

“John Schmid has been through tough times in life, but his wisdom and connection with the Holy Spirit are nowhere more evident than in his writing.”

- **John Carter Cash**

“As a songwriter, hearing from John Schmid that he had just used one of my songs at a prison concert and that the inmates were deeply moved by it is like winning a Grammy... only bigger! Annie and I initially met John Schmid several years ago through an Ohio prison inmate who recognized that we had much in common in regard to music. How grateful we are for that introduction! We have come to appreciate John’s servant heart that is so well displayed in his devotion to his wife Lydia, to their family, and to his musical work that reaches out with compassion to all who hear, especially those who have lost their freedom. Now we are blessed that we get to learn even more about his life and ministry through his excellent book, *Encounters/In & Out of Prison with John Schmid*. We can promise that every chapter is a treasure trove of inspiration.”

- **Steve & Annie Chapman**

“My friend John Schmid’s *Encounters* takes you on a mesmerizing journey; the relationships and front line ministry stories are priceless. It would take 5 lifetimes for an ordinary man to accomplish the travels and experiences of Brother John, but this is a very special man of God who has been blessed, gifted, and anointed to do extraordinary work for the Lord. You will certainly enjoy *Encounters*; it’s an exciting Kingdom Adventure!”

- **Jack “Murf the Surf” Murphy**

Director, Inmate Encounter Ministry
Ex-convict and Author of *Jewels for the Journey*

“Our friend and fellow musician John Schmid is a multi-talented man with a heart for the Lord and a heart for people. He faithfully uses his gifts to entertain and inspire crowds in all kinds of settings – prisons, churches, coffee shops, house concerts, and more. In his book *Encounters*, John tells stories of his life; stories of traveling the world, singing, and sharing the Gospel message of hope. We enjoyed reading *Encounters* and were thoroughly entertained, encouraged, and inspired! We were reminded that everyone can use their God-given gifts to be a good influence on others. Our friend John is making a difference in the world and we know you’ll be blessed by his stories!”

- Sharon White and Ricky Skaggs

“I have known John Schmid for a long time and it is my great pleasure to highly recommend his book on his life’s work of music and ministry. I’ve had the privilege over the years to do a number of his recordings; not only is he a great music entertainer, but he can leave you spellbound with his stories. It can be a family gathering, a business banquet, or a concert with hundreds; his message for Jesus Christ has never changed. He brings hope, laughter, and inspiration to hundreds of prison inmates as he shares his ministry in song. John’s organization, Common Ground Ministries, has for years sponsored correspondence Bible studies for men and women in prison in the state of Ohio. What a great brother! You will find these stories very interesting and inspirational.”

- Marvin Beachy
President of Gospel Echoes Team

“With wit and honesty, John Schmid provides story after poignant story of the people he ministers to in our nation’s prisons. Some of the stories in *Encounters* are as warm as summer rain while others are as bracing as ice water. This is an exceptionally rich and varied collection that, besides the author’s prison experiences, includes his friends and local acquaintances such as basketball star Freeman.

John Schmid understands and puts into practice Jesus’ command, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ I love this book.”

- **David Kline**

*Amish minister, farmer, author of *Scratching the Woodchuck* and *Great Possessions**

“John is a great storyteller and is a master at connecting with his audiences. From the man in the pew to the one who has never darkened the door of a church, John brings a relevant message. Drawing from history and current life/ministry events, this book gives you a front row seat to what God is doing through John and Common Ground Ministries.”

- **Glendon Bender**

Serving with Gospel Echoes Team Prison Ministry since 1980

JOHN SCHMID

Encounters

IN & OUT OF PRISON WITH
JOHN SCHMID

2006 - 2016

JPV  PRESS

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Lydia, my faithful wife of 38 years, who endured (and even encouraged) my travels, notions, crazy ideas, and shares my love for Jesus and the desire to make Him known. Also to Adam, Amelia and Katie, my dear children, who were victims of all of the above and still love Jesus and me.

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ENCOUNTERS

Foreword

“I first met John Schmid in 1972 in Berlin, OH, at Berlin Mennonite Church; that’s where our friendship began. John and Lydia had returned home from the mission field and Common Ground Ministries was born. He also started serving as a prison evangelist for Wingfield Ministries. John and I have had the privilege of ministering in many places, not only here in America, but around the world. I have so many fond memories of being with John that it would take another book to tell all those stories. I am sure a few of them will be included in this book.

I always enjoy receiving John’s newsletter. Not only does it help me know how to pray for him and his ministry, but I always enjoy his stories. John is a great storyteller. I think he learned from the greatest storyteller that ever lived, Jesus. People can argue about lots of things, but they can’t argue

about your story because it's yours. I know each of the stories will not only be enjoyable to read, but they will bring encouragement and hope to your life, and each of the stories will honor our Savior.

