

# My Best Friend

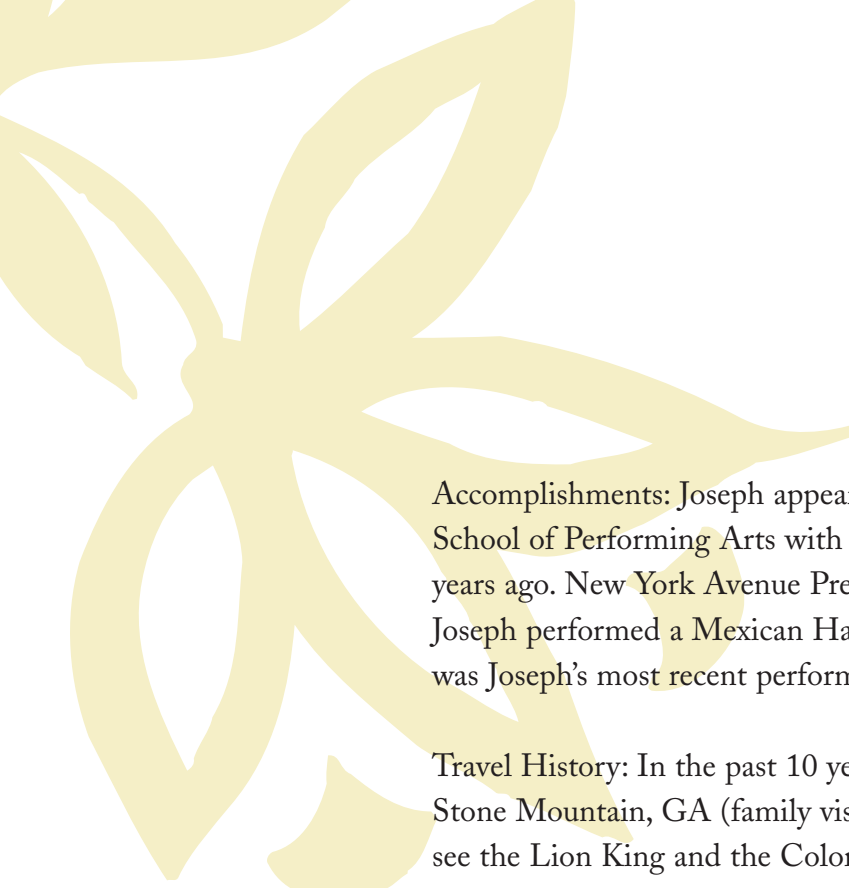
**J**OSEPH B. STEWART IS A 53 YEAR OLD GENTLEMAN BORN ON May 21, 1954. Joseph has Down syndrome. He was the only child born to Alice and Joseph Stewart. Joseph parents both believe God had blessed them with a saint. They raised him with a lot of love, pride, and joy. Joseph's father had once considered entering the priesthood before he met and married Joseph's mother who was an orphan and raised by nuns during her early childhood.

Joseph's mother often would tell the story of how she went to the doctor to confirm her pregnancy and was told she was experiencing a "false pregnancy". Well, after Joseph was born, Mrs. Stewart was told "not to get too attached to this Downs child because he probably would not live past the age of 5 years old!"

These proud parents of modest means gave their child a triple dose of love and care. As he grew they taught him to enjoy life, be proud of his accomplishments, and always be a gentleman. They exposed him to theater, all genres of music, art and made sure he had a healthy interaction with his extended family.

During Joseph's young adult years, he worked as a volunteer usher on Sunday along side his dad, while his mother sang in the choir. Joseph lost his father approximately 23 years ago and his mother 13 years ago. He continues to say Good Morning & Good Night to "mommy and daddy up in heaven". Each holiday he sends them appropriate greetings and everyday he asks God to bless them.

Joseph received his formal education at Richardson Annex, moving on to Military Road School, then to the Therapeutic & Recreational Center (T&R Center) and now at the Art & Drama Therapy Institute, all in Washington, DC.



