



STANDING

Born with no arms and no legs, Nick Vujicic is teaching the church how to overcome challenges by finding true strength in Christ.

ON FAITH ALONE

HE SURFS. HE SWIMS. HE'S GOING TO BE in the Los Angeles Marathon in March. He has a contagiously optimistic outlook on life. And yet he has no arms or legs.

Born without limbs, 26-year-old Nick Vujicic (pronounced voy-a-chich) is becoming known worldwide as an evangelist and motivational speaker, drawing up to 100,000 people at stadiums and other venues around the globe. The founder of California-based Life Without Limbs, he is now on a world tour and will release his first book, *No Limbs, No Limits*, later this year.

Vujicic, a native of Australia who recently relocated to California, says he feels called by God to share how he overcame nearly insurmountable circumstances to bring hope and inspiration to people. "I know what I'm here to do, and that's to tell people about the hope in Christ that strengthens me," Vujicic says.

"I'm not living on my own strength. I'm basically walking on water. That's the miracle. For a guy without arms or legs to smile, that's a man walking on water."

Although it may seem to those who recently saw Vujicic surf in Hawaii that he can walk on water, the fact that a man born without arms or legs can do so much is, in his words, a miracle. And the story of the faith

BY TROY
ANDERSON

that inspired him is one Vujicic is taking around the globe as part of his ministry.

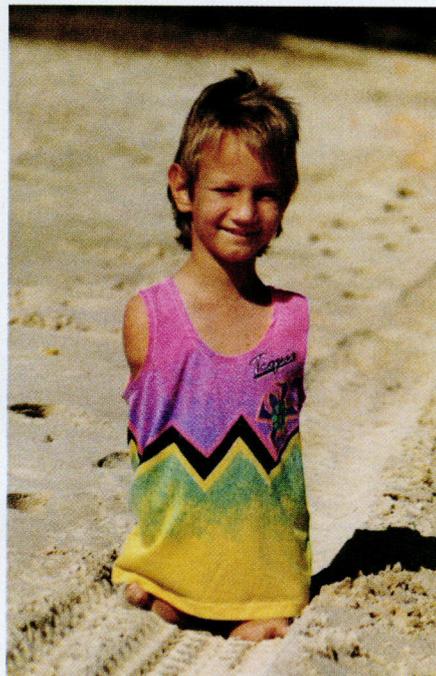
"I'm not a supernatural guy," says Vujicic, who has met with world leaders and appeared on ABC's *20/20*. "It's not about me. It's about the power of the Holy Spirit in me that gives me the ability to live a supernatural life of victory. That's the power I live in. I'm more than a man without arms or legs. I'm a child of God."

Vujicic, who began speaking publicly as a teenager, moved to California in 2005

People naturally wonder how Vujicic gets through a day without the use of arms or legs. Through videos posted on YouTube, he demonstrates how he manages simple, everyday tasks such as combing his hair or brushing his teeth (to watch the videos, go to vujicic.charismamag.com).

Cattley says one video showing him walking toward a swimming pool, jumping in and swimming on his back using his "little foot" is stunning. "You can almost hear people hold their breath [when it's

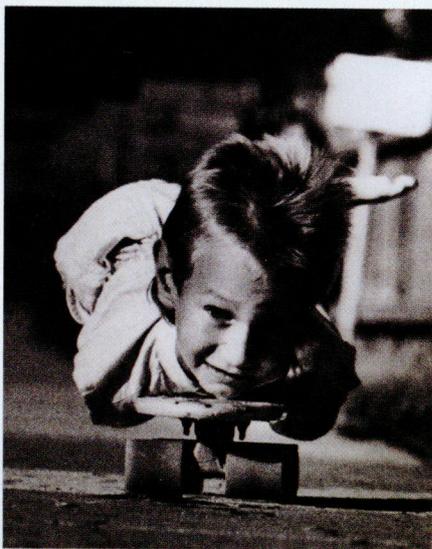
"I think he has that anointed presence," Govatos says. "It's beyond his personal charisma. There is something that speaks to the spirit and calls forth in people the deepest longing from God. Billy Graham was able to do that. It's a far different style. But he has a true charisma of the Holy Spirit in an anointed fashion."



after some Australian relatives immigrated to the U.S. Initially, Joni Eareckson Tada, a world-famous author and artist who was left a quadriplegic after a 1967 diving accident, gave him office space at the Joni and Friends International Disability Center in Agoura Hills, California.

