

Chapter One

STEVE'S STORY

My Grandmother would have said that Steve had the eyes of a very old soul. Steve Creel stood for everything real, and was truly a human being who epitomized all the wonderful contradictions that make us “human”. He played hard. He cried. He loved intensely. He expressed almost every emotion man can feel at some level. He lived on the “edge” and some would say the “edge “ finally caught up with him.

Somehow Steve’s life and death have so much value that it is really difficult to say what is supposed to be. Steve’s sudden death caused major turmoil in many people who just never thought seriously about death or life. Questions about life after death and basic existence suddenly became commonplace throughout Boulder.

This story has to be written, not for Steve, but for all individuals and families that have suffered a death experience. Steve’s story and his family’s story after his death are vital for other Sieves and their families who have faced a major trauma through death in their lives.

Steve lived his life to the fullest. He gave his complete attention when he played sports. He “just did his job” according to him. Yet the power he commanded physically, mentally and spiritually was incredible. He could be very kind, warm and sensitive to people he felt needed his friendship. He tolerated teasing. he allowed many people to think that maybe he was a

dumb jock. Yet nothing could have been further from the truth. Steve Creel cared deeply for life, people and God. He was multitalented, bright, loving and spirited. Steve was all boy growing up, full of impish tricks and getting into everything. Stories about him jumping out of a two story window into a backyard pool or streaking the homecoming dance his junior year with his friends are plentiful. There were many times when his eyes danced with mischief and joy. He loved to be a clown. He also loved to draw and design things. In the fall of his senior year he decided he might like to work with handicapped kids in some way.

When I first tested Steve for my class, I had no idea what a complex human being he was. The English teacher that referred him recognized not only his intelligence, but also what she had termed unusual insight. While testing Steve to see if he qualified for my learning disabilities program, I discovered that his reasoning ability was quite high. In every academic area Steve had an extreme high skill and an extreme low skill. This caused confusion and frustration in many school activities. Things were either very easy or extremely difficult. These unusual “splinter skills” discussed Steve’s intelligence.

The sense of invincibility that Steve carried with him everywhere he went was probably due to his size, strength, vigor, boldness and courage. There was an aura about him that Steve was almost protected, because he never really got hurt, it seemed. Shock rippled through us all as we digested the fact that Steve Creel, at 18 years old, was dead.

His family was shocked and amazed. Amazed because a person they considered a normal teenager had clearly made a major impact on people.

Everybody had stories of Steve helping them in some way. Most of the things I remembered were the mischievous tricks or pranks that he pulled almost on a daily basis. An incident only weeks before he died captures much of who Steve creel truly was. At one of the big football games of season, Steve hit another boy so hard that the boy did not get up. The ambulance came, taped the boy to a board and took him to the hospital. Ted acted a little dizzy, so they took him out for awhile. He turned around , and looked at me with tears rolling down his cheeks. Many though he was crying because he was hurt. We talked the following Monday about the intense conflict within him. He loved sports, football especially. He played the best he could. He gave all he had in the moment. He cared deeply about people and this tears came because he had unintentionally hurt another human being. Some kids thought it was “cool” that Steve could knock someone out by just hitting them in a game. It terrified Steve. The only fear I ever saw in Steve creel was of his own physical strength. he didn't want to harm anyone.

Death is the great equalizer. Some experience death's existence throughout their lives, others run desperately and hope somehow not to face its power or inevitability. Life and death are one. To experience the extreme tragedy and deep pain of losing a loved one is one of life's major lessons. Death teaches us what life is all about. Darkness makes us appreciate light. Balance is vital in the human experience. The intense pain of not being able to communicate the total devastation we feel, is overwhelming. The desire to have the loved one with us, sharing all the moments of life we took for granted the day before is a powerful longing

