

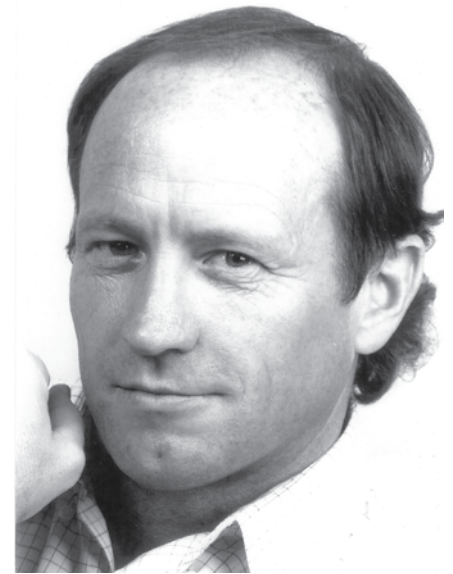
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# I Never Knew Him

## *Remembering a man I never met*

by James R. Spencer



**Steve Boughton**

“Well, my little troubadour died today,” my wife, Meg, said as she handed me a CD. Meg is a charge nurse on the oncology floor at our local Regional Medical Center, so it is not unusual for her to tell me that she lost a patient—that happens a lot. And she suffers real loss every time it happens. The thing is, she is very guarded about anything she says about what goes on in her work. Not only because she keeps her emotions pretty much to herself, but because in this day and age medical privacy is a huge issue.

It was July 30<sup>th</sup>. We were in her car going for dinner at T. G. I. Friday’s. I popped the CD into the car stereo system and listened—for the first time—to the voice of Steve Boughton.

Meg went so far as to tell me that Steve was a dentist from Hailey, Idaho. He really had not wanted to be a dentist, she said, but his family members were all medical professionals and he was sort of forced into that role. What he had always wanted to be was *a musician*.

Steve practiced dentistry for 25 years. He was diagnosed with Leukemia nine

months before I heard his DVD. Two months before he died, he copyrighted a song called “The Photograph.” It recounts his discovery of a photograph taken of him thirty years before, playing his guitar and singing in a microphone.

Steve’s wife, Lynn, encouraged him to sell his practice and start singing. He resisted, but she put the practice up for sale. So Steve began singing in earnest—every chance he got—including in his room on the cancer floor at the hospital where Meg works.

I put Steve’s CD into Meg’s car stereo. I liked his voice immediately, it was not slick but earnest and rustic. I loved the music and the words he had written. The words slew me. (*I should mention that not everybody reacts as emotionally to things as I do. I have discovered from watching Scrubs on TV that I am what is known as “a feely.” I have the gift of “feeling and weeping.” Or is that two gifts?)*

Anyway, as I listened to Steve sing, I wept. I wept for loss. Selfishly, I wept because I would not meet him this side of heaven. Of course I wept for what his untimely passing meant to his wife and his eleven-year-old daughter, Marty. He sings

**Cont’ on page 2**

### **A Note About this Newsletter:**

Some people will wonder how this article fits into the mission of Through the Maze. Two ways. First, there is a compelling Christian message in Steve’s coming to terms with his faith under fire. Second, I hope as readers see how God dealt with me in this matter, they will be reminded, as I was, that we must always examine ourselves as closely as we examine others.

poignantly about both of them.

In the opening cut on his CD, he sings about “coming home to Idaho”—coming *from* California after fifty years, coming *to* a new start in life. Steve discovered a new life in Idaho, much like, I presume, John Denver did when he discovered his Rocky Mountain home.

During the nine months between diagnosis and death, Steve became a troubadour, singing his life with his words. And as I listened, he strummed my own pain with his fingers and—like Don McLean touched Lori Lieberman when he sang “Empty Chairs”—Steve killed me softly with his song.

The opening cut, “The Road to Idaho,” chronicles his move from California to Idaho:

*I took the road to Idaho to make a brand new start. To seek, to serve, to know the life that dwells within her heart...*

Too soon after arriving in his new home, he got his diagnosis.