Steve Bundy, managing director of the Christian Institute on Disabilities at the center, says people are drawn to Vujicic because he exudes a "champion spirit" and gives people hope. "I think Nick's life displays the goodness of God," Bundy says. "Here you have a man with no arms or legs, but he's filled with joy and happiness because he has an eternal perspective."

At the Evangelical Free Church of the Conejo Valley in Newbury Park, California, disability ministry director Rhonda Cattley has heard Vujicic speak several times. "He has such a powerful message of not feeling sorry for yourself; believing God has a plan for your life, no matter what your circumstances are or what your physical disabilities are," Cattley says. "He knows that God is sovereign ... that God has allowed this for a reason."



shown publicly]," she says.

Jim Govatos, pastor of the Indian River City United Methodist Church in Titusville, Florida, says Vujicic recently spoke to more than 4,400 youth and adults in the area. After hearing him speak, many youth gave their lives to Christ, including the "big man on campus" and nearly the entire volleyball team.

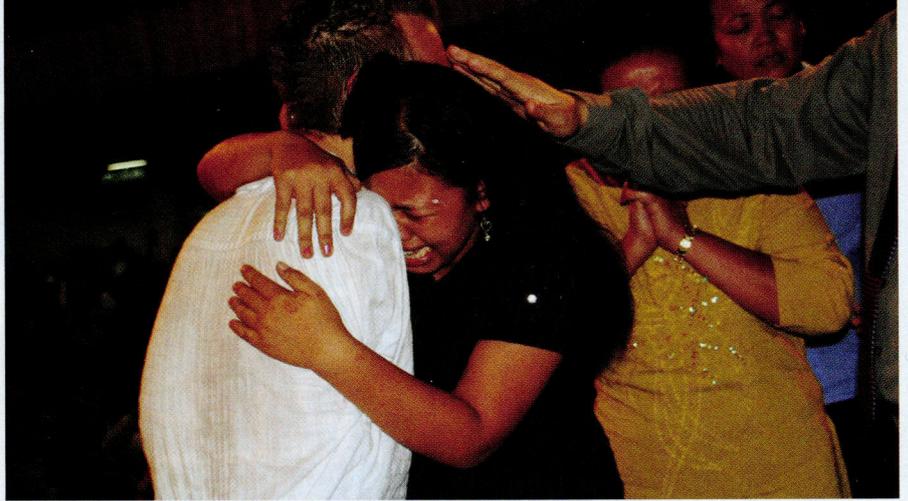
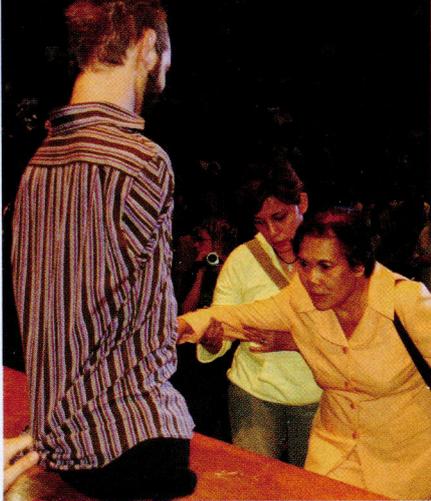
»When he was growing up, Nick Vujicic learned to use his chin to manipulate objects and his small foot to walk, skateboard and play soccer.

