

Chapter 11

Call Me Steve

The week following Steve's death was one of the strangest of Diane's life. She did not understand what had happened but she knew Steve was all right. She had been through a lot with this troubled son. He had shared many unusual experiences with her. She was sure Steve could and would communicate with her. Her training as a stake missionary had taught her to listen to the spirit. It was simply a matter of waiting, listening and being open to the messages that would come.

Tom too has a practical spirituality. Both actually felt "joy" as they greeted friends, neighbors and fellow teachers at Steve's viewing on Friday night. At times it was exquisite ecstasy--pain mixed the hope, joy, understanding and love. Often during the days between Steve's death and funeral, Diane found it hard to focus on Stephen and to listen to what he had to say to her. However, when things got too hectic, she would simply delegated the task of making arrangements to her sister and retreat to a room where she could concentrate. As she did this she felt peace and love. Constantly, she was aware of Steve's presence.

Finally, at the viewing before the funeral on Saturday Diane began to get some information that amazed her. ***"Don't fall apart on me now Mom. We talked about this before, you knew it would come. Don't worry about me. Things are exactly as they are supposed to be. It's all right."***

How can anything so wrong be right? She wondered. But the most amazing experience came as she walked into the chapel behind the casket. Suddenly, Diane was in a different world. She experienced something unlike anything she had ever felt before. It can only be described as a near death experience, Diane found herself in an entirely different state of consciousness. She actually felt what Steve was feeling and she knew what he knew. Steve had chosen his disabilities for his parents growth. He had come into her family for a specific purpose. There was a reason why he suffered from learning disabilities. He came in understanding, on a different level, that he would die young. Diane recalled an agreement made in a different consciousness. She knew that there was a purpose in what had happened but did not completely understand until that brief moment when the veil was lifted.

As Diane walked into the chapel with her family she learned that all humanity is connected. We are here to love and teach one another and to learn Christ like love. The other world was indescribably radiant and beautiful. Everything was absolutely perfect in heaven and on earth just the way it was. The moment pulsed with warmth and love. Diane learned that all humanity are part of a universal plan. Every person has Devine purpose, and every family member, with their weaknesses and strengths balances, teaches and plays an essential role in the development of other family

members and in the spiritual development of the community. We are intricate stitches in a Devine pattern. We are here to teach, support and lift one another. The feeling of love were so intense and the knowledge so pure and beautiful that if Diane could have remained in that altered state she would not have returned to this world. There was simply no words to explain what she had experienced so Diane simply addressed the congregation in these words:

:

I just want to say a few things about my son Stephen. The night that this happened, Bishop Luke gave me a priesthood blessing. He said, "Angels will attend you, some you will know, some you don't." Angels have attended me. Some from this side of the veil, some from the other side. One of them is Stephen. From the moment we knew of his death he has said over and over to me--"**Mom, I'm all right. I'm okay. Don't be sad Mom.**"

We went to the temple the day after he died. I expected to get a message from Stephen there. My sisters went with me. There was a wonderful spirit of peace. We enjoyed being there. I felt comforted but did not receive the communication I was expecting. It was the next day when we were picking out the flowers for the casket when they asked my sister, "Who is the deceased?" Laraine, my sister said, "His name is Stephen Stokoe."

It was then that I heard him say emphatically, "**It's Steve!**" For years he has been trying to get me to call him Steve. He did not like being called Stephen, or worse, "Mr. Stephen." He even changed the spelling of his name when he was in the 7th grade. He was always correcting me and I had a hard time getting it right. I promise this time I will get it right. "Steve Stokoe" will be engraved on his headstone. Then there was the question about how he was to be buried. As I looked around the floral shop, I heard him say, "**Mom I want a Hawaiian burial.**"

I knew this meant leis. Steve wanted to be buried according to Hawaiian custom, in a white shirt, white pants and Hawaiian leis. I called my mother-in-law and I told her I needed ceremonial leis. My nephew Sean brought the leis with him from Oahu. The mai-lei lay, the green one, is used for weddings and graduation. You do not know the struggle we went through to get this boy graduated from high school.