Evangelists are a rare breed; maybe that's why I like John so much. We're both a little crazy, but I hope and believe we are both crazy in love with Jesus. Our hearts' desire is to see other people come to know Him and experience the joy that we have in following our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So grab a cup of coffee or tea, find a comfortable chair, and enjoy this book. I hope you all enjoy it so much that you will buy copies and give them to your friends. As you read it, remember that there are other stories to be written. I hope you will be motivated to pray for and support my friend John Schmid. He's going where many people can't go, won't go, or are afraid to go, and God is using him to rescue the perishing and care for the dying."

"God has not lost his enthusiasm for the great commission."

- Theologian Carl FH Henry

Written by: Steve Wingfield

CEO and Evangelist of the Steve Wingfield Evangelistic Association & Victory Weekend

ENCOUNTERS

Preface

Country Music legend George Hamilton IV once approached Willie Nelson from behind, put his hands on Willie's shoulders, and began singing,

"I want a girl..."

and Willie finished the line,

"... just like the girl that married dear old dad."

George said, "No, not that one! The one you wrote for me:

'I want a girl, whose heart has been broken by a love that has passed her by...'"

Willie turned around with eyebrows raised and an inquisitive look on his face. "Did I write that?!"

As I read through these monthly stories that I supposedly wrote, I find myself asking, “Did I write that?!” Some of the stories jog my memory, some take me right back to the place and time they happened, some I tell often from on stage or behind the pulpit (or at the coffee shop), and some I have to ask, “Did that really happen?” I’m rumored to have a good memory, but I’m beginning to wonder...

These stories remind me that maybe my life did make a difference. Isn’t that what we want? To make a difference (for good) in someone’s life? I think I started writing *stories* instead of *monthly reports* after reading the weekly blogs by good friend – and now New York Times bestseller – Ira Wagler. His stuff is easy to read. Why? They are real life stories. They really happened. And he wrote them well. And because of Ira, I now try to do that.

I hope you enjoy these true to life stories. That really happened. (That’s another thing I learned from Ira. Incomplete sentences. Just like we talk.) They were written to inform, inspire, educate, spur, and help “our people” to not forget the work of Common Ground Ministries. We go to prisons, churches, camps, living rooms... wherever we are invited to sing and share. May God bless you as you read.

ENCOUNTERS



Time...

1949, 1967, 1980, 1985, 1987, 1989, 2005, 2006!

In December, we think about winter and Christmas and the end of the year. In January, we think about... *time*. The Bible tells me that I was allotted a certain amount of time the day I was born, and when that time is up, I will go home, where “time is no more.” We are also admonished in the Bible to redeem the time, make good use of it, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). The modern seminars tell us to schedule every minute, because time is money and each of us has the same amount – 24 hours each day.

In the year 2005, and especially these last six weeks, I was reminded again of the brevity and uncertainty of life and how quickly things can change. On Nov. 20, my 26-year-old nephew was killed in a car accident, and two weeks later, my 90-year-old friend Ed Maxwell died. One was tragic and one was “normal,” or at least Ed had lived “threescore and ten” years and then some. But even 90 years can seem like a short time when viewed from the perspective of eternity. On Christmas Day, my 81-year-old dad pulled up to our door to unload some presents, and then was going to pull back down the hill while it was still light. He didn’t want to back down the hill in the dark. I did it for him, and then backed the car up the hill so he could leave in the dark going forward, but it made me think, how time changes! It seems like not long ago he was showing me how to drive a tractor, and then a car, and he was always the one in control – and now I am helping him. Two years ago my son Adam and I went for a jog and for the first time I not only didn’t have to slow the pace for him, but I couldn’t keep up. Time changes, roles reverse, and how quickly life moves on. It won’t be long before Adam will move my car for me so I can leave in the dark. I learned several years ago that I wasn’t bulletproof, and slowly I am realizing that I am no longer young. I am more and more grateful for good health, and more grateful for each day of life. I want to redeem the time, make every day count; to look back on each day and be able to say, “I did my best.” If God blows the whistle today, I don’t want to have to say, “Oh, if only I had done such and such yet...”

I am writing this the week between Christmas and New Year’s and am hoping to use this time to review 2005 and evaluate

my life and work. I then want to plan and visualize 2006 and see what I can do make my life and ministry count. And yes, I am even going to make some resolutions (plans). Dr. Dennis Kinlaw reminds us that we can look back at 2005 and see the undeserved goodness of God, and we can look forward with joyous anticipation because He is faithful! Friends, life is short and uncertain, time flies... Make every day count. Until the next *time*...

