FOR THE LOVE OF STEPHEN

The Story of a Boy Who Was Never Broken

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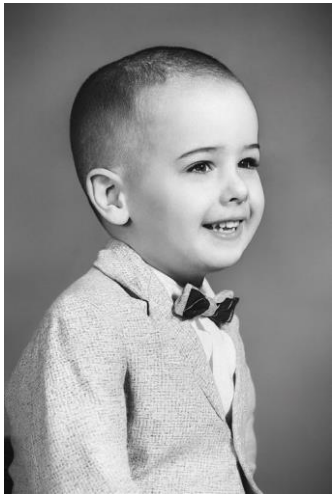
FOREWORD BY TEMPLE GRANDIN, Ph.D.

PROLOGUE

In Every Life, a Light



Stephen Keith Jones

For as long as humankind has walked the earth, there have been individuals whose minds, bodies, and senses danced to a different rhythm—children not broken, but beautifully unique. These individuals with exceptionalities have been present throughout history like human constellations in the dark and quiet sky—sometimes misunderstood, often unseen, but always there. Their stories, like Stephen's, have rarely been written in bold print. Yet they are shooting stars in the universe of human progress.

Not so long ago, society looked upon these individuals with fear and ignorance and excluded them in every way. A child who moved differently, spoke differently, or didn't speak at all might be dismissed as a burden, labeled a fool, or cast away as some sort of punishment from the heavens. Families grieved not because their children were unworthy, but because the world told them so. Educators—when they were present—had no tools, no training, and too often, no hope. Compassion was eclipsed by confusion, and the children—well, many were left in the shadows, locked behind doors both literal and figurative.

But slowly, the world began to change. A shift—stubborn and hard-won—took root. Rotatori, Obiakor, and Bakken (2011) remind us that although individuals with exceptionalities have always been part of

society, they were often regarded as “burdens, worthless, demons and buffoons” (p. 3). Today, however, these same individuals are recognized as valued citizens with the ability to contribute meaningfully. The authors describe this evolving journey as “colorful, innovative, and intriguing” (p. 3).

This is the story of Stephen (Steve)—one boy among millions, yet one who quietly changed everything for those who knew him. He was not famous, not rich, not celebrated on magazine covers. But Steve’s journey is a thread in the fabric of progress—stitched with struggle, and with hope. His life, marked by laughter, setbacks, trials, triumphs, and the quiet resilience of an unyielding spirit, gives human form to the abstract arc of change.

His story will not only reflect that historic evolution—it will embody it. From the dark days of segregation and silent exclusion to the hopeful march toward belonging, Steve walked, stumbled, and soared through a system still learning to see the beauty in difference. His life is both a love letter to those who never gave up and a challenge to those who still might.

So let us begin—not with pity, but with pride. For this is not a story of what was lost, but of what was found: dignity, worth, and a place in the world for every kind of mind.

INTRODUCTION

When Grief Whispers: The Story That Wouldn't Let Go

Why is it that thoughts of our lost loved ones can haunt us— quietly, persistently—even years later? Maybe it's unresolved feelings. Maybe it's memory's strange power to resurrect emotion without warning. Whatever the reason, these thoughts rise from the depths of the subconscious, whispering—demanding to be acknowledged. That's exactly how it's been for me. For two decades, one thought refused to let go: *Tell Steve's story.*

The author, Dr. Stuart Jones (center), with his and Steve's parents, Keith and Phyllis Jones, following a session of Steve Storytelling, June 2025

I had a choice. I could keep stuffing that thought down, denying it space, pretending the ache was gone. Or I could face it. I could grit my teeth, stop making excuses, and say to myself: *Okay, dammit. I'm doing this.* And here we are.

It took me twenty years to find the resolve—twenty years of starting, stopping, and deleting drafts as if I were erasing my own regret.

Writing this book meant facing more than memories. It meant facing grief—the kind that lingers long after the flowers, cards, and condolences are gone. I made dumb choices—like thinking I could silence grief by procrastinating. But grief is louder than denial, and far more patient.

In the summer of 1954, my brother, Stephen Keith Jones, was born with intellectual disabilities. He lived an inspiring and impactful life, as you'll witness in these pages. Steve passed away about two decades ago, at the age of 52. I've learned something profound: when someone you love dies, grief doesn't disappear. It simply changes shape. It walks beside you—softens, sharpens, shifts—but it always stays. And that's okay. What matters most is what you do with it.