*...We may just be passing through here 'til we find eternity.  
We will navigate a wilderness before we're truly free.  
There are turning points in every life that fix our destiny.  
A mix of accidents and circumstance and blessed meant to bes.*

*I believe there is an angel out there watching over me.  
With a faithful heart I've come to know a Presence I can't see.  
The road of life has ups and downs and changes with each bend,  
And by His grace in Idaho I've found the rainbow's end.”*

As I said, I knew almost nothing about Steve. I went online and found his obituary. Services were held in Idaho at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Hailey and at the Presbyterian Church of Novato in California. Episcopal and Presbyterian. I am not proud to confess that I would have been happier to have read something like Southern Baptist and Assembly of God. I was raised in the Episcopal Church. I was an acolyte. I thank God for the spiritual direction I got from St. Andrews Episcopal in Basin, Wyoming. But, I would be less than honest if I didn't say that I have a mild prejudice against so-called mainline Christian churches. Too often the mainliners seem to me to have slipped into a liberal Christianity that makes me uncomfortable. But, to put things in perspective, my opinion and four dollars will buy a Starbucks.

I did feel a genuine brotherhood in Steve's music. There was something familiar—a Christian fragrance and humility. I prayed Steve was in heaven.

Steve's song “While I Live in this World,” was filled with images that were familiar and comforting. He wrote that the things he could completely rely on included tomorrow's sunrise, the constancy of the North Star, and that God will “favor the humble with Grace.” He was certain that kindness to strangers would come back to him (although there was no telling how or when).

He openly admitted that as he lived out the hand he had been

## “The Photograph”

by Steve Boughton



*I recognize the singer  
And I remember well the era  
But I've never seen this photograph before...  
When the future lay before me  
My profession got the call to serve the times  
But the singer never left me  
He just re-emerged inside me  
Now I'm back to writing songs and singing rhymes*

dealt, good health was the wild card, “for sure.” Smooth sailing, he said, is rare on the ocean of life—choppy seas are more often the norm. And “Everyday of the journey, somewhere on the earth, there'll be refugees caught in a storm.”

But, in the midst of his own storm, he found the courage to say, “Each day I take time to thank God for my blessings the peace in my heart is renewed,” and “I will continue to trust in God's will 'til I leave here to join the hereafter.”

Steve includes some other tunes on the CD, tunes not his own by authorship: Bruce Springsteen's “Working on the Highway” was one. This song is important to me because when it was popular, my daughter, Erin, loved it. I was, in retrospect, an uptight preacher. I disdained the song and—to my regret—exhibited that disdain to Erin. Time does things to people. Some of us it

hardens, some of us it softens. I pray I have become softer. Hey, I found after age sixty that I like the Eagles!

Steve also included George Strait's "Amarillo by Morning," a tune I find easy to like. Johnny Rivers' "Poor Side of Town" and John Michael Montgomery's "Letters from Home," along with a couple of more of his own tunes, round out Steve's eclectic collection.

Time works wonders. When I listened to the CD last summer, I literally couldn't see the forest for the trees. I was deeply touched, and I knew there was a message in his story for others as well as for me. For days I was beset with the idea of writing about him and how he touched me though I never knew him. I thought about calling his wife to get more information. But it was too soon.

I didn't listen to the CD again after hearing it that one day in July. And I never called his wife. But I never gave up the idea. As Christmas approached I began to think about it again. I told myself I would call his wife right after Christmas.

About two days before Christmas, Meg and I were walking in the mall. A handsome woman passed by us and Meg called out to her. She introduced us. "Jim," Meg said, "This is Lynn Boughton, you remember, her husband, Steve. He did the CD you like so much."

My jaw dropped. I grabbed Lynn and said, "I was going to call you right after Christmas!" I told her how Steve's music had impacted me. I told her a little about myself and said I wanted to write his story for my newsletter. She said, "I think Steve would like that!"

