

## HIS NAME WAS RALPH

By Rick Founds

His name was Ralph, but everybody called him "Skip". He was short and bald, with the voice of Darth Vader on Steroids. Skip had more energy, enthusiasm and creativity than any of the kids who attended his youth group. Having been an orphan, he knew just how to relate to, and encourage anyone who had ever felt abandoned, lost, or uncared for. Skip was a master of empowerment. He'd help you to articulate your hopes and dreams, and then do everything possible to make them come true.

His life's passion was to give young people a sense of importance and accomplishment, and to assist them in discovering their purpose in life. He created countless opportunities for local kids to be a part of performing arts groups. These groups would play in church and entertain at fairs and other community events. Designed to use as many of the arts as possible, and thus involve as many kids as possible, he would have them singing, dancing, acting, playing instruments, setting lights, making graphics and costumes, and constructing sets. I count myself privileged to be one of the many who were fortunate enough to benefit from Skip's unique mentoring style. He lived every day as a practical example of Jesus. When you were with him, you felt genuinely important and appreciated.

On a summer morning, while riding his bicycle to work, he felt pain in his chest, stopped pedaling, set his bike aside, and lay down on the grass. He breathed his final breath on earth and the next moment took his first breath of heavenly air. His funeral was packed with people and bright balloons.

The work of God through my life can be attributed in large part to this short, bald, wonderful man of God, with the Darth Vader voice.