

CALL ME STEVE

A Biography



by

Stephen Alexander Stokoe

his family, friends and others

Introduction

Late in the evening of February 13, 1995, Stephens' parents relaxed in the hot tub on their patio. As they gazed into the heavens they were awestruck by the ethereal beauty of a gathering storm. Billowing, tumbling banks of cumulus clouds swept northward along the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains. A pale winter moon and a few bright stars played hide and seek behind a bank of rolling, churning clouds that skirted Mount Olympus.

Steve's dad, impressed by the dramatic display, wondered if the gossamer sentinels had come to escort the spirit of Howard W. Hunter, the beloved but ailing Mormon prophet, from his earthly home. Surely the heavenly display signaled the beginning of important events about to unfold. The next day, Karl B., their neighbor, died unexpectedly. Three weeks later, President Hunter finally succumbed after a long bout with prostrate cancer. Then on the afternoon of March 6th, the day before President Hunter was buried, Stephen Alexander Stokoe, their tall red haired son, died of a gun shot wound to the head. He was nineteen years old.

The last two and a half years of Steve's life had been as turbulent as the winter sky on that February night. In a few short months during his Sophomore year, Steve had gone from a quiet, shy, sensitive youth to a confused and depressed young adult. He struggled with poor grades, questionable friends, drug and nicotine addiction and finally legal problems. Steve passed his nineteenth birthday in Oxbow Jail. He began to realize where his poor choices were taking him. The fog of adolescent rebellion began to lift as he started setting goals. He was making new friends. He had given up drugs. He had embarked on a career and was talking about going on a mission.

Then, quite suddenly, he was dead. Was it suicide or murder? Steve had intervened to prevent the suicide of a friend a few weeks before his own death. "**Jared, you never throw your body away,**" he counseled. Could Steve really have taken his own life? None of his immediate relatives believed it possible. Steve was not the kind of kid who would kill himself.

Initially, even the police who investigated Steve's death suspected foul play. The officer wrote "pending" under cause on his death certificate. David, a younger brother and Steve's dad were given ballistic tests to determine if either had fired a pistol. His parents and younger brothers were taken to police headquarters and instructed not to talk to one another. The questioning went on for six hours and their testimonies were taped. The physical evidence at the scene was not consistent with a suicide.

Steve's mother was sure he had been murdered--either by someone he knew or by influences she could not begin to explain to the detectives. Diane had been close to her son. She believed him when he said two weeks before his death: "**Mom, there are two**

evil spirits who are trying to destroy me, but there is another who is trying to help me.”

The police conducted a thorough investigation. They talked to Stephen's friends and neighbors. They combed his bedroom for evidence. They removed the mirror four bullets had passed through and cut pieces of paneling out of the bedroom wall. They took ceiling tile down and pried bullets out of floor boards. They collected all Steve's journals and written material. The Stokoes believed detectives also took Stephen's Y.D.E. journal where he had recorded his first experience with spirit possession. Later they discovered that the detectives never saw it. That journal disappeared when Stephen died and was never recovered. (Steve had described his most public possession experience in that journal.) Sixteen months earlier Y.D.E. leaders had written Steve's parents explaining priesthood blessings and special prayers had to be offered that night "to calm things down." They threatened to send Steve home if he continued to "mess around with the dark forces."

Unfortunately, these problems did not end in the summer of 1993. At home for the last quarter of his senior year, Stephen continued to flounder. Did an acid overdose expand his consciousness or cloud his mind permanently? Were evil spirits really trying to destroy him or was Stephen mentally ill? Did emotional overload triggered his suicide? The reader may draw his own conclusions.

As both Stephen's Uncle Leo and Grandfather Johnson had survived bouts of demonic possession, his mother believed that Steve too would "weather the storm." Steve's parents tried medication, counseling, placing his name on the prayer roll and several priesthood blessings. Nothing helped. Finally, Diane decided that this was a problem Steve was just going to have to work out for himself.

