

He Always Had The Last Word

Charisma columnist Jamie Buckingham died in 1992, but his writings still reach millions today.

The legacy of the late Jamie Buckingham, Charisma's all-time favorite columnist, lives on through his family, the church he founded in Melbourne, Florida, and the many books he wrote.

His son Bruce Buckingham, 44, now a spokesman for NASA at Kennedy Space Center, was only 22 when his father began writing a column for Charisma, which editor Stephen Strang had started in 1975. "My dad's influence, I believe, was in encouraging an attitude of, 'Let's do this right, and in so doing, let's make sure God is in it,'" Bruce said.

Jamie, who died in 1992 of liver cancer at age 59, wrote the popular "Last Word" column, which was published from 1979 to 1993. He also wrote numerous books, including the definitive biography of Kathryn Kuhlman, Daughter of Destiny. And he founded The Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, which was a hub of charismatic renewal in the 1970s and 1980s.

Today, Bruce and three of his four siblings live near Melbourne with their families and their mom, Jackie, in separate houses on a 25

-acre ranch called Hebron. Besides Bruce, Jamie and Jackie's other children are Robin Moore, 43; Bonnie Ranzino, 41; Tim Buckingham, 40; and Sandy Smith, 38. The 14 grandchildren who live on the property—seven girls, seven boys—"are like their own support group," Bruce said.

That's helpful when you carry the Buckingham name, "a legacy that's been somewhat difficult to live with," he added. "Even now when I go to church, someone will say: 'You look so much like your dad. Aren't you going to be a preacher like he was?'"

None of the Buckingham children are in full-time ministry, nor do they all attend The Tabernacle, which is affectionately known among members as "The Tab." But all the kids are active in their churches.

"One thing Dad always made clear: You don't have to be in full-time ministry to be full-time in God's will," said Bruce, who is writing a biography of his father.

Helping him is his wife, Michele, who was a writer and editor before marrying Bruce. She became Jamie's right hand during his stint as editor of Ministries Today magazine from 1987-1992, and when he died she succeeded him as editor. She became an associate editor of Charisma until 1998. Today she devotes most of her time to her family and edits books for several Christian publishers.

Jamie's books, including his first best seller, Run, Baby, Run, the biography of evangelist Nicky Cruz, are still touching millions of people. But his broadest-reaching legacy is a book he wrote on commission for the DeMoss Foundation in 1983.

Power for Living may be the most-read Christian book in the world, other than the Bible. The nonprofit DeMoss Foundation has distributed millions of copies of

the book free of charge. It is offered in familiar TV advertisements, which encourage interested seekers who want spiritual help to call a toll-free number.

In the early 1970s, Jamie had been editor of Logos Journal, which failed financially. When he first learned of Charisma, he was excited to see in Strang the right combination of business savvy, Christian values and publishing skills, Jackie said.

"He came alongside Steve and said, 'I want to help you,'" Jackie remembers. "Sometimes, when Jamie was too busy to drive over to Orlando, Steve would bring his whole staff over here, and I'd fix lunch for them. Even up to the time Jamie died, Steve would sometimes come over with three or four of their guys, and they would brainstorm here at the house.

"These guys would all have their suits and ties on at work, and before they came up the driveway Steve would take his tie off because he knew Jamie was

always in his shorts and T-shirt and tennis shoes. And his tennis shoes usually had holes in them. He said that's when they became most comfortable."

Continuing another Buckingham legacy, Jackie has taken more than eight charter groups to Israel since Jamie died.

"I just love to take people there and introduce them to the land where Jesus lived," she said. "But mainly I just feel comfortable being here with my few friends and my family and enjoying my grandchildren. I can just go love on them whenever I want to. They're all believers, and all go to church. None

of them have ever rebelled.”

It may be one of those grandchildren who will walk in Jamie’s footsteps in the next 25 years, Michele Buckingham said. “I see the kids that are growing up in the family really carrying on a love for the Lord and for people,” she said. “There’s probably a couple of preachers among them and a few missionaries and a lot of great business people. I think they’ll have an impact for the Lord when their time comes.”

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