I would like to thank the Skyline faculty, Youth Development Enterprises, the Granite High School faculty and all those who helped Steve complete his classes and graduate. It was a community effort and now we are graduating him again. The small orange lei is reserved for Hawaiian royalty. It is appropriate for Stephen because Stephen is a son of God and because Stephen had a Polynesian heart. He had great love for others but he also had Stokoe stubbornness.

He could not share his feelings. It was hard to ask for help I appreciate the things many of you have told me about Steve's last few months. Several people came

and told me Steve was preparing for a mission. I appreciated knowing that. It helps me understand his struggle. He would say, "**Mom, I have some bad habits. I have to quit smoking. I haven't had a cigarette in three days. It's driving me up the walls.**" He was trying hard and seemed to be succeeding. He was sincerely trying to make his life better. I found a list of his goals that he had written out a few weeks before he died:

"I believe in Christ. How great Thou art. I am going to give up my bad habits. I am going to start reading the scriptures. I am going to find someone to go to church with and when I am strong enough I am going to go by myself. I will go and do what the Lord wanted me to do." He was trying hard to do what was right. Steve has been with me every moment since this happened and he has said over and over again when I have become sad, "**Don't be sad Mom, it's okay.**"

Two people came to me last night and said, "I know that your son is all right and he wants you to know it." Don Bowen, our home teacher, received this impression during President Hunter's funeral: He said Stephen is worried about Tom and I. He wants us to know that he is well and is now with his grandfather. My close friend Pat Webb called with the same message.

I asked Tom how he really felt. We talked and he told me that he also feels as if he has been lifted upon the crest of a wave. We see the wide expanse of eternity before us. We know the beginning, we know where we are now, and we understand what is to come. We feel a great deal of peace and love and are very worried about all of you down in the currents who are feeling sad because you do not know what we know. We celebrate Steve's life, we celebrate his existence. We had him for nineteen years. For sixteen years he was everything a mother and father could ever ask for in a son. He made one wrong choice three years ago this coming May. He never really got out from under it. But he was trying hard. He did his best and this is what eternal progress is all about.

Steve had some experiences that you would not believe. I believed him because they were the same kind of experiences my father had as a young missionary in Australia. They were like the experiences Steve's Uncle Leo had as a twelve-year-old boy in Western Samoa. Steve had experiences on Maui as he struggled with evil spirits. He had experiences at home and he continued to struggle. He shared these things with me and he shared them with many of you. My son understood the plan of salvation. He knew what he should be doing and he was trying to make his life better. Once he said to me, "**Mom, my spirit is older than yours. I chose you and Dad for my Father and Mother.**"

I knew that was true. My own father's patriarchal blessings said: "You were born in this day for a wise and glorious purpose and your parentage was ordained of God." Steve came into our family for a special reason. We were told that someday Steve

would do "a great work for the Lord." I believed he was and is about that work. He had some very disappointing and discouraging times. I thought the worst was behind him, I thought he was out of the woods.

Yet I know that priesthood blessings are forever and that if eternal promises are not fulfilled in this lifetime, they will be fulfilled in the next. I know that this is not the end for Steve. We are talking about eternity and this is only the end of the second act. I am looking forward to the third act. I know that it will not be long until I see Steve again.

Throughout all of this I have felt the great love of our Heavenly Father. I have witnessed the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I now know that the scripture in John 14:27 is really true: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let it be afraid." God is in his heaven. Stephen is all right. I have peace in my heart. I have great love for all of you. We all have our roles and purposes in life. Steve fulfilled his.¹

Remarks by Bishop Luke,

This past week as I listened to the funeral of President Hunter, President Hinkley said, "A great tree in the forest has fallen leaving an empty space. Brothers and sisters another tree has fallen in the forest leaving another empty space. Stephen Stokoe, a son of God. Our Heavenly Father's eyes look on all of us equally. A fallen tree, he has gone to be reunited with loved ones who have proceeded him.