Giving Hugs and Hope

After spending a couple of years at Joni and Friends, Vujicic opened his own office in late 2007 and expanded the number of staff to a dozen. Although he plans to focus on speaking in the U.S. this year, he usually spends about half the year traveling to other countries, including ones where he encounters "horrific poverty" and "tin shack cities," says Heather Tayloe, a ministry communications representative for lifewithoutlimbs.org.

He once spoke to more than 100,000 people in India, to 18,000 at a bullring in Colombia and to 8,000 during a thunderstorm in Ukraine. On a recent trip to Africa, he met the president of Liberia, the first female president of an African nation. In a country recovering from civil war and beset by 80 percent unemployment, Vujicic spoke to more than 18,000 people, and thousands gave their lives to Christ.

"One speech took place in the same



» Vujicic travels internationally for his speaking engagements. During his meetings, he invites people to come forward and give him a hug. Hundreds often respond and join the “hug line,” such as these people who attended one of Vujicic’s conferences in Indonesia.

location where Muslims were killing Christians with machetes four or five years ago,” Tayloe says. “They were only expecting 350 to 400 people to show up, but 8,000 turned out. People were hanging from trees and were on the rooftops.”

During these trips, Vujicic tries to raise awareness about the value of disabled people. In parts of India, Africa and

Eastern Europe, there is an unspoken belief that babies born with deformities should not live. Infanticide is practiced without repercussion.

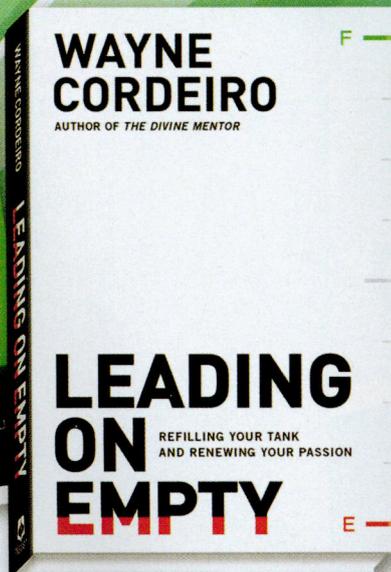
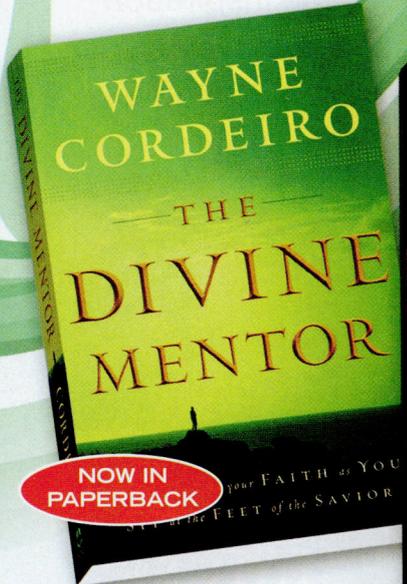
“Sometimes, they lock it in a room, won’t feed it, call it an ‘it’ and wait until it dies,” Vujicic says. “That’s why we’re partnering with Joni and Friends to spearhead education and awareness throughout the world.”

The son of Serbian immigrants—a pastor and a nurse who still live in Australia—Vujicic was born in Melbourne on December 4, 1982. Ultrasound tests performed on his mother failed to reveal that his limbs were not developing, and his doctor and parents were completely shocked when he was born.

Doctors couldn’t offer any medical explanation for his condition, one that

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has affected only 15 people worldwide that Vujicic is aware of.

"No one has any idea why," Vujicic says. "They said, 'Your son may not have a good life, and he may not be able to walk; he may not be able to move, and he may very well be a burden to you.'"

At first, his parents and church family questioned why a God of love would allow the pastor's son to be born without limbs. But in time, they came to trust that God was in control.

Although he was often teased, bullied and rejected in school, he learned to use his chin to manipulate objects and his "little foot" with two toes to walk, play marbles, swim, skateboard and play soccer. He also learned to use his toes to write, type and drive his wheelchair.