Some days, grief whispers. Other days, it roars—on his birthday, the anniversary of his passing, or when I stumble across a photo, a chessboard, a Bruce Lee movie, a scripture passage. Grief has no expiration date. And neither should love.

I'm no psychologist—my sister, Susan, holds that title—but I've learned that grief needs space. Suppressing it only delays its demands. For me, writing this book has been a form of grief therapy. Not a cheap one, mind you. (Have you priced therapy lately?) But it's been healing. And healing, I've found, comes not from forgetting, but from remembering well.

So yes, this book was born of grief—but it is not *about* grief.

It's about Steve. It's about love—unyielding, unshakable love. And it's about the ones who stood by him with fierce devotion, especially when the world tried to dismiss him, label him as broken, wound him, or shut him out.

1984: Steve (left) and Stuart (right),
sharing one of many unforgettable moments on their journey together

It's about honoring a life that was, by all odds, extraordinary—not in the traditional sense, but in the ways that matter most. Steve lived a life full of quiet courage, resilience, and love. He was born into a world not ready to accept him, yet he changed that world in ways most of us could only hope to. Through the unwavering support of family, friends, and a few champions along the way, Steve carved out a life of meaning. He proved that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are not defined by what society says they lack, but by the limitless potential they possess.

Let me be clear: this isn't a story about perfection or pity. It's a story about possibility. It's the story of a young man who endured cruelty and neglect, overcame staggering odds, and lived with a kind of grace that many people spend their whole lives searching for. Steve was not a saint, but he was a teacher. Without intending to, he taught everyone

around him the power of empathy, patience, persistence, unconditional love, and unwavering human dignity.

A Story of Courage, Compassion, and Change

For the Love of Stephen is a heartfelt and often humorous journey into the life of a deeply courageous boy the world tried to forget— but who refused to be erased.

Meet the Fab Four Siblings, from left to right:
Susan (sister), Steve (brother), Scott (brother), and Stuart (kneeling)

Born in the mid-1950s—decades before disability rights laws, inclusive classrooms, or national conversations about acceptance— Steve entered life too early, too fragile, and far too different for the world as it was. Persons close to the family urged his institutionalization. Society whispered shame. Our family chose something radical instead: love.

Set against the backdrop of mid-20th-century America, a time when children like Steve were routinely hidden away or dismissed, this memoir tells the story of a family that pushed back. We were no heroes—just stubborn, flawed, fiercely loyal people who chose to believe in Steve's worth when others didn't.

Steve's story is not a sanitized tale of inspiration. It doesn't flinch from the truth. He was mocked, bullied, and even abused by those entrusted with his care. Some teachers overlooked him. Peers ridiculed him. Systems failed him. Yet Steve, in his quiet, persistent way, endured. Ultimately, he triumphed—not by changing who he was, but by remaining fully, gloriously himself.

This is a story of resistance and resilience, heartbreak and humor, policy and personal transformation. It is both a searing indictment of the way our society treated people with disabilities and a loving tribute to the teachers, caregivers, and everyday allies who dared to see Steve not as a burden, but as a boy worth fighting for.

At its heart, *For the Love of Stephen* is more than a memoir. It's a call to conscience. A reminder that the smallest lives can provoke the biggest change. And an invitation to witness the grace, grit, and quiet courage of a life that, though nearly overlooked, left a mark that cannot be erased.

Through memory and history, laughter and tears, this book asks readers to look again—at disability, at difference, at dignity—and to discover, as we did, that love is not always easy, but it is always right.

This is my story, as I remember it, and as my family remembers it. While I've done my best to be accurate, memory is imperfect, and details may differ from another person's recollection. For privacy, I've changed many names and identifying details of most people outside Steve's immediate and extended family. No harm or offense is intended toward anyone mentioned or alluded to in these pages.

I miss my brother every single day. If there were any way to bring him back—even for a moment—I wouldn't think twice. But I can't. None of us can. What I *can* do is share his story, just as you may have shared the stories of those you've lost. I can honor the lessons Steve taught us by offering them to you now. I invite you to witness a life that mattered deeply.

The Fab Four Siblings on Christmas Day, 1966. Left to right: me, Steve, Susan, and Scott

His story matters—because all stories of courage, resilience, and love matter. Steve reminded us, without ever saying a word, that every person has value. That "God don't make no junk," as the saying goes (as cited in Smedes, 1993). That every human being, regardless of ability, is—as the psalmist beautifully wrote, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, New International Version).

