

The Mom's Choice Awards® Magazine

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Jaclyn Stapp

Children's author, beauty queen, and loving mom on self-confidence, bullying, and philanthropy.

Are Your Kids Ready for Kindergarten? New survey points out gaps, offers tips for better preparation.

The Best in Family-Friendly Media, Products and Services for 2012.

Multi-Cultural Author Celebrates Diversity



Bullying has become increasingly troublesome in elementary schools, high schools, the workplace and at home. Cyberbullying—the posting of threatening or hurtful messages and images on Web pages and social networking sites—has a tremendous reach. Here is how one woman works to boost children's positive self-image, counter the harmful effects of bullying, and provide inspiration and support to many in need.

For every young girl who feels like an ugly duckling and wishes she could become a swan, there's a delightful children's book that addresses the issue of difference with sensitivity, humor and wisdom. *Wacky Jacky: The True Story of an Unlikely Beauty Queen* is an autobiographical tale based on author Jaclyn Stapp's experiences growing up.

Looking at her today, no one would imagine that she had once been the target of bullying. But as a child, Jaclyn was often mistaken for a boy and became known at school as "Wacky Jacky" for her lanky frame, unruly hair, and Middle Eastern heritage. Teased unmercifully by her classmates—she ate pita bread sandwiches instead of PB&Js—the young girl finally took control of her destiny by entering a local beauty pageant. In so doing, she learned some important lessons about herself and won quite a prize—not for beauty, but for something much more valuable.

Today, Jaclyn is a model, actress, philanthropist, mother, champion of children's and family rights, and is married to the Grammy Award-winning lead singer of Creed, Scott Stapp.

With skinny legs and arms to match, her knobby knees were bumped and scratched. Her family came from Jordan, a beautiful faraway land. Kids at school found it strange, they just didn't understand.



Girls and boys learn from *Wacky Jacky* that they don't need to shine in order to succeed.

"I always wanted to write a children's book," Jaclyn says. "And as bullying became more prominent in our towns and I heard about it from my own kids, I really wanted to share my story to let other kids know they aren't alone."

What Makes Us Different Makes Us Special

Jaclyn wrote *Wacky Jacky* "to reach all those children who feel different for any reason," so that they might feel encouraged.

She remembers the years of being rejected for looking different than her classmates. What had given Jaclyn confidence was her supportive family—her mother and four siblings who encouraged her to be strong and to embrace her heritage.

"My mother, Hayat, stood by me all those times when kids teased me," she says. "She made me believe in myself and instilled the confidence and courage to face my challenges." Jaclyn realizes that not all children have such a strong support system, and *Wacky Jacky* is for them.

Young readers follow *Wacky Jacky* in her adventures as she looks inside herself and realizes she doesn't need a crown to sparkle. With its vibrant illustrations and inspiring message, the story teaches children to take pride in who they are and where they come from.

Bullying—a Serious Epidemic

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 160,000 children stay home from school every day for fear of being bullied.

"It can devastate people," Jaclyn says, "and kids can't handle that type of pressure." She hopes *Wacky Jacky* will influence others to address—and help reduce—bullying in schools. Her husband, Scott, speaks to kids on the dangers in social networking, and Jaclyn is the spokesperson for NVEEE—National Voices for Equality, Education and Enlightenment—a national anti-bullying organization whose mission is to prevent bullying, violence, and suicide among youth.

Book Hits a Chord With Women, Children

The messages in *Wacky Jacky* are resonating with young girls in many lands. Jaclyn has received enthusiastic emails from Russia, Israel, South America, and Iraq, in addition to the many she's gotten from children in America.

Jaclyn knows first-hand about the importance of having strong role models. "My father died when I was nine, so my mother raised her five children on her own. She taught us about courage, determination, and never giving up—as well as to be grateful for everything we had."

Today, with her siblings having reached the American dream as doctors, lawyers and government officials, that sense of gratitude is stronger than ever. She is passionate about the needs of women and children and families with hardships. "Giving—simply of time, or service, listening, sharing and mentoring—can positively impact the lives of others," she realizes.

She can't emphasize enough how important it is that we are all kind to one another. Jaclyn tries to hear as many personal stories as she can when she's presenting her book. "Parents get busy and can't always talk, but kids need to have an outlet." So Jaclyn is starting a blog on her website, a safe place for children with questions who need to know someone will be listening.



Scott and Jaclyn Stapp with children Jagger, Milan and Daniel.

A Lifelong Mission of Gratitude

Jaclyn and her siblings discovered the joys of community service early in life, frequently volunteering within their community. Some of Jaclyn's fondest childhood memories involved volunteering at the Florida Elk Children's Hospital, and also helping newcomers to America learn English.

From page 11 of *Wacky Jacky*. Illustration by Kristine Lucco.



Although she didn't win a crown for beauty in the first pageant she entered, Jaclyn received a trophy for volunteering. That experience inspired her to embark on more opportunities in pageantry as a way to bring awareness to the philanthropic causes close to her heart.

As a college student, she established the charity organization CHARM (Children Are Magical), which now partners with other foundations to bring recognition to the plight of women and children in need.