January - 2006

Alcatraz

In its day, no word was more feared among prisoners than the word, “Alcatraz.” A mile and a half from San Francisco in the cold, swirling waters of the San Francisco Bay, it was a fortress prison known as “The Rock.” It was usually cold and damp. The cells were never warm. It was America’s first super-max prison. Escape was almost impossible. Not only was it an impenetrable physical structure, but also the tough warden and guards had never heard of prison reform. Infractions were dealt with by beatings, isolation, starvation, and extra-hard labor. Many men, including America’s most famous criminal, Al Capone, went crazy there. Very little news ever got to the press from Alcatraz. These were America’s incorrigibles, and the system would keep them safely away from the public. On top of all that, the view of San Francisco from The Rock was fantastic. Cars and trolleys could be seen moving in the streets, and if the wind and weather were just right, the

prisoners could hear the voices and singing of people in the city, so there was a constant reminder of what their crimes had deprived them. That was almost as hard to bear as the beatings, according to several ex-cons.

Lydia and I had the privilege of visiting America's most famous prison. It's been closed since 1963. As we walked the corridors of the cell blocks on a self-guided walking tour, we viewed the cells of America's most wanted: Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Robert Stroud (The Bird Man of Alcatraz), and Frank Morris, who escaped with two others through the ventilator and was never heard of again. From 1934 to 1963 Alcatraz housed the criminals who couldn't follow the rules elsewhere and were subjected to regimen meant to control their rebellious ways and crush their resistance. I was reminded that crime is not a modern phenomenon. Men schemed and plotted and killed and cut corners in the 1930's and '40s, just like they do today. Every society throughout history has had to deal with people who did not follow the rules. A sad commentary on the human race is that the first murder in history was committed by the first man ever born on planet earth. (Genesis 4:8)

Looking at it from a theological point of view, mankind has a major problem: sin. There is only one solution: Jesus. On earth we have prisons; in eternity there is a horrible place that the Bible calls Hell. As far as I'm concerned, a prison is a taste of hell, but even at a place like Alcatraz (some called it Hellcatraz), there was still hope, at least for the next life. I am more convinced and committed to bring the message of the gospel of Jesus to the least, the last, and the lost in prison

(and anywhere else I am invited to sing or speak). If you are reading this, you are a part of this ministry. Thank you. (And if you get a chance, visit Alcatraz.)

SAN QUENTIN...ALMOST

One of the reasons we are in California is the opportunity I had to be a part of a chapel program at the famous San Quentin Prison. Everything was approved – for the wrong date! I called the chaplain and he was working on changing it when two days before the chapel service, a prisoner stabbed a guard and the whole prison went on lockdown – no movement, no outsiders, no nothing! Service cancelled. Even if he had scheduled the correct date from the beginning, it would have been cancelled. Ironically, I got the word from the chaplain while I was touring Alcatraz. Sometimes you're the windshield; sometimes you're the bug. (P.S. This whole trip is being paid for by Smucker's Harness Shop, Narvon, PA.)

February - 2006

A Trip To Germany

We visited daughter Amy at Bodenseehof Bible School in Friedrichshafen, Germany. I was favorably impressed with the spirit and the teaching of the school, which is also known as "Fackeltragers," or, Torchbearers. It is a British system of lectures and lots of reading. We attended a few lectures with Amy, took a few day trips (Salzburg, Austria; Neuschwanstein Castle), and also a five-day trip to visit friends I had met when I was there with the USO in the late '70's.

I discovered that my recording, *In Dutch*, is making the rounds in linguistic circles there, and also among musicians who are trying to preserve the Palatinate dialect. They are very interested in the fact that a group of people still speak a German dialect in America. I was invited to Dr. Michael Werner's house in Mainz (he is the editor of a Pennsylvania Dutch newspaper, *Hiwwa wie Driwwa*), to talk about Dutch songs and sing with Palatinate musicians Paul Reinig and Peter Braun. We stayed up way past my bedtime, singing and playing music. Their Pfalz dialect is very similar to Pennsylvania Dutch, so we understood each other very well.

I was interested in looking up my roots, but since I don't know the village where great-great grandfather Adam Schmid came from, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, especially since Schmid (with its various spellings) is one of the three most common names in Germany. His obituary says he was born in Carbunda, Baden, Germany. The problem is, no one has ever heard of such a town. However, we did know where some of Lydia's ancestors came from, so we went to Langendorf and saw the ancestral home of her great-great-great Grandfather, Daniel Bender. The lady who showed us around invited us to stay at her home, the oldest house in town, built in 1632! We thanked her, but instead, we headed for Mengerhausen, the village where the Gingerich ancestors were living when they left for America in 1833. Although we didn't know which house was theirs, we saw the mill where they worked and we also visited the Waldeck castle (nearby) where the Gingerichs and two Swartzentruber families farmed the Prince's royal farm until 1833.