Steve was that. Wonderfully made. And so very loved.

I hope it reminds you of someone you loved, something you lost, or maybe something you didn't know you were looking for. I hope it

teaches, challenges, and comforts you. And most of all, I hope it helps ensure that people like Steve are never again left out of the story—because their stories *are* the story.

I wrote this book for the love of Stephen, the story of a boy who was never broken.

PART I

THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

CHAPTER 1 THE CALL THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Everyone imagines how they might die someday.
No one imagines how their brother will. —

Dr. Stuart Jones

The conference center lobby was buzzing with chatter—hundreds of voices colliding like static—attendees laughing too loudly, juggling coffee cups and conference packets, completely unaware that my world was about to tilt on its axis.

That's when I felt it—a subtle vibration in my suit coat pocket.

A phone call.

I glanced at the screen. Terri.

My wife.

I hesitated.

I actually thought about ignoring it. (Shame on me—but the first workshop was about to begin.)

But something in my gut whispered: *Answer it.*

"Hello?" I said, bracing for the mundane.

Terri's voice came through, rushed and breathless, barely audible over the conference chaos in the background.

“Honey… you need to come home.” The words didn’t register at first—not in the way they should have. “What?” I asked, annoyed, squinting at the sea of strangers around me, still locked in their morning small talk.

“You need to come home. *As soon as possible.*” Then,

silence.

It was the type of silence that didn’t feel empty. It felt… loaded. There was something she wasn’t telling me.

“Why?” I snapped, frustration creeping in.

“Your brother Steve’s been in an accident. He’s in the hospital.”

Silence again. This time, the kind that crushes your chest like a vise.

Then she said it. Not loudly. Not hysterically. Just quietly—like it took everything in her to get the words out.

“It’s not good.”

My heart dropped like a stone in my chest.

“What?” My voice cracked. I barely recognized it.

She steadied herself. “Steve was hit by a car while riding his bike to work.”

“Is he okay?” I asked too fast because I already knew the answer. I could feel it clawing its way up my throat.

She went silent again. Then, the soft sob on the other end.

“It’s not good,” she said again, this time, her voice completely breaking.

I could barely breathe. “Is he… is he dead?”

“No,” she whispered gently, “but you need to come home.”

If you’ve ever received a call like that, you know the way time collapses.

Your heart stops.

You forget how to breathe.

Your stomach clenches so violently that it feels like someone just sucker-punched you from the inside out.

And then… nothing. No memory. No timeline. I couldn’t tell you how I got back to the hotel, packed my bag, or checked out. I was no longer inside myself. I was watching everything from some strange, detached place.

The next thing I remember—*really* remember—was the road.

I was somewhere on Highway 30, heading south, toward the small town of North Manchester, Indiana, where Terri and I lived with my two sons, Daniel and Derek.

It was Monday, December 18, 2006. A date now burned into my memory.

The three-hour drive became a movie reel in my mind—an emotional kaleidoscope I couldn’t control. Images of Steve flooded me in rapid-fire sequence:

His quirky smile.

His goofy laugh.

The times he made us laugh until we cried—and the times we just cried.

Childhood games. Family dinners. Saturday bowling. Visits to our grandparents’ farm.

The memories came uninvited and unrelenting, each one stinging like salt in a fresh wound.

Fear, sorrow, disbelief, guilt, helplessness—and yes, even laughter.

God help me, I laughed out loud at one point, thinking of some ridiculous things we did as kids and adults.

But the laughter faded fast. Terri's voice echoed in my mind: *"It's not good."*

That's when it hit me.

He's dying and I'm not there.

And with that realization came a cascade of tormenting questions: When was the last time I saw him? What did we say? Did he know how much I loved him? What if I don't get to say goodbye?

As the miles rolled beneath my tires, more memories raced in my mind, tossing me into an emotional turmoil I never saw coming.

And deep down, I knew *nothing* would ever be the same again.

As I drove, my mind didn't just reel through what happened; it drifted to who Steve really was. And if you're going to understand the heartbreak of that call and the events that would follow, you need to understand Steve first.

