

Poet and Peacemaker Before 13

Mattie Stepanek was born with a rare, disabling and painful disease (called dysautonomic mitochondrial myopathy). Instead of focusing on his pain and fear of the future, however, Mattie wrote seven best-selling poetry books. He became a peace advocate and motivational speaker.

Born on July 17, 1990, he suffered from the same illness that claimed the life of his three older siblings. His parents divorced when he was a child, and he was raised in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and later lived in Rockville, Maryland.

His hero was former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who described Mattie as “the most extraordinary person whom I have ever known.”



A poet and speaker, Mattie penned six volumes of bestselling *Heartsongs* poetry books and a collection of peace essays that also became a bestseller. He was the lyricist for *Music through Heartsongs*, an album produced by Sony that was released in 2003 and performed by Billy Gilman. It debuted at No. 109 on the *Billboard 200* and at No. 15 on *Hot Country Songs*.

Mattie died on June 22, 2004, at age 13, at Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, D.C. He had said he wanted to be remembered as “a poet, a peacemaker and a philosopher who played.” His writings and his work live on in a foundation created to honor his legacy and advocate for peace.

One of his poems, especially beautiful, is titled *Heavenly Greeting*. In it, he asks how God will greet us when we enter His final kingdom. Mattie said he felt certain that God would reach out a hand to us. But, he wondered, will it be God’s right hand or His left one?

Finally, he asked his mother. He said she told him God would reach out both hands and give him “a great big, giant hug.” He ends the poem by saying, “Wow! I can’t wait for my hug, God!”

(more)

Here is the poem:

Dear God, For a long time ... I have wondered about ... How You will meet me ... When I die and come to ... Live with You in Heaven ... I know You reach out ... Your hand to welcome ... Your people into Your home ... But I never knew if You ... Reached out Your right hand ... Or if you ... Reached out Your left hand ... But now I don't have to ... Wonder about that anymore ... I asked my mommy and ... She told me that You... Reach out both of Your hands ... And welcome us with ... A great big giant hug.... Wow! ... I can't wait for my hug, God ... Thank You. And Amen.

Mattie Stepanek got his hug. And he is living the life God made him for, with no more weakness or sickness or sorrow or pain.

Because Jesus lives, Mattie looked forward to eternal life with God. And his family and all those who loved him can find hope in their grief.

Jesus said it:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24 ESV).

Isn't it truly amazing how God can use a child with such physical disabilities to speak truth to the world?

– Beecher Hunter