What really happened to Steve Stokoe and what did this whole experience mean? What about the other six nineteen-year-old men from the Sandy-West Jordan area who died in the five month period between March and July of 1995? Five of the six Mormon youth were contemplating L.D.S. missions. Could there be any connection? And what about the other young men from Utah and neighboring states who were dying by their own hand? Why are the incidents of suicide higher in the Western states?

Although Steve's biography touches on only a few cases, suicide among young Mormon men appears to be increasing. A high school counselor and close friend of Steve's mother, contacted her. She was counseling a single L.D.S. woman who had just lost a sixteen-year-old son to suicide. The boys' mother suspected her son was also involved with the demonic. She feared for his life. This really disturbed Diane as did increasing number of teen obituaries appeared in the local newspaper with the phrases "now he is at peace."

Steve's mom had impressions that Steve wanted this biography written. These impressions confused her because Steve was a very private guy. She had no idea what purpose Steve's story might serve and did not want his life subject to public scrutiny.

However, as the months passed, it seemed more and more important to share Steve's story. His biography was compiled, often in his own words, or in the words of his father, brothers or others. It is presented as accurately, objectively and truthfully as possible, without any conscious effort to exonerate or justify the poor choices Steve often made. Most of this was written at the time it happened. Footnotes were added in January, 1997.

Steve completed the drawing on this page shortly before his death. It probably best summarize the message he would want drawn from his story.



Chapter 1

Early years

The baby was two weeks over due. Diane had not gone beyond her due date with any of the other boys. Her husband's mother had flown from Hawaii to welcome her first "haole" grandchild. She was scheduled to return in a few days. Diane met with her doctor the morning of October 21, 1975. It was her thirty-fourth birthday. Tests showed that the child was very large so the doctor decided to induce labor. Years later, Diane wondered if that procedure, combined with the anaesthetic might have caused Steve's learning disabilities?

Stephen Alexander Stokoe was born at Cottonwood hospital in Murray, Utah. Tom, her husband, was teaching at Skyline High School that day and not aware that the delivery was about to take place until the school secretary called: "Tom, I've just received a phone call. Drive slowly and carefully to Cottonwood hospital. Your wife is in labor."

He arrived to discover his first son had just been born. The baby weighed nine pounds, nine ounces and was twenty-two inches long. Tom cradled the child in his arms and looked down into bright, steel-grey eyes. He noticed soft red hair along the rims of Steve's little pointed ears and whips of copper fuzz on the top of his head.

At first, neither Tom nor his mother could decide where the red hair came from. Then Grandma Stokoe remembered her Scottish grandfather--William Crichton--who had been a pirate and slaver on a ship in the South Pacific. Grandma had once seen an old tin plate of William wearing a full sleeved shirt. He had long red hair tied back in a pony tail and he wore one gold earring in his ear.

Stephen was a great joy to his family. His grandfather, Tom Sr., had retired from Dole Pineapple Company the previous year. He was staying in England with his aged sister Lily. He returned by way of Salt Lake City so he could visit his newest grandson. Tom Sr. was a very conscientious grandfather who loved to walk. Each day he took Stephen out in a stroller around the community. Steve was a happy, bubbly little baby with lots of copper curls, white porcelain skin and an unusual half moon of five moles on his left cheek.

When Bishop Richard Pater named and blessed the Stokoe baby, he promised that someday he would do "a great work for the Lord." His father reasoned that if Steve was called on a mission to some primitive tribe, the natives might regard his unusual moles as an important sign. Neither Stephen nor his mother liked them. When Grandma Stokoe visited again and had her moles removed, Stephen's mom had his taken off as well.



The Stokoos, a devout Mormon family, usually read from the standard works when Stephen was young. He insisted on taking his turn. Being too young to read he improvised with descriptions of cars crashing, trucks crashing and other incidents of mayhem.