He Was Different — But Not How You Think

Temple Grandin, author and autism advocate, said it perfectly: "Different, not less." (Grandin, 2010, p. 13). You probably think you know what "different" means. You've seen movies, read books, maybe

even shared a few inspirational social media posts with soft violin music and pastel fonts about people who are "unique." But Steve… Steve redefined different. He made it impossible to look away—and not just because of his appearance. He was a walking contradiction: childlike and wise, fragile and strong, comical and tragic, inconvenient and irreplaceable.

Yes, he was different—but not in the ways most people could understand at first glance. That's the trouble with first glances—they rarely tell the whole story. Or even half.

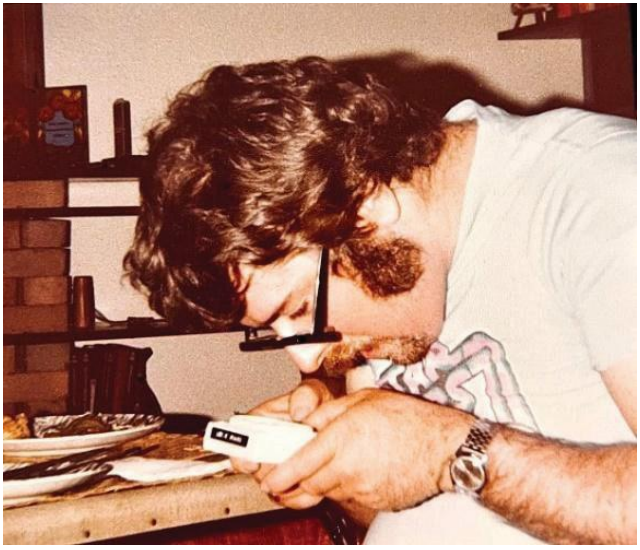
Steve wasn't your garden-variety "different." No, he was one of a kind—beautifully, bewilderingly, unmistakably *Steve*. Physically, Steve had a presence. Not in a movie-star way—more in a "whoa, what's going on here?" way.

Forever our lovable Steve

Picture a full-grown man, five-foot-five, with the build of a retired linebacker whose belly never quite made peace with retirement. His hair, thick and dark as espresso, defied balding with stubborn pride, often cut short as if in protest to grooming altogether. Combing? Optional. Styling? Unthinkable. Dandruff? Abundant—so much that it looked like snow. Not real snow, of course, but a constant flurry that followed him like a sad, invisible weather system. And his skin—due to an epic case of ichthyosis vulgaris—looked scaly and peeled like a sunburn that never got the memo to stop. Thoughtless kids gave him the nickname of Snowflake because of his skin. His skin simply lacked natural oil.

(That may sound like a mechanical problem, but it was dermatological.)

His scent was… distinct. Let's just say the best lotions from the fanciest department stores barely made a dent. He couldn't help the sometimes "interesting" odor he carried—unless he was deliberately skipping showers, like the time Mom caught him running the water but not actually stepping in. Poor kid; showers made his skin feel tight and uncomfortable afterward, so why bother? His hands and feet resembled worn leather boots—cracked, tough, and welltraveled. If you sat on our family couch, you'd likely leave with a few of Steve's DNA flakes hitching a ride on your pants. He left his mark, literally. And trust me, you never, ever wanted to reach behind that couch—I'll tell you about that unpleasantness in just a second.



The Vision Thing—and the Nose

Steve's eyesight was another tragedy wrapped in a comedy. He was born prematurely in 1954, a time when neonatal science was more guesswork than guarantee. He spent nine weeks in an oxygen-rich incubator, which saved his life but damaged his retinas—a condition called retrolental fibroplasia. It left him with severely limited vision. He wasn't fully blind, but close. Close enough to wear glasses so thick they looked like discarded aquarium glass. When he put them on, you didn't see his eyes—you saw warps in the timespace continuum. And the glasses themselves? Often crooked, bent, cracked, or smudged with fingerprints. Even with the Coke-bottle bottom glasses, he had to lean in close just to see things.

Steve was a nose-picker of Olympic stature, unbothered by social norms, and unfazed by shame. It was almost a form of performance art. His nose was, for him, both a sensory tool and a snack bar. He didn't care about using a tissue, as my sister begged him to do. No sir. The back of the couch was right there. That poor couch became his personal art canvas, showcasing an array of smears and crusts that defied both logic and upholstery cleaner.