The apostle Paul talks about “endless genealogies” and how futile they are, so I want to be careful not to go overboard on the subject. I am, however, grateful for the chance to see the land of my forefathers and to appreciate what they went through and the risk they took in crossing the ocean, back when 20% of the passengers died enroute. (Would you travel with an airline that advertised: “80% guarantee of arriving alive!”?) Many of our ancestors came here with only what they could carry, and some even less than that: some were sold as indentured servants (slaves) for seven years to pay their passage! What freedom and opportunity I have because of their dreams and courage! God has given me a “goodly heritage” and I want to honor Him by being faithful. We had a great trip! We saw several ancestors and one descendant.

UPDATE: I have learned that Adam Schmid came from Koenigsbach, near Karlsruhe.

March - 2006

He is Risen!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

April 16 is Easter. For the last several prison services in March, I have been ending with an Easter song and some comments about the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is undoubtedly the most significant event that ever happened on planet Earth! The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! Because Christ died in my place, I can have my sins forgiven. Because

He rose from the dead, I can have eternal life. I tell prisoners that because Jesus lived, died, and rose again from the dead, I have the audacity to come to a prison (or the First Church downtown, or a company banquet...) and confidently proclaim that Jesus Christ can change your life.

If the resurrection were not true, I would be pretty stupid to go to prison chapels when I could be home with my family and friends. In March, I missed my high school's appearance at the state basketball finals because of a chapel service, and because I was in prison, I couldn't go to the airport with my wife to pick up my daughter who was coming home after seven months in Germany. I have missed other events at home because of being in prison. I'm not complaining. I could have scheduled differently if I had been more alert. I could have canceled when the schedule at home changed. What I am trying to say is: because Jesus rose from the dead, and because He called me to do what I'm am doing, I can look the prisoners in the eye and tell them, "I'd rather be here than anywhere else in the world." The only thing I love more than going to prison chapels is... *leaving the prison!* I love to *leave* prisons! I love freedom, especially the freedom that comes through Jesus Christ. I will tell you the same thing I tell prisoners: because the Bible is true, and because Jesus is alive, I can say to anyone who reads this letter – "Jesus Christ can change your life!" He is risen! He is risen indeed!

PRAYER OF JABEZ AUTHOR AT KIDRON

Last week I had the privilege to be on the platform with Bruce Wilkinson, author of *The Prayer of Jabez*, at the P. Graham Dunn Dealer's Show. And even more significant for me, he is

the founder of *Walk Through The Bible Ministries*. WTB is a two-day conference on the Bible. After I had graduated from seminary, I had the chance to be a part of a Walk Through The Bible weekend, and I couldn't believe how it made the Bible come alive for me; it put everything together! I had studied theology, philosophy, and homiletics, etc., for three years and I thought I had a pretty good grip on the scriptures, but Wilkinson's simple and fun memory method gave me a new handle on God's overall plan as outlined in the Bible. Last week he challenged us to be open to God's blessing. What a privilege and inspiration to get to know this servant of God and to sit under his teaching! Oh yes, and I also got to be with Peter and LeAnne Dunn, who left the next day for Bodensee-hof, Germany, to visit his daughter – the one who talked our Amy into attending.

April - 2006

Israel

My daughter Amy and I were in Jerusalem last week when you should have been reading this newsletter, but I didn't get it written because I was in Jerusalem ☺. What a trip! We walked where Jesus walked. (Well, sometimes we ran where Jesus walked!)

Of all the amazing places and things that we saw, let me share a lesson I learned from the Western Wall and its builder, Herod the Great. It used to be called the "Wailing Wall" because Jews

from all over the world would come to pray here at the only original part of the temple that survived the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. In their prayers, they would mourn the fact that Jerusalem fell and Israel was gone. Bystanders who heard their wails began to call it the Wailing Wall, but in 1948, when Israel became a country again after 1,878 years, the Jews began to call it the Western Wall. No more wailing.

Our group was able to enter and walk through the tunnel that was dug along the wall to the north. Archeologists were trying to see just how long the original wall was and how deep it went. They found that it is almost 1/4 mile long! I was fascinated. The foundation stones upon which the wall rests are 45 feet long, 11 feet high and 11 feet wide. Solid stone! Hundreds of them, each one larger than a Greyhound bus and weighing 628 tons! By comparison, the largest stone in the pyramids of Egypt weighs 50 tons. A shaft was dug to see how far down the base of this wall is, and it went down 70 feet before it hit bedrock! Herod the Great built this wall 60 feet high with these huge stones, somehow lifting them up and putting them in place without modern cranes and mechanical equipment! We saw a short movie that tried to explain how the stones were quarried and moved, but experts are still baffled as to how it was done.

