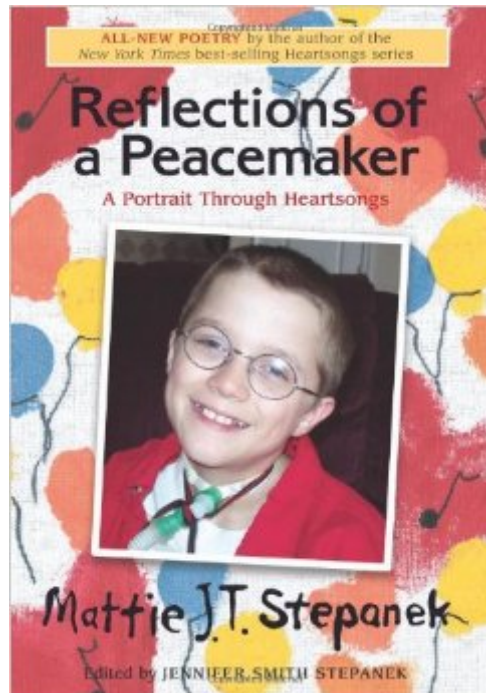


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# Reflections Of A Peacemaker: A Portrait Through Heartsongs



## Synopsis

“I write about anything that touches the essence of my existence. What I witness, what I feel, what I think, what I fear, what I treasure. I write about life, which is our greatest gift.” --Mattie Stepanek, 1990-2004

Mattie J. T. Stepanek lived and died a child, but he had the spirit of a giant. Affected by a rare and fatal neuromuscular disease, Mattie lived almost fourteen years but in that time became a poet, best-selling author, peace activist, and a prominent voice for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Before his death in June 2004, his five volumes of Heartsongs poetry sold more than a million copies. *Reflections of a Peacemaker: A Portrait Through Heartsongs* is the final collection of Heartsongs that Mattie was working on when he died. It includes the last poem Mattie penned along with a special collection of unpublished poetry, photographs, and artwork spanning the decade from when he began writing Heartsongs at age three. Culled from the thousands of poems, essays, and journal entries Mattie left behind, the entries in *Reflections of a Peacemaker* create a portrait of Mattie in his own words. In these poems he explores disability, despair, and death but also the gifts he finds in nature, prayer, peace, and his belief in something “bigger and better than the here and now.” The poems are grouped by theme such as playful, stormy, sacred, and final Heartsongs, with each section introduced by a personal tribute from the likes of Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Larry King, and former President Jimmy Carter.

In the words of Mattie’s mother, Jeni Stepanek, who has published *Reflections of a Peacemaker* at her son’s request, “In reading these poems we enter Mattie’s world and gain insight through a child who somehow balanced pain and fear with optimism and faith.”

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is perhaps possible to read this book and miss the fact that Mattie's passion for peace motivated almost all of its contents -- including the narration by Jeni, his Mom, and the comments of his friends. The poems -- as simple and powerful as ever -- provide an autobiographical sketch. Jeni's unobtrusive and excellent comments provide a superb biographical outline. Mattie discussed the book with Jeni before he died, told her where his most recent poems were (in a folder under his bed) and, among other things, specifically instructed her about the last page -- after the index. When the reader reaches that point, he or she will understand Mattie's certain intention that this book should be a means of promoting his message of peace. He seems to be saying, at least to this reviewer, that Mattie, in every aspect of his life, had this goal in mind and he was eager to motivate his readers to share his dream. It is most certainly a commendable goal and one we should all take seriously. Bob Balkam

This book is an inspiration in many ways. Mattie is a true hero for all disabled, dreamers, writers, peacemakers, and anyone who has a heartsong. The book says "slow down", "be silent"; advice that we forget to use many times in our busy lives. If we all read the book with deep thought and an open heart, I believe it would bring us a step closer to world peace. In a word, this book is amazing!

The challenge issued on the last page of the book is a fitting climax to the journey the reader has made to reach that point. While the book is autobiographical -- Mattie's poetry is as transparent and disarmingly descriptive as ever -- it is also biographical. Jeni, Mattie's Mom, provides a narration which, with the chapter introductions by Mattie's friends, contribute a more comprehensive view of Mattie than we have had before. Autobiography and biography, partial though they are, make a powerful combination. Together, they make the book at one and the same time enjoyable, heart-wrenching, illuminating, and demanding. It is difficult to imagine anyone reading this book and not doing some soul-searching as a result. At the same time it is a very comforting and hopeful book. Mattie's passion for peace and hope which totally dominated his life, even in the face of almost unimaginable sufferings, will impress any reader, even those who had never heard of him before. Mattie's words ring forth: 'Peace is possible. Live with hope.' Simply face the challenge on the last page. Bob Balkam

Mattie touched my heart with his heartbreak at loosing his siblings; his love of his mom and of life itself. He understood he had a limited time to be here on this earth and he made a decision to use that time to be someone that none of us will ever forget. The writings grow and mature as he does. I think he truly made an impact on his world and on those around him. We should all stand up for peace, safety, and happiness as Mattie did.

I own this book, and even purchased a copy for the use by my Alma mater University for their children's collection of books. This book is the FINAL published book of poems by 13 year old Mattie Stepanek, who died on 22 June 2004 from a rare form of muscular dystrophy: Dysautonomic Mitochondrial Myopathy. He was a genius by intellect, but as sweet as a boy could have been. I recommend this book because of Mattie's keen insight into major human issues such as LOVE, PAIN, SUFFERING, FRIENDSHIP, SICKNESS, LONLINESS, FULFILMENT, DEPRESSION, AND IMPENDING DEATH. By late Autumn of 2003, I believe Mattie surmised that not only was death possible but was probably imminent. By Dec 2001, Mattie and former US President Jimmy Carter became close friends, and this undoubtedly had an impact on Mattie's later poems. You actually SENSE Mattie becoming a Peacemaker like his childhood idol, Jimmy Carter. This book is more than simply GOOD poetry, but the plethora of photos from his mother's collections give the reader a visual biography of a boy who ROSE ABOVE his fatal sickness and who proved to be an angel in disguise for millions upon millions of people, when the day was Done! A MUST BUY Book.

I don't think this will rank as one of the most useful reviews you'll find on , but all I have to say is that I loved this book and am again stunned by what a gifted soul Mattie is.

Mattie Stepanek will have a piece of my heart forever. For all of his trials and setbacks, through his writing he inspired me to think of the better, more beautiful side of life. Compared to what he went through in his much too short life, I think most of the rest of us should realize that we truly are blessed.

This book is a must-read for all adults, and older children. The amount of suffering this child endured, and yet could find a reason to grasp life to the fullest, is a lesson for all of us. Mattie had a special gift that only comes from God, with messages that are profound. And yet, the messages are delivered in utter simplicity. It will absolutely change your life.

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