

The Gospel Magazine May Issue

A Mother's Day Story Of Another Kind

JEFF STEINBERG



*A Mother's Day Story
Of Another Kind
(The Jeff Steinberg Story)*



*A Handicap is anything that
keeps me from being or becoming
ALL that I was created to be!*

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The early fifties brought with it the latest technology and breakthroughs of its day. One of which was a drug called Thalidomide. Ruthe and Irving Steinberg were expecting their second child and the doctor prescribed this drug in hopes of building her immune system to maintain a potential problem pregnancy. She had no way of knowing that one day it would become known as the "Thalidomide Tragedy" as it was feared to have left in its wake thousands of birth defects before being pulled from the market in 1961. One of those victims would be her only son, Jeff Steinberg.



When Jeff was born it was obvious something had gone terribly wrong. His father and grandmother were horrified when they saw this precious newborn with no arms and mangled legs. Together with the doctors they determined it would be best to protect Jeff's mother from the pain and place him in a welfare shelter in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania telling her he did not survive.

It was a decision that would haunt his grandmother as the months began to pass. She urged Jeff's father to tell her daughter that her baby boy was indeed alive. Still Jeff's father felt he was doing the right thing for his wife and family.

Almost seventeen months later Ruthe was cooking dinner when her mother came in and quietly sat at the kitchen table. Suddenly she broke the silence with a single line, "Ruthe, he's alive."

Ruthe paused but never so much as glanced over her shoulder when she asked, "Why can't I see him? Is he ugly?" To which her mother replied, "He's not ugly, he's beautiful."

At that period of time there were different methods of

dealing with mental health like there would be today. Ruthe internalized her feelings of grief and guilt and succumbed to a near nervous-breakdown before she was able to see her disabled child for the first time at the age of 2.

Her first visit with him was awkward and painful. She picked him up and held him for a short period of time that may have spanned 10 to 15 minutes. Then she became overwhelmed and asked her husband to take her home.

Jeff would remain at the Children's Welfare Shelter until he was two and a half then he was placed in a Shriners hospital for crippled children in Philadelphia. The Shriners hospital care for crippled children until they are 18 years old free of charge. There are 19 across the country today with 3 for children with severe burns.



They operated on Jeff's mangled legs and found no joint bone in his right one. They fused it straight but the fusing damaged growth tissue making it stop growing when he was approximately 3 therefore it is several inches shorter than the other one. The left leg has a knee but it never straightened completely because of the tension on the muscles. He has no toe joints and uses his feet for many purposes. He learned to feed himself and brush his teeth with his feet. Between his feet and his mouth he can do almost anything.

The Shriners hospital included a school where Jeff received his education and was fitted with an artificial arm. He was there until the age of eight and a half when he went home to live with his family for a period of 9 months. Ruthe was now the mother of four. Jeff had one older and two younger sisters. One

was a baby at the time. She felt unequipped to deal with him and the other children. His parents made the decision to appeal to the state and had him placed into a home for kids with disabilities and the elderly. It was "The Good Shepherd Home" in Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1960 where destiny would collide with his life.



He went to public school from there and lived with other handicapped children. Four doors down was a small store-front Mennonite church with an army of Sunday School Teachers. Every Sunday morning they would walk down the street and begin gathering, pushing, escorting and carrying the children from The Good Shepherd Home and taking them to Sunday School and letting them know they were special. It was one particular Sunday School teacher by the name of Erma Long and her husband that took an interest in Jeff. Sometimes they would invite him to their home for Sunday dinner. Later he met a Christian couple who came to visit another child at Good Shepherd. They had heard that Jeff did ventriloquism and invited him to perform at their daughter's graduation party. Jeff began to build a relationship with Art and Betty Snyder from Jimthorpe, Pennsylvania.



Mom & Dad Snyder

They became his adopted family who would take him to their church and camp meetings on weekends. It was at one of those camp meetings in South Central Pennsylvania that as an 11 year old boy with no arms and crippled legs from a Jewish home accepted Jesus Christ as his Messiah.

Jeff began to travel and sing with the Snyder's at times. The Eastman Quartet was the first gospel group he ever heard at a time in his life that he had

aspired to be a radio DJ, but this gospel concert would change his direction, now he realized his heart would be in gospel music.

As the Snyder's got older they begin to pass his name out to pastors and contacts as their schedule was slowing down. He went to Bible College and began a singing group called The Total Victory Trio. One of the members of that original group Jeffery Rudloff, became a songwriter and has written many of the songs that Jeff Steinberg sings today. Later he traveled and sang with David Roff. Eventually Jeff Rudloff and David Roff formed a group together with him they called "Jeff Steinberg with Wind and Fire."

