



word

THE STORY

Celebrating Six Decades of Hits



ESTABLISHED 1951

WORD: THE STORY

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ESTABLISHED 1951

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AT THE INTERSECTION OF MUSIC AND MINISTRY, WORD RECORDS HAS STOOD AS A PILLAR OF THE CHRISTIAN MUSIC COMMUNITY FOR 60 YEARS.

Pioneering the way, the company has introduced such talented artists as **EVIE, THE HAPPY GOODMANS, RUSS TAFF, AMY GRANT, POINT OF GRACE, CINDY MORGAN, JACI VELASQUEZ, MARK SCHULTZ, BARLOWGIRL, GROUP 1 CREW, BIG DADDY WEAVE, FRANCESCA BATTISTELLI, SIDEWALK PROPHETS, CHRIS AUGUST and DARA MACLEAN.**

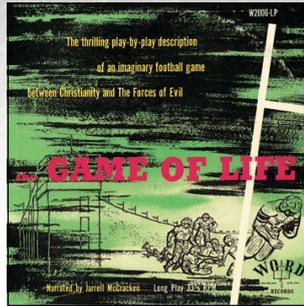
Decade after decade, as the life-changing music of their artists infused the church and permeated culture, Word Records staffers have worked diligently to help spread the gospel of **JESUS CHRIST**. Word's history includes a number of groundbreaking achievements—from launching the Family Record Club, the first direct response record club for Christian consumers, to Word's pioneering deal with A&M Records that exploded Amy Grant's career and earned the first platinum album in contemporary Christian music.

Yet behind every No. 1 hit single, successful church musical and Dove Award-winning album, there has always been a tightly woven network of artists, songwriters, producers, sales people, record promoters and marketing executives working as a family to impact the world for the glory of God.

THIS IS THEIR STORY. . .

IN THE BEGINNING

Word was founded in 1951 by Jarrell McCracken, a Baylor University student, who had been working at Waco's KWTX radio as a sportscaster. McCracken launched the company with one recording, "The Game of Life," a play-by-play account of



an imaginary football game with Jesus and Satan coaching, as good and evil battled on the grid-iron. McCracken had been asked to speak at a church youth rally and his faith, love of sports and public speaking ability coalesced as he wrote and delivered "THE GAME OF LIFE."

**JARRELL
MCCRACKEN**



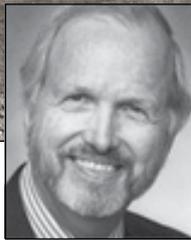
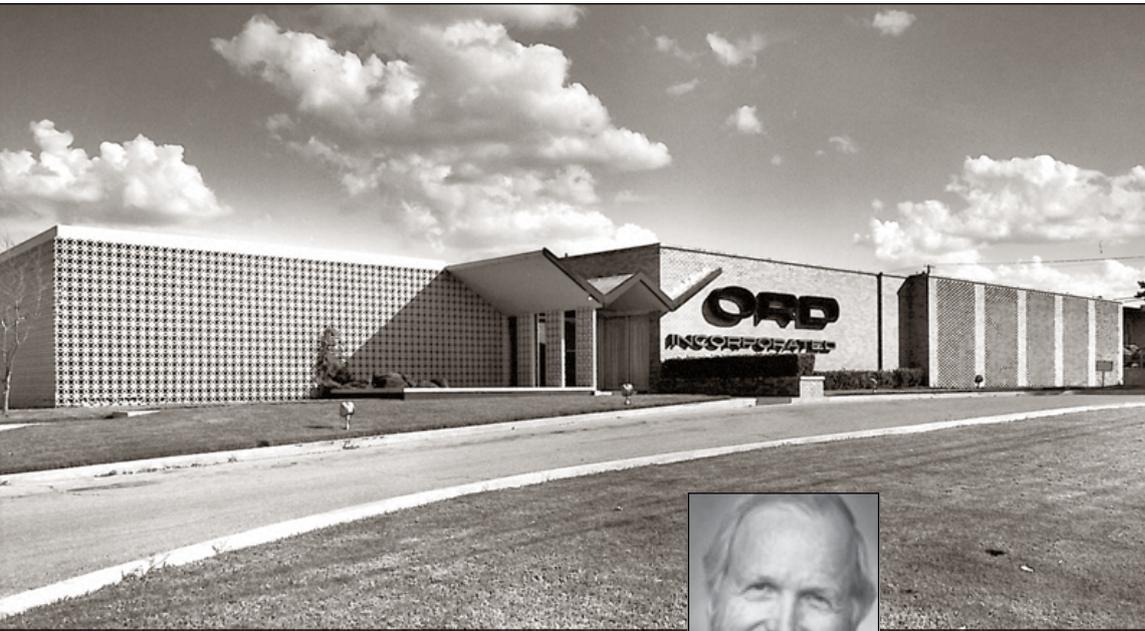
WORD
Hear the word of the Lord
HIGH FIDELITY

started getting requests from people looking to purchase "The Game of Life," so the Baylor student paid \$70 to have 100 copies printed on 78 rpm records. A friend suggested he put WORD on the label, the name of the

started getting requests from people looking to purchase "The Game of Life," so the Baylor student paid \$70 to have 100 copies printed on 78 rpm records. A friend suggested he put WORD on the label, the name of the

Jarrell McCracken (holding shovel) and the Word management team break ground on the new Word building in Waco, Texas.





mythical radio station used in the story, and **WORD RECORDS** was born.

The first artist on the label was **FRANK BOGGS**, a friend of McCracken's who was a seminary student at the time. In 1952, as McCracken struggled to get the fledgling label off the ground, he met a young accountant named **MARVIN NORCROSS**, who became a partner in Word for \$1,000. McCracken's vision combined with Norcross' business savvy was a winning combination. The two entrepreneurs soon expanded into the music distribution



business, taking on product from a jazz label, a classical music company and a children's record label.

As the 1950s drew to a close and Word was nearing its 10th anniversary, McCracken expanded the company's team by hiring a young musician from Chicago.

"I came to Word in '59," recalls Kurt Kaiser, who would remain with the company for 33 years.

"Jarrell McCracken came to Chicago and visited me. I finished graduate school at Northwest University and moved to Waco right after that because he really needed someone to do A&R, which is what I did."

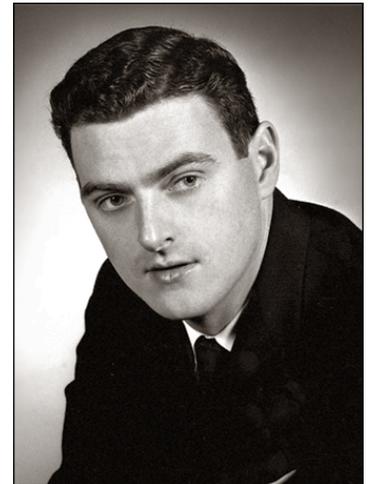
McCracken had a gift for employing the right people

do I want with a high school kid?' But she was really good."

He signed the young artist, who proceeded to have an impact beyond typical Christian music circles. "I remember one time we did a prayer breakfast in Washington D.C. when President Ford was in office," Kaiser continues. "**EVIE** said to me, 'What do I say to him? And I



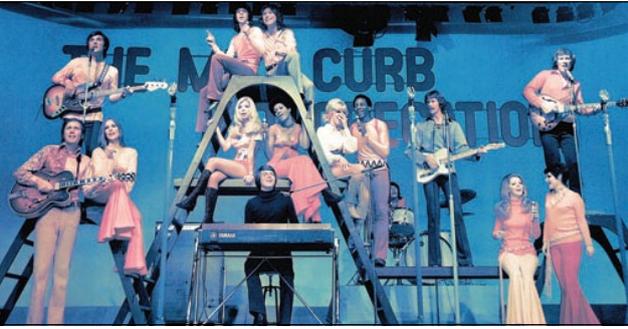
said, 'You might say something like, "Kids my age are really interested in what you are doing and are praying for you." So she said that and by the time she sang her first song, she had the President right



in the palm of her hand. She was amazing. She had that ability. That was very rare."



Evie receives a gold record from the Word Records staff.



GATION, Burl Ives, Anita Bryant, Carol Lawrence, Ray Price, **TENNESSEE ERNIE FORD** and many others. “I worked with Wayne Newton and all kinds of people. It was a challenge,” Kaiser recalls. “But it was always great fun. Most of these people were raised in church, so they knew all the hymns. Burl Ives knew all the verses, the third, fourth and fifth verses. He knew them all. Recording for Word gave those guys like Burl Ives a chance to harken back to their roots, which was a really big thing.”

Two of Kaiser’s favorites among the many artists he produced are Ken Medema and **GEORGE BEVERLY SHEA**. “Ken’s an incredible pianist and a great singer,” Kaiser says of Medema. “He came into my office one day in Waco and he sat down at my piano. He started playing and I started crying, so I got some of the other people around and they reacted the same way.”

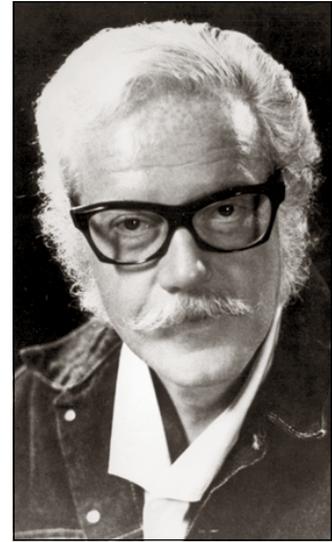
Kaiser and Shea remain good friends. “I’m honored to know him,” he says of the legendary 102-year-old singer, who has been part of the Rev. Billy Graham’s ministry for decades.

Kaiser rose through the ranks at Word from Director of A&R to Vice President and Director of Music.



During his tenure with Word, Kaiser worked with a variety of artists, including **THE MIKE C U R B CONGRE-**

Though he was an award-winning producer and savvy executive, Kaiser also continued to exercise his creative muscle as a songwriter. He and his friend **RALPH CARMICHAEL** wrote several musicals geared toward church youth. Their first offering, *Tell It Like It Is*, included the now classic song “Pass It On.” The



musical sold 2,500 copies, selling out the first run, and then completely sold out its second run of 100,000 copies. Kaiser and Carmichael also penned such additional musicals as *Natural High* and *I’m Here, God’s Here, Now We Can Start*.

Kaiser, who was awarded a special Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992 from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), says the success of the musicals taught him an important lesson. “I remember one night I was all by myself in Cincinnati in my motel room,” he says. “Back in those days it was black and

white TV and I saw 100,000 people singing my song ‘Pass It On.’ I recognized then that God can take anything He wants and use it how He wants to.”