Steve wrote about his early years in one of his journals:

When I was young I was known as the smearer, the dumper and the escape artist. Yes, I was always getting into trouble. "The smearer" came about because I used to take off my diaper and smear it all over the walls, the couches and even on the beds and tables. I also knew how to welcome our new car into the family by spreading poop all over the windows, on the seats and even on the dashboard and the steering wheel. I was known as the dumper because I put Ajax cleaner on beds, tables, and chairs. I also poured red Kool Aid on Mom's white couches and chairs. Finally, worst of all, I was an escape artist. My family would be kneeling together for evening prayer and within ten seconds of everyone closing their eyes, the family would hear the door open and I was gone. By the time the prayer was finished I had a fifty yard head start on my Dad who would have to run me down. Many times I was found by the policemen down the road. But that did not matter because the next evening, during prayer, I would take off again.

Shopping malls were the worst. My Mother and Dad would look for me for hours. Mom took me to Trolley Square to have my picture taken on my second birthday (above). I disappeared into one of the shops. She was frantic before she finally found me. I have no idea where I went. I still don't know why my parents buy a leash.

Well, let's talk about my crib. I hated my crib. I could not stand one second in my crib. I would climb out and sleep in my parents' room or with my Grandpa. He stayed with us for a year when I was little. No matter how many times I was put back I managed to get out somehow. One winter morning I pushed the kitchen door open and wandered outside. Thinking the dog had nosed the door open, my Dad closed it tight a little later. About an hour later my Mom heard a small whimper outside. They opened the door to discover me crying with tears and snot frozen on my face and down the front of my pajamas. Having a toddler like me must have been a pain in the butt.

Steve's early years were typical of the other children in his Willow Creek neighborhood except that he found school very difficult, even though he had attended preschool. Steve struggled with basic skills and had to repeat kindergarten. He attended



Brookwood Elementary across the street from his home. He sang in a choral group called the Teddy Bear-i-tones with his brother David. The performers wore white shirts, black bow ties and green vests when they entertained. Stephen was eight, David, four and Neil a little over a year when this photograph was taken.

Steve was in the seventh grade at Churchill Junior High, when his English teacher required her student to write autobiographies. They began the project by writing about an ancestor:

I couldn't contact my Grandma for this assignment, besides, she has an island accent and it's too hard to understand her. My Mom's parents are dead, so I am going to begin my autobiography by writing about my Dad.

My Dad grew up in a very primitive place. He was born in New Zealand and lived there for eleven years. Then his family moved to a plantation in a rain forest in Western Samoa. My Dad's Mother's grandfather was a pirate. There is an interesting story about how he ended up in Western Samoa.

William Crichton was born in Scotland. When he was about eight years old he and his small sister went to the railway station to watch the trains arrive and leave. His mother always told William to be careful and take good care of his little sister. Something really bad happened one day. As a train pulled into the station, the little sister leaned forward and fell on the tracks in front of a train. She was killed instantly. William never went home. He ran away and became a cabin boy on a sailing ship. Eventually he grew up and became a pirate in the South Pacific. Finally, he married a Samoan girl and settled down in Western Samoa. He became the ancestor of all the Crichton's in Samoa. That's probably where my red hair probably came from. Bella Stokoe, my grandmother, is William Crichton's youngest and his only living grand daughter.

My Grandpa Stokoe is an Englishman from Manchester. He looks a lot like my Dad; they have the same features, except Grandpa has light skin and blue eyes. Dad has dark hair, dark skin and brown eyes. My Dad was only a year old when my Grandpa Stokoe went off to fight in World War 11. Dad was five when his father came back from the war to join the family in New Zealand.

A few years after he returned, Uncle Leo and Aunt Lilian were born. Uncle Leo was a very sickly child so the doctor told my grandparents to move to a warmer climate.