We mourn his passing because it is appropriate, for we loved him. That is why we are here to share our love and support. As I had the privilege this past week to meet with the family, I was impressed with what I saw along with what I felt. I could see, I could sense, I could feel that great love they had for Stephen and the other young men in that family. I could see courage and hope and love and a commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One great purpose of life is that of a test. One great test is to accept what we do not fully understand. None of us fully understand the events of this past week. We

¹ Orson F. Whitney taught that: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God. . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and mother in Heaven." Spencer W. Kimball, Faith Precedes the Mireacle, p. 98.

probably never will.² Only our Heavenly Father will truly understand. It is our responsibility to say, "Thy will be done." Then to ask for the comforter to give us peace and assurance in those matters we cannot comprehend. Look forward, brothers and sisters, keep your eyes on the Savior at all times. Don't look back and the hurt that you now feel will soon pass. May the path we choose to follow lead us to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ Amen

The evening after the funeral Don Bowen, the Stokoes' home teacher, stopped by. He had something he wanted to give to the family. He said he had felt impressed to buy a certain print. He had gone to several stores until he found exactly the right one. It is entitled "Going Home." When he unwrapped it Diane discovered that it was exactly the same picture printed on the program for Mike Payne's funeral. Stephen had kept the program with that picture in his room. It was a drawing of a young man in the arms of the Savior. The face of the savior in that picture looked almost exactly like the face Steve had drawn of the Savior in his sketch (see introduction.) The Stokoes' have a family rule that when you are going to be away you always called home. Don's gift seemed like a powerful message from Steve to his family. It was almost as if Steve was calling home to let his parents know that he had arrived safely.

However, this was not the only time Steve's family enjoyed rich spiritual experiences. Diane discover that she always had a special feeling when she worked on Steve's biography or when she played church hymns on the piano and the words passed through her mind. She came to think of this feeling as her "Stephen feeling." She practiced many hours the years after Steve died because when she did so she always felt close to him. Of her three younger sons, Steve had made the most progress during three years of piano lessons. The most unusual incident occurred when Bear, Steve's dog, became badly matted. The afternoon Diane took him to be groomed and clipped, Diane's "Stephen feeling," was very strong. Diane asked for this feeling only once, the night of Jared's viewing. Diane always expected to receive this feeling in the temple. However, she never did.

Tom had a special experience in the Jordan River Temple on what would have been Steve's twentieth birthday. He and Diane attended an early morning session with Diane's sisters and their husbands. Tom was given the name of an American Indian from the family file to stand proxy for that day. The worker explained that this was a special privilege as they seldom had Indian names.

While waiting for the endowment session to begin, Tom was greeted in the chapel by a Tongan brother whom he had never met. When he moved into the endowment room he was greeted warmly by a Samoan sister, a woman he knew from Laie. She was the only Polynesian in the company. During the course of the

²Diane could not accept this. She had spent her life doing research. She believed that she could and would find out what happened to Steve and why.

endowment, Tom had the distinct impression that these encounters with Polynesians were not coincidental. Tom felt sure that Steve was serving a mission to the Lamanites, the ancestors of the early Polynesians and American Indians, and that he had taught the Indian who Tom was doing endowment work for.

This impression was very strong and reinforced later. Out of forty veil worker there were only two Polynesians--a man and a woman. Diane was assisted at the veil by the woman. When Tom reached the veil, a brown hand reached through and clasp his own. He was assisted by the only male Polynesian in the entire company. As Steve's parents embraced in the Celestial Room, Tom whispered his impressions to Diane. They recalled their son's love for the Polynesians and agreed that Steve was sending them a strong message that day.

A few weeks after this experience, Tom and Diane attended one of David's football games in Orem. During the first quarter, Diane had a very strong impression that Steve was watching the game with them. However, Tom was so engrossed in the contest she did not mention this to Tom. The teams were well matched and the game was very close. It could have gone either way.

As Steve's parents drove back to Salt Lake, Tom said: "You are not going to believe this but during the first quarter I heard Steve say: ***"Dad, we're going to win."*** Tom thought that was remarkable because no one could have called that game in the first quarter. Brighton did win--by one point in the final play of the game.³

Diane told David about the experience the next morning. "I invite Steve to all of my games," he replied. "I always wear this bracelet around my ankle for him," David told his mother.