He mumbled when he spoke and stuttered when excited or nervous, making deciphering him part sport, part art form. He had a kind of musical cadence to his speech, like he was humming a tune only he could hear. But sometimes, the mumbling was strategic; he didn't *want* to be understood. You'd see him mutter something he probably wasn't supposed to say, then smirk, as if to say, "Good luck decoding *that*, Sherlock."

His fingernails? Long enough to qualify as multi-tools. They could have been used as emergency letter openers or box cutters if needed. We had to nag him to cut them before someone lost an eye. As kids, we feared those talons. "Steve, cut your nails!" was a weekly refrain. "You're

gonna hurt somebody!" And eventually, he did. Accidentally, of course—but painfully. I received my unfair share of scrapes, as did my sister, Susan, and other brother, Scott.

Webbed Toes and Bloody Gums: A Love Story

Unless he was swimming, you'd never notice Steve's webbed toes— the same ones that, in the pool, turned him into a human torpedo. Michael Phelps had nothing on Steve once he kicked into gear. On land? Totally undetectable. Underwater? All flipper, no brakes.

Then there were his teeth—or rather, the saga of them. Steve had gingivitis—ultra-sensitive, bleeding gums, the kind that would throw a full-on protest at the mere sight of a toothbrush. A little scrubbing and suddenly it looked like a crime scene in the bathroom sink. Naturally, he wasn't keen on brushing. And let's just say that when he didn't brush, his breath could clear a room faster than a fire drill. Heck, even at night, his gums might bleed, creating a red-blotched pillowcase by morning—a horror movie prop nobody asked for. Mom, ever the hygiene enforcer for Steve, took up the noble crusade of Dental Justice. It was an uphill battle— like brushing a shark with feelings. But she kept at it, bless her heart. Poor guy. Poor toothbrush.

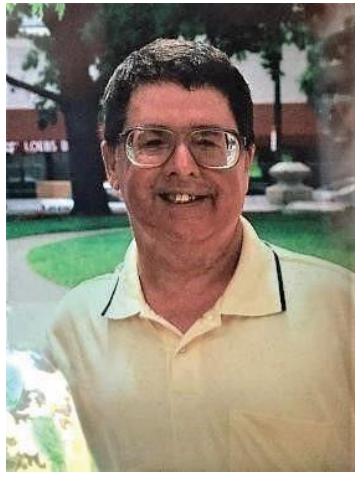
The Fast and the Flaky

At mealtimes, he ate like someone was going to steal his food—and let's be honest, with five other family members around, that was always a possibility. His face hovered inches above the plate, and his chewing was... assertive. A bit like a wood chipper set to "enthusiastic."

He didn't care about appearance unless an event *demanded* it, in which case he could surprise you by looking almost "shiny"—our version of a sharp-dressed man.

You know what else? We loved him with all our hearts—every bit of him—and we miss him more than words can say. Oh, what I wouldn't give to see that familiar face again, even with all its flaky charm. To wrap him in one of those big, lingering hugs he always pretended to hate but secretly loved. To hold his hand—rough and weathered as it was—just for a little while longer.

Yes, You're Judging People—Now Stop Believing Yourself



Steve was stamped early on by the system as "slow" or "mentally retarded"—terms now banished to the archives of educational malpractice. Today, we use "intellectually and developmentally disabled," or IDD. But let's be honest: if there were a genetic bad-luck tree, Steve hit every branch on the way down. But the miracle? He never complained. Not once. Not about his skin, his sight, his gums, the cruel stares of strangers, or even the bullies who hurt him. He didn't want pity. He wanted to belong.

We've all heard the old chestnuts: *"Looks can be deceiving." "Don't judge a book by its cover."* If idioms had frequent flyer miles, those two would be seated in first class. They're classics—probably embroidered on your grandma's pillow or shoved between fridge magnets in a well-

meaning therapist's office. But despite their popularity, we humans remain impressively terrible at following this advice. And by "we," I do mean all of us, including the guy writing this. Especially the guy writing this.

Because here's the irony: we know we shouldn't judge people based on how they look, but we do it anyway. Constantly. Instinctively. Like it's our evolutionary hobby.

Let's just admit it. You've probably sized someone up before they said a single word—He looks shady. She's too made up. Are those pajamas or a fashion statement? Our brains are like overcaffeinated talent scouts: quick to evaluate, relentless with commentary, and not always right. As Dr. Abbie Marono (2024) put it, "Judging by appearances, while often seen as judgmental, is a deeply ingrained human behavior with roots in evolutionary psychology and reinforced by societal norms" (para. 1). Translation: Blaming our ancestors for premature judging is totally fair game.

