

From
Hollywood
to **Heaven**

PROPERTY OF CITY OF LOS ANGELES

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*“Hollywood is a place where they’ll pay you
fifty thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul.”*

~Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962),

American movie actress

*“If God doesn’t destroy Hollywood Boulevard,
He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology.”*

~Jay Leno (1950–),

American comedian and TV talk-show host



Foreword

*“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness
who has shone in our hearts.”*

—2 Corinthians 4:6

Throughout the past twenty-six years, I have told portions of my story during seminars and interviews, but I’ve persistently resisted a nagging impression to write it down. There are a couple of reasons: Much of my past isn’t pleasant, and I haven’t wanted to draw so much attention to myself. However, because many people have said they want to see my story in print and because I think it can help others, I’ve taken the plunge. In telling my story, I have left out many degenerate details because they wouldn’t inspire anyone and wouldn’t serve my purpose. But I’ll tell you enough that you’ll get the picture.

Hollywood isn’t entirely evil; some scattered stars illuminate the night there. Yet anyone with half a conscience can see that far too many Hollywood movies, TV series, and musicians promote values that lead downward, toward slime and the pit, and away from common decency, goodness, and heaven. And while in many Hollywood movies, the heroes live “happily ever after,”

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that's only on the screen. In real life, Hollywood stars may end up in prison or dead in some hotel room from an overdose of drugs. To be blunt, much of Hollywood corrupts and can kill. I know. It almost destroyed me.

As you read my story, you may relate to my confusion and struggles. You might even think that your life story resembles mine. You'll be pleased to know, then, that this book has a happy ending. If your life is anywhere near the edge or just empty and unfulfilled, you can still live happily ever after—for real. Heaven is a real place, and it's waiting for you. This book will help you get there.

From
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Hollywood Hills

*“Every life is a march from innocence,
through temptation, to virtue or vice.”*

*~ Lyman Abbott (1835–1922),
American religious leader*

Temple Hospital, Los Angeles, California, April 5, 1959—
“It’s a boy!” the doctor exclaimed to Gene and Sandra Wohlberg. Of course, I don’t remember that moment, but I had arrived—a healthy, wiggly, energetic baby. One year later, my brother, Michael, came along. Then, after six more years, our sister, Cathy, joined us. I remember feeling Cathy’s vigorous kicks inside Mom’s tummy before she emerged, which was very exciting to me.

Six of us—Dad, Mom, me, Mike, Cathy, and Jackie Fowler, Mom’s sister—lived together at 3150 Donna Maria Drive, a corner house in a hilly neighborhood known as Laurelwood just west of the famous Hollywood sign that overlooks LA’s smoggy basin. The larger community is called Studio City; it’s named after nearby Universal Studios, where many movies are filmed and edited. By meandering to the top of our hill and then down the other side

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on Laurel Canyon Boulevard, one can easily reach Hollywood itself, the steamy Sunset Strip, or ritzy Beverly Hills.

The first twelve years of my life seemed normal, at least for a boy growing up in the shadows of the entertainment capital of the world. Like most kids, I started out on the innocent side of life. I rolled on skateboards with neighborhood friends, flipped basketballs into hoops across the street from our home, created a butterfly collection, and hiked in the Hollywood Hills catching lizards—I became an expert lizard catcher. I also accumulated lots of pets. At one point, our house and yard resembled a small zoo. We housed an extremely lovable Great Dane, a calico cat, rabbits, a chicken, a rooster, a bird, fish tanks, tadpoles, frogs, turtles, lizards, snakes, a hamster, and a foot-long alligator that I creatively named Ali. I remember one occasion on which the woman who cleaned our house poked her head inside the front door and shouted out before entering, “Steven, is anything loose?”