³Time is only relevant on earth. In the Teachings of The Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Four 1939-42 p. 220 we learn: The past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal "now." . . he knew the human family, their weakness and strength, power and glory; He ordered all things according to the council of His own will; He knows the situation of both the living and the dead and has made ample provision for their redemption according to their several circumstances. . .

Chapter 12

Aftermath

Diane began her research into the causes of Steve's death at the state Coroner's office on the Monday following the funeral. She wanted the coroner's report and she wanted some professional help in understanding what it meant. She drove to the University of Utah feeling euphoric, knowing that Steve really wanted her to know what was in that report. The clerk went over the report with her. It stated that powder burns on Steve's hands was evidence that his wounds were self inflicted and that Steve died of a gun shot wound to the head at close range. His body was in excellent physical condition. His lungs were clear (he was listed as a non-smoker). His blood contained only a tiny amount of an antihistamine which he had been taking for a cold. At the time of his death, Steve had been drug free for some time. Diane felt badly that few people knew that Steve was trying to turn his life around or came forward to support him in that effort.

The next morning Diane had a dream. She dreamed there were two funerals. There were no flowers at the first funeral but there were many beautiful flower arrangements at the second. Perhaps the first funeral symbolized the day the neighbors came to report all the problems that they had noticed during the Stokoes absence the previous summer. That meeting marked the beginning of the end for Steve. Diane felt that few of the neighbors that attended came in the spirit of unconditional love for the family. She felt judgment and condemnation. No one asked if there was anything they could do to help Steve. There were no "flowers" or symbols of love then. Yet many beautiful flower arrangements arrived for the "second" funeral.

Jared and his mother were both shocked by Steve's death. Sharon had driven Steve and Jared, to Lifestyles 2000 to work out in January and February. She thought Steve looked better than he had in months. His eyes were clear and he was beginning to gain back some of the weight he had lost in jail. Sharon thought Steve looked "very handsome." just before his death and did not feel he was depressed. Both she and Jared felt Brad was somehow responsible for what had happened.

Steve's mother called Jared as soon as he returned from a visit to Idaho. Jared recalled Steve telling him that he had tried to talk to Michelle when he ran into her at Matrix a few days before he died. Michelle had not responded when he called to her and Steve felt rebuffed. Steve complained to Jared that Brad was spreading rumors about him being bisexual. Steve thought Brad had called Michelle and told her to stay away from Steve because he was bisexual. Naturally Steve was furious with Brad. Jared's theory was that Steve had finally confronted Brad for spreading nasty rumors about him. Jared believed the two had fought, struggled over Steve's gun and finally, Brad grabbed the gun and shot Steve.

The Sandy police department finally concluded their investigation and released Steve's journals and written material to the family about the first of April. These notes were included:

ITEM # 17

Description of Evidence: Torn Written note
Date and time of Recovery 3-6-95 2100
Location of Recovery: Trash Can

Brad T. is so full of shit. How can you lose a girl you never had? Just like how can someone make up a story that never happened?

ITEM # 15

Description of Evidence
Date and time of Recovery 3-6-95 2100
Location of Recovery: Above ceiling tiles over

bed

Brad lied. I was never gay and he f---ing knows it. But he's just a f---ing LIER that's all he will ever be.

ITEM # 10

Description of Evidence and/or Location: Pad of Papers with notes by Victim. found in Closet Wall. Date and Time of Recovery 3-6-95 2100

Dear Michelle,

I just want to apologize for everything. . . No Mike wasn't my best friend, but he treated me better than anyone else so in my mind he was my best friend but Brad was his best friend. . . I tried to quit drugs but it didn't work. . . Brads life revolves around lying and hopefully this will pull him out of them. . .

I thank you for showing me sympathy and letting me go with you that one time. . . I didn't go to Matrixx expecting to be going out with you. I know you won't believe this but I just wanted to be friends with you. . . Michelle you are a great woman and you and Kenton will share a good life together. Your children will have great spiritual power and this experience will

make you stronger and you will be prosperous.