Kaiser was not only an inspiration to audiences, but to young executives he mentored within the company. “When I first came to Word, Kurt was there and was still making extraordinary music,” says **LOREN BALMAN**, who joined Word in 1984 and became president of Word Label



Tennessee Ernie Ford and Kurt Kaiser in the studio.

FAVORITE WORD SONG



I love Julie Miller’s “Jesus Loves You,” but my favorite goes all the way back to Larry Norman and the song “If God Is My Father.” That was prior to me being at Word but, if you go back and listen from a musical standpoint to the craft of

the song and to what he actually said and what it called us to, that’s one of my all-time favorite songs. ~ Loren Balman

Group during his 18 years with the company. “Kurt was so cool. He was an immense talent from a music standpoint and a very forward thinking man, and yet when I came to Word in my late 20’s, he was so encouraging. For a lot of people, he was a mentor, breaking down creative doors and just continuing to provide great music. For Word, he was one of the early masters.”

RUSS TAFF, who joined the Word roster as a member of the Imperials and then stayed with Word for five successful solo albums, credits McCracken, Norcross and Kaiser with providing a firm foundation that has served the company well throughout the years. “They were spiritual entrepreneurs,” he says. “They knew how to take situations and make them bigger, and the people that Jarrell hired were taught and trained by him. They turned out to be just great men and women of character.

He was like a daddy to so many of them, but there was a gentleness about him that you listened when he spoke. Of course, I was a fan of Kurt Kaiser’s. I was really intimidated by the music that he had written and the song ‘O How He Loves You and Me.’ When I first met him, I didn’t know quite what to say because that was **KURT KAISER!** That’s the guy. That’s the musician, performer, writer!”



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

You could say a thousand things about them, but what I loved about them most is they never backed down and they never just accepted the norm. They always pushed the boundaries and stayed relevant because of that—challenging the culture, challenging Christians, challenging the world. The staff that they had, and still have, is intelligent. They see the world culture. They see how Christian artists can impact and they constantly work to make that happen, and they don’t settle. They just don’t settle. ~ Russ Taff



WORD GROWS THROUGH PUBLISHING AND NEW LABEL VENTURES

As the value of songs and copyrights became increasingly obvious, Word got into the music publishing game launching its publishing division in 1963 headed by the late **FRED BOCK**. A



native of Great Neck, NY, Bock was a 24-year-old graduate student at the University of Southern California when he

became Director of Publications for the music publishing division of Word. “He was a very important contributor to church music in lots of ways,” Kaiser says of Bock. “He was a very talented guy and he started the company on the west coast and it just grew and grew. We found out what music publishers do and we bought other catalogs. I remember we bought the Rodeheaver Company catalog that owned ‘The Old Rugged Cross,’ ‘In The Garden,’ and ‘Beyond The Sunset’ and then we bought George Beverly Shear’s publishing company, which included ‘I’d Rather Have Jesus’ and the other things he owned. That’s how we just kept going.”

Word also kept going through strategic acquisitions, launching their own new imprints and by continually building their artist roster. Partnering with Ralph Carmichael,

FAVORITE WORD SONG

The Happy Goodman Family had a huge hit with a song called “The Lighthouse.” They were the biggest act in the business at that time and “The Lighthouse” was a monster song for them. It’s so singable



that even today it’s a big selling soundtrack.
~ Bob Crawford



Gospel music. Nobody had ever done that,” recalls **BOB CRAWFORD**, who joined Word in 1972 and remained with the label until 1984, becoming general manager for the Southern Gospel division.

“We had to build a list and figure out what to say to the radio stations,” says Crawford. “**THE HAPPY GOODMAN FAMILY**, the Inspirations and the

Word established Lexicon Music and Light Records in 1968, helping launch such legendary artists as Walter Hawkins and Andraé Crouch. In 1965, Marvin Norcross launched **CANAAN RECORDS** and Canaanland Music. The label is notable for the careers of such Southern Gospel legends as The Florida Boys, The Happy Goodman Family, Wendy Bagwell, The Inspirations, The Nelons, The LeFevres and The Cathedral Quartet.

“I was the very first radio promotions guy in

Florida Boys were the first acts I promoted. I did a lot of work for the Myrrh label and that was a different list of stations that were playing Contemporary Christian music, which was called ‘Jesus music’ back then. We promoted Randy Matthews and Ray Hildebrand. They were the two biggies. By the time Amy Grant came along, I was strictly in the Southern Gospel business. The Contemporary Christian artists and labels had begun to branch away and have their own marketing.”

In 1976, Norcross hired Ken Harding, who had been working at the Oak Ridge Boys studio, to become associate director of A&R for Canaan. “Other than my dad, Marvin Norcross was the greatest man I’ve ever worked with. Even to this day, in Southern Gospel, he is legendary,” says Harding, Founder/President of New Haven Records. “He got into Southern Gospel music and loved it. He loved the people and they loved him. With his work ethic, his humor, his character and his integrity – I don’t think there’s ever been anybody in Christian music that compares to Marvin.”

KEN HARDING says McCracken and Norcross each had their strengths and complemented each other. “Jarrell was the visionary and Marvin was the hands-on operational finance guy. Jarrell was the dreamer and Marvin was the person that was hands-on with numbers and personnel. Out of 400 employees, if Marvin took you on a tour of the office and warehouse, he knew everybody’s names. When they sold to ABC he became a millionaire, but instead of going out and buying a Cadillac or Lincoln, he drove a Buick and lived in the same house.”

Norcross was known for keeping a close eye on the numbers at Word and never abusing his power or privilege. “When his wife and Marvin and I would go to dinner, he’d always take her portion of the bill off and pay it out of his pocket so the company wouldn’t pay for it,” says Harding.

Norcross, who died of a heart attack in 1980 at 51-years old, is remembered for his kindness and sense of humor. Every year at the National Quartet Convention, he would have a phone line installed in the Canaan booth so artists could call home and keep in touch with their families. This was back in the days before cell phones and Norcross didn’t want his artists to have to find a pay phone to stay connected to their loved ones.



When Harding first joined the Canaan staff, he moved to Waco for four years before returning to work from Nashville. “When my mom, dad and girlfriend came down to visit me in Waco, Marvin walked them around the building and back then they had these big old computers,” recalls Harding. “The last thing he did was go into the computer room and it was printing out these dots and stuff on that big old computer paper. He opened up the report and it said, ‘Welcome to Waco, Mr. & Mrs. Harding!’ He programmed that for my mom and dad.”

Norcross also wasn’t above pulling the occasional prank. “CB radios were big and I had a CB radio as everybody did back then,” says Harding. “I had gotten a new antenna, and I was getting ready to go over to East Tennessee to see the Cruse Family and Mercy River Boys; so Marvin said, ‘let me go out and sit in my car. You and I talk and see how far it will reach.’ I said, ‘That’s a great idea!’ His handle

was ‘Handshake’ and I’d be driving along and say, ‘Breaker, breaker 19, Handshake are you still there?’ ‘Yeah, I’m still here in the parking lot, but you’re coming in loud and clear.’ I drove another five or 10 minutes and said, ‘Handshake, are you still picking me up?’ ‘Yeah, yeah, Junkyard Dog, you are still coming in. Man, that antenna is something else.’ This went on for about an hour and he says, ‘Well, I’m going back in the office. I’ve got to get some stuff done.’ I thought this antenna was unbelievable and didn’t know until I

got back that Marvin had gotten in the car and followed me. Here he is, Treasurer, VP, co-founder of Word, and he drives two hours, an hour behind me, and an hour back. Then he went in and told everybody in the office. Of course I didn’t have any idea, but that’s the kind of guy he was.”

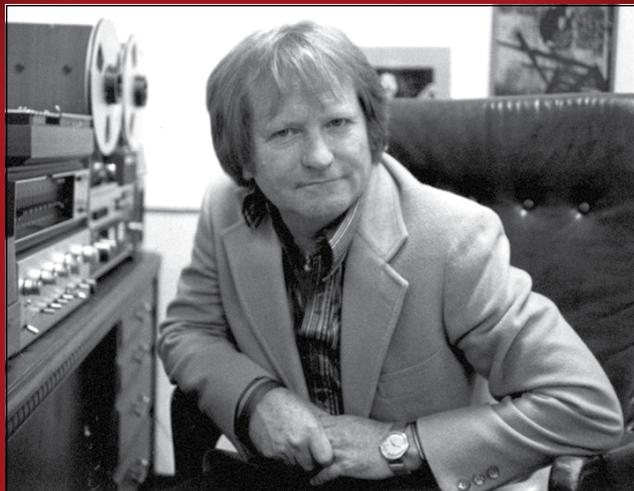
Even as McCracken and Norcross were expanding Word through publishing acquisitions and the development of new labels, one of the keys to the company’s dominance in the marketplace was their distribution.

“During the mid ’70’s, Word’s strategic plan was to build the most successful distribution arm in Christian music,” says Roland Lundy, president of Word from 1989 through 2000. Through the years, Word has been the distributor to Reunion Records, Maranatha! Music, Integrity Music, Light Records, Gotee Records, Lexicon Music, Paragon Records, plus many more successful labels.”

DIVERSIFICATION IS KEY

While Word Records focused on what was often called “high church music” as well as popular vocalists such as Larnelle Harris and George Beverly Shea, and Canaan became one of the most successful labels in the Southern Gospel field, McCracken and Norcross were always looking for other sounds that would connect with Christian consumers. In 1972, Word became part of the burgeoning Jesus Movement with the launch

myrrh



FAVORITE WORD SONG

Things at Myrrh were moving so fast and we were receiving so many great reports from the breaking market, we were encouraged to look forward to the next day. We knew that God was in this. A particular incident that caused great excitement was when we sent 10,000 45rpm copies of “Easter Song” by 2nd Chapter of Acts to churches all over the country. The feedback was awesome!

~ Billy Ray Hearn

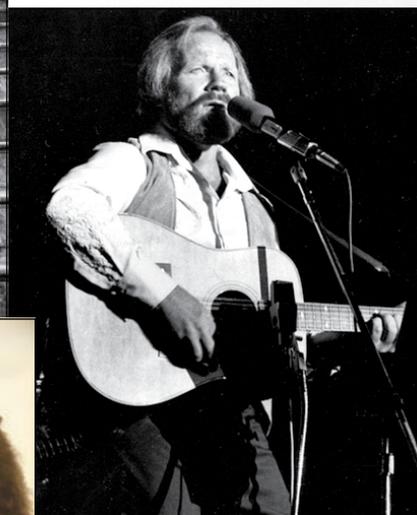
of **MYRRH RECORDS**. Named for one of the gifts brought by the wise men to the manger of Jesus, Myrrh would quickly become the home to the most successful artists singing a “new style” of music.

