

The Hunchback Was a Wizard

Charles Steinmetz, the electrical genius and one of the early founders of the colossal General Electric, was crippled from birth. His body was grotesque. He was so short in stature that he looked like a dwarf, and he was a hunchback.

His mother died before he was one year old. His father was comparatively poor, but was determined that, as far as possible, young Charles would have a thorough education.



Steinmetz couldn't run and play games as normal boys did, so he made up his mind that he would devote himself to science. He set his goal: "I will make discoveries that will help other people."

When he emigrated from Europe to the United States in 1889, he could not speak a word of English. The port authorities were tempted to return him to Switzerland. His face was swollen from the cold he had endured on the boat passage across the Atlantic. He was dwarfed and misshapen in body. His sight was defective. His clothes were shabby.

But Steinmetz stayed, and even found a job that paid him \$12 a week. And he showed amazing abilities.

The infant company, General Electric, quickly realized that in Steinmetz it had one of the greatest experts in the world in the field of electricity.

And the company's assessment proved correct. Steinmetz's career was marked by unparalleled research and development. Among his pioneering achievements: He fostered the development of alternating current that made possible the expansion of the electric power industry in the United States, formulating mathematical theories for engineers. He also made groundbreaking discoveries in the understanding of hysteresis that enabled engineers to design better electric motors for use in industry.

When Steinmetz died in 1923, one writer said, "This deformed hunchback had the mind of an angel and the soul of a seer."

Though he was twisted and dwarfed in body, Charles Steinmetz was a giant in mind and spirit. It would have been easy for him to have offered excuses for maintaining a sedentary, do-little lifestyle. He refused to do so.

What about you? Are you allowing barriers – physical or imagined – to keep you from doing great things "that will help other people," as Steinmetz purposed?

It is a question each of us should ponder.

– Beecher Hunter