They moved to Western Samoa. In Samoa the family lived in a hut with no walls and a roof made out of coconut leaves. Lizards crawled across the ceiling and Dad would shoot them down with rubber bands. The Samoan lizards are white with black stripes down their backs.

There were also rats in the hut. Dad said that one time he went to bed under his mosquito netting. He had a huge scab on his leg. The rats chewed through his net and ate off the whole scab. The next morning, Dad discovered that the sore had bled and the blood had dried and his leg was stuck to the mosquito netting.

Dad said that as a young boy he and his brother, Leo, often hunted flying foxes which are large Samoan bats with a two to three foot wing span. They used to shoot them with a slingshot and then take them home to eat for dinner. They also hunted wild pigs and birds. The family ate taro, a purple root sort of like a potato. They grew taro on their banana plantation. Their plantation was inland from the coast in a rain forest.

When my Dad went to school he had to wear a uniform--either shorts or a lava lava with a yellow shirt. He had to walk eight miles barefoot round trip to school each day. He said if your clothes were wrinkled or you were missing a button on your shirt that it was a disgrace and you would be sent home. If you failed one of your classes by even one point you had to repeat the entire school year. Samoan kids were always hungry. If you had a loaf of bread you were very popular.

Dad was nineteen years old when a lady missionary from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints suggested he attend the Church College of Hawaii (C.C.H.) He didn't even know there was such a place but after she told him about the church school in Hawaii he wanted to go. He and his family were able to save money for his flight to Hawaii by selling bananas.

While attending C.C.H. on Oahu, Dad stayed with his uncle and worked in the pineapple fields during the summer to earn tuition and expense money for college. After he finished school in Hawaii he left for the mainland. A few months later my grandmother, Bella Stokoe, was offered a job as a dorm mother for the Church College of Hawaii. She, Leo and Lilian flew to Oahu where she began work at the College. My Grandfather came later. They have lived in Hawaii ever since.

Church College of Hawaii was a four year college but Dad wanted to experience life on the mainland so he left for Provo, Utah to attend Brigham Young University for a year. Then he transferred to Utah State University, an agricultural college in Logan, because he planned to be a farmer and return to Western Samoa. But Dad liked drama classes better than agriculture classes so he became a drama teacher. He acted in many plays in Provo, Logan and Cedar City. He and my mother met while they were both teaching at Skyline High School in Salt Lake City in 1969.

In 1988 my parents went back to Samoa for a visit. My Dad would like to live there and maybe teach school in Western Samoa some day. My Mom thinks it is too hot, humid and primitive there. She says the best thing that ever happened to the Stokoe family was moving to Hawaii. Dad has poor relatives that still live on the island of Savaii in Western Samoa. Sometimes he sends money to them so that the kids can pay their tuition and attend school. My father is glad he got an education and always tries to help others.

When Dad lived with his uncle in Hawaii he was given a blessing. His uncle told him he would become "a light unto the youth." I guess that came true because my Dad has been a teacher and drama coach for years. He works long hours at Skyline High School during the school year. Mom said that when we were little we only saw Dad on weekends because he left in the morning before we woke up and came home after we went to bed at night. Once when my Dad was directing a musical he was gone so much, my younger brother David asked, "Does Daddy live here anymore?"

My Mom was raised on a dairy farm in central Utah. Her parents had three daughters. Mom and her sisters had to milk cows and do a lot of work on the farm when they were growing up. So Mom decided then and there she would never marry a farmer. She chose someone who was really different when she married for the first time at age twenty. Pete Belov, her first husband, was the son of a white Russian family who had lived in China but later moved to the United States. Mom met her first husband in Washington D.C. when she was going to school there. My Mom was married to him for five years. They had three sons and then divorced.

My Mom married my Dad seven years later and then had three more sons. I am the oldest in the second family. My mother's favorite saying is "Mr. Stephen have you done your work yet?" My Mom is nice and I am glad she is my Mom.