BILLY RAY HEARN, a Baylor graduate, who would later start Sparrow Records and form EMI Christian Music,

founded the new label. “By 1968, Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser were on the leading edge for the church youth choir. That was my orientation also,” says Hearn. “Jarrell McCracken offered me the opportunity to leave my job as a Minister of Music in Thomasville, Georgia and work in the marketing and sales of Ralph and Kurt’s music. It was a chance of a lifetime for me.”

But by the early ’70s, a new kind of music was emerging. “After being so involved in the youth musicals of Kurt and Ralph I began getting tapes and phone calls from a lot of the “Jesus People” that wanted an outlet for their music,” recalls Hearn. I went to Jarrell and asked for the opportunity to start a new Word label for the new music. He was hesitant at first, but finally gave me the go ahead.”

The exploding Jesus Movement had created a market for recorded music. The successful concert tours and festivals were the outlets for artist identification and made the demand for their albums very strong in Christian Bookstores. While the stores were rather slow in



accepting the new music, the demand broke down their resistance. “The key early releases that broke the barriers were albums by the **2ND CHAPTER OF ACTS**, **HONEYTREE** and **BARRY MCGUIRE**,” says Hearn.

Hearn remembers fondly the first time he heard a certain sibling trio. “I was invited to the coffee house at First Presbyterian, Hollywood to hear a young group called 2nd Chapter of Acts,” recalls Hearn. “I stood in the back of the room as they sang and cried all through the short concert, knowing that God had revealed Himself through this music and artist. I had never been so moved. This was the moment I knew what the future could hold.”

“Billy Ray Hearn started Myrrh Records because he believed in young artists,” says **PHIL KEAGGY**. “Back when they had 2nd Chapter of Acts and Barry McGuire, in the original days . . . those were pretty exciting. It was a special time because the artists were so into sharing the

Gospel. They were excited about being able to be musicians and the record label came along to help get the music out to the world, and I thought they did a good job. There was a real excitement back in the vinyl days.”

Keaggy’s first association with Word came via a distribution

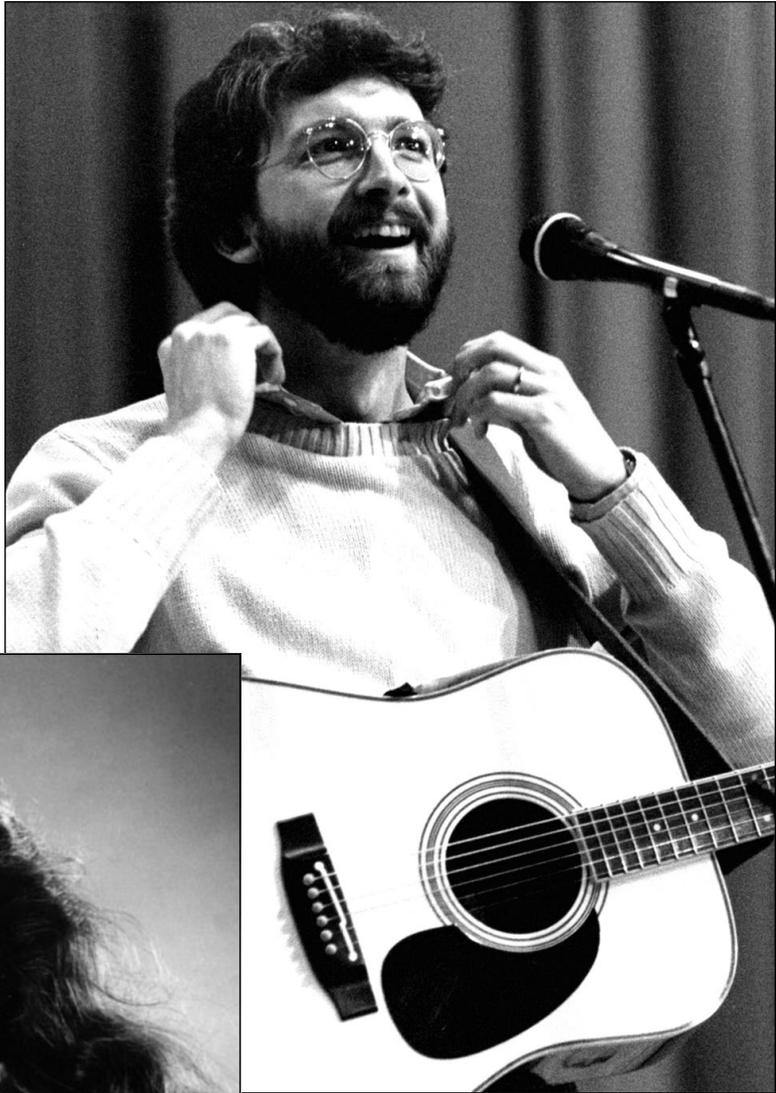


deal in 1977. Buck Herring produced Keaggy’s **LOVE BROKE THROUGH** album for New Song Records and Word distributed the project. He would later sign directly to Word in 1987 and released several albums, moved to another label; then he returned for another stint at Word in the late ‘90s.

Reminiscing about the early days of Myrrh, Keaggy says those records are still among his favorites. “The **WITH FOOTNOTES** album by 2nd Chapter of Acts was wonderful,” he says of the trio’s Myrrh debut in 1974. “‘Which Way The Wind Blows’ and ‘Easter Song’ were just wonderful. There was also a lot of great stuff that Randy Stonehill did in those days. I dug the Barry McGuire albums too. I think Buck [Herring] and Billy Ray really were a good team in the very beginning. Some of the highest quality stuff that was happening in Christian music was happening on the Myrrh label.”

Myrrh continued to be a leader in the industry and the label's greatest successes were yet to come. In the spring of 1978, Myrrh released the debut album of a Nashville teenager who was about to graduate high school, and would soon become the most successful artist ever in Christian music. Grant knew aspiring producer **BROWN BANNISTER** as one of her youth leaders at church. He was taking classes at Belmont College and offered her studio time to record some of her songs. Later, as Bannister was making copies of her tape at Chris Christian's studio where he worked as an engineer, Christian asked him about the young artist.

Christian had just gotten a call from Word's Buddy Huey that they were looking for 12 new



artists. "Chris's words were, 'Well, she's not very good, but she sure is sincere,'" **AMY GRANT** says good-naturedly, recalling Christian's assessment of her early skills. "Brown got the details of the contract and called me and offered me the record deal. It was the middle of October of my junior year in high school. I turned 16 that Thanksgiving.

"Of course my dad picked up," Grant recalls of that late night, life-changing phone call. "I had a crush on Brown. He was my youth leader of our youth group. That's how he knew I was writing and he was teaching me guitar chords. So he called later than he should have and said, 'Do you want to make a record? Chris Christian has a record deal if you want it.' My dad picked up the phone and said 'You're grounded. It's after your curfew!' That was my illustrious beginning."

WORD SELLS TO ABC

As usually happens when a small venture grows into a thriving business, other companies came calling, looking to purchase Word. In 1974 the company sold to ABC. “Early on he was very happy,” Kaiser says of McCracken, who continued to run Word after the sale. “Before the sale, Word was doing very, very well, but was not able to continue to grow the way it had been growing because the funds weren’t there. Then here comes ABC, which had a lot of money they infused into Word to make it really grow, and it was a good time. But, then as often happens, individuals change and where at once you were very comfortable with a guy at ABC, now you aren’t so comfortable anymore.”

Some of the changes weren’t comfortable for Kaiser either and he chose not to move to Dallas when the company relocated from Waco. “While I like Dallas and Nashville, I much prefer to stay home because my family is in Waco. My kids are there. Everybody who matters to me is there,” says Kaiser, who has operated his own label Kurt Kaiser Music for many years. He continues to produce and record.

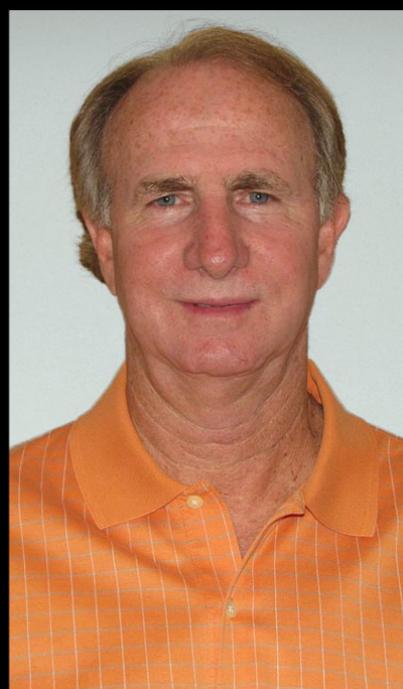
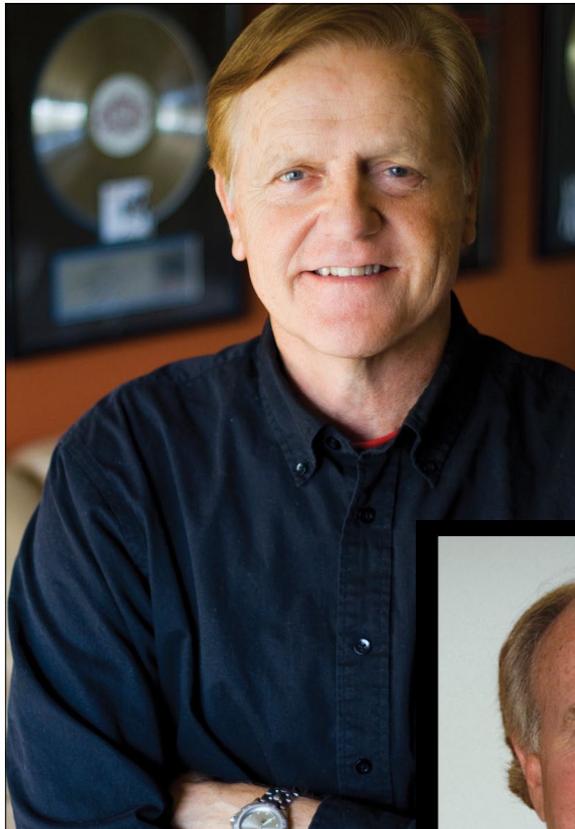
In addition to McCracken, Norcross and

WORD

Kaiser’s formidable leadership, there was a trio of young executives who rose through the ranks at Word to become key leaders through the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s. **STAN MOSER**, Dan Johnson and **ROLAND LUNDY** shepherded the company through many of its biggest successes. “I started Feb. 1, 1970 as a part-time college student making \$1.25/hour,” recalls Moser, who became executive VP of the music division,

and remained with Word for 15 years. “At first I was working for the direct marketing division of Word. I was given a stack of what we called computer dumps. They were printouts of each of the persons who had dropped off the Word Book Club, Family Record Club and Cannon Record Club. I was supposed to figure out the common denominator of why they were dropping off our programs.