I really wasn't near as evil as people thought. . . I did have a fake [reputation] which was given to me by Brad and which was added onto and exaggerated. . . [by others]. I could never hurt anyone but myself. Seriously your smile, kindness and warm heart will be forever imbedded in my soul. That was meant in all goodness. No girl that I ever met showed me more kindness than you did and for that I will be eternally grateful. Good luck in your life and goodbye.

Steve

Stokoe

(In the name of God, I was never gay and never wanted to be. Michelle Brewer is the only girl I wanted to be with. I truly love you more than life itself. . . (The rest of the letter rambled, it included mention of Steve's cousin, Mike K., and an incident that occurred at the end of ninth grade, and concluded with comments about evil spirits.)

After reviewing this material Diane visited Brad and Maggie again at the car wash to specifically ask if Brad had ever teased Steve about being bisexual. Both denied knowing anything about the rumor. Diane called Michelle and asked if she knew or had ever spoken to Brad T. She said she had never heard of him nor had she ever talked with any of Steve's friends from his Sandy neighborhood. Brad did admit to victimizing Steve on other occasions-- he and others had locked Steve out of the house and had teased him just before the Marazine overdose two years earlier. However, he denied spreading ugly rumors about Steve's sexuality.

Diane asked Brad about Steve's recent drug use. Brad claimed that Steve was doing acid with Jared and marijuana with his friend Travis from Matrix. She also wanted to know what Brad knew about Steve's bouts with evil spirits. This was the only subject Brad and Jared (who hated each other) could both agreed upon. Brad believed Steve saw spirits because of his Marazine poisonings almost three years earlier. Jared said Steve often saw them at his bedroom window at night. Steve believed they were real.

The Wednesday after Steve's funeral Diane picked up a box of thirty books for the Granite High library. She had never read Jay's Journal The library copy had disappeared and so Diane had reordered it. As she picked up the box to take to the car, Jay's Journal fell off the top of the stack. Diane took it home and read it. She found some uncanny parallels between Jay's life and Steve's. Jay had experienced evil

spirits, drugs and a friend who died in an automobile accident shortly before he himself committed suicide with a hand gun. At the time of his death, Jay believed he was possessed and had no alternative but to take his own life.

The fact that the only item missing from Steve's room was his Hawaii journal bothered Diane. It was illustrated with photos and was the best one he had done. What happened to the journal? Diane talked to her friend Miss J. about Jay's Journal. Miss J was from Jay's home town, one of the small Mormon communities not far from Steve's home. She knew the Jays family and assured Steve's mother that the book, although published anonymously, was definitely not fiction.

Diane found a lot of comfort in the poem Jared wrote for Steve's funeral. Jared handed it to David just before the service so Dave included it in his talk:

STEVE STOKOE

Who was this man?
I think I know
One of God's prophets
He told me so.

Who was this man?
I think I know
His power within
can make flowers grow.

Who was this man
I think I know
Could talk to deer
With humility low.

And isn't it sad
How the reaper
Comes, to take us
Away to Heaven to stay?

Who was this man
I think I know
Turns strangers
Into friends
Yes that's how
he goes.

Who was this man

I think I know
A friend to us
all,
Who helped us grow.

Who was this man
I think I know
One of Gods prophets
He told me so.

Diane called Jared to ask if she could use it in Steve's biography. Jared gave permission. Then she asked Jared to tell her about the poem.. "Oh, you want to know about the deer," Jared replied.

"Well, every time I went with Steve into the mountains we would see deer. He said they called to him. Steve could get within five feet of them and they wouldn't run. Every time I was with him we saw them. Late one night, he went up there in the car and knew exactly where they would be. There was a buck, a doe and a fawn. It was the strangest thing."

Who was Steve really? Diane had received a witness of who he was at the funeral but she continued to wonder. None of the grieving books she read seemed to fit her particular situation.⁴ Often it had been difficult to parent Steve. The family had made a lot of mistakes. However, Steve had told her he had chosen Tom and Diane⁵ for his parents shortly after his acid poisoning.