The lesson I wanted to share is about two builders. Our guide pointed out that Herod the Great built at least six palaces, several fortresses, 9 Olympic sized swimming pools, roads, aqueducts, cities... He built the city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean, but it had no harbor, so he created a 40-acre harbor by making breakwater walls of cement, poured in water close

to 100 feet deep! And this was 40 BC! There is evidence of his buildings all over Israel. We visited his amazing palace and the fortress of Masada near the Dead Sea, which was so formidable that 70 years after his death, about 1,000 Jewish zealots were able to hold off the powerful Roman 10th Legion (20,000 soldiers) for over 1-1/2 years before they fell.

Herod the Great was the greatest builder the Middle East has ever known. But as powerful and great as Herod was in his day, Ray Vander Laan asks: What do you remember about Herod? Answer: He killed the babies. He was cruel and ruthless. He murdered two of his own sons and two of his wives. A Roman emperor said it was better to be Herod's pig than his son.

By contrast, Jesus of Nazareth never built a physical structure. He never wrote a book. He died a criminal's death. And yet He is the one known as the Rock. Those who build their lives on Him are promised stability, joy, security, and eternal life. In fact, the Bible calls those who don't build their lives on Him, "fools."

I am still amazed at Herod's buildings. I can't believe how huge those stones are. I thought we knew something about building, because here in Amish country we can start building an 80' by 40' timber frame barn in the morning and be milking cows in it by 5:30 PM. But Herod's accomplishments blow me away.

But where is Herod today? Just 3 miles from his most elaborate palace in Herodium was a cave (stable) where a peasant family had a baby named Jesus. He challenged the people to follow Him. In Luke 21, even the disciples were smitten by

the majesty of the building that Herod built. Jesus said, “*Follow Me.*”

Here’s the lesson: build your life on the Rock. Not the amazing rocks of this world (Herod, this world, job, fame, fortune...) but on Jesus. In AD 4000, if tourists are looking at the ruins of our society, they will be amazed, but the culture will be gone. Where will you be? If you built your life on things of this world, you will be where Herod is, but if Jesus is your Rock, you will be with Him. Forever! Life without end, Amen!

Build your life on Jesus!

May - 2006

Ireland

I am writing this from Belfast, Northern Ireland (June 8, 2006). We (daughter Katie and I) just returned from Dunfanaghy, County Donegal, which is in the North of the Republic of Ireland, and we are now in Northern Ireland. (It took a while for me to realize that Northern Ireland and Ireland are two different countries.) Ten of us were in the village of Dunfanaghy with missionaries Alan and Rosemary Armstrong, helping them to establish Bible studies in neighboring villages. On day one we walked through selected areas, distributing invitations for people to receive the Jesus film, the most viewed film in history. (Over 800 million people have viewed it.) The next day we went to the same houses to actually give them the film. They could view it over the weekend and we would

be back on Monday to pick it up and ask what they thought of it. It was a way of making contacts for Alan and Rosemary. I didn't think we had much success (most people thought we were Jehovah Witnesses or some other cult), but last night (6/7/06) when we got home, we discovered that someone had left a phone message for the Armstrongs; "Thank you for the literature you left in my mail slot. I would like to talk to you about my spiritual life..." This was the first such call the Armstrongs have received in two years. Maybe something did happen.

The other method to make our presence known was through concerts. In the eight days we were there, I had seven concerts in various places – concert halls, community centers, churches, and a hotel. Tom and Noirin DeLasa, local residents and friends of the Armstrongs, helped to arrange several of the concerts. I discovered that knowing a lot of Johnny Cash songs is a free ticket to winning the hearts of the Irish people in this area. These were advertised as "Country Gospel" concerts, so I sang country songs and I soon learned that if I sing Cash songs, I can say whatever I want to about the gospel and they will listen. Larry Skrant was with us and each night after I sang a few prison songs and explained that I am a prison minister, he would give his testimony of being transformed from being a three-time convicted felon to an ordained minister and the founder of Changed Life Ministries. Hearts were touched as he gave credence to the message of the songs. The local missionaries were thrilled with the response and the contacts that were made. There was so much positive feedback that this morning when we filled up with gas (whoops! I mean "petrol") before we left Dunfanaghy, the owner of the station

came out and wanted to tell me how much he enjoyed the concert last week. This is an area of beautiful people; an area that is religious but in need of an understanding of the true gospel. We already have an invitation to come back, with the promise that the concerts will be even fuller because of all the positive buzz. Pray for Donegal and the Armstrongs.

June - 2006

Happiness and Security

During the Wingfield Encounter Festival in Martinsburg, PA, last week, Power Team Member Jonathan Caldwell told us about the time he was a bodyguard for a famous rapper (singer). He was on the singer's private jet as they flew from his mansion on the East Coast to one of his mansions on the West Coast. During the flight, when the singer realized that Jonathon did not even know who he was, he let down his guard and turned to him to speak. He had several gold necklaces around his neck and a Rolex watch on his wrist. The value of the jewelry he had on was worth more than my house. He sighed as he looked at bodyguard Jonathon and said, "There's got to be more than this..."

