

THE GIFT OF TOUNGUES

By Tyler Freeman

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Cast: Can be played by either Male or Female

(The character has severe deformities. The performer should make physical adjustments to portray these deformities. Furthermore, the character's vocal pattern should also reflect his/her communication handicap.)

My mom was a God-fearing woman. And I would have feared God too if he made my child look like that. My parents were strict Pentecostals, which was very confusing to me. They called everyone in our church brother and sister, and for the longest time I thought Grandma was a total slut. . . Yeah, I thought we were related to the entire congregation.

I am an only child; my parents had only been married 8 months when I was born. But something went drastically wrong the night my dad's sperm did the backstroke up my mom's uterus, because I was born all messed up. I had facial deformations, part of my jawbone hadn't formed, and I didn't have any fingers on my right hand.

But Mom says that from the very start she was thankful that God trusted her enough to give her a kid like me. But she lies. . . As messed up as I was when she first saw me she was probably screaming SEND IT BACK! SEND IT BACK! To this day the doctors can't explain what caused my birth defects. But that didn't make for a very good story, so I use to tell people at church that my mom was a drug addict when she was pregnant with me and that's what caused my problems.

I didn't talk until I was seven years old, which was probably just fine with my mom because she loves to talk, and she hates competition. Our pastor, Brother Jackson, said that she had the gift of tongues. . . if you call it a gift. I think it was more of a curse. As if I didn't have enough deformities, I use to think that she was trying to talk my ear off.

I could only open my mouth far enough to eat, so as a toddler all I could do was grunt at things. But when I was six my jaw was surgically rebuilt so that I could learn to talk. The surgery took eight hours but it worked, and the doctor's told my parents that with intensive speech therapy I could probably learn to speak in about a year.

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I said my first word at a tent revival. Brother Jackson was convinced that I was possessed of the devil. So he put oil on my forehead and started hitting me over the head with his Bible and screaming SATAN GET OUT! It was very scary. . . People were dancing around, singing and shaking around all over the floor. . . And he thought I was possessed? Then, just when I thought he was going to let me go, he started hitting me again. So I said. . . STOP IT JERK!

After that night my parents were convinced that miracles really happen. So we started praying for lots of things, I prayed that God would give me a new face that wasn't deformed, I asked him for fingers on my right hand and, most of all, I prayed for people to stop looking at me like I was a monster. But God never answered those prayers.

Growing up was very hard for me. People can be unbelievably cruel. I can remember so many days at school when I would be walking along, minding my own business, but the other kids would be staring at me. But I didn't let it bother me. I would just keep walking along like nothing was wrong. But then, when I got right next to them I would go **(makes a face and growls like a wild animal)** and they would jump. **(laughs)**

I learned how to deal with ignorant people. But I never felt sorry for myself, I always felt sorry for my parents. Not because they had to put up with people staring at us, or deal with me cussing in church, I felt sorry for them because they couldn't have a normal kid. They never said anything to make me think that I wasn't good enough, but kids aren't stupid. I will always remember the look on my mom's face the first day of school. I felt like such a disappointment. All the other mothers were bragging about how their children could already read and do math, but I was just learning to talk.

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