



## Courage Beyond the Game: The Freddie Steinmark Story

By Jim Dent

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**Courage Beyond the Game: The Freddie Steinmark Story** By Jim Dent

**A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction of 2011 title**

**Jim Dent, the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Junction Boys*, returns with a powerful Texas story which transcends college football, displaying the courage and determination of one of the game's most valiant players.**

Freddie Steinmark was an under-sized but scrappy young man when he arrived in Austin as a freshman at the University of Texas in 1967. Despite the pronouncement by many coaches that he was too small to play football at the college level, Freddie was a tenacious competitor who vowed to start every game as a varsity Longhorn.

By the start of the 1969 season, Freddie was making his mark on the college gridiron and national stage as UT's star safety, but he'd also developed a crippling pain in his thigh that worried his high school sweetheart, Linda. Despite the increasingly debilitating pain, Freddie continued to play throughout the season, helping the Longhorns to rip through opponents like pulpwood. His final game was for the national championship at the end of 1969, when the Longhorns rallied to beat Arkansas in a legendary game that has become known as "the Game of the Century."

Tragically, bone cancer took Freddie off the field when nothing else could. But nothing could extinguish his irrepressible spirit or keep him away from the game. Although his struggle with cancer would be short-lived, Freddie's fight would inspire the nation as well as thousands of cancer victims, earning him a special citation from President Richard Nixon. Today, a photo of Freddie hangs in the tunnel at Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium, where players touch it before games en route to the field. With this moving story, a *Brian's Song* for college football, Jim Dent once again brings readers to cheers and tears with a truly American tale of resolution and bravery in the face of the worst odds.

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## **Courage Beyond the Game: The Freddie Steinmark Story By Jim Dent Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Praise for *Courage Beyond the Game*:

“Jim Dent, dadgum him, keeps writing books I wish I’d written. Like *The Junction Boys* and *Twelve Mighty Orphans*, to name two. Now here he comes with another terrific effort, *Courage Beyond the Game*, the story of the most courageous kid to ever pull on a football suit. If you pick it up, it’s guaranteed to pick you up.” -Dan Jenkins, author of *Semi-Tough* and *Dead Solid Perfect*

“Jim Dent is a world class story teller, and in Freddie Steinmark’s courageous and triumphant fight to be a man of substance, he’s found a tale worthy of his ample talents. Dent will bring tears to your eyes, and Steinmark’s example will make you want to be a better person.” --Joe Drape, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen*

“You will cheer and you will weep as you read Jim Dent’s irresistible rendering of one of the great real-life dramas in college football history. Dent has brought plenty of tough guys to life in his other books, but little Freddie Steinmark surely ranks as the toughest. Dent has brilliantly re-cast a Longhorn legend. I could not put *Courage Beyond the Game* down.” --John Eisenberg, author of *That First Season: How Vince Lombardi Took the Worst Team in the NFL and set it on the Path to Glory*, and *Cotton Bowl Days: Growing up with Dallas and the Cowboys in the 1960s*

“Freddie Steinmark’s story will inspire you and make you cry, and Jim Dent has told it better than anyone in *Courage Beyond the Game*. Jim’s eye for detail and gifted writing will take you back to another place and time, and a new generation of college football fans will learn why Freddie lives forever in the hearts of those he touched in his brief life.” -...

#### About the Author

JIM DENT, a long-time award-winning journalist who covered the Dallas Cowboys for eleven years at the *Dallas Times Herald* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, has written eight books, including *Twelve Mighty Orphans*, and *The Junction Boys*, the *New York Times* bestseller and ESPN movie that remains a fan favorite to this day. Dent lives in Texas.

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#### *Chapter 1* **FIRST KISS**

On a day like no other, she saw him running over a grassy hillside with the snowcapped Rocky Mountains in the background. Linda Wheeler was sitting on the passenger side of a baby blue Jeep. She had never seen anyone as alive as Freddie Steinmark. Here was the boy with the big, sparkling eyes and the smile that chased away her blues. The mere sight of him left her breathless.