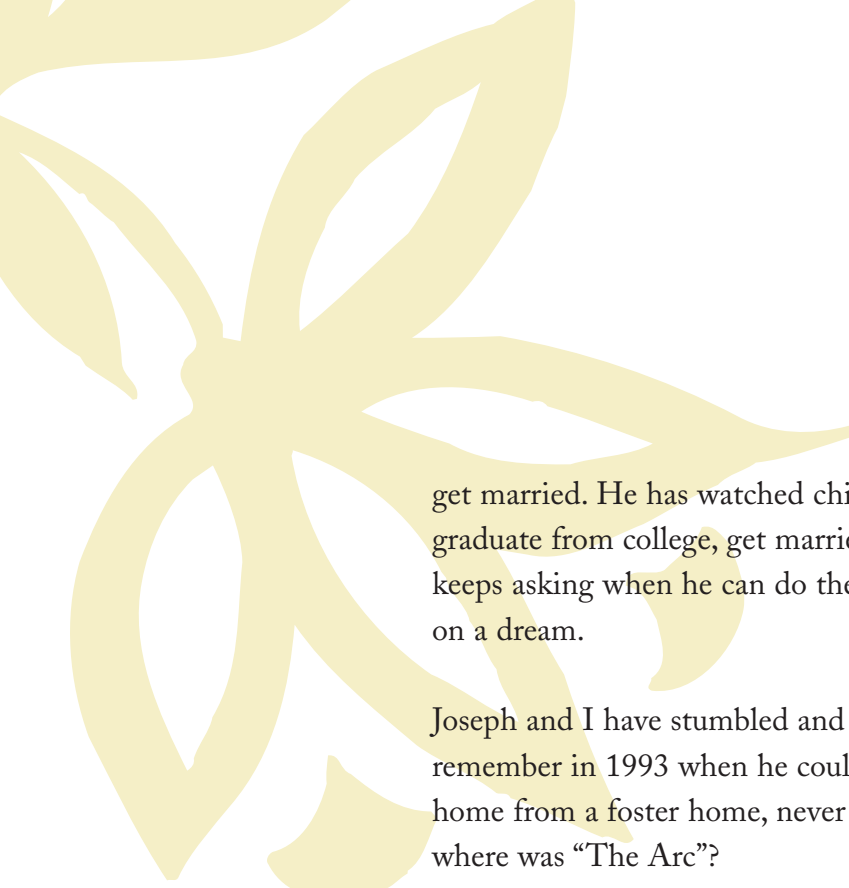
Accomplishments: Joseph appeared in a production of the “WIZ” at Duke Ellington School of Performing Arts with many of his peers all over the city. That was over 30 years ago. New York Avenue Presbyterian Church was host to a talent show where Joseph performed a Mexican Hat Dance. Art & Drama’s production of “Angel Tears” was Joseph’s most recent performance.

Travel History: In the past 10 years Joseph has flown to Las Vegas, and Atlanta & Stone Mountain, GA (family visit and vacation). He rode the bus to New York (to see the Lion King and the Color Purple); Connecticut (Foxwood Resort), Hampton, VA (Family member—college graduation); New Jersey (Atlantic City Casinos), Charlestown, WV; Richmond, VA (Kings Dominion), and Harrisburg, York & Lancaster, PA (family visits and county fairs).

Joseph’s favorite past time is writing, copying text from a book. Joseph can only read/recognize approximately 20 words. Joseph loves to dance, whether it’s the waltz, country line dance, or his favorite “boogie down”. His favorite theatrical performances are The King and I, Fiddler on the Roof and Hello Dolly. Joseph likes to bowl, go to amusement parks, but no roller coasters. Joseph is a good housekeeper: dusting, sweeping, folding clothes and making beds. He loves jewelry, rings and bracelets. He’s one sharp dresser wearing the latest jeans and shirts to Sunday suits to African attire to black tie and tails.

Joseph celebrated his 50th birthday nearly 3 years ago. I rented a hall, hired a caterer and a dee jay. Joseph arrived in a white stretch limo. There was a head table with guest giving testimony/stories of good times shared with Mr. Joseph Stewart. That was a party talked about for a long time. I got the idea from a parent of a special young lady who celebrated her 50th birthday in a similar fashion.

Joseph and I are first cousins, the children of two brothers. Joseph is one year older than me. He has watched me find full time employment after leaving high school, move from my parents home to numerous apartments, learn how to drive a car, and



get married. He has watched children, who he held in his arms as a baby, grow-up, graduate from college, get married, buy a home and have children of their own. He keeps asking when he can do the same thing. I am amazed how he never gives up on a dream.

Joseph and I have stumbled and fumbled our way into incredible opportunities. I remember in 1993 when he could no longer stay in his home, I didn't know a group home from a foster home, never heard of a case manager, what was a "MRDDA" and where was "The Arc"?

Well, it's 2007 and Joseph has never been on behavioral medication or any hospitalizations since childhood. He's enrolled in the best Day Program in America (The Art and Drama Therapy Institute). He has a new responsible transportation company and is presently waiting for placement in the assisted living program. Joseph is by far one of the most giving, loving, and sociable individuals you would ever want to meet and I wish for him the best that life has to offer.

*Linda Stewart Wells*