“I was so low on the totem pole that I shared a rented table with Verna Washburn. Verna took the reject slips from the club people when they’d mail them back in to say, ‘No, I don’t want the



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

I think it was the foundation that was laid back in Waco by Jarrell and Marvin, who Jarrell was and what he drove us to, and who Marvin was and what we learned from him. Those principles endured.
~ Roland Lundy



main selection.’ I was so low, I shared a table with a girl whose title was ‘reject girl.’ So that was where I started at Word,” Moser says with a laugh.

Moser’s supervisor suggested he get on the phone and start calling stores. “That was really the beginning of telemarketing in our industry. I started calling stores and 18 months later I had 13 people on the phones calling stores and also calling directly to customers, so telemarketing was launched. That’s where Roland came in; he was one of those 13 people,” Moser says of Lundy, a baseball player at Baylor, who joined the Word staff in 1973.



Moser offered **DAN JOHNSON** a job in the fall of 1975 and on the first day of the New Year, Johnson arrived from Burbank, California to join the Word team. “We learned from Jarrell how to be optimistic, creative and never give up,” Moser says. “He should have gone

head of the company. “He was the first car in the parking lot in the morning and he was the last to leave. That’s the kind of guy he was,” says Ken Harding.

When Ingersoll left, Lundy assumed the presidency, a post he held until October 2000.

under 10 times.”

“Jarrell had his own plane,” adds Johnson, “and he always would say, ‘There’s only one way to fly a plane, and that’s *scared*.’ That’s exactly how he ran the company in that he never allowed us or anybody to get comfortable. He was a visionary.”

McCracken remained at Word until 1986. By then ABC had merged with Capital Cities and after 35 years, McCracken exited. After leaving Word, he continued for a while with his other successful venture, raising Arabian horses. He passed away in November 2007.

In the wake of McCracken’s departure in ’86, ABC/Capital Cities installed Gary Ingersoll as

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

Ultimately it has to come back to good management over the years and willingness to change and shift, but their distribution system has probably been their strength, I think, and so they aren’t dependent on others. ~ Kirk Wakefield (Professor and Executive Director, Sport and Entertainment Marketing, Baylor University)



CHANGING TIDES

In the wake of the Jesus Movement, the once booming Christian music scene began suffering. “There was a period of time in the ’70s . . . the Jesus Movement that had hit basically the west coast and then spread across the country was so overpowering and so overwhelming that I think in ’74 or ’75 we could have done the Dan Johnson Trio and sold 30,000 records because there was so much momentum,” jokes Stan Moser. “But by the time we got to the end of the ’70s, the wave was over; the tsunami was done and it had gone back out to sea.

“In 1981, we realized that we were in a significant downward turn, and we looked at each other and said, ‘I guess we’re going to find out now if we really know how to run a business,’ recalls Moser. “That’s why it was so critical in 1982 when Amy Grant’s **AGE TO AGE** album came out. The record did not come out till May of 1982 and it sold 200,000 copies between May and the end of the year, which was unheard of. When *Age To Age*



came along, it drew people into the stores and really launched that next era.”

Roland Lundy recalls hearing “El Shaddai,” a landmark single from *Age to Age*. “We had a listening party for the entire staff,” he says. “The record was finished and Dan

FAVORITE WORD SONG

“El Shaddai” Amy does it in her shows right along with her pop music and people don’t differentiate. They think it should be there, so it’s kind of like walking into a museum and you’re looking at all this modern art and, all of a sudden, you look at an impressionist painting and you go, “Okay, that works.”
~ Dan Harrell

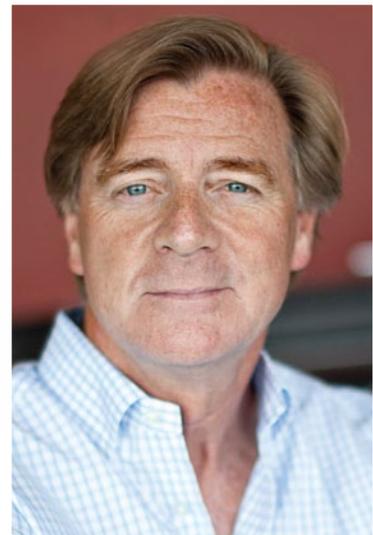


rented this old historic home in Waco. We had dinner and had it all set up in this living room, and we listened to this record. When that song came on, everybody in the room was like, ‘Oh, my gosh! This is like nothing we’ve ever heard!’ For me personally, and for all of us, it was a watershed moment and a watershed song.”

“We made a decision right there,” adds Moser, “and basically said to the staff, ‘For right now, 80% of your effort goes into this one album.’”

Grant’s longtime manager, **DAN HARRELL**, also remembers that special listening party. “One of my fondest memories was when we played *Age to Age* and there was this silence,” recalls Harrell, who managed Grant with his business partner **MIKE BLANTON**.

“It wasn’t a silence like ‘Oh, you guys have missed it.’ It was, ‘This is something special.’ I remember Stan stood up





Amy Grant receives the first Platinum record in the Christian industry for her landmark album, *Age To Age*.

and said, ‘God has appointed you for this time,’ and he went over and put his hands on Amy and prayed for her.”

Harrell appreciates the care and the creative vision of the Word team. “*Age to Age* ended up being the **FIRST PLATINUM ALBUM** for a solo Christian artist,” he notes. “Dan Johnson came back a couple weeks later and said ‘We’ve put together a plan. We think this record can go gold.’ Everybody was like ‘Ok?’ and as soon as the record went gold, he had another meeting and said ‘I think this record can be platinum.’ There was a real commitment within the company that we could do something with this artist and this record that we’d never done before. When you look back on it, that really launched the Contemporary Christian industry into a different realm because the secular music industry began to look at the numbers and say, ‘Something is going on. Something is happening here. We may not buy into the philosophy,’ but the economics caught their attention. That was really a turning point for Christian music. Obviously there was Evie and other people before Amy, but no one had ever sold as many records, sold as many concert tickets.”

As the industry continued growing and changing, it was obvious there was a need for a new description or catch phrase, and a Word staff meeting spawned the new terminology. “We were all sitting in a marketing meeting and Dan Johnson was not yet an employee of Word. He was a consultant,” recalls Bob Crawford. “Stan made the comment ‘Do we really want to go forward using the term ‘Jesus music?’ We are far away from the hippie era. It’s not what it used to be. Marketing-wise we need to come up with some term other than ‘Jesus music.’ We knocked it around

and knocked it around and Stan finally said, ‘Why don’t we call it ‘Contemporary Christian music?’ and the five or six of us in that room went, ‘Wow! That’s genius!’ And from that day forward, everything started being called ‘Contemporary Christian music.’ Stan thinks Dan said it. Dan thinks Stan said it. But regardless, from that meeting forward,

all the advertising started saying ‘Contemporary Christian music.’ And that’s what it’s called today.”

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

Someone once asked Marvin what the difference was between the Benson Company and Word Inc. They were the two biggest companies by far. John T. Benson was one of Marvin’s best friends. There was no competition. They did their thing. We did our thing and they were still great friends. But Marvin’s answer was ‘The Benson Company is a wonderful Christian family operating a publishing and music company. Word Inc. is a business run by Christians.’ He said that one time in an interview and many guys have quoted that over the years. / I think the longevity of Word is because they were always willing to dip back into the well one more time to build something else for the future. Everybody was always willing to shell out the bucks to try this Amy Grant thing or to try taking the Imperials to the next step. Nobody had ever heard of 2nd Chapter of Acts. I could go on and on. Word was always willing to make risky decisions to launch a genre, to launch another artist and another idea when the rest of the business would have shied away from that. Word was always willing to believe in the artists and their ministry and put themselves behind it. And through the years, that has always been what’s kept it going, taking that one more step, one more step with new people, new types of music and new ideas. ~ Bob Crawford

BUILDING A DYNASTY

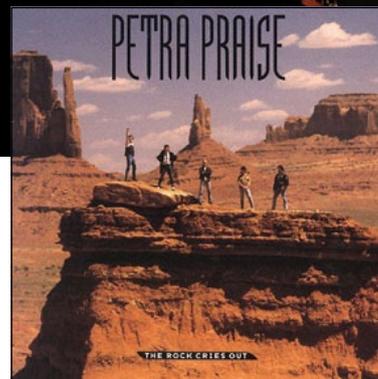
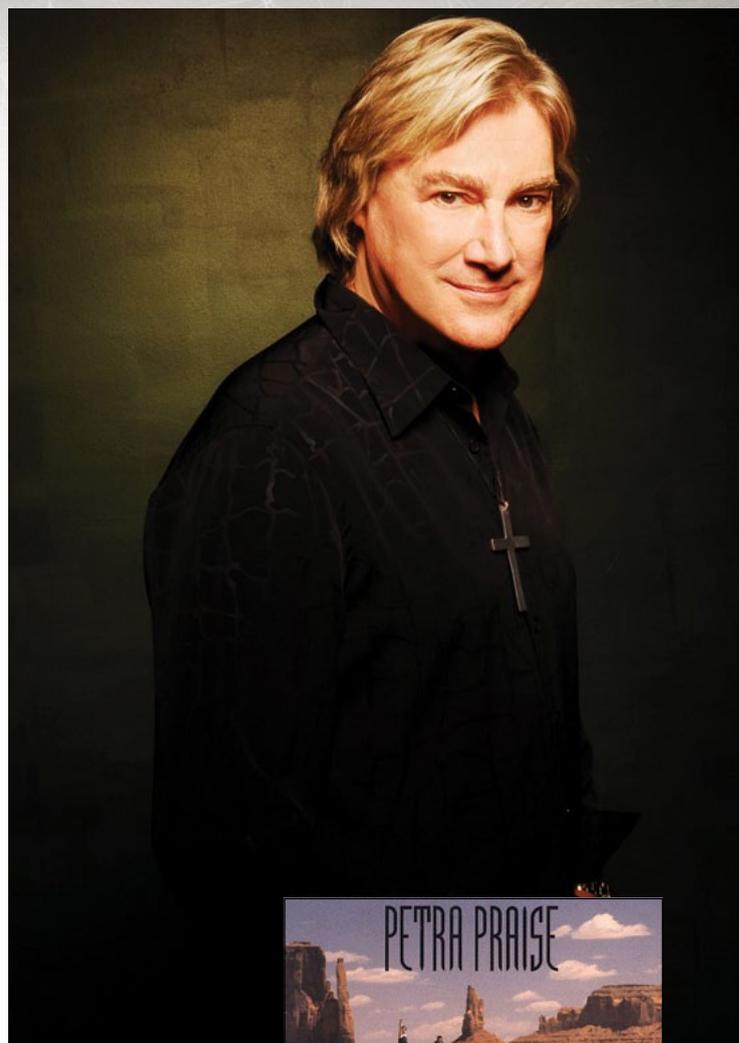
During the '80s, Word proved adept at not only breaking new artists, but furthering the careers of established artists. "The whole culture changed in the early '80s in that we slowly became noticed as somebody who could sign an artist, even somebody who was very successful like Sandi Patty, and take her career to the next level," says Roland Lundy.