There are eight people in my family including myself and five brothers. Brian is the oldest followed by Dean, Matt, me then Dave and Neil. Brian works in a bank and he is about 6 feet 4 inches tall. He played varsity basketball at Brighton and now plays in a special community basketball league.

Dean is next in line. He lives in an apartment and attends the University of Utah. He has a strange style of clothing. Everything he wears is black or white. The furnishings in his apartment are either black or white. Even his car is white with black interior. He is a good mechanic.

Matt lives at home is six feet tall and weighs two hundred twenty pounds. He wrestled and played football at Brighton High School. In wrestling he won thirteen medals and took region. In football he started both ways as defensive end and tight end. During his senior year at Brighton he was injured in a collision with another player and was out for about eight games. This knee injury ruined his chances of playing college football so now he plays for a team called the Utah Sons. The second year he played his team went

undefeated and won the league championship.

I am next in line. I am thirteen and will be fourteen on October 21st, 1988. I am the pet person in the family and my little brother calls me "pet man" because I like animals. I really enjoy football and am going to be on the little league team again this fall. The next brother is Dave who is ten. He also plays football. He likes motorcycles and snowmobiles but my Dad won't let him have one until he is older.

Last comes my little brother Neil. He is the spoiled one. He always has to have his own way. My Grandma calls him, "the boss of the family." He always has to come along with either me or Dave or he starts yelling his head off.



Steve's family in 1991. Top row Dean, Tom, Brian, Matt Belov, Steve, at age 15, David, Tom, Diane holding Grandson Andrew, Neil, Granddaughter Alexandra Belov.

Since I was a young boy I have liked animals. In the past I have had five dogs, thirteen rabbits, ten hamsters, two cats and two birds. First we got a dog and later rabbits. Dad was against our having rabbits so Dave and I bought two and told Dad we had a surprise for him. On Easter morning we took Dad out in the back yard and showed him our surprise--his new rabbits--Standard and Frosty. Since they were gifts he had to keep them.

Shortly after we got them, Dusty--our year old Chow/Malamute mix, killed Standard and broke Frosty's leg. My parents felt bad about this loss so they got us two more rabbits. A few weeks later one of the new rabbits got her leg caught in the cage and died. Swifty, the other rabbit, ate some kind of poisonous fern and died. So we got two more rabbits.

Mom accidentally ran over one when it was hopping around in the garage. She did not realize it was under the car. Finally our family gave up on rabbits.

Next we got hamsters. They were cute and fuzzy and very tame. The first two were sisters. They were brown and white. My Mom hated them because they got out of their cages and chewed holes in the wall and ate wires and cables. They also got into our storage closet and chewed up the Christmas costumes. After having the pair for about six months, my hamster got eaten by Dusty because my little brother let the dog in when I was at school. The other hamster lived for three more years and then escaped with two other hamsters and we haven't found them yet. My brother Dave saw one in the storage shed with a white mouse. We saw them a couple of times in the wood pile. The meanest thing I ever did was when my hamster bit me. I got so mad I picked him up and threw him against the wall. He started squeaking because he was in pain. I still feel bad about that although it happened over three years ago.

One of my most favorite things is collecting bird eggs and trying to hatch them. Last summer Todd, Jim, my brother and I found fifteen eggs from different nests. We used an old hamster cage for an incubator. We attached a real hot lamp to the cage to keep the eggs warm. We had about twelve or thirteen eggs including robin eggs, magpie eggs, blackbird eggs and many more. After about two weeks in the incubator, a magpie egg hatched. He was pink and skinny and a little on the ugly side, but I took care of him and fed him soggy bread.

We have had several dogs. The first was Mieko who we had for thirteen years. He was a Lhasa Apso. Mieko used to run away with me when I was little. He would follow me down the road or sometimes run in front of me. When my Mom went looking for me she would always look for Mieko. Usually, if she could find the dog, I was close by.

