017**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2017**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2017**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2017**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2017**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2017**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2017**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 30, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2017**

**MONDAY, MARCH 5, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 10, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2017**

**MONDAY, MARCH 12, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2017**

**MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2017**

**MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 2017**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2017**

**MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2017**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 2017**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 2017**

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**TUESDAY, APRIL 17, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2017**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2017**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2017**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2017**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2017**

**MONDAY, APRIL 23, 2017**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2017**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2017**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 2017**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 2017**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 2017**

**MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MAY 1, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MAY 3, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MAY 6, 2017**

**MONDAY, MAY 7, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MAY 11, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2017**

**MONDAY, MAY 14, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MAY 15, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MAY 17, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MAY 18, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MAY 19, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2017**

**MONDAY, MAY 21, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MAY 22, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 23, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2017**

**FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2017**

**SATURDAY, MAY 26, 2017**

**SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2017**

**MONDAY, MAY 28, 2017**

**TUESDAY, MAY 29, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 30, 2017**

**THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2017**

**MONDAY, JUNE 4, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 5, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2017**

**MONDAY, JUNE 11, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 2017**

**MONDAY, JUNE 18, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 19, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 21, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 2017**

**MONDAY, JUNE 25, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 30, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2017**

**MONDAY, JULY 2, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JULY 3, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 4, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JULY 5, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JULY 6, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JULY 7, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JULY 8, 2017**

**MONDAY, JULY 9, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JULY 10, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 11, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JULY 13, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JULY 14, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2017**

**MONDAY, JULY 16, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JULY 21, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JULY 22, 2017**

**MONDAY, JULY 23, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2017**

**FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2017**

**SATURDAY, JULY 28, 2017**

**SUNDAY, JULY 29, 2017**

**MONDAY, JULY 30, 2017**

**TUESDAY, JULY 31, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2017**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 2, 2017**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 2017**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 4, 2017**

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 5, 2017**

**MONDAY, AUGUST 6, 2017**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2017**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 9, 2017**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 10, 2017**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 2017**

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 12, 2017**

**MONDAY, AUGUST 13, 2017**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2017**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 16, 2017**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 17, 2017**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 2017**

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2017**

**MONDAY, AUGUST 20, 2017**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2017**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2017**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 25, 2017**

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 26, 2017**

**MONDAY, AUGUST 27, 2017**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2017**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 30, 2017**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 31, 2017**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2017**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2017**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2017**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2017**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2017**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2017**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2017**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2017**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2017**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2017**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2017**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017**

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**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017**

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**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2017**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2017**

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**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2017**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2017**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2017**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2017**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2017**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2017**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2017**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2017**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2017**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2017**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2017**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2017**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2017**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2017**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2017**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2017**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2017**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2017**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2017**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2017**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2017**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2017**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2017**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2017**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2017**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2017**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2017**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2017**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2017**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2017**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2017**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2017**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2017**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2017**

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2017**

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**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2017**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2017**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2017**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2017**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2017**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2017**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2017**

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**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2017**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2017**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2017**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 31**

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