Word propelled the careers of Sandi Patty, Petra, the **BILL GAITHER TRIO** and other well-known artists to new heights. "I was totally blown away that, just by signing with them, the amount of sales went up 100,000 records, so they were a very important change for us," says former Petra lead vocalist **JOHN SCHLITT**. Petra recorded two albums on Myrrh early in the band's career then exited, signed with another label, and then returned to Word in 1989 with **PETRA PRAISE: THE ROCK CRIES OUT**, the first contemporary praise and worship music album.

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

History always helps you and they have had a great history. I think Baylor University could take some credit for that because a lot of their leadership came from Baylor. The other interesting thing was they were more of a contemporary northern music sound until the Happy Goodman Family came along and that's when they developed a Southern Gospel label called Canaan, which became bigger than their main label.

~ Bill Gaither



Schlitt admits most people in the industry were a bit baffled by rockers doing a worship record, but Word executives caught the vision. "Other people thought it would never work and it turned out to be one of our top selling records," he says. "They were a good label and they believed in us and they put their money where their mouths were. It helped take our momentum totally up another level.

"Word took chances. They exposed our product to a whole lot more stores. The product was never a cause for a slow down. There was always enough there," Schlitt says,



FAVORITE WORD SONG

“Upon This Rock” was a huge song for me that Sandi Patty sang. She had a way of bringing the church into her music and with that song particularly. You know Christ is going to build His church. He is the Rock that would build this church. She brought unity in the church and inspired me that music made a difference through God. It brought about churches into worshipping together with music that was new and inspiring and energetic beyond hymns. It was her music that made me want to sing Christian music. ~ Denise Jones (*Point of Grace*)

praising Word’s former head of distribution Mark Funderburg for a job well done. “When I’d go to a record store, they’d always have Petra. That’s what you call support – and back then they believed in doing a lot of publicity. They weren’t afraid to spend a lot of money to get money back.”

Schlitt says Word executives were also supportive of his desire to release solo projects. “I loved Lynn Keesecker and Bubba Smith. They believed in me personally and were behind my solo career,” says Schlitt. “They stood behind me immensely, helped me out and did a bunch of extra stuff. That was the mindset of those guys.”

SANDI PATTY, winner of 11 consecutive Dove Awards for female vocalist, also has fond memories of her days as a Word artist. “We really seemed to line up artistically and spiritually and where my heart was. It just really felt like a good fit,” she says. “It felt like we were both headed in the same direction.

“That was back in the day when record companies were really all inclusive and they didn’t just distribute. They did artist development as well. They really had their hands in a lot of things and so they were able to help their artists expand. It was Word’s idea to do a brand new version of ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ that would really celebrate the Statue of Liberty as much as the flag. They asked me to sing that and you don’t think of ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ as being your career song, but it’s really one of those songs that opened some other doors for me. I ended up getting on Johnny Carson three times. I also became familiar with Peter Jennings through that and we became not quite friends, but more than just business acquaintances throughout the years, so that was very, very special. And I did ‘Christmas in Washington’ and then I also did ‘A Capitol Fourth.’”

“When she sang that on July 4, 1986 it took Gospel artists into a world that they had never been,” notes Johnson.

Patty also admires the way Word helped artists stay connected to the church. “One year Word hosted pastors’ luncheons all over the country,” she says. “Even to this day, there are some pastors that I met during that time that have become sweet friends and colleagues. We really went everywhere from Seattle to Florida and everything in between. That was awesome and I enjoyed that. I’d talk a little bit and sing a little bit and just had an opportunity to interact with them just on more of an intimate level.”

The Word team was also known for working hard for their artists beyond the U.S. “Back when I was with the Imperials, my wife, Tori, and I wrote a song called ‘Eagle

Song.’ There was some interest in Canada on the secular side,” recalls Russ Taff. “They worked that song in Canada and it was a top 10 hit. There was a song called ‘I Still Believe’ on a record that I did for them in ’87 and that song was No. 1 in some countries in Europe. They were aggressive. It was like there were no boundaries. We can do this. Let’s go! There was such an air of excitement.”

“They did a great job throughout the world,” Phil Keaggy agrees. “There was Word Australia and Word UK. I got to know a lot of people from over there. Ian Hamilton and people that were working down in Word Australia were wonderful. They provided opportunities and blessed me.”

Keaggy has equal praise for the Word’s stateside team. “Chris Houser was working at Word at the time and he was the best radio guy I had ever met, such enthusiasm and belief,” Keaggy recalls. “You really felt like you were a part of the family, and Roland Lundy was really a key person in



all of that. I’m very grateful for those years and for the opportunity. I’m partly here today thanks to those folks. I still have a career and a ministry in music thanks to the people that took me under their wings there. I’m really grateful for that.”

In 1984, **NEWSONG** signed their first major label deal with Canaan, but then were moved to Word for a better fit as the group hailed from the South, but wasn’t Southern Gospel. “We loved being on Word Records,” says **EDDIE CARSWELL**, a founding member of the group. “We were there for 10 years or more and had the

opportunity to get some great songs recorded. Sandi Patty recorded songs that we wrote on her records back then, too, so it really gave us a great, great start.”

Taff also has fond memories of his days with Word. He first came to the label as part of the Imperials. Word launched **DAYSPRING RECORDS** in 1978 with the Imperials’ **SAIL ON** album. Taff exited the Imperials in



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

It’s amazing, and what’s really cool is we’re connected with Word again because they are really involved with our tours. We had some great meetings with Jim [Van Hook] about NewSong and what we’re doing with Winter Jam, and now I’m working with Rod Riley and a lot of those really sharp people. They believe in the artists they’ve signed and are investing in people like Francesca. She’s been touring with us now for three or four years. We’ve also had Chris August and Sidewalk Prophets on Winter Jam. They’ve done a great job bringing these new artists along. I’m very impressed with what they are doing at Word now. I’m even sending some artists their way when I meet someone I think has something going on. I’m truly excited about what they are doing and I’m very proud of them. ~ Eddie Carswell



1981, but remained with Word for a groundbreaking solo career. “The reason I wanted to stay at Word was the quality of people, the vision, and character,” he says. “They were just real movers and shakers for the Kingdom of God and they have always set a standard, always. They shaped Christian music. I just wanted to work with them and be a part of what they were doing.”

Taff made his solo debut with the 1983 album **WALLS OF GLASS**, which included the classic hit “We Will Stand.” “Tori and I had written ‘You’re My Brother, You’re My Sister, So take me by the hand, Together we will work until He comes’ and they caught the vision,” Taff says of

the Word team. “I wrote it because of the frustration I had with the denominations and the racism in the church, but they saw a much bigger vision for that song. They began to put a marketing thing together. They saw what it could do, and I watched them take this little idea and turn it into an anthem that the church could sing. Still, to this day, it’s one of the most requested songs.”

In 1981, Word launched Rejoice Records, which became a very successful part of the Word family. “We signed **SHIRLEY CAESAR** and started Rejoice Records. We had the **CLARK SISTERS**, Rev. Brunson,



to Word in 1980. “We sat down and played around with it on the keyboard. Richard is a much more sophisticated keyboard player than I am so he put in some beautiful harmonics. He and I crafted that melody of the chorus and all we had was the hook, ‘Jesus, you are the center of my joy.’”

Gaither and Smallwood worked on the song and Bill took the cassette tape home to his wife, Gloria, who contributed lyrics. “When I got done, I asked if he liked it and he said ‘yes,’ so he took it and the Richard Smallwood Singers recorded it. He put a



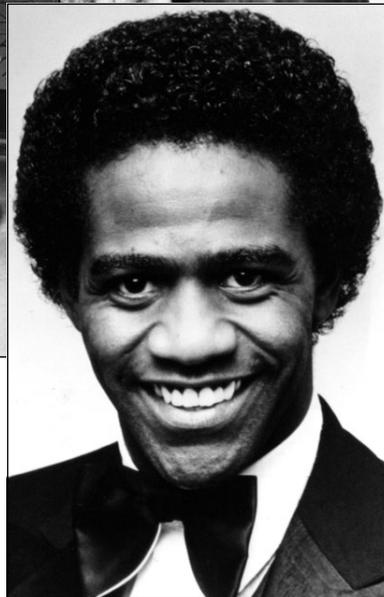
wonderful arrangement to it and that little addendum at the end,” says Gaither. “Every black church choir sang that song, and that

year at the Stellar Awards it was the Gospel Song of the Year. So here were these two white people, Gloria and Bill Gaither, at the Apollo Theater in New York, with pride picking up our first and only Black Gospel award.”



THE MIGHTY CLOUDS OF JOY, **AL GREEN**, Shirley, and The Williams Brothers,” recalls Ken Harding, who ran the division.

Southern Gospel and Black Gospel intersected when Bill Gaither and Richard Smallwood co-wrote “Center of My Joy,” which became a landmark hit from Smallwood’s 1986 Word debut album “Textures.” “We went downstairs in the little writing room and he asked me if I had any lyric ideas and I said, ‘Yeah, I’ve got a hook – Jesus, you’re the center of my joy,’ but that’s all I had,” recalls Gaither, whose Gaither Trio signed



we made our first recording at Word. It was a combination of traditional quartet Gospel and contemporary Gospel. There wasn’t really a slot to put us in, but Word helped us develop our own slot.”