In other words, our brains are wired with "heuristics," those cognitive shortcuts that help us make snap decisions. Back in prehistoric days, it helped us quickly decide if someone was a threat or a potential ally—or just really, really bad at hygiene. But in modern times, it mostly means we're unfairly writing people off before they've even opened their mouths (Kahneman, 2011).

We do this with restaurants (the grimier the sign, the better the food, by the way), books (the dullest covers have the richest stories), and yes—people. Including people like my brother Steve.

If you had seen Steve before knowing him, you might've made assumptions. He didn't fit the mold of what society calls "put-together." And if you judged him too early, I forgive you—because I've done the same thing to countless others. But here's the twist: everyone who took

the time to know Steve discovered someone gentle, funny, decent, loyal, and full of pure-hearted mischief. Basically, the kind of guy Hallmark would write movies about if they had the guts.

The real lesson isn't to stop making snap judgments—you *literally can't*. That's biology. But you *can* stop treating those first impressions as gospel. You can listen to that little voice in your head—the one that says, *Seriously? You don't even know this person yet. Stop it.*

Because while your brain might jump to conclusions faster than a cat in a dog pound, your heart has the final say. And those who let their hearts guide them quickly saw that Steve's exterior was just that—exterior. Inside, he was all gold.

So yes, we're stuck with judgmental brains. But thankfully, we're also blessed with the ability to outsmart them—if we try. Maybe if we all practiced just a little more humility (and listened to Grandma's needlepoint wisdom), we'd see the Steves of the world for who they really are: rare, radiant souls in less-than-flashy wrapping.

And if you're still skeptical, I know a winery in an old dilapidated barn in Massachusetts making wine good enough to convert you.
Just don't judge it by the peeling paint.

The Scrappy Saint

Mentally and emotionally, Steve hovered around age 13 forever. That meant you got the sweet parts of adolescence without the smugness. He could be annoying—who isn't?—but he loved, laughed, and lived with a kind of earnestness most of us lose by middle school. He was a soft-hearted tough guy, obsessed with Bruce Lee and Dick the Bruiser, convinced he too was a force of nature in our bedroom wrestling matches. When he teasingly called me a "sissy boy," it was the

beginning of our WWF-style smackdown… until Dad's voice thundered from another room: "HEY! STOP PLAYING GRAB ASS!" (Still don't know what that meant. Neither did Steve or Scott.)

The Judgment of Strangers

Steve's emotional intelligence far exceeded his cognitive assessment scores. He could read a room. He knew who liked him, who pitied him, who feared him, and who underestimated him. And he carried all of that quietly. He just didn't let it define him. He was too busy watching *Enter the Dragon* and making sure everyone knew that *he* was Bruce Lee's true spiritual twin.

People stared. Of course they did. And it's okay—we expected it. Steve's appearance was not subtle. Strangers would double-take, children would ask awkward questions, and adults would mumble apologies after making snap judgments. You probably would have stared too. But if you looked past the dandruff, the mumbling, the

glasses, and the skin flakes, you'd find a heart as pure as gold and a humor sharper than those fingernails.

What's the old saying? "Don't judge a book by its cover." Well, Steve was a masterclass in that lesson. He was proof that some of life's best stories are hidden inside the books with cracked spines and faded covers.

Steve vs. the Church Ladies

One Sunday, Steve went to church with Mom and Dad in their small Indiana town. Two older ladies behind them—blessed with bad hearing and worse manners—whispered loudly, "I didn't know they had a retarded boy. What's wrong with his skin?" Steve heard them. So did Dad. Dad turned, furious, ready to strike down the wicked with righteous Midwestern justice. Steve gently placed a hand on Dad's leg. "It's okay," he said quietly. And he meant it. He had learned the world didn't always see him kindly. But he still offered it kindness in return.

It wasn't okay to my Father, but to Steve it was. Grace under fire. Later, Dad made a point of introducing Steve to the church ladies, knowing full well it would make them uncomfortable. Steve, ever the gentleman, offered his hand. They shook it—reluctantly, uncomfortably, and probably with a generous helping of guilt. The next time Steve was invited to church, he declined. He remembered. Because people with IDD *do* have feelings—don't ever forget that. If those ladies had gotten to know him, they'd have met a Christlike person in a flannel shirt. He'd already forgiven them. He always did. Because people like Steve don't carry grudges. They carry grace. And a moisturizer, if someone packed it for them.

