

Mama's Voice, Through the Years - History

I may be credited with writing the original lyrics, but I was given this song more than created it. This will become clear later.

First, you need to understand that I am not a musician and have no musical ability. In high school, I took two semesters of chorus. Both semesters the chorus director told me my voice was changing. She was a kind person, but perhaps she should have told me the truth. I didn't know that I couldn't sing until my first wife told me to stop singing in church because I was embarrassing her.

I wanted to be part of a rock and roll band in my high school years. To that end, I started taking guitar lessons. I could play the notes, but that's all I could do. Having never seen a band using sheet music while playing, I gave that dream up. Much later in life, my current wife, Leslie and I took ballroom dancing lessons. We thought it would be fun if we could dance at some of the weddings and other events we were attending. I could memorize the dance steps but discovered that I couldn't determine which type of song was being played so I didn't know which steps to use, unless Leslie told me. She also had to count the beat of the song so my steps could be in time with the music. Needless to say, that didn't work very well either.

The Lord gave me some gifts, but music and art are not among them. So how can a guy with no musical talent end up writing lyrics for a song—a Christian song, at that? And more importantly why? Below is how it was created, but why it was me and for what reason I'm still hoping to discover.

The song came to me in Taos MN while staying at a historic inn downtown. The first night I was awakened with a tune and words going through my head. The words were "Through the years" and it was a sweet little tune. I assumed it must have been something I heard in the car on our way out, or something from the past, but I couldn't place it. Then everything changed as after the "Through the years" I started hearing spoken words. The voice was a deep voice similar to that of Johnny Cash. I knew at that point I had never heard the song before.

I have been awoken before with answers to a nagging issue, but never for a song. For instance, I write a column for a monthly publication. I can write about whatever I want and as I am known to do; I often wait until the last minute to write it. Often having no idea what to write about. On the occasions when I am having an especially hard time finding a subject, I will wake up in the middle of the night with the story. I know from experience that one of two things will happen at this point. I will either get up and write it down so I can get some sleep or I will wait it out until I fall asleep. However, I have found that when I wait it out, I often cannot remember it the next morning. This has taught me to get up and write down, even if it is just enough to remember the premise. Sometimes I end up with a complete column.

So that night when this song started to go through my mind my inclination was to ignore it. What do I know about writing a song? It continued to build with more spoken lines, so I eventually decided to get up and write it down, if for no other reason than to get back to sleep.

Now at home when something like this happens I go to my office and shut the door so not to disturb Leslie. This was not possible in this quaint, but small hotel room. I tried to do it in the bathroom, without turning on the light but that was proving impossible. About that time Leslie was asking me

if I was sick. I explained the situation and having past experience with my idiosyncrasies she told me to just turn on the lamp next to the bed and write it down, so we all could get some sleep. Unfortunately, this happened the next two nights as well.

On the second and third nights, the song would replay what I had written before and then start a new section. I thought the song was simply about a mother's love until the second night. By the end of the three nights, I had written over 1470 words.

After the third night the midnight adventures calmed, but never quite ended until weeks later. Over those weeks, I would get refinements to the song. I would wake up with something new for the song. Either a new line or a line that needed to replace an existing one. The nightly adventures finally slowed and I started wondering, what was I to do with it now?

As luck would have it, if it was luck, we had befriended a gentleman a few years before who is a wonderful musician. We decided to approach Billy with the song and see if he could help us. We met with him to tell him the story and ask if he could help. He was less than enthusiastic. He writes his own songs and I am sure he was thinking he didn't have time for some rank amateur's song. Nonetheless, he agreed to help. It was then I gave him my notes. He took one look and said this would be a 20-minute song and said "you need to cut it down if I'm going to help".

I was hesitant because by now I knew the message of the song and diminishing the message wasn't an option, but I also knew a 20-minute song was not reasonable. I tried to cut it down, but by then I was too emotionally involved with the song, I couldn't do it. So I asked my wife to help and she did a marvelous job. She condensed the song significantly while maintaining the message. Although not quite as condensed as Billy wanted it, he did agree to work on it. Here is a guy who gets several pages of notes, with no idea as to what I was hearing in my mind, and me with no way to describe it in musical terms.

When I gave the notes to him there were only two parts that I knew were to be sung. They were "Through the Years" and the chorus. Everything else I thought would be spoken. However, Billy was able to take many of the spoken verses and change them to singing parts. He is an incredible musician. I don't know how he did it, but he made it a song and what you hear now is what Billy was able to do with my notes.

I do want to mention that when our close friends first heard the song they remarked how incredible my mom was. She was incredible, but this song is not about her. Nor is it about me. But in some ways, it is about all of us.