

**Face Your Fears**  
**A Novel by Bill Mathis**

**Chapter One - Nate and Jude**

**Nate and Jude**                      **Friday, June 26, 2015 Chicago, Illinois**

**Jude**

I exit the 'L' and start jogging. I get too nervous walking, so I jog across Daley Plaza, toward the Picasso, looking through the couples, the supporters, the flags and banners, the people celebrating. Looking for a man with reddish-brown hair.

Inadvertently, I slow to a walk. This is nuts. I never envisioned feeling like this. Like a thirteen-year old with his first kiss. It's not like I don't know him, or we just met last week. We've been together three years and this isn't a last minute decision on my part. But today's news pushed me through my hesitation, my procrastination, reminded me of Lacie's words. Words that brought us together in the first place. Still, asking someone to marry me is a big move. I haven't thought about rings. We can figure them out later, as we go along. Like we have with everything else in our life together. I bet he'll be surprised.

I realize I'm walking and start jogging again.

**Nate**

I start humming. I do that when I'm nervous. I'm waiting at the East end of the Picasso, with my gay flag. Ordinarily I'd be chatting to people, making funny-eyes at the little kids staring at me, making them smile, but not today.

**Comment [N S1]:** Perhaps Pride flag instead?

The rings are tight on my finger. I designed them, and my friend made them. They're ceramic. I've had them for two months, not sure why I was waiting to ask him. When I heard the news late this morning, I knew today was the day.

I hum some more. I want to break out singing. A show tune, maybe *Some Enchanted Evening*, in honor of the first time we met as adults. Now that would be funny! Singing would relieve my stress, but it would also draw attention, which I don't need, we don't need. I didn't think asking him to marry me would make me this jittery. We've been together three years. Still, it has, and I am. I wonder if he will be shocked. I've managed to keep the rings hidden, which is amazing.

I hum some more.

**Comment [N S2]:** Today is different, though. Today, the attention isn't just on him, and rightly so.

## Chapter Two - Nate

Nate McGuire, Age 8

October 1996

Suburban Chicago

Me and Mikey are going to a healing service. We're singing camp songs in the back seat of my mom's Jaguar. I'm trying to sing in my quiet voice, which Mom says is my loud voice anyway.

*John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt, that's my name, too. Whenever we go out, the people always shout, there goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt. Dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah.*

Mikey taps my shoulder so that I look over at him. He winks and points his first finger up. Not his second one, he'd get in big trouble if his mom saw him doing that. Her name is Judy Howard. She's in the front seat, talking God stuff with my mom. My mom's name is Kryz McGuire. I nod. I know he means we're going to sing the second round loud, lots more loud.

We holler it out, my throat even starts to hurt. *John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt!*

"Boys! Boys! You must sing quietly or not at all," Mom yells back at us. "Nate, your voice is far too loud, now quiet down! Judy and I can't hear ourselves think." She's smiling so I know she's not mad. She hardly ever gets mad, just nervous and concerned about me being disabled. But she usually calls it handicapped. I have CP, cerebral palsy. But when I was little and didn't talk good, I told people I had Tee Pee, tea-a-bull-pawly.

Now, when people stare at me in my wheelchair, I say real nice, "My name is Nate, I have cerebral palsy and I'm a spastic quadriplegic. Do you have any questions I can answer about my condition?" Most people don't. I think they're surprised I can talk and think. Usually they act like they want to get away from me. One time at the mall, a big kid said he wondered why my parents took me out in public. He said I looked ugly and messed up. Only he used the 'F' word. I gave him the finger with my right hand. I have pretty good control with my right

**Comment [N S3]:** Oh, Lord... do I remember those! I went to a few, at my aging grandmother's behest. I actually had to stop yesterday, when I first read this, so I could get a grip. ☺

**Comment [N S4]:** I always heard it as"...his name is my name too."

hand. But not with my left hand, or my legs. My big sister, Lacie—she’s thirteen—ran up to him and yelled she’d beat the crap out of him. Only she really said s-h-i-t. Then Dad took us home and sent us to our rooms.