Of course, Bill and Gloria have continued to be two of the industry’s most prolific and highly awarded songwriters. When Gloria decided to leave the Gaither Trio, Bill reinvented the group as the **GAITHER VOCAL BAND**. “The Trio did their last bit of recording with Word, the last five or six projects,” recalls Gaither, “and by that time, Gloria wanted to stay home more and concentrate on writing. The Vocal Band was just starting to get our legs and



TAKING JESUS TO THE WORLD, WORD ARTISTS IMPACT MAINSTREAM CULTURE

By the mid '80s, Amy Grant was established as the Christian industry's top selling artist when Word inked a groundbreaking deal with **A&M RECORDS** that catapulted the young singer/songwriter into the mainstream. "Word Records called A&M and said, 'We have an artist that we feel could have a broader reach than we can provide,'" Grant recalls. "So A&M came to me with a record deal, but it was brought to me because of Word Records. Talk about a non-controlling approach – to say, 'We feel like your stage is bigger than what we have under our umbrella' and apart from me, approached A&M Records. So A&M comes to me and I signed this totally unique deal that I release the same product through both companies.

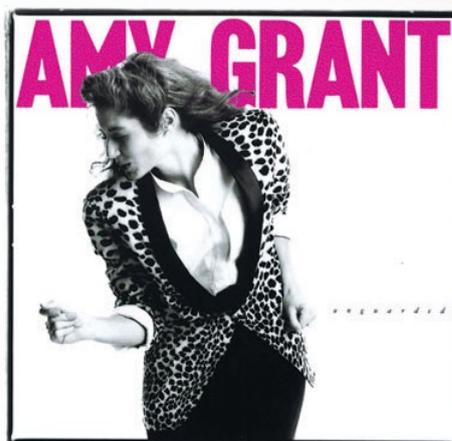


"I met with Jerry Moss and Herb Albert and they were legendary. They were rockin' and rollin.' They told me, 'When we had our first meeting, we were expecting the preacher to show up from the Gospel music label.' It was Loren Balman who walked through the door and started giving his ideas, and they said, 'Oh my, we love this liaison!' Of course that was my family. It was just a magical time to be at Word Records."

As her artistry expanded, Grant admits there were growing pains, but recalls a specific conversation that was pivotal in her life. "Dan Johnson had dropped by the recording studio in California and I was working on a record called **UNGUARDED** and I was kind of broadening the subject matter," Grant says. "Everything didn't have a Gospel message and I knew that my contract was offered to me on that basis. I knew what the mission statement was of this company and I remember crying in the control room with him saying, 'I know what it feels like to be a kid. I know what it feels like to be a college student and I can't answer all the questions. I don't have all the answers.'

"I felt like I was not doing what they had signed me to do, but I was doing what felt the most creative to me. Dan was so great; he said 'Amy, Jesus just told stories. He didn't

explain it all. You just go tell stories.' It was that record that they took to A&M. I knew the opportunity they had given me. I didn't take it lightly. I knew my talent. I knew my limitations. I knew there were a lot of people who were a whole lot better than I was, but this record company kept giving me opportunities. It was emotional for me to say, 'I feel like I'm not doing what you asked me to do' and he just ab-



solutely gave me carte blanche."

"Unguarded" became a major crossover success. And Grant became the first Christian artist to have a No. 1 mainstream radio single—

and go on to score numerous multi-platinum albums and industry accolades. "We were all working so hard and enjoying it. I just remember the relationships, I remember great dinners and being in each others' homes and hearing about families. I don't remember a celebration for the platinum record," says Grant, who remained on the Word roster for an incredible 30 years. "I just really enjoyed the company of the people I worked with, so I don't remember career milestones, I just remember how much I liked them."

Word also teamed with A&M to promote Russ Taff to the mainstream, and he admits sharing their artists with the mainstream wasn't a popular decision with some Christian gatekeepers. "Back then it was huge," he says. "Amy was hammered and I got criticism and so did the record label. It was like, 'What are they doing partnering with A&M?' But I've noticed over the years when there are visionaries, they are always attacked. The great thing is that I've watched Word quietly do what they did with great success. They didn't listen to the negative voices. Jesus said, 'Let's go unto all the world and preach the Gospel,' and that's what they did."



**TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE
WORD'S LONGEVITY?**

They had good leadership and
the music mattered to everybody!

~ Amy Grant

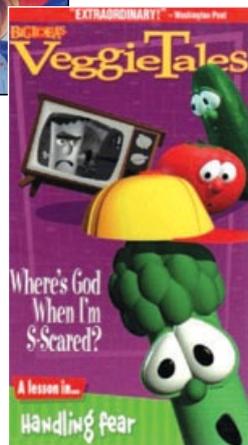
NEW OWNERSHIP, NEW VENTURES, NEW ARTISTS DEFINE WORD IN THE '90S

The '90s proved to be a decade of immense change and growth for Word. In 1992, the company was bought by Thomas Nelson Publishers, and the Nashville-based Bible publishing giant moved Word to Music City – Nashville, Tennessee. Word continued to shape the Christian entertainment landscape not only with the introduction of such talented artists as Jaci Velasquez, Point of Grace, Anointed, Fernando Ortega and Cindy Morgan, but with the creation of a new division that expanded their reach into the children's market.

In 1991, Word launched **EVERLAND ENTERTAINMENT**, a children's division that included Carman's "Yo! Kids," Sandi Patty's **THE FRIENDSHIP COMPANY** and the groundbreaking series VeggieTales. "My daughter was real young, and there wasn't the kind of material out there that I thought she would enjoy," says Loren Balman.

WAYNE ZEITNER, who became VP/GM of Everland, brought **VEGGIETALES** to Word. "We saw its potential and said, not only are we going

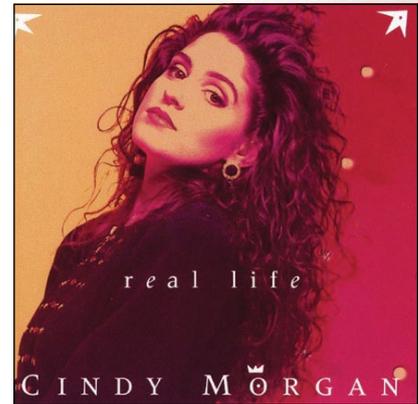
to fund it, but we spent all the initial marketing dollars for those first 13 episodes," states Balman. "I give so much credit to Wayne Zeitner for his vision about exactly how to roll that out. VeggieTales is extraordinary stuff and still vibrant right now."



In 1992, Word continued in its mission to impact the mainstream by signing a general market distribution deal with Epic Records.

However, when most people think of Word Records in the '90s, they remember an onslaught of great new music, including singer/songwriter Cindy Morgan who debuted with the compelling album, **REAL LIFE**,

and took home the Dove Award for New Artist of the Year in 1993. "When I think about the impact of Word in my life, it's enormous," says Morgan. "In the early days, I worked at the West End



Cooker restaurant. Every day after working, I would go next

door to the Wendy's bathroom and change out of my Cooker uniform into some decent looking clothes. And then I would go to John Mays' office," she says of her early interaction with Word's head of A&R. "He played me songs or we'd listen to a song that I'd written earlier or we'd just talk, but I remember that his door was always open to me. I was unproven. I was a waitress and his door was always open. John was such a mentor to me and to me he was so much a part of what Word was."

As Morgan grew to know more about the company, she found that warmth and graciousness extended throughout the building. "The reason I love Word is because they had a birthday party if anyone had a birthday," she recalls. "If the guy in the mailroom had a birthday, they would buy him a cake and have a party. There was such an incredible synergy of family and faith and creativity and work ethic."



FAVORITE WORD SONG

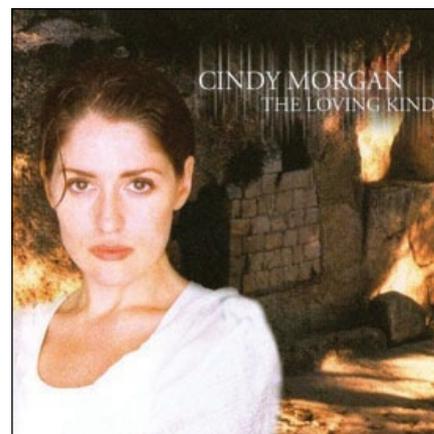
I feel compelled to go with the first thing that popped into my head, so I'm going to say 'Man After Your Own Heart' by Gary Chapman [from *My Utmost For His Highest*.] I just thought that was a powerful song. If I was going to say what album was the most important record that Word ever did as far as I'm concerned, I think it's the *Streams* album. That's a powerful record. ~ *Cindy Morgan*



The cast of artists who contributed to the album, *Streams*.

Word staffers who worked with **CINDY MORGAN** have fond memories of her days at the label. “We would take her out to visit retail stores and she would get in the car and she would sing,” recalls **DUSTY WELLS**, who has been with Word 20 years and is currently Senior Director of National Account Sales. “I remember when her album **THE LOVING KIND** had just come out. We visited the Lemstone Stores and she’d sing all these classic Dottie Rambo songs and these old hymns. We’d be cry-

ing. She’d sing all these songs a cappella and to me, that’s true artistry. Those are the kind of memories I wouldn’t trade for anything. I’m glad I got to be part of it all. I love what I do.”



In the '90s,

Word further developed its reputation for breaking artists and bringing new music to the marketplace. “I was really fortunate to work with some great artists during my time there,” says **JOHN MAYS**, former VP of A&R. “Personally, a highlight would be a run of signings that were

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

When I first got saved at 14-years-old, the first thing the people that led me to the Lord did was hook me up with Christian music.



One of the first things I did was join the Word Records and Tape Club. The very first record I got was David Meece’s ‘Everybody Needs a Little Help’ and I thought it was the coolest music ever. . . Word has always had such a diverse collection of artists. You had Southern gospel. You had black gospel and the best of contemporary music, and there was rock music like Guardian and Petra and then you had real traditional stuff [including] the Lawrence Welk singers like Norma Zimmer. You had inspirational music like Sandi Patty. Every genre was covered. You had comedians like Jerry Clower and Mark Lowry. Mike Douglas, who did the TV show, recorded for Word. Lulu Roman from ‘Hee Haw’ recorded for Word. Then you had Evie and Russ Taff. There were tons of different artists from all different genres. That’s what I think Word really prides itself in. It’s always been so diversified. Walking into a bookstore as a sales rep, I laid my catalog out and I covered every genre. And another thing about Word is the relationships. It’s the people that work here alongside the artists. For me it’s felt like family. It’s always felt that way. There’s always been that family element. Even through all the changes, you still have people that make it feel like family. ~ *Dusty Wells*

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

The only thing that keeps any label around [is] signing,



developing and promoting great artists. In addition to that, during my term at Word, Roland Lundy was president, and I believe God has honored the organization because good and Godly men like him have been in leadership over the years. ~ *John Mays*

honed with consecutive new artist of the year Doves—Cindy Morgan, then Point of Grace. Scott Krippayne didn’t win but was nominated the following year.”