Months earlier, in the fall of 1963, he had stormed into her life in the hallway of Manning Junior High. The eighth-grade girls, hoping to ogle Freddie that first day of school, had gathered near the front entrance, anticipating his arrival. They chattered excitedly about a heartthrob more celestial than Elvis Presley.

“I hear that Freddie Steinmark is around here someplace,” one of the girls loudly whispered.

“I’ve got my eyes wide open,” another gushed. “I might just kiss Freddie Steinmark straight on the lips when I see him.”

Linda could not have cared less at the time. Nothing on that first day of school in this strange place was going to make her happy. Against her will, her family had moved twelve miles from near downtown Denver to Wheat Ridge, a place a little too countrified for a girl from the city. This outpost seemed as distant from urban Denver as Memphis was to Mozambique. When the sun set over the Rockies, everyone headed home to watch *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriett*, then went straight to bed, or so it seemed.

That first week of September, Linda was walking into an alien world she could not comprehend. Even more troubling was the realization that this strange journey into nowhere was just beginning. In two years, she would enter Wheat Ridge High School, where the cheerleaders wore overalls and the team was called the Farmers. At football games, one of the male students actually dressed like a hayseed rode around on a mule named Daisy. The drill team square-danced at halftime. Any day, Linda expected to see goats grazing on the football field.

Linda did not need to remind herself why the Wheelers had moved to the end of the earth. Simply, her mother was seeking a controlled environment where she could raise her two youngest daughters, Linda and Shannon. Marion Wheeler did not want to endure another teenage pregnancy, as she had with her oldest daughter a year earlier. In Wheat Ridge, she knew she could keep the reins on Linda and Shannon and shoo the boys away.

Linda wore black horn-rimmed glasses and a blue dress. Before heading off to school that morning, she peered into the mirror at a girl she judged to have average looks. Boys rarely gave her the time of day. Given her mother’s attitude toward the opposite sex, she wondered if she would ever get a date. A boy with the status and charm of Freddie Steinmark would never show interest in her and, if he did, she wasn’t feeling all that sociable anyway.

As Freddie swaggered into the building that morning, toting a passel of books and motoring like an all-district scatback, every head turned to see the raven-haired youngster with the Pepsodent smile. Amazingly, Linda felt his big brown eyes watching her. The girls were standing in line outside homeroom, waiting for the bell to ring. Freddie smiled and winked at her. *How is this possible? Why is he not looking at the other girls?* Freddie walked a little farther down the hall, turned, and set his eyes on Linda once more. She felt light-headed. She knew the others were jealous. *Why is Mr. Wonderful stuck on the new girl? We’ve known him a lot longer than her.*

In Wheat Ridge, Freddie Steinmark was bigger than the Beatles. They loved to talk about “Fast Freddie” and his athletic gift. They said that before long he would be playing halfback at the University of Colorado, then it would be off to the pros. A devout Catholic who attended mass almost every day, he also made straight A’s. He was the hero of the football, basketball, and baseball teams. He had once played on a Denver midget league football team that won every game for eight straight seasons.

Freddie was brimming with so much energy that his vitality seemed to flow through his pores. The girls around Wheat Ridge thought he was the sweetest boy they had ever met, but the boys who competed against him in sports knew better. The kid possessed a hard edge honed by a pushy father and some pushier coaches. When Freddie walked onto the football field, or the basketball court, or the baseball diamond, look out. Winning in Freddie’s world was the only way to have fun. Little wonder that Mickey Mantle was his hero

and why Freddie was idolized in the same manner as "The Mick."

Linda knew virtually nothing about sports, having grown up with two sisters who did not know if a football was blown up or stuffed. Her father Selby MacMillan Wheeler was an M.I.T. graduate and a well-known architect in the Denver area. He was not the type of man who would sit in front of the TV, watching the weekend games and memorizing batting averages. So the idea of Freddie Steinmark being the best athlete in the school did not impress her. Still, she could not get over those eyes, that smile, and the way he carried himself.