In 1972 Jeff attended a rally hosted by Dr. Jerry Farewell in Pottstown Pennsylvania who was touring at the time with Doug Oldham and the Gospel Hour Trio. There were 1200 people in attendance and Jeff was particularly moved by Doug Oldham's performance. He began to worship God by waving his hook in the air. Doug Oldham began the walk down a ramp off the stage toward Jeff. He stopped and directed his attention to Jeff, "What's your name," he asked. Jeff responded. Then Doug proceeded to tearfully address the audiences and said, "This boy with no arms has his hooked raised in the air worshipping the Lord and some of you haven't even cracked a smile," then continued to finish his song.

After the meeting it was Jerry Farewell himself that shook Jeff's hand and said, "Doug wants to meet you." So with great anticipation Jeff found his way to where Doug was waiting to meet "the boy with the hook." Jeff took the opportunity to ask for advice on what to do to expand his ministry. Doug looked at him and said, "Let's see if you have the goods." He rounded up his piano player and asked Jeff to sing. It was a memorable night as Jeff sang "Follow Me" by Ira Stanphill, then proceeded to sing "Through it all" with Doug. The rest of the Gospel Hour team filtered back into the auditorium and re-

spectfully sat and listened. Afterward Dr. Farewell approached him and asked what he was doing on the following Sunday. He said, "I'd like for you to come to Thomas Road Baptist Church and sing on the Old Time Gospel Hour." Jeff appeared on October 27th, 1972.

It would prove to be a turning point for him as his ministry began to flourish. He has now traveled all over the world. He has co-hosted the National Easter Seal telethon seven times with Pat Boone. As well as other varies telethons throughout the years.

Jeff made an appearance in Winston Salem, NC where he met Debbie and they married in 1974. Ruthe had advised him against having children expressing how unfair it would be to his wife to have to take care of him as well as a child. Despite that advice, it was Jeff's delight to watch Benjamin David being born in June of 1977 with two arms and two legs, ten fingers and 10 toes, a perfect baby boy.

They were married for 12 years when the stress of the ministry and time apart finally took its toll. During a trip to California in 1985 for an Easter Seals Telethon he was staying with his uncle Morty when he received a ten page double spaced letter from Debbie saying, "I don't know if I love you but I know I don't want to be married to you anymore. By the time you get home I will be moved out."

The couple made a valiant attempt to salvage their marriage through multiple counseling sessions, but it was not to be. Jeff told her she would have to file for divorce because he married her for life, which she did. Jeff and Debbie then became the first couple in Tennessee to negotiate joint custody of their child.

He remained single for 7 years believing no woman would want a man without arms and crippled legs. Then he met Ellen. She had been in the process of recovering from an abusive relationship. They dated for a year and a half before uniting in mar-

riage. They have been married for 18 years and live in Orlando, Florida. Ellen is now attending Asbury Seminary to obtain her masters in Counseling and has helped many woman and children who have been the victim of abuse.



“My message is that you can’t have an intimate relationship with the Lord until you understand who you are.” Jeff explained. “No matter what you’ve done, no matter where you’ve been, no matter who your friends are, you are loved.” Then he continued, “My physical disability stands out and everybody thinks because of the way I look and the way I walk that I’m handicapped. But there are a lot more handicapped people who look like everybody else.

I tell the church all the time that I’d like to be John, the guy who set beside Jesus at the Passover. He was so close to Jesus he could lay his head on His chest and whisper in His ear but more important, he could hear Jesus whisper back. I tell the church, when you mess up, and you will, when you stumble, and you will, when you fail at something and you will, know that He loves you.”

Jeff’s father was diagnosed with cancer when Jeff was 29. At that time his father called him and said he knew he had a lot of questions surrounding his birth and the reasons for some of the decisions made and he was ready to explain. The cancer happened to be an aggressive type and Jeff’s father died 4 months later. Four weeks before his 30th birthday and before that conversation was able to take place.

Ruthe later remarried a man named Leon who helped her understand that she could no longer bear the

burden and guilt that she had carried for so many years since the birth of her "special" son.

What appeared to be a "Thalidomide Tragedy" became a triumphant victory for the Kingdom as Jeff Steinberg travels full-time in the ministry with his team, Larry Stegner and Alex Beitzel.

Jeff, Larry and Alex will leave May 4th for London where they will spend 6 weeks ministering in "Her Majesties Prisons" and schools throughout the United Kingdom and Wales. They will be singing and ministering in churches as well during this time.

