

# FAITH & SPIRIT



Stephen Curtis Chapman's *Beauty will Rise*, a collection of profound songs created 18 months after his daughter's death depict his struggle. *Courtesy Photo*

## Singer Copes with Daughter's Death Through Music

He stood there at the hospital, not as a Christian music singer comforting a little child, but as a father praying for a miracle. Steven Curtis Chapman held onto his wife that night 18 months ago and prayed for their 5-year-old Maria, their youngest adopted daughter, who had been accidentally struck in the family's driveway by one of her brothers returning home in his truck. Chapman had tried CPR at his house. The paramedics had tried to revive her but she had been pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. Now he asked God's help to bring her back. Chapman's wife, Mary Beth, told him they had to accept her destiny.

"It was after a few minutes that my wife, with her hand on my shoulder, said, 'I really think we are supposed to let her go for now,'" the soft-spoken Chapman said recently by phone before a concert in North Carolina. Chapman, who has been singing Christian music for more than 20 years, was now faced with a God he had not known before. Everything he thought about God was different, he said, and he began to wrestle with his beliefs. His new album, his 19th, entitled "Beauty Will Rise," is his personal testament to Maria's life and the overwhelming belief that they will be together again one day.

Maria had been playing behind the family's home in Franklin, Tennessee, on May 21, 2008, when her brother Will came around the driveway in an SUV. While no one is sure exactly what happened, Maria, who wanted someone to lift her on the monkey

bars, ran towards her brother's truck and was struck. An investigation called the tragedy an accident and no charges were filed. In the days after Maria's death, the whole family -- Chapman, his wife, their two sons, their daughter and two other adopted daughters -- grieved together, went everywhere together, did everything together, even sleeping all in one room.

Chapman said he felt like he was in a black hole. "I just felt myself being pulled down into this place of despair," he said. Chapman and Maria had a special connection. He met her in her native China while she was an infant. He and his wife had already adopted two children from there, and weren't looking for another. But Maria "touched a special place in my heart," and he called his wife just to tell her about the baby girl. "I can't put it into words, but I've picked up a lot of little orphan boys and girls over the years," he said. "I've never had anything happen to my heart like what happened when I held this little girl in my arms for a few minutes."

It was almost impossible to imagine her not bouncing through the house, not dancing along as he sung to her, he recalled. And it was equally as difficult to think about singing again after she died. Her passing was an emotional earthquake and in the immediate aftermath Chapman doubted he would want to write and sing again. He cringed at the suggestion that he write songs about Maria. Her death was such a deeper level of sadness than he had felt before that he thought he would never be able to share that pain through music, he said.

But as the dust settled and life went back to its new normal, Chapman began to think about putting his fears and hopes into music. He still didn't plan on doing an album, but songwriting was helping him heal. "Songs are really cathartic for me," he said, "because they force me to put my feelings and thoughts into a capsule and say, 'There it is.'" (Hear more clips of Steven Curtis Chapman's music at his website)

The first song he wrote, "Just Have to Wait," was an example of the raw emotion Chapman hoped to share. Chapman said he wrote it sitting alone in the darkness, just aiming to share with his family the faith he has that each one of them will join her in heaven. He soon knew that these personal psalms needed to be recorded, but he didn't want a slick, produced sound.

Instead of working with a slew of recording people, Chapman and co-producer Brent Milligan decided to work on the album while the singer was out on a tour. Just the two of them,

*Continued on page 10*

## The Trash Where People Live Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



When I was a little kid my dad used to take me with him to the garbage dump. From building houses he would always have lots of stuff in his truck that he would have to get rid of. I remember lots of dust flying around in the air and feeling dirty every time I got home. I remember it smelled, even from the front seat with the windows closed, it smelled. And then dad would buy me a Slurpy from a 7-11 and we'd go home never realizing that all over the world people spend their lives living in garbage dumps.

I'm currently back in Ethiopia and a few days ago I went to a place in Addis that they call the trash city...the sky went from being blue to dark grey as I walked further into the dump. Immediately I was overwhelmed with one of the worst smells I've ever experienced, it was nothing like I remembered from the dump in California.

The thick smoke was everywhere from some of the trash being burned and the combinations of smells made me want to gag. Every step was carefully maneuvered in order not to step into leftover food, used toilet paper, wads of hair, goat feet, animal bones, IV bags and lots of other things I never want to step in. Vultures and other types of birds swarm around hunting for things salvageable to eat in the trash.

There are stray dogs and pigs running around everywhere. In the midst of it all you find two stone walls holding up some kind of steel roof. And here, among all the trash, is a community of people living. They weed through the garbage looking for items they can recycle and food for their empty stomachs.

Their ages range from eight to twenty three and most have been abandoned or orphaned, leaving the dump as the only place for them to go. There are around fifteen guys and twenty girls. Some of the girls have families and don't actually live in the trash but spend all day there, looking for recyclables in order to bring home some kind of food and possibly pocket change.

The oldest guy is a natural leader and really tries to take care of the others. The youngest is an eight year-old who has only known the trash as his home, moving around his cardboard home as the trash piles move. They all wear smiles on their faces despite their circumstances. They don't struggle with finding joy but the lack of hope is heart-breaking...aren't children supposed to have the most hope?

It shook me to the core; there is so much poverty in this world and I've seen a lot of it. But there is something about total poverty, living in trash with no family and no hope, that hit me harder than normal.

Of course there's a part where you come in. So the plan right now is to find a house that we can rent and after about six months, they can take the rent over. To find them jobs or to begin a chicken farm which they would all be able to have a hand in and bring in enough money for rent and school. Other ideas are still in the process but this is what we've come up with so far.

We're hoping to get them to a point where they are fully sufficient on their own but for now we need finances to give them that start. We want to create an environment that helps them grow, with clean clothes, school uniforms and food that someone else didn't eat first.

And we want to see them dreaming again of what they could do with their future. As with every project, we need prayer. Pray that these guys develop hope for their lives, that we find the perfect house, that churches in the area will help support them and people who care about them. And anything else you can think of to pray for children without a home. Just like *Drawn From Water*, Pick a Pocket is supporting this project.

*The Music DTS*, who is on outreach right now in Addis, is the reason I went to the dump while visiting Ethiopia this time. Ulla and I came down to talk with the people directly involved with *Drawn From Water* (children's home). We've been staying with the *Music DTS* in the meantime and have gained a

*Continued on page 10*

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