As the days passed, Freddie seemed to be everywhere. One day, she peered up from her desk in homeroom and saw him walking toward her. He casually sat down in the desk next to hers. For the next fifteen minutes, until the bell rang, he stared at Linda without saying a word. The same routine followed the next day and the next.

Linda was beginning to wonder if Freddie was ever going to speak when Rocco Rofrano, another eighth grader, sidled up next to her in the hallway. Rocco was a handsome boy and he was one of Freddie's few non-jock friends, but they were extremely tight, going all the way back to kindergarten.

"You know, Freddie is really crazy about you," Rocco said. "He's liked you a lot since the day he saw you."

"Come on, Rocco," Linda said. "Are you being square with me? Are you sure Freddie's talking about *me*?"

"He only has eyes for you, Linda."

"So why doesn't he talk to me?"

"Because he doesn't know what to say."

"So why does he sit and stare at me?"

Rocco grinned. "Because he likes you. I mean, he likes you a *lot*."

Linda felt a mixture of excitement and frustration as she walked away from Rocco that day. Boys were a new phenomenon in her life, and she really wanted a boyfriend. She knew, however, that all eighth graders were still fighting off inhibitions. This agonizing game of silence could drag on forever.

Little did Freddie know that Linda was soon watching him—from afar. She went to the junior high football games and, at first, was completely confused by the confounded system of first downs and other assorted silliness. One thing was certain about the Manning Junior High games: Freddie Steinmark was the star who carried the ball on practically every play. He scored most of the touchdowns. He played offense and defense and never left the field. He was the reason the band played. When the games were over, the cheerleaders chased him all the way to the locker room.

As football was winding down in the late fall, and the heavy snowfalls arrived, Freddie took his game to the gymnasium, where he dominated the basketball court. To Linda, it seemed that no one at Manning Junior High cheered for anyone but Freddie Steinmark. *Does he possibly know how popular he is?*

The next day, she shook her head and sat down at her desk, waiting for Freddie to come bee-bopping into her life once more. She knew he would have nothing to say.

\* \* \*

Out on the rolling farmland of Wheat Ridge, the winds were soft and cool in the spring as the sun began to warm the farmland stretching west. The basketball season was almost over in late March and Freddie soon would be lacing up his baseball cleats.

Linda was sitting in the Jeep, basking in the sunshine, waiting for her sister Shannon to turn the ignition key, when she spotted Freddie running toward her. She thought there must be some kind of mistake. His dark skin glistened and she was mesmerized by everything about him. She prayed he would open his mouth.

Shannon Wheeler, sitting behind the wheel, almost panicked when she saw Freddie tearing over the hill.

"Oh, my God, what is he doing?" she yelped. She released the clutch and said, "Linda, let's get out of here!"

"No, no, no!" Linda yelled. "Wait!"

"Gotta go," Shannon said. "What would Mother say?"

"Stop! Dammit!"

The windows were rolled down because of the beautiful weather. Within seconds, Freddie's face was inches from Linda's. She had never seen such a happy boy. He flashed the smile she would never forget.

“Wanna go out?” he blurted. The voice seemed strange. She had never heard it.

“Well, sure, Freddie Steinmark,” Linda said. “Of course I would like to go out with you. What are we gonna do?”

“How about let’s go to dinner tomorrow night after the game?”

“Why not?” she said, turning slowly and smiling at Shannon.

Shannon rolled her eyes as her left foot searched for the clutch. “Can we leave now, Linda?”

“One second,” she said. Then she turned to Freddie. “Where do you want to meet?”

Freddie named the restaurant. Again, their eyes met and they shook hands.

As the Jeep pulled away, Linda’s eyes were locked onto Freddie’s. She would think about him for the rest of the day. But how in the name of Pikes Peak was she going to explain this to her mother?

\* \* \*

A date the following night with Freddie meant that Linda would sit in the stands by herself. Amid the adulation of the Wheat...

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