



"Retard! Retard!
You're so stupid
you can't even
talk right!"

By Jeffery Alan Ford

I was born with Moebius Syndrome, a condition of under-developed cranial nerves that caused a facial deformity and a serious speech impediment. As a child, I was also extremely thin and physically weak. Sometimes the horrendously cruel words above still echo from my childhood memories. Often I'd return from school an emotional wreck, never wanting to leave the safety of my home again.

As an adult, life is different. It is rare for grownups to outright insult me, inasmuch as they think they are subtle. That subtlety can take the form of someone obviously trying really hard not to look at me.

Considering that kind of pain, today, some people would deem my life as one not worth living. If I were a child in the womb, ultrasound machines would show a pronounced facial deformity involving my lower jaw. Prenatal testing would reveal a probable speech impediment and visual impairment. In the



Jeff Ford as a bright youth.

current cultural climate, it's not uncommon for such a child to be aborted by his parents. After all, what possible quality of life could someone like myself enjoy? I've heard people actually say that it's "cruel" to bring disabled children into the world; and that the child would actually be better off if he was aborted.

Gratitude for life

In every way, I am grateful my parents didn't rely on technology and false "quality of life" ethics to gauge whether my life was worth living. Since my beginning, my parents loved God, each other and me.

The medical establishment has tricked far too many women I've met to believe that they were merely aborting "useless" tissue. Years later they were completely crushed to comprehend their responsibility for the needless death of their own precious children. These women believed a lie—the lie that only certain lives are worth living.

While my existence isn't justified by a so-called quality of life ethic, no one could have predicted the happiness I found in discovering my role in this world. For example, I am not mentally challenged as some people have erroneously prejudged. It turns out

that my IQ rating ranks in the upper 97th percentile, which means only two percent of the world's tested population has a higher IQ.

Like many people, I attended college and earned a degree. I'm also a chartered mutual fund counselor, an accredited asset management specialist and have numerous other certificates in the fields of accounting and finance. Additionally, I'm a certified TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) instructor and have written articles for numerous publications. All these gifts are great, given by God to serve Him in the world. Nevertheless, they are not something you would be able to predict with a sonogram.

Human dignity

Above all, I am a human person. And that carries with it an inherent dignity, including the power to love and be loved. With the power of love, I am happy for my marvelous family and wonderful friends.

Furthermore, each and every human life is precious. I have dedicated my own to helping others become more comfortable with their differences. When people read my story and see how different I am, they usually begin to appreciate their own distinctive differences. After all, God made each and every one of us unique, but also in His glorious image.

Just think about something for a moment: who has ever fallen in love with someone because the beloved reminded him of everyone else he had ever met? The answer is no one! One falls in love with another because he or she possesses something especially unique inside. And who has ever risen to the pin-

nacle of his profession by thinking and doing things just like everybody else? Again, the answer is nobody. One must think or do things in an uncommon manner if he or she is ever going to stand out from the crowd and become a success.

It seems ironic that many still feel justified in judging another human being by his or her appearance. The casual dismissal of somebody because of his physical attributes means the possible loss of a friend, spouse or employee. If you know a parent who's afraid to bring a disabled child into this world, ask her or him to reconsider. Couldn't we all use another special person in our lives?

To deny our differences is to deny God's plan for our lives. Every child that has ever been conceived has been placed in his mother's womb for a reason. I acknowledge the courage, love and devotion that it took for my mother and my father to raise a special needs child. I just hope that I have blessed them, and the entire world, half as much as my parents have blessed me.

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One of the best days of Jeff's life—the day his daughter Sarah was born.