

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

Today (Sunday, July 13, 1997), our minister, Charlie McMahan, finished a two-part series entitled "Climbing Your Mt. Everest" - a somewhat corny title, perhaps, but startlingly appropriate. He had finished reading the book *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer about the March 1996 ill-fated expedition to Mount Everest. As many of you may know, eight people, including Krakauer's guide, died on the descent when a storm overcame them.

One of the lessons Charlie pulled from that book is that if you are going to dedicate yourself to a goal, you must be able to answer the question "Why?" before you begin. Otherwise you may share Krakauer's experience when he stood atop the summit, gazed all around from the ceiling to the floor of the world, and felt - nothing. It was a "thin air moment" - there was not enough oxygen to allow his brain to deal with much more than simple motor functions such as moving and breathing.

At the end of the series today, Charlie made a simple point about trying to achieve success: How do you know when you are overreaching? Charlie's answer: When you are clawing rather than working your way to success.

To me, being a songwriter is a constant succession of moments experienced by anyone who has taken someone by the hand to see a wonder of beauty. It is that uniquely human drive to share that keeps me going. True, much of what I write is fictional, but it is securely based on a truth born of common experience; were it not truth, the audience would not respond.

I believe that the songwriters' fascination with being human is our common source and identity for our craft. Also, to me

the climb up the songwriting mountain is meaningless unless I take others with me. For that reason, I have come to work as hard as your workshop leader as I do as a songwriter. I have found that there is an incredible reciprocal effect when I share with others what I have learned - or am in the process of learning - along the way. I do not believe that I would have climbed as far as I have if it were not for our NSAI workshop.

But a principle tenet of our workshop is that becoming a successful songwriter will probably be the hardest thing we ever try to do. I have found ways to balance my family, my salaried career, the workshop, and my songwriting career; sometimes it is necessary to allow one of those to tip the scales for a while, but I have always managed to tip the scale back before everything slides off the plate. I am therefore often merciless in exhorting all of you to attempt to do the same, because I've learned that none of us will advance in our songwriting careers without that kind of effort.

But there are some writers I've come to know along the way for whom the struggle even without the songwriting is too much. I've read your messages on the Internet and listened in person to what often sound like confessions. You beat yourselves up because you must so often turn away from songwriting, and then you feel that you have squandered something or somehow failed to measure up.

Charlie's message is, I believe, valuable especially for songwriters. If success doesn't come naturally - albeit with hard work - then perhaps it is wrong, at least at this time. If becoming a successful songwriter means clawing your way up the side of your mountain no matter what obstacles

fall in your way, then you may find at the summit only a "thin air moment" awaiting you.

By no means am I negating the *craft* of songwriting and the necessity of mastering it. And I do not mean to suggest that success will come "naturally" when in fact it comes only with persistent face-to-face networking, the eager welcome of criticism, and much more disappointment than jubilation. But if you must set the world aside to climb one mountain, you may find that your very success becomes an overwhelming failure.

To the best of my knowledge, no songwriters I know personally have lost their marriages or their families due to songwriting. But I have heard horror tales in Nashville of successful songwriters who enjoy no other success in their lives at all.

I am not suggesting that *anyone* give up the struggle, but it is good to stop and ask yourself if you truly know *why* you are struggling. Is it simply the challenge coupled with a fierce desire not to ever admit failure? Is it an obsession with proving that your investments - monetary, temporal, and sacrificial - will ultimately pay off? Or is it a passionate desire to capture various elements of what we feel as human beings and reflect it back through our respective prisms to the largest audiences we can find? Our service today fin-

ished with a moving performance of a Christian song written by Geoff Moore (with Jeff Silvey) on the occasion of walking through a cemetery. Moore writes, "As I walked among the headstones I wondered who these people were, what kinds of lives they lived, and what was left. I couldn't help but consider my own mortality...."

The song "When All Is Said and Done" is melodically and lyrically one of the most beautiful songs I have ever heard. For those of you for whom a Christian lyric doesn't quite resonate, read it for its more universal message, and think about what it means for you as an aspiring songwriter.

August, 1997 - Jim Melko

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

When the music fades into the past
When my days of life are through
What will be remembered of where I've come
When all is said and done?
Will they say I loved my family
That I was a faithful friend
That I lived to tell of God's own son
When all is said and done
Of how I longed to see the hour
When I would hear that trumpet sound
Rise to see my savior's face
See him smile and say "Well done"
You can forget my name and the songs I've sung
Every rhyme and every tune
But remember the truth of Jesus' love
When all is said and done
When all is said and done....

- Geoff Moore and Jeff Silvey
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