Judgment Free Zone

People like Steve typically don't judge. It's just not in their wiring. I've met many people with ID and IDD, and I've found them to be the least prejudiced or judgmental humans on Earth. They don't care how you dress, how much you weigh, or whether you have some missing teeth. They care if you smile. They care if you're kind. They care if you'll talk to them or play a game. They especially care if you'd hug them; how they love to hug!

Let me tell you something: people with intellectual and developmental disabilities may be born with differences, but they are never born with prejudice. Steve accepted everyone. He didn't care about your job title, where you live, your skin color, your religion, or your flaws. If you were kind to him, he adored you. If you made him laugh, he loved you. If you hugged him, you'd get one each time he saw you. If you treated him like a person instead of a problem, you earned a loyalty that could outlast time itself.

Steve's first ride in a motorcycle sidecar—getting in was a challenge and half the adventure

Steve's whole life was about believing in people. That belief would later lead him into two marriages—one that drained him, and one that reminded him love was worth the risk and the wait.

People often said he had "the mind of a child," but that's too simple. He had the *heart* of a saint. And the observational skills of a comedian. He noticed everything. You just had to listen closely to catch it. Steve

accepted people with zero hesitation and absolute trust. He was "special," all right—special in the ways we all should be: loving, genuine, non-judgmental, and unafraid to be exactly who he was.

The Athlete Nobody Expected

Despite being labeled as someone who "would never be able to participate in regular physical activities," Steve bowled like a man on a mission. His aim was questionable, his form was unconventional, but his spirit? Unmatched. He played backyard wiffleball, church softball, and outdoor volleyball with gusto, and flailed his way through golf—cussing like a sailor while the rest of us tried not to laugh out loud. He even threw Jarts (you know, those now-outlawed, child-endangering lawn darts) with the kind of joyful recklessness that only the '70s could endorse.

Steve sometimes got frustrated with himself because his coordination and eyesight made it hard to do as well as others. But he never got mad or frustrated with anyone but himself. We were always there, patting him on the back, pumping up his self-esteem like coaches with a never-ending supply of pep talks.

Golfing with Dad, my other brother, Scott, and me at Swan Lake in Indiana was a highlight for Steve. Sometimes he'd crush a shot, other times, well… let's just say it was more "unique" than precise. I remember one time when Scott and I teased him for muttering "Goddammit" after every bad shot. Then, after he nailed a great one, Scott joked, "Why aren't you talking to God now?" He just laughed it off and kept playing like nothing happened. Classic Steve.

One legendary family fail: we gave him cigars during the golf outings, because, hey, cigars and golf are practically a package deal. Mom later

found cigars hidden in his apartment and quickly put a stop to that little habit. But somehow, cigars still managed to sneak their way into our golf trips—old habits die hard.

Dad also took Steve to a small golf course near where he lived in rural Indiana, where the owner, fully aware of Steve's situation, always let him play for free. No scorecards, no pressure—just good times and lots of laughs. Those acts of kindness meant the world to us.

Steve loved games, competition, and any chance to prove he was just as capable as the rest of us—even if he wasn't. But honestly, that didn't matter to him. He measured success in fun, laughter, effort, and whether someone gave him that all-important pat on the back.

The Real Steve

If you met him, he'd confuse you, charm you, and maybe make you feel awkward. But he'd also teach you—about kindness, happiness, and what it means to truly accept someone with no caveats, no disclaimers, no "but" at the end of the sentence.

You never got to shake his coarse hand or lose to him in a chess match. But through this book, you'll meet Steve. Not the diagnosis. Not the label. Not the cautionary tale. You'll meet the real Steve. The messy, magnificent, misunderstood man who changed our lives—one flake, one laugh, one hug at a time. You'll walk with him through trials, tribulations, and more triumphs than anyone thought possible. You'll

laugh, get mad, and probably cry once or twice. And you'll definitely feel something real, because it's all for the love of Stephen.

So buckle up. Grab a snack and your favorite beverage. This is the story of Steve—the flakiest, funniest, fiercest-hearted man I've ever known.