Jaclyn and Scott love to get involved with the community to help raise funds for various charities. The Scott Stapp With Arms Wide Open Foundation was created to promote healthy, loving relationships between children and their families.

Recently, Jaclyn was selected to be the first honorary chair of the Ronald McDonald House Charities' Home for the Holidays Lighting Ceremony of South Florida. That charity provides resources for families with children undergoing medical treatment, by providing housing so families can stay near to their children.

She is constantly sought after for appearances, and was delighted to be asked to read *The Night Before Christmas* as well as *Wacky Jacky* to a crowd of some 30,000 people at a tree lighting in her community last year.

Jaclyn placed as one of the top six winning countries when competing in Mrs. World 2011, where she was asked to represent her Jordanian heritage by participating as a contestant for that nation. "I have dual citizenship, and this was a huge opportunity to 'come out' as a proud American and showcase my heritage." One of Jaclyn's role models is Queen Noor of Jordan, who works tirelessly to help conditions for women and girls in that nation.

Looking Ahead

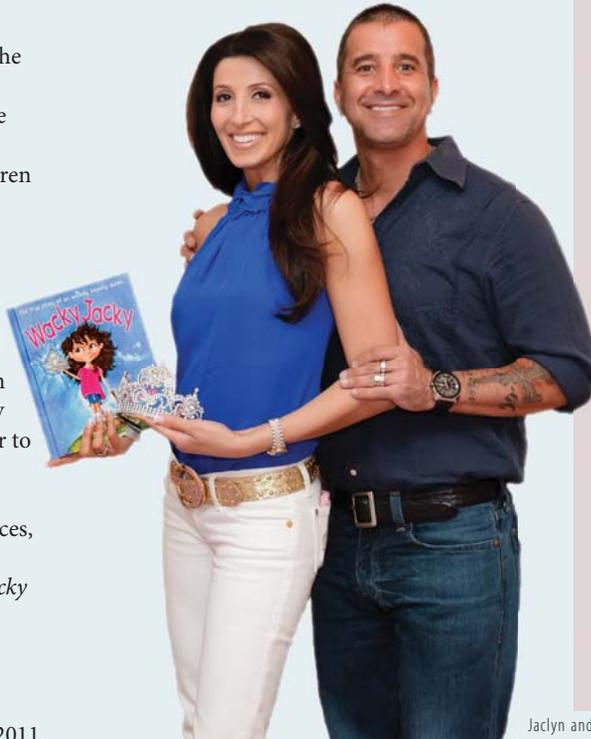
Wacky Jacky is sold internationally and will be translated into several languages.

Jaclyn has received invitations to visit schools abroad, and is also planning a trip to Japan to work with tsunami victims, with proceeds from book sales going to their aid. She is making a public service announcement against bullying, and also has ideas for a second "Wacky Jacky" book.



But first and foremost, Jaclyn Stapp is a wife and mother. She and her husband make it a point to be together with their three children as much as possible. "If I had an extra hour in the day, I'd sit down with my kids and catch up with them," she says. "I want to let them know I'm here and supportive. You can never give them too much time."

It's what's inside, not a sparkling crown, that truly makes you win! 



Jaclyn and Scott Stapp.

Jacky liked to volunteer where Yuma was a nurse. Seeing the sick kids at the Children's Hospital was hard for her at first. Some were ill with crooked hands, or feet that weren't there. Some were paralyzed and had to live their lives in a wheelchair. But no matter their difference, Jacky never stared. The children loved to sit with her, because they knew she cared.

Bullying can be very damaging to adolescents and teens, and can lead to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls bullying, especially among school-age children, a major public health problem.

The National Center for Education Statistics states:

- Boys and girls are nearly equally likely to be the target of bullying.
- 32% of middle and high school students say they have been bullied during the school year.
- 4% say they were cyberbullied.

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, and at least 10% are bullied on a regular basis.

Jaclyn Stapp is a full-time mother, wife and mentor who travels around the world empowering at-risk youth and championing for women's rights through her national outreach foundation, CHARM (Children Are Magical), which aims to heighten awareness of children's issues and enrich the lives of underprivileged youth by providing them the tools for a fulfilling future.

She is also the Executive Director of The Scott Stapp With Arms Wide Open Foundation, a global foundation that has helped raise more than \$1 million for children and families in need.

A graduate of Stetson University, Jaclyn has appeared in numerous films and television shows, including *Sex and the City*, *Fear Factor*, *Olive Juice*, and as host of the Travel Channel's show, *Florida's Best Beaches*.

Wacky Jacky won a Mom's Choice Award in 2011 and a Children's Literary Early Reading Award.

Jaclyn has been interviewed on local television programs and pictured on numerous magazine covers, both nationally and internationally, and won 100 beauty titles. She is the recipient of the President's National Community Service Award for her work with international humanitarian projects. In October 2008, she entertained the troops in the Middle East on the USO/AFE Tour with husband, Scott. The Stapps live in Florida.



From page 10 of *Wacky Jacky*. Illustration by Kristine Lucco.