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of fishing trips with my dad and brother. Dad would quietly enter our bedroom at 4 A.M. and whisper, “OK, boys! Are you ready to go fishing?” We would awake in a flash and soon be on our way to Redondo Beach or San Diego to board fishing boats full of anglers hoping to catch bonito, barracuda, rock cod, or an occasional halibut. Once, Mike even won the jackpot for catching the biggest fish. We were two wide-eyed little boys happily carrying our fishing rods, fascinated by the rolling ocean, excited to wiggle anchovies onto our fishing hooks, eager to feel a nibble on our fishing line, oblivious to the world around us. We were thrilled just to spend time with our dad. We had lots of fun with Mom, too. Those times were great.

Our family was big into sports. At an early age, Mike and I joined the Studio City Little League, and soon our dad became our team coach. We also joined the Indian Guides (similar to Boy Scouts), went to summer camps, swam in swim meets, and joined

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a bowling league. After regular basketball, baseball, football, and bowling games, we usually went to the Sav-On Drug Store on Ventura Boulevard to devour double-scoop hot fudge sundaes. Like most kids, we ate lots of ice cream!

We also watched a lot of TV. On Saturday mornings, Mike and I sat fixated before cartoons, watching Road Runner, Daffy Duck, Yosemite Sam, Bugs Bunny, and Woody the Woodpecker. These seemed innocent enough. After school during the week, we switched the tube on again and soon became hooked on *Batman* and *Gilligan's Island*. And after dark, we watched *My Three Sons*, *Lone Ranger*, *Get Smart*, and *Bonanza*. It wasn't long, however, until I noticed that our *TV Guide* listed movies that weren't so family friendly, such as horror flicks about blood-sucking vampires, Frankenstein's monster, scary werewolves, and Egyptian mummies that returned to life to terrorize the living. By the time I was eight or nine years old, I was often up until 1 A.M., reclining on pillows, eating ice cream, and watching monster movies. Step by step, these shows introduced darker elements into my young mind. Hollywood was moving in.

As for religion, our home had very little. We were a Jewish family, to be sure; yet we didn't go to the synagogue. We had Jewish friends who lived across the street, and sometimes we went to their home for Passover Seders, to eat fruit, nuts, honey, matzo crackers, horseradish sauce, and portions of lamb. On Sunday mornings, we often walked down Laurel Canyon and visited Art's deli for traditional lox, cream cheese, and bagels. Mom and Aunt Jackie were great cooks, and we enjoyed Jewish food. However, my parents didn't keep a kosher home, so we ate just about anything, including ham, bacon, and salami. One thing I couldn't stomach was chopped liver. I always hated chopped liver!

At age twelve, Mike received his bar mitzvah—a ceremony that marks a Jewish boy's transition to manhood—in a synagogue in Studio City. It was a big occasion. I still remember my brother

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standing before the rabbi, the Torah (the first five books of Moses), and a host of family and friends as he respectfully recited Hebrew phrases. I had no clue what the words he said meant. After the service, we all went back to our house for food and fun, including a hired magician who performed magic tricks.

“Steve, do you want a bar mitzvah?” my dad asked me once. “I have nothing to urge,” he said.

After thinking about how many ball games I might have to miss while I prepared for the ceremony, I said something like “Er . . . ah . . . not really,” and that was that. So, while Mike learned Hebrew words, I played basketball, roamed the hills, and caught lizards.

I remember being vaguely curious about one Jewish custom. During the few Passover Seders we attended at the home of friends, the host family usually set an empty chair at the dinner table for someone named Elijah. Malachi 4:5 says, “ ‘Behold, I will send Eli’jah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes’ ” (RSV). A Jewish tradition rooted in that verse speculates that the ancient prophet Elijah might return during the Passover to herald the arrival of the Messiah. The empty chair symbolizes Judaism’s expectation that someday our Messiah will come. However, just as Elijah’s chair was empty during those Passovers, so that expectation was absolutely empty for us. We never talked about any messiah or about God at all.

I appreciate my family, but something was missing. As far as I can remember, my family never once prayed at home. I don’t think we even owned a Bible, never mind read from one. The main books I read as a child were from the Dr. Seuss series: *Green Eggs and Ham*, *Horton Hears a Who!* and *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*. But mostly I watched monster movies produced in Hollywood studios. I had no thoughts of heaven. One day this would change dramatically.