"The first few years were very difficult," Vujicic says. "But the teachers were very good about educating the kids about me. And once I started talking, they forgot that I have no arms or legs and could see that I'm just like anybody else."

Despite his active life, Vujicic became depressed at age 8 when his family moved to Brisbane, Australia. He saw himself as a burden to others, unlikely to go to college, have a wife or even be able to hug his children. Once, he attempted to drown himself.

But at age 13 his mother gave him a newspaper article that changed his life. The story—about a man who overcame his disabilities—inspired him to be thankful for his family, his health and his "little foot."

"I realized I had a choice," Vujicic says. "I could either ... feel sorry for myself or thank God for what I have."

But he still felt God owed him an explanation. "No matter who we are, we always ask ourselves three questions: Who am I? Why am I here? And where am I going when I'm not here?"

"I didn't know who I was supposed to be. I didn't know why I was here, and I didn't know where I was going when I was not here," Vujicic says. "It was scary. And that fear was worse than having no arms or legs. Fear and guilt paralyze people more than having no limbs."

At 15, he read in John 9 that Jesus gave sight to a blind man so the works of God might be revealed through him. Finding the answer he was seeking, Vujicic gave his life to Christ.

"When I read that, a wave of faith came over me and this peace, this realization that I'm looking for an answer why, but the answer is not knowing why," he says. "The answer is that God knows why. If God can use a blind man ... then He's got a plan for me."

A couple years later, teenagers in his Bible study group asked him to speak. His testimony brought the room to tears. Soon, he had dozens of invitations. While

speaking at a high school at age 19 he realized God was calling him to be an inspirational speaker.

As he started speaking, a teenage girl began "bawling her eyes out." Vujicic stopped and looked at her. Embarrassed, she raised her hand and asked if she could give him a hug.

"In front of everybody, she came and

SEE FAITH ON PG. 65»