Point of Grace burst on the scene in 1993 with their self-titled debut album and captured the New Artist Dove Award the following year. Currently a trio that consists of Shelley Breen, Leigh Cappillino and Denise Jones, Point of Grace remains on the Word roster. Jones recalls Word being a part of her life, even before the group signed their record deal. “I was in high school and didn’t really know



anything about record labels, but Word Records was the one I knew about. It seems like all the artists that I loved were at Word,” Jones says. “My older sister wanted to be like Evie Tornquist. I remember seeing her record jackets and you would see the Word label on there, and then Sandi Patty came along and Wayne Watson.”

Like Morgan, Jones recalls the supportive environment at Word. “When we got our first No. 1 radio song ‘I’ll Be Believing,’ [Word radio promoter] Grant Hubbard was so excited to see if it went No. 1. The chart numbers used to come in after midnight over the fax machine and he was up at Word waiting to see what happened. Then he called us. He was so excited. There was a huge support system. A lot of people ask us, ‘How did you have so much success?’ It’s because they built a team that not only cared about what they do, but they cared about us. They were excited for us and that makes you want to work hard for them, too.”

“I’m proud of the artists that we built that continue today to minister,” says Roland Lundy. “We tried some innovative things. We did some crazy things that worked and some crazy things that didn’t. One of the craziest things we ever did was when **POINT OF GRACE** was releasing the **LIFE, LOVE & OTHER MYSTERIES** album. We chartered the Dallas Mavericks’ team plane. We flew it from Nashville to Grand Rapids to Chicago to Minneapolis to Oklahoma City, all in one day and did concerts, in-stores and stuff. It cost \$55,000. When I pitched it to Thomas Nel-



son, they thought we were crazy, but it really worked. That record sold a million copies and it was a great launch.”

Jones agrees and has fond memories of the event. “We’d fly into a city, drive to an in-store and these places were packed with people and they all sang songs with us,” recalls Jones. “Sometimes we’d ride in vans with fans to and from the airport. It was just an unbelievable day. We started super early and went all day and returned at midnight. I look back at those sweet faces of little girls and moms that brought their daughters, or teenagers that came with their friends. It’s a beautiful memory.”

1997 was the year that Myrrh newcomer **JACI VELASQUEZ** won the Dove Award for New Artist of the Year. Velasquez says she inked a deal with Myrrh because she was a fan of Amy Grant, Bryan Duncan and the other artists on the label. In signing, she became a second-generation Word artist. “My Dad’s band used to be on Word back in the ‘60s,” she says. “When I look at Word,

I look at the past and their roster, and I’m proud to have been a part of the family of artists. Word gave me my start and I will forever be grateful.”



**TO WHAT DO
YOU ATTRIBUTE
WORD'S
LONGEVITY?**

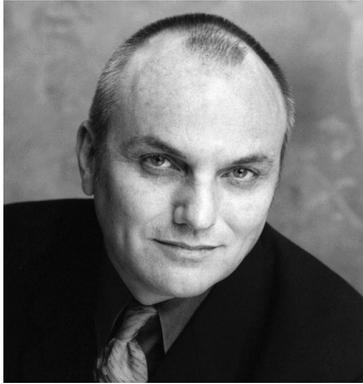
Word is a label that makes smart choices and lets creativity flow!
~ Jaci Velasquez

squint

ENTERTAINMENT

1997 was also the year that Word launched **SQUINT ENTERTAINMENT**, headed by artist/producer Steve Taylor. The company's first signing, **SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER**, became a huge success, both with Christian consumers and mainstream audiences, as the hit single "Kiss Me" raced up the charts, buoyed by exposure in the Miramax film "She's All That."

"We stayed after that single well into a year," recalls Balman, who says he and former Myrrh president **JIM CHAFFEE** were excited about **STEVE TAYLOR**'s vision for Squint. "It was a company-wide commitment. We really believed in them and we were very fortunate. Of course, they are extraordinarily talented, so it worked out very well. It was a lot of fun."



ented, so it worked out very well. It was a lot of fun."

In 1997, Gaylord Entertainment purchased Word from Thomas Nelson and changed the corporate name to Word Entertainment. When Thomas Nelson sold Word, the record label and book publishing arms were split, with Thomas Nelson retaining the book division. Over the years, Word had become as successful in the book world as they had in music, publishing such acclaimed authors as Chuck Swindoll. After the Gaylord acquisition, Thomas Nelson continued to use the "Word Publishing" name until 2002 when it changed the name of the division to "W Publishing Group."

When Gaylord took over Word, Dan Harrell and Mike Blanton became co-presidents of Word Entertainment. "The biggest thing we were dealing with was



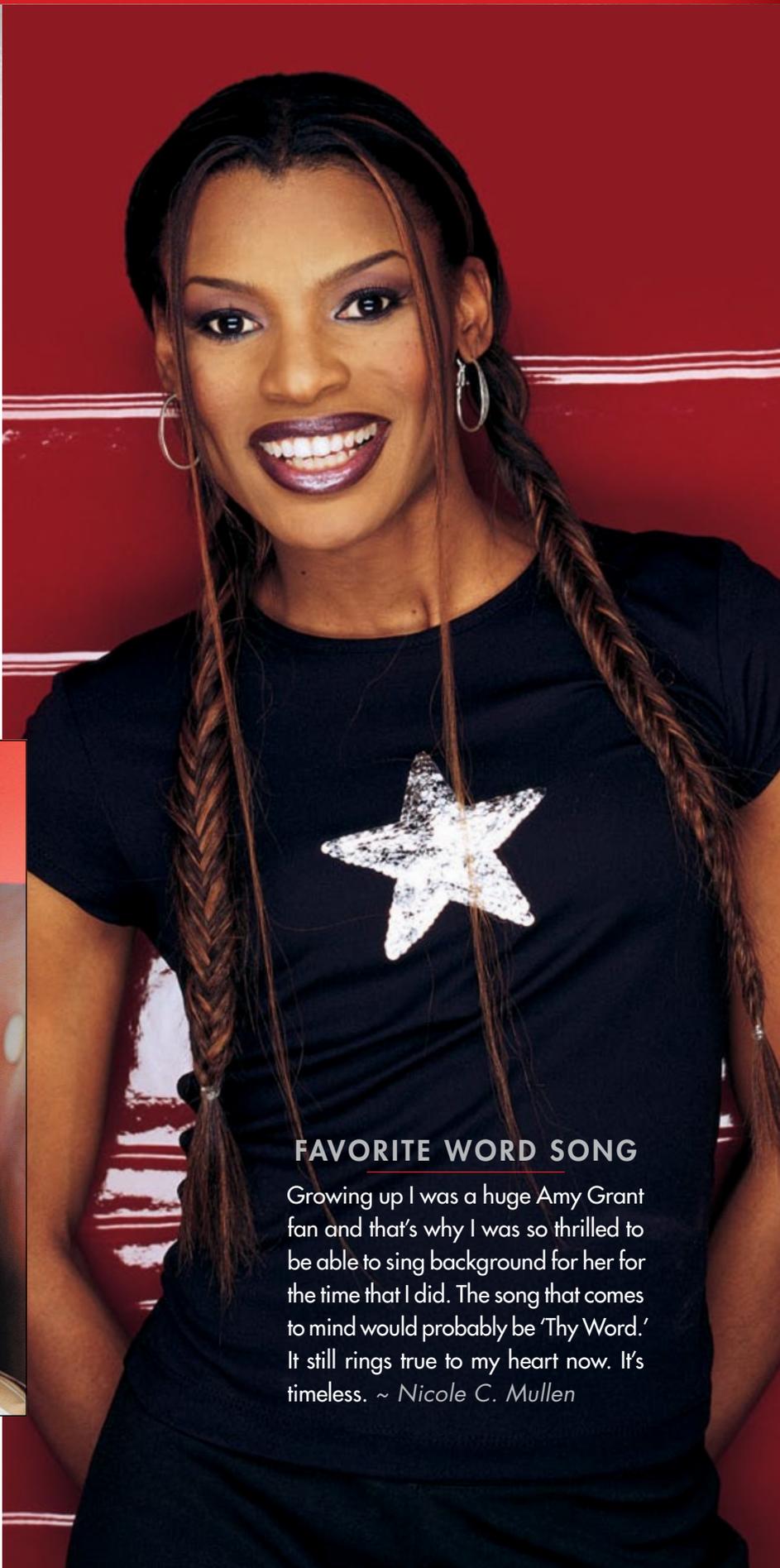
integrating a lot of different entertainment assets under one roof and trying to get everybody to play on the same team," Harrell says, recalling that era in Word's history. "Gaylord bought the [Blanton-Harrell] management company so that was one of the assets under our direction, and then we had Z-TV, the Christian video channel. We also bought a sports management company, which was very, very successful. It became Gaylord Sports."

Blanton and Harrell had long been notable figures in the industry, having successfully founded Reunion Records and Blanton Harrell Management. Joining forces with Gaylord to helm Word presented a new opportunity. "It was really different because we were no longer small, independent operators," says Harrell. "We were part of a huge corporation that owned a lot of other assets. It was interesting and exciting because there were a lot of other areas we could find synergy with and get help from. It was an interesting time."

NEW MILLENNIUM, NEW MUSIC

As the new millennium dawned, Word continued to be a powerful presence in Christian entertainment, and the decade got off to a great start as Word broke three exciting new artists – **NICOLE C. MULLEN** (right), **RACHAEL LAMPA** (below) and Mark Schultz. Mullen was well known as a singer, songwriter and choreographer. She and her husband, David, had written the Jaci Velasquez hit “On My Knees,” which won the Dove Award for Song of the Year in 1998.