His mother's reaction at that time was: "I certainly would not have chosen you." Although she thought this she never said it. However, as she pondered the matter in her heart it made a lot of sense. Obviously the Lord had something to teach Steve's family. Otherwise he would not have sent Tom, a speech teacher, a son who was too shy to talk and Diane, a research librarian, an impulsive boy who, simply did not

⁴December, 1996, Newsletter. Brent Hinze and his wife's research on Near Death Experiences indicate that "beings have a sense of purpose. They are ready to fill a unique mission that pertains only to them on this earth." IANDS, The international Association for Near-Death Studies c/o Carol Gibson, 103 East 300 South, Kaysville, Utah 84037.

⁵Betty J. Eddie, The Awakening Heart, (New York; Pocket Books, 1996. pp 17-18. I learned during my experience that my children were previously developed spiritual beings like myself. We were friends before this life, and we wanted to remain together for this life's lessons and experiences. We had bonded as soul friends there and chose to come here as a family sharing our experiences with each other to further our spiritual development.

reason.⁶

"My spirit is older than yours Mom."

"I chose you and dad to be my Mother and my Father."⁷

Then there was the special feeling Diane received after Steve died. She knew Steve wanted his story recorded and when she worked on the manuscript, a wonderful feeling came over her each afternoon, Diane felt a swelling in her heart. The feeling always came unbidden. She concluded the biography with these words: My son, continue your "great work," whatever it is and know you are loved. We all look forward to the time we will be together again. Diane completed most of this section by the end of May in 1995. All footnotes were added later.

⁶Don Wood is the oldest living cystic fibrotic, and had a N.E.D. When he asked why he suffered from such a painful disease he was told that he chose the disease and amount of pain he would be willing to suffer in the premortal world.

Don expressed disbelief, then a scene opened to his view. "I was in a room, sitting on the second row, right-hand side where we were taught principles by beings of light of what we might experience on this place we call earth. The pupils were choosing some of the lessons they wanted to learn. In this particular room I was in, they were talking about accountability, responsibility, truth, light and disease. The instructor explained that there was a fast way to learn these things, and if you choose to learn it the fast way, you either learn it or you don't get it at all. He said there is a disease that teaches it very quickly, and he wrote on the board the words, "cystic fibrosis." The instructor turned to the class, and one hand went up in the group. I said, 'I'll take it,' at the same time thinking, be careful, you don't know what pain is. The scene closed immediately, and I knew I could no longer blame God." IANSA, December 1966 Newsletter."

Also, Lucy Lucardie learned this same principle in her N.E.D.: Before they come to earth, spirits volunteer for the challenges they face in this life. Lucy found she had volunteered for all the health problems she suffered such as Polio when she was seven, throat cancer which ended a professional singing career, muscular dystrophy, asthma and diabetes. IANSA Newsletter, December 1966.

⁷Notes from an Astrological Reading for Steve, his mother and father, drawn Aug., 1995. One thing we look at with Child #4 (Steve) is that he definitely came into life with a purpose. This whole experience over the past year has been a catalyst for helping you both overcome deficits you came in to work with. . . Steve's moon sits in his mother's house of service, his sun sits in his father's house of service. It is like Steve's death opened you both up to express and serve someone else in some specific way. . . And this is the commonality in both charts; both charts indicate that there is something you will do in this lifetime that will be a service to humanity. This will occur because of what you have learned as a result of Steve's death. . .

It looks as if it is something you all decided to do at some point in time in some other consciousness before this life experience. It is like he said, "I want to be your son. I want to help you do this." Then out of pure love he volunteered to be the one who would be the catalyst to bring all this about." Diane, you will always have a feeling connection with this child. You will know when you are experiencing him. It will be like a sweet energy. . . Always it will be there. You need to realize that he did not leave. He is here and active in both charts. . . Steve was a full moon child. He was born with a mature spirit. Steve's chart indicates that he was a very old soul.