Several years ago at a Bill Glass prison weekend, I had the privilege to be on stage with heavyweight boxer Ernie Shavers. He lost the Heavyweight Championship fight to Mohammad Ali, but Ali said that Shavers hit him so hard that it "shook me back to my ancestors in Africa." Ernie said that with all

the friends, money, fame, and the physical fitness of a professional boxer, he of all people should have been secure, but he wasn't. He felt more insecure and fearful than he did when he was young and poor. It wasn't until he committed his life to Jesus Christ that he began to sleep all night and not worry about losing his possessions. "Now I am secure," he said.

I remember talking to a prisoner at Mansfield Prison who was holding a coffee cup as he told me of his privileged upbringing with maids and chauffeurs and possessions. He held up his coffee cup and said; "Now all I own is this coffee cup and the things in my foot locker, but for the first time in my life I am happy. I have shamed my family and lost my freedom and all of my possessions, but now I have Jesus. I'd rather have Jesus and nothing else than all the wealth and privilege without Him."

I think what I am trying to say is that as necessary as money and possessions are, they are limited in their ability to bring happiness and fulfillment. The world and its possessions can be very alluring. In fact, even in my own life, every time I think I have this in perspective I see that bumper sticker that says, "Lord, help me prove that winning the lottery wouldn't ruin me." It's just hard for someone in my economic position to believe that the *large life* is as empty as they say it is, but the truth is that only Jesus satisfies. There is no security in this world. Living is hazardous to your health. Life is risky. Our only security is Jesus. Ask the rapper, or Ernie Shavers, or the once-wealthy prisoner. They've been there, done that. Anne Graham Lotz says it best; "Just give me Jesus."

July - 2006

What is Important?

I had coffee last week with a school friend whom I hadn't seen in over thirty years. After telling each other that we hadn't changed a bit (right!) and how good we each looked, we talked about families and careers and what have you done in the last thirty years? When I asked why he wasn't a football coach like he wanted to be when we were young, he said, "Well, I guess I sold my soul to the company I was with. I have worked 10 to 12 hours a day ever since 1971." I asked him, "Did it pay?" I figured a man who worked that hard for so long would be rewarded by being financially secure. He answered, almost expressionless, "No, not at all. It didn't pay." Whether he meant it didn't pay financially or family-wise (he was divorced), or that it had derailed his original plans for his life, I don't know. He had a far-away look in his eyes which gave me the feeling that if he could do it over, he would be a teacher and a coach, which is what he really wanted to do.

FOUR DAYS LATER: I talked to a friend that I hadn't seen for 25 years. He had contacted me after hearing one of my CDs and was complimenting the songs and their message. He is a successful lawyer in a Midwest city, and after comparing notes on each of our families and our financial situations, one of his comments was, "All I do is sue people. What you are doing is helping them in an eternal way." He then went on to say that maybe some of the career choices he made when he was young were based on his youth, ambition, inexperience, and the times (Vietnam, late 60's, etc.). If he could do it over, maybe he would realize that what he used to think was important was not so important after all. His pursuit of success had

cost him his family and I got the feeling that this friend, whom I had thought was so successful, was reevaluating what was really important in life.

Two friends – out of the blue – within four days of each other, made comments that made me ask myself again, “What is really important?” In our task-oriented society, we can get “*worried and upset about many things...*” But as Jesus went on to tell Martha in Luke 10, “*...only one thing is [important]. Mary has chosen what is better...*” Steve Wingfield boiled it down to Faith, Family, and Friends. One of his goals is to live in such a way that there will be at least 12 friends at his funeral who don’t look at their watches. Rev. Dwight Mason summarized it as the difference between “*...making a living and making a life.*” Jesus said, “*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things [the necessities of life] will be given to you as well.*” (Matt 6:33)

If you want to live a life without regrets and “what ifs,” I have some 3,000-year-old advice from a wise king: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.*” (Prov. 3:5, 6)

I have been encouraged to continue to sing and speak about Jesus and not worry about “many things” (I confess, now and then I worry about “things”). Allow me to rephrase Prov. 3:5,6 – “Instead of allowing our culture to guide you, seek godly advice and pray about every decision and God will keep you from making decisions that you will regret.”

August - 2006

Family Advice From Willie Nelson

“MAMAS, DON’T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS...”

Adam and I just returned from a ten day trip to Wapiti, WY, to see where he worked as a wrangler the last two years, and just to spend some time together before he heads for college. And yes, Adam’s mama let him grow up to be a cowboy! Willie Nelson would say, “I tried to tell you...” After two seasons (a total of about six months) of saddling and unsaddling five to ten horses a day for the hunters, and “wrangling” (rounding up) about 30 others on free range, I noticed that Adam really knows how to handle horses. He is a cowboy. (What a funny language – a man who handles horses is a “cow” boy and a person who works with cows is a dairyman or a milkmaid.)