that all mourners share. Unanswered questions rip through friends, parents, and loved ones of all ages. Tears flow, rage pounds and most shocking of all, life goes on. The shock that a person's world feels as though it has been shattered and is ending cruelly, is compounded by life around the grieving souls. People get up, eat their breakfast, start their cars and go to work. Life for them is the same. Life goes on. Death happens to someone, somewhere, every second, every moment. Yet we are never really prepared for a loved one to die. The sudden death of their healthy, strong son shattered the lives of the Creel family for months to come after that fateful, stormy November night.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing this book is the retelling of the tragic death of Stephen Vincent Creel. The pain comes from not only the raw facts, but also from the confusion surrounding that night. Many of the facts related to the case were unclear. Many questions went unanswered, and when Steve's family asked for answers they were given the runaround. Steve and Tom went out to play in the snow as many of our teenagers do today.. Tom pulled Steve on a pair of inner tubes behind a green Volkswagen through a deserted neighborhood street around 12:30 AM, November 27, 1983. When he saw the approaching car Tom swerved as far to the right as he could - a telltale thump and jerk were felt and heard. Tom got out of the car, and saw Steve lying in the snow covered street. The woman who hit Steve stated that she saw him, heard a thud and stopped and got out of the car. She found his body in the street and gave him emergency first aid until the ambulance and police arrived.

Steve was dead on arrival at the hospital. The injuries he received killed him instantly. Apparently his body was thrown some distance. Somehow the car hitting him from the angle it did caught him completely off guard. The facts are cold, and death is a stark reality that no one can refute.

Tom, the 18 year old was read his rights, interviewed and taken in for a blood alcohol testing immediately. Neither Tom or Steve had been drinking. Tom was in every major news media in the state, including television. There is a very incomplete picture as to what really happened that night. This vital information was not available to the Creel family at a time when they desperately needed to know the truth.

The seeming inconsistencies in the justice system added a great burden to the Creels years of adjustment after the death of their son. This compounded their grieving process. They needed to know the truth. Nothing could bring Steve back to them, but they weren't even sure if justice had been done in terms of their son's accident. Surely just being involved in such a horrible accident would be very traumatic to any human being. Tom can testify to that. Closure on a situation is vital to the family of the victim, and to all the people involved in the accident. The flaws in our justice system that sometimes prevent the truth from coming out, wind up protecting no one. Instead they hinder the steps to healing and letting those who grieve get on with the job of living.

But death is a part of life, and life is so complicated that many of us never even put half the pieces together by the time we die. This story is about someone who was really trying to put the pieces together, and helped many people in this process, including his teacher me.

There were times when this book was very difficult to write. I watched a beautiful moth drawn to the flame of a large candle. Drawn to his death so stupidly, and yet so relentlessly that my heart ached when I heard the moth scream in pain as it burned up in the light that drew it. Was Steve like that moth drawn by a way of life, living on the edge and totally unaware of his fate, dying uselessly. Or is there another dimension, another answer or answers to everything we see around us?

The questions that death raise could take many lifetimes to answer. To search for the answer constantly is probably a massive waste of time. Possibly we should just accept life one step at a time with all its joy, pain, suffering, uncertainty, love and loneliness. It may be the only way ultimately to come to any true answer in the midst of all the craziness and illusions that we live in. Doubt often clouds our perceptions. There are times when I want to know what the answers to life really are. Life has given me many experiences that hint at what is real, and what is illusion. Yet I still get caught up in the pain of loss, or fear or lack of trust in an orderly, all knowing God and Universe.

Perception is so illusive and deceiving. The rules that the world puts on us are not as cut and dry as many people would have us believe. Steve saw through people and their facades. Injustice at any level upset him greatly. It was very difficult for him to deal with the inequalities in this world.

The earth shattering reality of death shakes up all of our perceptions in life and all the people around us. Things that were important before this type of crisis are often abandoned as we reevaluate what is real and vital to

our lives and existence. Steve impacted his family as all children do, and yet the following pages will show how his death transformed their lives.