Mikey looks at me funny. His eyebrows are raised up. I remember I’m supposed to give Mom an answer. “Okay, Mom. I’ll try not to yell. Hey, Mikey, let’s sing the *This Land* song, only I don’t know all the words.”

Mikey starts out in his inside voice. *This land is your land*. I catch up with him. *This land is my land, from California to the New York Island*. Then Mrs. Howard starts singing with us. *From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters, this land was made for you and me*. That’s as far as I can remember. Mrs. Howard keeps singing. Mom joins her and they sing all the words. Mikey and I just listen. I like their voices; they sing good together.

After that, it’s quiet for a while. My mind starts to be a little nervous. We’ve never gone to a healing service before, or even talked about it. But Mom got borned again, or saved, or something like that. Now she’s sure I can be healed because she believes God can do it. She’s been praying over me every night since school started. Does getting healed mean I’ll walk like normies—normal kids? Will my legs and body still be stiff or jerk? Will I still need surgery for my twisty feet and legs? Or, when I get real big, for my back? ’Cause it’s slowly getting crooked. I know I don’t need my head healed. I talk good, too good, my mom and dad and Lacie and school teachers say. And way too loud.

Mikey told me getting healed was bull-s-h-i-t. That’s what his dad said. But his mom got interested after listening to my mom, so that’s why they’re coming along with us. Mikey has MD, muscular dystrophy. He looks normal, other than he can’t run fast like he used to. He isn’t as strong, and his back sways a little. But he still pushes me around in my wheelchair. People

with MD die young, usually when they're young-grown-up, like twenty or thirty. But sometimes they die just when they're teens. Like the age of his big brother Jon, he's nineteen. But not Lacie's age, she's thirteen. People with CP don't die young. Maybe Mikey should get healed before me.

Mikey and me met at camp. Lakeside Camp for Crippled Children. I was still eight, he was nine, and we were in Robin, the youngest boys' room. Mom was afraid to send me to camp. She said I was too young and too handicapped and two weeks was too long and the place was too old and the staff too unprepared. Everything was *too* wrong. But Dad said it would be a good experience for me. He told Mom the camp was highly recommended by my school's special ed director. He said she told him she didn't like the word crippled in the name, but the staff was great. So I went.

Mikey and me slept in old metal, hand-crank beds next to each other. It was his first time away from home, too. It was so gnarly! Mikey pushed me all over, even helped feed me sometimes. We were always together. Everybody called us the 'Robin Room Twins.' We loved each other so much. On the last morning, Mikey asked Grunt, one of the counselors, how far Northbrook, that's where Mikey lives, was from Lake Forest. That's where I live. "Well, I don't think it's very close," Grunt said.

"You mean we live a long ways from each other? When will we get to see each other again?" I was scared I wouldn't see Mikey ever again.

"Well, I bet your parents will send you both back here next summer. You'll see each other then. That's the fun of camp, seeing each other every year." Then Grunt moved our bags over to the pavilion where our parents would pick us up.

“Let’s go out on the trail. The woods one,” Mikey whispered in my ear. I nodded. I was feeling so sad inside. Mikey pushed me through the screen doors out onto the smooth path. No one stopped us or asked where we were going. No one said we had to wait inside till our parents came.

“Mikey, what are we going to do? We live so far away and I won’t see you for a whole year.” I started crying. Mikey came around the chair. He bent over and hugged me, then kissed me on the cheek. We liked to hug, especially me. Being eight and in a wheelchair, means I don’t sit on the couch and Mom doesn’t hold me on her lap much anymore. I miss it.

I touched my right fingers on his hand and he hugged me again. “Mikey, you’re my bestest friend in the whole wide world!”

**Comment [N 55]:** That’s because he’s touch-hungry. I would say most of us are that way until we get to adulthood. Touch from doctors and nurses doesn’t really count, and our teenage years can be frequently lonely.