We rode the 24 miles back to Ron Dube’s Mountain Creek Camp, which is in the Shoshone National Forest and is southwest of Cody, just a few miles east of the southeast corner of Yellowstone National Park. (Did you follow that?) It is a designated wilderness area, so no chainsaws or motorized devices are allowed. We cleared the trails of fallen trees (there was a forest fire in 1988) so that when hunting season begins on Sept. 1, the guides can get their horses and hunters to the good hunting spots. We used an axe and a crosscut saw. I remember a crosscut saw hanging in our barn when I was young, but we moved before I was old enough to use it much. But even so, cutting downed trees and firewood at the camp with a cross-

cut brought back memories of a farm house back a long lane where I was raised until I was 11 years old.

Loren Neuenschwander is the camp cook and his son Nick is a guide. They left the camp on Sunday and Adam and I stayed until Tuesday because a camp cannot be left unattended overnight in a wilderness area. The next morning, as I was praying and walking around the beautiful meadow area with mountains and forest all around (with my hand near my bear spray, like a quick draw artist), I began to pray for prisoners that I could remember. As I looked around at the majestic Glacier Pass and over to the Bull Range Peak and all the other mountain peaks that Adam could call by name, it dawned on me: *What could be more opposite of a prison than where I am right now?* Even with bear tracks and the sounds of coyotes and wolves at night. I was looking at everything that represented freedom to me: wide open spaces, a million acres of forest, mountains (we rode up to those places in the two days we were alone), no schedule or pressure... A prison is a confined space with bells that ring before your cell door opens and bells to tell you when to eat, when to sleep, when to go to recreation, when to clear the yard...

And then another thought occurred to me – you don't have to be in prison to be in prison. What I just described is what many working people experience every day! If I remember correctly between naps in my psychology class, the greatest human need after security is freedom. In America, the cowboy symbolizes freedom, among other things. As a student of the Bible, I know that true freedom only comes through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. *"Ye shall know the truth*

[Jesus] and the truth shall set you free.” (John 8:32) So after one of the most fun, hardest, *free-est* trips I have ever taken, let me contradict Willie Nelson: “Mamas, make sure your babies grow up to be cowboys (free).”

September - 2006

Variety; The Spice of Life

One of the more interesting aspects of the type of ministry God has called me to is the amazing variety of situations in which I find myself. After starting the month of September singing on the square in Berlin, OH, I was asked to help an Amish employer host a wedding reception for one of his Mexican workers. There were about 100 in attendance. It was the first time I ever sang the Dutch song, “Maydly Vit du Hayara?” with a Spanish translation (Me Hija, quieres casarse?). I gave a meditation in Spanish without translation because my Amish friend said he wanted to know what a non-Amish visitor felt like at his church. (Amish services are in German.) I think he now has a feel for it. ☺

In the afternoon of that same day, I was getting ready to sing at the Fredericksburg Homecoming when I got a call from Perry Chupp. “I bought two tickets to be at Beachfest in Long Beach, MS, tomorrow. Do you want to go?” In other words, your name is on one of the tickets and in this terrorist era, you can’t change it. So the day after the Amish/Spanish program

and the Fredericksburg Homecoming, I was on stage with Randy Travis in Mississippi! I didn't sing with him, but, hey! I was on the same stage! Beachfest was a three-day evangelistic event put on by the Steve Wingfield team for the hard-hit victims of Hurricane Katrina.

After two days in a row at Trumbull Correctional near Youngstown, OH, I found myself at Diamondback Prison in Watonga, OK, at the invitation of Darwin Hartman, pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Hydro, OK. I performed two concerts at his church as well as participating on Sunday morning, and then we went to Great Plains Prison in Hinton, OK, where every one of the prisoners at the chapel service was from Hawaii! There is not enough prison space in Hawaii, so they come to Oklahoma.

On the 15th of September I sang at the Gospel Echoes/Common Ground Freedom Rally at London Prison. I left the prison early to be a part of a benefit concert at the Helmuth farm in Plain City and then drove to Cleveland that night to leave the next day for a Transport for Christ Retreat in Muskegon, MI. From there I flew to Denver, CO, where I met up with Lydia, and we attended a Ministry/Marriage retreat at Sonscape Retreats in Divide, CO. As I write this, I still have concerts at the Amish Farm in Berlin, the Amish Flea Market in Walnut Creek, and the Methodist Church in West Lebanon. In the month of September, we ministered in ten concerts, four churches, six prisons, and various meetings (breakfasts, lunches, church meetings, etc.) in six different states. We were told at the retreat in Colorado that we probably need to slow down, so we are looking into that.

As We Forgive...