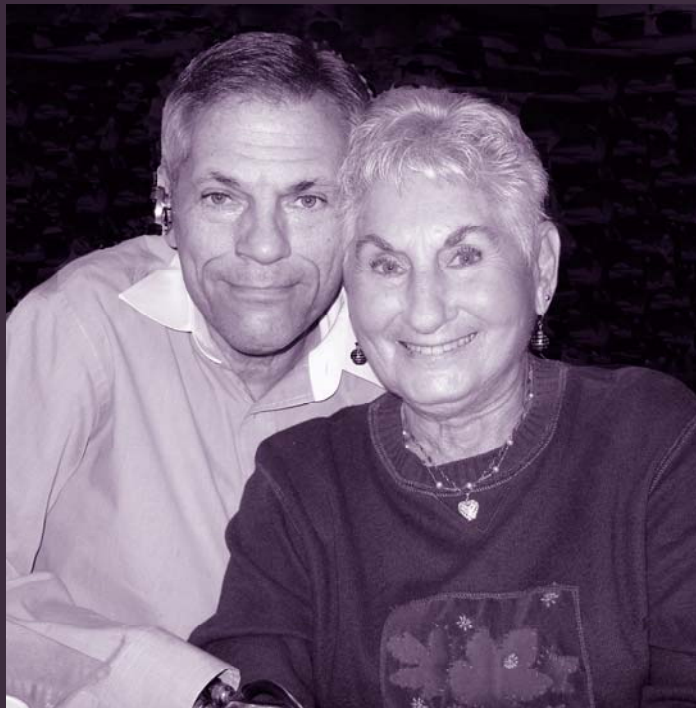
But that's not the only thing on



Jeff's "to do" list while in England. On May 8th, as Ruthe receives gifts, flowers and cards from her children like other mothers that day. She will also receive an interna-

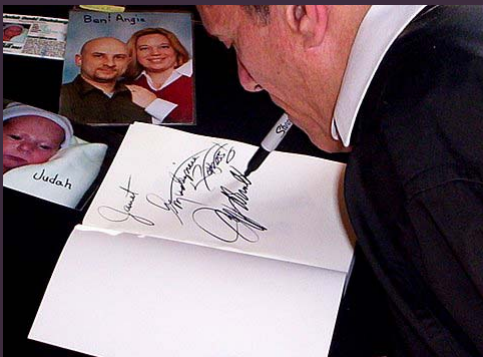
tional phone call from the United Kingdom from the son she gave birth to under what seemed to be unbearable circumstances at the time. He will tell her he loves her as he wishes her a happy Mother's Day.

Her story is far from ordinary. But that is only because she just happened to have given birth to such an extraordinary son.





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RECOMMENDED READS

Masterpiece In Progress

By Jeff Steinberg

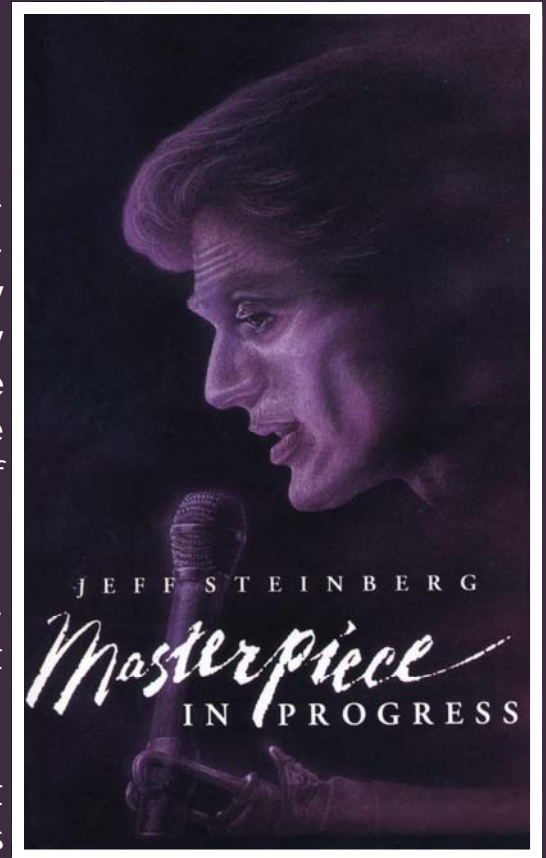
They called his condition Phocomelia, probably the result of Thalidomide or some medication prescribed for his mother. Born with tiny scissored legs, only one arm, and that a tiny stump. Jeff spent his first years in a welfare center then later in a Shriners Hospital, where he learned to walk in braces, feed himself with a hook, and fight for survival.

Later he went to live in a home for the severely disabled, where he would have spent the rest of his life.

But God had other plans. The Master Artist was at work putting together the materials that He would use to create another masterpiece. Jeff Steinberg's story is about a masterpiece in progress living proof of what a person can become when willing to be shaped by the hands of the Master Artist.

Someone once described Jeff as having "a face like B.J. Thomas and a voice like Neil Diamond." He now travels around the country, singing about what God has done in his life and encouraging others to be "the best YOU – you can be."

Masterpiece in Progress was written for people who are giving up on themselves, thinking their situation is too hard, that they don't have enough to work with, that life has dealt them a bad hand. Jeff Steinberg's story will inspire anyone to see that their lives, too, can become something beautiful – a masterpiece in progress!



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