My saddest experience with a dog was when we lost Bear. He was a German Shepherd mix. Bear got out of our yard one day and went over to the school. At school a kid started teasing Bear with a cracker and he jumped up and bit him on the hand. The kid got stitches and plastic surgery so now we have to pay his medical bill. Bear had to be put to sleep because if we got him back from the pound and he bothered someone else, we would have to pay \$300. My brother Matt would have to go to jail because he went to the court hearing where the judge decided what to do about Bear. He told Matt that if he took the dog home, he would have to be personally responsible for him. So, no more dogs for us.

The mother of the boy who got bit kept calling my Mom to apologize because her husband called the police and Bear was impounded. This really upset my Mom. The family did not know that their dog had bitten me a few months earlier. My Dad did not even mention it to them when he went over to apologize for Bear. I miss Bear a lot so I wrote this poem about him:

*Pointed ears, woolly coat,
Grey and black his color.
Curled tail with large paws,
A friendly smile upon his face,
He greets us warmly at the door.*

*Man's best friend they say he is
and true enough say I.
No better friend I ever had
Than my Alaskan Malamute, Bear.*

*Farewell my friend, ever faithful and true.
You bit the neighbor's son.
And so off to the pound you go.
Your memory will linger on.
No matter where your spirit roams.*

I have lots of friends but I don't really have one I'd call my best friend. I guess if I had to pick my favorites it's either Sven Smith or Joe Addison. We like to do many things together but the thing I like to do best is to go to the mall and play arcade games and check out the pet shops. My gang like to play an arcade game called crime fighters.

I think the adult I admire the most is my Dad. He's taught me a lot through the years. He has helped me to understand assignments and how to work things out and some football techniques. I like how he always gets treats when we go to the store. I also like how he is so devoted to his job and works long hours on his plays and he hasn't missed a day of teaching school in twenty-one years. I admire my Dad and in the future I hope to be just like him.

The most important people in my life are my friends because friends are the people you hang out with, the people who are with you as you are being chased for throwing a snowball and almost denting a car. They are the people who you spend time with and sometimes share a meal with. They help who you with things you don't understand.

Steve's behavior during his younger years was typical of other young boys. However, he was always very quiet and sensitive. Some times his mother worried about him. Mike Bush, was a close friend of Steve's older brothers. He was the son of a members of the stake presidency. Mike had given the Stokoe family a couple of his dad's old discarded office chairs. Steve was thirteen when George Bush was running for reelection. One day , Steve said:

"I like President Bush. He has always been kind to our family. It was nice of him to give us these office chairs. I hope he gets elected president of the United States."

Steve's teachers often complained that he had a hard time completing his school work but no one complained about his behavior. His fifth grade teacher made this comment: "Your son is such a gentleman. He would never do anything unkind or inappropriate."

Thirteen-year-old Steve wrote this about his future plans:

When I grow up I want to work with pets. I like animals. Perhaps this job might involve wolves, dogs, dingos, and endangered species. First, I'm going to complete high school either at Skyline or Brighton then go to college and work on some sort of chemical degree. Then I would like to go on a mission to Australia or some place like that. I don't want to go to Japan. After that perhaps I might be good enough to play college football.

I might move to Alaska or some place in the Arctic. Perhaps I will enter a dog sled race. This interests me. My brothers keep telling me I should raise dogs. This is something I would enjoy doing. If I couldn't go to Alaska, I might try becoming a veterinarian and take care of animals here in Utah. I could do surgery and give shots. I could be a worker in a humane society but I don't think I would have the heart to kill animals. It would be fun to breed dogs such as huskies or malamutes or even chows or German shepherds. When I get to be 28 I might get married.

I might end up as a lawyer or a garbage man. I don't know for sure exactly what I will be but I do know I love animals and would enjoy working in a profession that concerns them. If I pursue my dreams to work with animals, perhaps they will come true. Only time will tell.