Ten days later I called Lynn and we talked about this article. I tactfully (I hope) asked about Steve's faith. She said that when their daughter was born in California before they moved to Idaho, she started attending church. I asked her to describe her own understanding of faith in Christ. She told me how she had found Christ in a Youth Group in High School, but then had "sort of drifted." When her daughter was born she felt a need to return to church. (When I had asked Meg if she knew "where Lynn was spiritually," her answer had been simply, "Nobody on this planet is sweeter than Lynn Boughton.")

Lynn told me that when she started going to the Presbyterian Church in Novato, California, Steve, at first, would not join her. "Not for me," he had said. He watched his wife and daughter go to church every Sunday. Then one Sunday morning, he was up, dressed and went with her.

Lynn became one of the music directors in that church.

When they decided to move to Idaho, Lynn left California a week earlier than Steve. Her last act as music director was to assign Steve to sing a solo in the California church service. The



song she asked him to sing was "I Can Only Imagine."

*Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel?  
Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?  
Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?  
Will I sing 'Hallelujah!'? Will I be able to speak at all?  
I can only imagine! I can only imagine!*

As she told me that, I was weeping again. I said something like, "Well, at that point, he *had* to know Jesus!"

"He had *come* to know Him," she said.

"Let me ask you," I said, "When he got his diagnosis, I get the impression—from listening to the lyrics on his CD—that his disease created a new spiritual relationship for him."

"Not a doubt about it," she said.

I said, "I got that from the lyrics of one of his songs, the one in which he uses a pool (as in shooting pool) analogy.

She laughed, "When the Rock Started Rollin'."

"Yeah, he talked about how his life came together when the *Rock* started rollin' and his life started rockin'..."

Lynn completed the line "...And them balls started droppin' in the corner pocket..."

I said, "So when he got his diagnosis of death, his life actually brightened..."

"Jim," Lynn said, "The last 24 hours of his life in the hospital—everything for him seemed to be an awesome revelation of heaven. It was really touching and inspiring."

"Wow."

"I wasn't as excited as he was," Lynn said. He had a more certain vision."

"Sort of like," I said, "what Debra Winger said to Anthony

Hopkins in the movie made from C. S. Lewis' *Shadowlands*. As Winger's character (Joy) was dying she kept saying, mildly irritated, to Hopkins (Lewis), "You better be sure about this!" (Sure that this life is a shadowland and that heaven is the *real* place.)

"Exactly like that," she said.

Silence.

Again in retrospect, how could I have had any doubt? I guess I am sort of slow. I hope not jaded. Skeptical yes, but I hope not cynical. The "fragrance" of the CD, I should have perceived as a powerful aroma. How can you hear those words without seeing the obvious message?

So, though I never knew Steve Broughton, he taught me something. He taught me that I am no yet as soft as I need to be. Not as spiritually sensitive as I ought to be. Not as ready to embrace those outside my own clan as God would have me be.

Thanks, Steve. Rock on!

*I was a busy man  
always runnin' around  
Trying to get ahead  
but I was losin' ground  
and when I hit the skids  
and fell out of the race  
That's when I met the Lord  
And His amazing grace.  
Now it's a brand new place*

*When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'  
My pulse was jumpin'  
Them balls was droppin'  
In the corner pocket  
And nobody could stop 'em  
When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'*

*He'll take control when you say your prayers  
When you put your trust in the man upstairs  
He's got a master plan  
And things might get strange  
But get outta His way  
Cause He wants to rearrange you  
There's gonna be change  
When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'  
My pulse was jumpin'  
Them balls was droppin'  
In the corner pocket  
And nobody could stop 'em*



*When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'*

*Your heart and soul He'll fill your cup  
Lift up your eyes things are lookin' up  
He'll ease your pain and make you feel right  
And all you got to do is to hang on tight  
With all your might*

*When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'  
My pulse was jumpin'  
Them balls was droppin'  
In the corner pocket  
And nobody could stop 'em  
When the rock started rollin'  
My life started rockin'*

## How to order Steve's CD

**Send \$20.00 to:**  
Lynn Boughton  
1282 E. Braemere Rd  
Boise, ID 83702

**Alternatively:**  
Earmark \$20.00 of any donation to Through the Maze by writing "Steve's CD" on the purple card.