

ALWAYS & forever

Long before Randy Travis became a country music star he was a rebel bent on self-destruction. Drugs, alcohol and fighting fueled his life. But in his early 20s an unexplainable desire to read the Bible began to slowly transform him. So much so, that Travis would eventually leave the booze, drugs and scraps for a life of peace centered on Jesus Christ. Today, he sings country and gospel music, shares his faith, studies the Word and stars in family-friendly movies. Recently, Travis spoke to Managing Editor Kirk Noonan.

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**“EVERY ANSWER
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tpe: As a teen you seemed to be drawn to all the wrong things.

TRAVIS: I grew up in a small town where I ran with a group of kids who were drinking alcohol and using drugs. For me, smoking marijuana was an everyday occurrence. At 14 years old I started singing in clubs, which probably wasn't the best way to get an education. But that was the way I came through.

tpe: So you're a graduate of the school of hard knocks?

TRAVIS: I quit school at 15 and did all sorts of odd jobs. I worked with cattle and horses, did construction work and painted houses, all while staying messed up most of the time.

tpe: The music industry can be a dog-eat-dog world. How did you persevere in the early years?

TRAVIS: Every label turned me down in Nashville two or three times, but I didn't get discouraged. I just figured I could make a living singing and writing country music at some point in my life. But if you would have told me about the record sales, the awards, doing a music ministry, recording gospel albums and the acting jobs I would have said, "Yeah, right!"

tpe: How did you climb out of the rut of drugs and alcohol?

TRAVIS: I met Elizabeth, the woman I would eventually marry, when I was 17. I came from a background of a lot of shouting and screaming, and I thought that was how life was. But when I met her I saw someone who was at peace with everyone. That made me curious, and I wanted to be a better person.

tpe: When did you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior?

TRAVIS: I went to bed one night and just started reading the Bible. I'm sure I had a buzz going at that time because I was still drinking and doing drugs. But I literally felt a peace of mind the next morning. From then on, I read the Bible regularly. After Elizabeth and I married, we moved to Nashville, Tenn., and started going to church.

By my mid-20s I had pretty much stopped just about everything — drinking, smoking, fighting and doing drugs. I had been reading the Bible for several years and knew in my heart I needed to accept Christ.

tpe: What has your faith taught you?

TRAVIS: It's a path you continue to walk down as you read, study, learn and listen to knowledgeable teachers you enjoy learning from.

You can hear someone say something, then you can go and read the Bible and see if they are telling it in the manner it was written in the Bible or not.

tpe: Sounds like reading the Bible is paramount to your faith.

TRAVIS: Every answer you're ever going to need in life is in the Bible. But let's face it; none of us has the intellect to really grasp every detail from Genesis to Revelation.

tpe: Did your career change after you committed your life to Christ?

TRAVIS: My music didn't change at all, but all my life I have really wanted to record gospel albums. We continue to record gospel and country projects.

tpe: Currently you're starring in *The Wager*, which has been shown in hundreds of churches. Do you have the acting bug?

TRAVIS: I'm a singer first, but I do like acting. Michael Steele — the character I play — is an actor and Bible-believing Christian who is nominated for an Academy Award. At the same time, he is cast in a battle between good and evil like Job was. When I read the script I thought it was an interesting idea and I wanted to do it.

tpe: Any consequences for concentrating much of the last decade on gospel music rather than country music?

TRAVIS: We have our first totally country album, *Around the Bend*, coming out on July 15 — that's the first one in the past eight years. But I plan to continue recording both gospel and country albums.

tpe: Why do you enjoy performing gospel music?

TRAVIS: The ministry we get to be a part of. When I am doing gospel music and I am walking on stage, I know I am going to have fun. Music perfection is not always attainable on a live show, and I used to get mad when things went wrong on our live shows — not anymore. I am working with friends, and we are up there having a great time.

tpe: Any experience that stands out above the others regarding the ministry aspect of your gospel performances?

TRAVIS: One night we played "Raise Him Up," and after the performance a big guy approached me. I didn't know what to expect. He told me his son was marry-

ing a woman who had been raped and had become pregnant. He said he had told his son not to marry her, but then he started to cry and said after hearing the song he had changed his mind. He said he would tell his son that he would support that grandchild as if it were his own. I usually always have a quick answer for people, but all I could say to that big guy was, "Thanks for sharing that with me."

tpe: Ministering through your music must be extremely rewarding.

TRAVIS: Many people have come to know the Lord at our performances. I'll never reach as many souls as a Billy Graham, but I am honored and humbled by what we've seen happen. **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

AROUND THE BEND

Over Randy Travis' 25-year career, he has had 22 No. 1 hits, sold more than 21 million albums and won six Grammys. He credits much of his success to his wife who is also his manager. "She has business sense, and I have none," Travis says with a chuckle. "I write songs here and there. She does the business, and she does it well. We have a wonderful partnership."

SCREEN outreach

Travis is one of the founders of Outreach Cinema, which specializes in the promotion and release of films to the faith-based community. *The Wager*, which came out on DVD in May, had its theatrical release — so to speak — in more than 1,500 churches before the movie was available on DVD. Travis says the idea of providing churches with faith-based movies is for them to use the films as evangelistic tools.



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