



Mattie J.T. Stepanek Foundation

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Peace is possible!

For Immediate Release

Mattie Stepanek's life story reaches NY Times Bestseller List (June, 2011)

- **Messenger: The Legacy of Mattie J.T. Stepanek and Heartsongs** reaches NY Times Bestseller list.
- Written by **Jeni Stepanek, Ph.D.**, the book offers details of Mattie's life story as a poet, as a peace advocate, and as an ordinary child who celebrated an extraordinary calling to spread a spiritual message of hope.
- Jeni Stepanek recently appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which featured Mattie as one of Oprah's three "Most Memorable Guests." Oprah said the book 'is a wonderful story' about Mattie, whom she called 'a prophet for our times.'

June, 2011 NY Times and Other Bestseller Lists

Messenger: The Legacy of Mattie J.T. Stepanek and Heartsongs will be on the non-fiction paperback and e-book **NY Times Bestseller** lists during June, 2011. Published by Penguin Group in 2010, the book is also listed as a **Publisher's Weekly Bestseller** and is on **USA Today's Top 150 Bestselling Books** list. *Messenger*, written by Jeni Stepanek, Ph.D. (Mattie's mom), offers the private life story of Mattie J.T. Stepanek, a well-respected peace and disability activist and the author of seven bestselling collections of poetry and essays. The book covers Mattie's earliest years through his final moments of life, and includes many photographs and a Foreword by Dr. Maya Angelou. It also holds excerpts and selections from Mattie's previously unpublished poems, essays, and e-mail correspondence. Jeni recently appeared on the final studio audience production of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* when Oprah honored Mattie as one of her three "Most Memorable Guests" during the 25 years of the program. Oprah called the *Messenger* book "a wonderful story" and referred to Mattie as "a prophet for our times."

Background on Mattie J.T. Stepanek

Mattie Stepanek was born in July, 1990, the youngest of four children who each inherited a rare and fatal neuromuscular disease. Mattie's mom, Jeni Stepanek, was unaware that she had the disease at the time or that her children were inheriting it from her until 1992, when she was first diagnosed with the adult onset form, which led to the children's diagnoses. The first three children died during infancy or preschool years. Mattie lived until June, 2004. During his almost 14 years, Mattie penned countless poems and essays, delivered many speeches related to hope and peace, and authored seven bestselling books. He first began creating written works at the age of 3 while grieving the death of his beloved brother. Across time, his creations grew to reflect his spirituality, his personal philosophies for balancing burdens and blessings, and a message of hope and peace for all people. A frequent guest on talk shows, Mattie also served as an advocate for peace- and disability-related organizations including the *We Are Family Foundation* and the *Muscular Dystrophy Association*. Mattie had a unique gift that combined a deep spirituality with a belief in hope and peace despite the many challenges we face in life. He was a confirmed Catholic in the Archdiocese of Washington, and he taught both 2nd and 6th grade CCD religion at Holy Rosary Parish in Prince George's County where he was also a Minister of the Word (lector) at Mass and sang in the choir. Mattie's personal, medical, and spiritual life are all detailed in his biography, *Messenger: The Legacy of Mattie J.T. Stepanek and Heartsongs*. Written by his mother, Jeni Stepanek, the book explores the roots and evolution of the message he shared, and his evolving role as a messenger of hope and peace for people around the world.

Background on Jeni Stepanek, Ph.D.

Jeni Stepanek, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of *The Mattie J.T. Stepanek Foundation*, a volunteer-run not-for-profit organization established in 2005 to continue spreading Mattie's message of hope and peace. The Foundation develops educational and recreational programs and outreach activities for children and adults to encourage peacemaking as a deliberate action. An award-winning inspirational speaker, Jeni has appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Larry King Live*, and other news and talk shows. In addition to her work as an educational and research consultant, Jeni volunteers as a National Vice President for the *Muscular Dystrophy Association* and as a Governor for the *We Are Family Foundation*, and she serves as a mentor for nearly 100 teens around the world who are involved in peacemaking activities that tend to basic human needs.

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