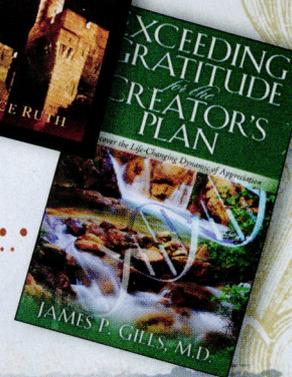
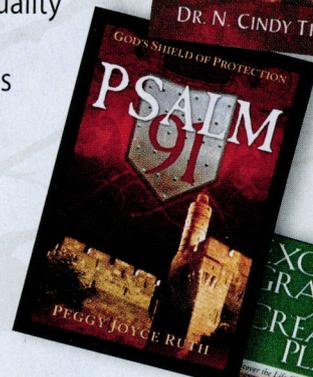
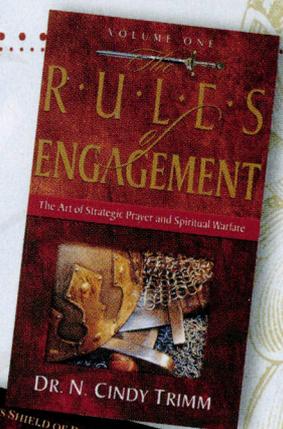
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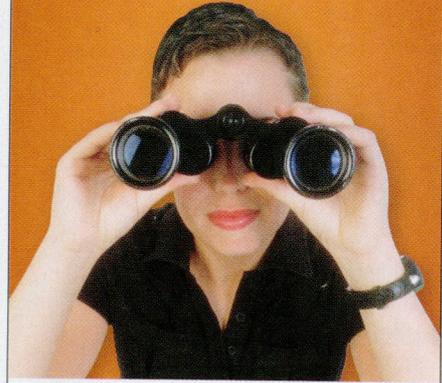
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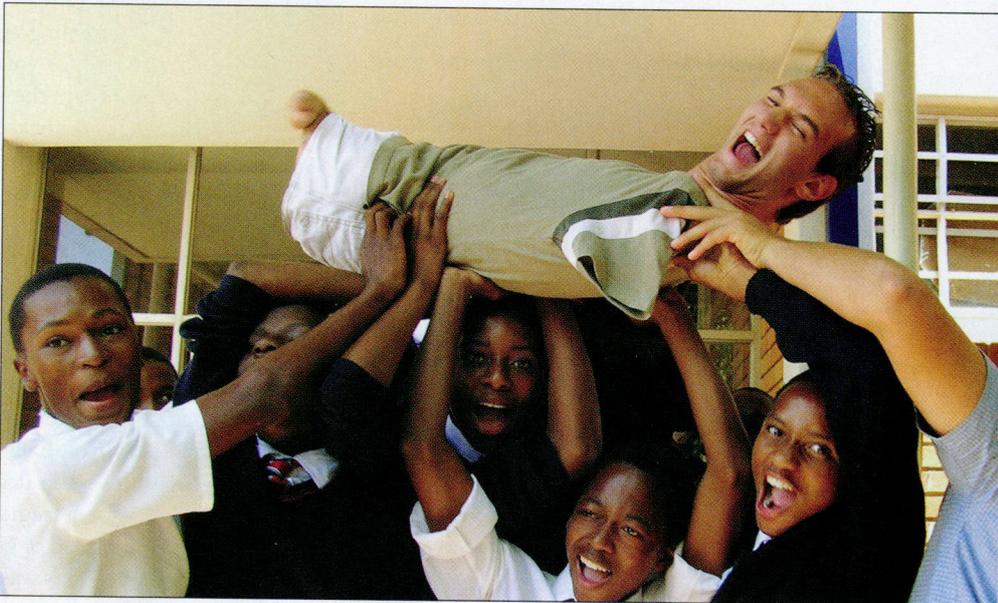
hugged me, and she whispered in my ear: 'No one ever told me that they loved me. No one ever told me that I was beautiful,'" Vujjic says. "And she held me, and she cried. And that gave me a glimpse of the impact my life can have on one person.

"And that day I was sure this is what I was made for—to give hope: hope that is priceless, hope that the world cannot understand, hope in an unconditional love that is only from heaven. And that's when I committed my ministry to God."

2003. Vujjic says Hamilton inspired him after he saw her on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* several years ago.

"We watched her on *Oprah*, and I'm like, 'Wow, being able to lose something and then keep on going in life is different than me being born this way,'" Vujjic says.

When Hamilton found out that one of Vujjic's lifelong dreams was to learn to surf, she offered him a lesson at Waikiki Beach. He caught on quickly, amazing a



That's also when Vujjic decided to hug and talk to people after speaking to them. After each event he invites people to give him a hug. Often, hundreds of people will get in the "hug line."

Walking on Water

Today Vujjic has spoken more than 1,500 times at schools, churches, orphanages, prisons and hospitals in 19 countries. He estimates that more than 30 million people have heard his testimony. He even earned a bachelor's degree.

But most surprising, he recently appeared in *Surfer* magazine alongside some of the world's top surfers.

During a recent speaking tour in Hawaii, Vujjic got to experience the next best thing to walking on water—surfing. A Honolulu pastor introduced him to Bethany Hamilton, a surfing champion who lost an arm after a shark attack in

» **No limits:** Vujjic crowd-surfs, swims and even rides waves in Hawaii.

curious crowd. Using his little foot, Vujjic not only stood up and caught some waves but also did a 360-degree spin and leaped from long board to long board. The exuberant onlookers cheered and whistled.

"This guy is so inspirational," says John Rogers, senior associate pastor at First Assembly of God, the Honolulu church where Vujjic spoke.

"His view of his purpose in life—what God has showed him—is that there really are no limits; He just exudes that. It's phenomenal." ◀

TROY ANDERSON is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

➔ ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Watch a day in the life of Nick Vujjic at vujjic.charismamag.com.