We were all shocked at the tragic news of a school shooting in an Amish school in Nickel Mines, PA, on Oct. 2. Of all the places and of all the people to choose, this cowardly pervert chose an elementary school of defenseless Amish children, ages 6-14, to terrorize and then murder. This act of terror would be shocking no matter whom the victims would be, but to target a group of people who would not resist because of age, isolation, and because of their belief system makes this monster seem even more despicable. And to make matters even worse, consider that this was a man that many of the children knew and trusted. In the Amish community, one of the most trusted outsiders is the milkman. He is on their farm every other day. He brings the news. He becomes a friend and a confidant. And this “trusted” one came to rape, rob, and pillage. So now on top of the physical and emotional scars and nightmares that will haunt these children (and the adults) the rest of their lives, they have to deal with the fact that one of their most trusted “friends” became a demon. Can they ever trust anyone again?

As unbelievable and horrible as this act was, even more amazing is the Christ-like manner in which the Amish community has dealt with it. Their forgiveness of the murderer and their lack of malice toward his family has baffled the world and convicted the church. The Amish leaders refused to set up a fund from all the generous donations that poured in from around the world unless the killer’s widow was also included. (Can you imagine what this man did to his own wife and children?)

I wrote a sympathy card to the families. After expressing my sympathy to the families, I said, *“You have represented your church well. You have represented the Christian faith well. You made Jesus look good to the world. The news reporters are speechless, and the world is taking notice. May God bless you.”*

It’s not easy to forgive such an atrocious act, but through Christ, it’s not impossible. I know of another tragic case where a girl was murdered. Her devastated family has filed lawsuits and blamed this person and that department. There have been articles in the paper about their grief and bitterness. They simply cannot get over it. Frankly, I would have felt the same way. But this Amish community has given me a new look at an old truth. *“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* (Matt. 6:14, 15)

In other words, if we want freedom, if we want relief, if we want forgiveness for ourselves, if we want *eternal life*, we must follow the way of Jesus. He came to forgive. The most innocent victim in all of world history looked down at His perpetrators from the instrument of torture and death and said, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing.”

Pray for the Amish community at Nickel Mines. Their reaction to this horrible tragedy has made the world (and the church) take notice and say, “Now, that’s Christianity!” They still need our support. Thank them for reminding us that no matter what happens in our lives, God is in control. Thank them for showing us how Christ would have reacted. Thank them for representing us well.

Silent Night

It's that time of the year again! We had a wonderful Thanksgiving! All the children were home (Adam from EMU, Amy from Rosedale, and Katie all the way from Hiland), I went deer hunting (no deer), we ate turkey with friends and relatives, went to my Mom and Dad's place, the Ohio State Buckeyes are #1... What more could a person ask? And now we look to the season when we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christmas is a favorite time of the year for me. I love snow (until mid-February – then spring becomes my favorite time of the year). I enjoy the family traditions and gatherings. I love the Christmas carols. This time of year I get to be at many company Christmas banquets, and this is the easiest time of the year for a singer/performer to bring up the subject of Jesus in a concert setting.

In February, while visiting our daughter Amy in Germany, Lydia and I had the privilege to be in Oberndorf, Austria, where in 1818 at the St Nikolas Church, Franz Gruber first sang "Silent Night" (Stille Nacht). The organ had broken down (mice in the bellows) and it was Christmas Eve, one of the most important days of the church year. In Europe, the big Christmas celebration is not Christmas morning, but the night before. The annual Christmas Eve service held in the Catholic Church is called the "Christ Mass," which is where we get our English word, "Christmas." With not much time until the service and nothing open on Christmas Eve, Franz Gruber brought out his new poem and Joseph Mohr put it to music.

Gruber wanted a simple tune so the whole congregation could sing it without much rehearsal (actually, without any rehearsal). As the simple song was sung at that Christ Mass service with Joseph Mohr accompanying with his guitar (a very undignified instrument, especially for a church), people seemed to sense already that this was a special song. It has probably become the most beloved Christmas Carol of all time, and crosses many cultures. And it was written and sung because of a crisis. The organ is broke, time is limited, it's Christmas Eve... what are we going to do? As a performer, I know the feeling of last minute panic when things don't go right, and the people are already gathering for the event

Many times during a concert, "Silent Night" is the song that I sing to transition from fun, secular songs to begin to tell the real meaning of Christmas. I have never seen a frowning face in the crowd while singing that beloved carol (although I have seen tears).

This Christmas, may we be reminded that in the rush and hustle of shopping and planning, and amidst the uncertainty of world events, and in the crisis of daily living, we can sing, "*All is calm, all is bright...*" because "*Jesus, Lord at thy birth*" is in our hearts. I can "*sleep in Heavenly peace*" in the midst of the storm.

Merry Christmas!

December - 2006