“I knew Brent Bourgeois from Michael W. Smith’s tour, and right after the tour was over Word hired him,” Mullen says of Bourgeois landing an A&R post at Word. “Brent called me



FAVORITE WORD SONG

Growing up I was a huge Amy Grant fan and that’s why I was so thrilled to be able to sing background for her for the time that I did. The song that comes to mind would probably be ‘Thy Word.’ It still rings true to my heart now. It’s timeless. ~ Nicole C. Mullen



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

I think it's based on how they started, really. They started small, in Waco. When I signed with them, it felt very family-oriented. I just felt like I was a part of the family. I think 60 years of success is born out of how you start it. That's how I see it. ~ Mark Schultz

FAVORITE WORD SONG

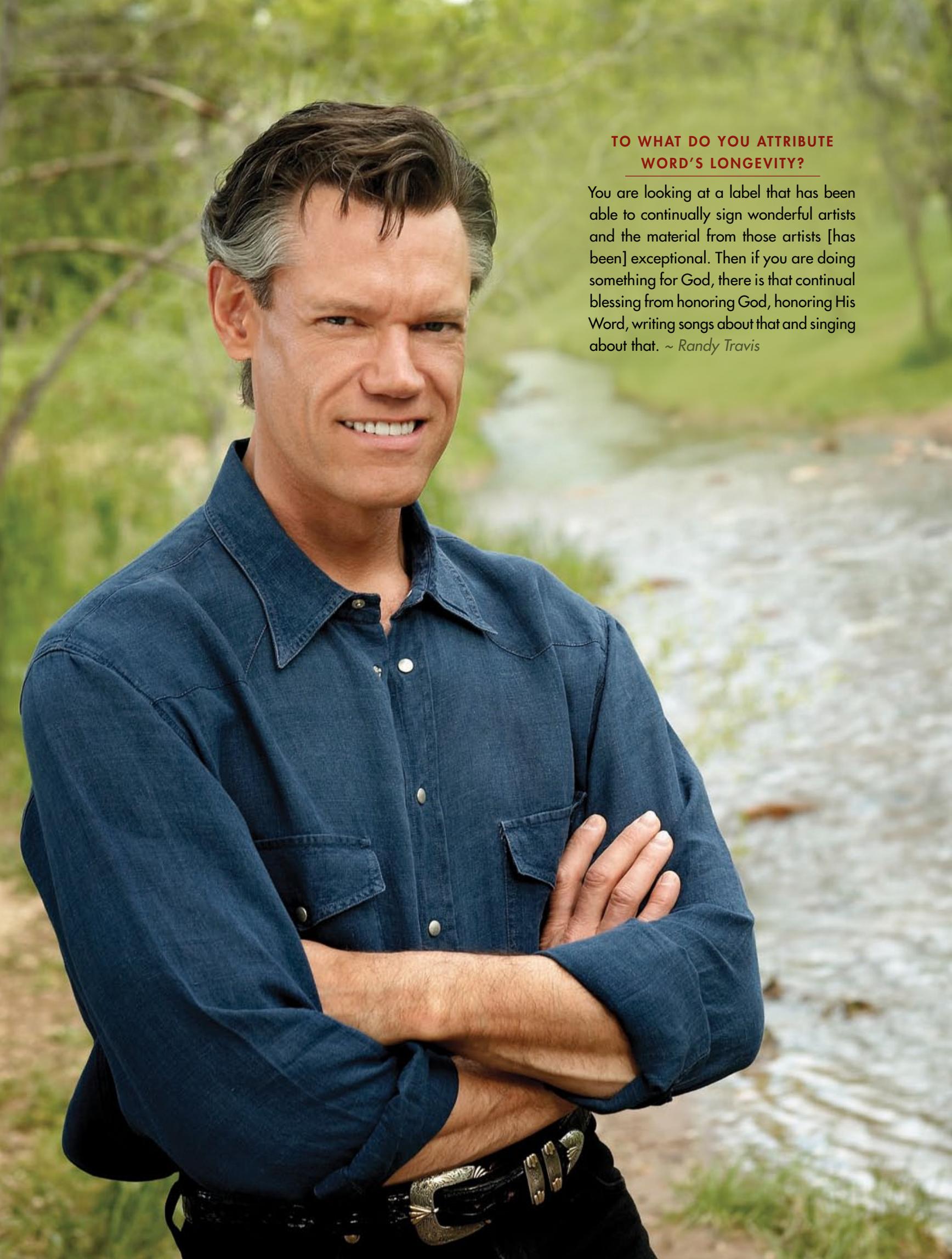
I love 'Redeemer.' I love Nicole [C. Mullen] as well. I saw her do it live and I think the only thing better than hearing it on the radio is watching her do it live. The way she delivers it, man, if I wasn't a Christian, I'd be one after she's done with that song. The way that she delivers that song is pretty awesome. When people come out of their chairs, it's great. When a song has that big of a pull on you that it emotionally moves you to get out of your chair, stand up and clap along and sing, that song has anointing on it that's just special, really, really special. ~ Mark Schultz

up and said, 'I want you to be the first one that I sign.' Of course, I was thrilled to be on the same roster as Amy Grant and some of my other favorites. I was honored because I grew up listening to albums that were produced by Word. As a child, I was always a label reader, reading credits and seeing who it was that put it out. When it became my turn to become a part of the Word family, I was honored to be among such great artists, and I admire the wonderful roster they have now. I love Chris August and I love Francesca Battistelli. They are great artists, so I applaud them and their talent and their craft."

Nicole C. Mullen has won seven Dove Awards, including 2001's Song of the Year for "Redeemer," two Female

Vocalist of the Year titles, and Songwriter of the Year. "Word had a great presence in the marketplace and I felt they really believed in my art," she says. "When I signed with them, their motto was 'we're not in this for the album, we're in it for the career.' So their artists were able to relax in producing what we were called to do."

MARK SCHULTZ, who was a youth pastor at a Nashville church when he was signed to Word, says he'll always remember his first radio interview. "It was on MIX 92.9 in Nashville. I was scared out of my mind and they said, 'we're going to take callers on this Sunday morning if you have questions for Mark Schultz.' The very first interview question that came in live was Roland Lundy,"



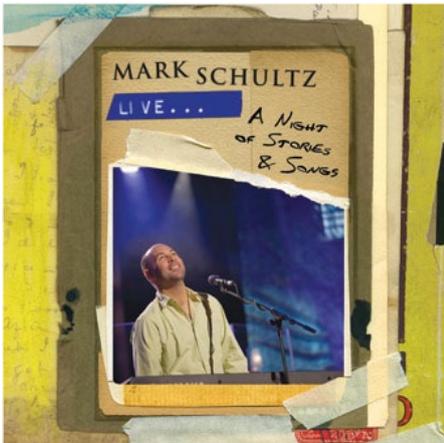
**TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE
WORD'S LONGEVITY?**

You are looking at a label that has been able to continually sign wonderful artists and the material from those artists [has been] exceptional. Then if you are doing something for God, there is that continual blessing from honoring God, honoring His Word, writing songs about that and singing about that. ~ *Randy Travis*

Schultz recalls, startled that the label president was calling in. “He said, ‘I’m on my way to church and we turned this on. We just signed Mark to our record label a few months ago. We love this guy, and I love this new record. I’m a huge fan. Anybody that’s listening needs to go out and buy his record. I’m not saying that because we signed him, I’m saying that because we love his songs.’”

“That was my first interview question, which was from the head of the label calling in on his way to church. Now that made me a Roland Lundy fan for the rest of my life. It’s cool and it wasn’t staged. It was honestly him calling in because nobody else knew who I was, so there weren’t any calls coming in.”

Over the years, leadership at Word has changed, but Schultz appreciates the support of the new team and their passion for music. “I was recording my live DVD, **LIVE... A NIGHT OF STORIES & SONGS**, in Marion, Illinois. I look out in the crowd and there’s Tim Marshall,” Schultz says of Word’s current Senior VP of Sales and Operations. “I was singing one of my older songs and Tim is sitting in the middle of this packed house. He has

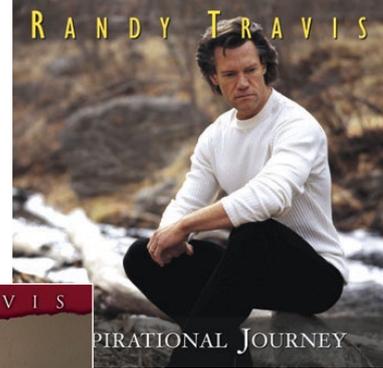
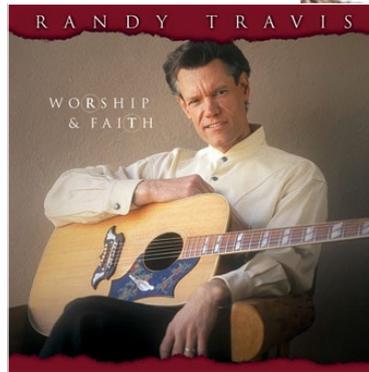


his hands up and tears running down his face as I’m singing. He is not here because he works for the label. He is here because he is a fan of what I do. I’ll run through a wall for those people. He’s a good man and I’m grateful.”

Country music icon **RANDY TRAVIS** is also appreciative of the support he received as a Word artist. In 2000, Travis



made his bow in Christian music with **INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY**, which was quickly embraced by fans. He followed with 2002’s *Rise and Shine*, 2003’s **WORSHIP & FAITH** and 2005’s **GLORY TRAIN: SONGS OF FAITH, WORSHIP AND PRAISE**. These three follow-up releases each won a Grammy Award for Best Southern, Country or Bluegrass



Gospel album in 2003, 2004, and 2006, respectively. *Rise and Shine* spawned the mega hit “Three Wooden Crosses.”

Penned by Doug Johnson and Kim Williams, “Three Wooden Crosses” became Travis’s 16th No. 1 hit and holds the distinction of being the only single released by a Christian record company that went to No. 1 on the Billboard country chart. Through the promotion partnership of Word, Curb and Warner, “Three Wooden Crosses,” published by Curb, was also named the Country Music Association’s Song of the Year in 2003 and the Dove for Country Song of the Year in 2004.

In addition to breathing new life into the career of a legend like Travis, Word also spent the better part of the decade breaking new acts, including **BUILDING 429**, which won the Dove for New Artist of the Year in 2005. Propelled by lead vocalist Jason Roy’s distinctive voice, the band’s breakthrough hit “Glory Defined” became an instant classic.

WARNER & CURB TAKE THE REINS

After months of speculation, the announcement came in December 2001 that Warner Music Group had acquired Word Entertainment from Gaylord. “I met Mr. Gaylord before he died and he started asking me a few questions about Word,” recalls **MIKE CURB**, founder of Curb Records and Word Entertainment Chairman. “I got the impression that he might be thinking about selling it, but he was worried about selling it to a major company. He wanted to make sure that it continued on as a Christian label and it continued to have its own identity. I didn’t hear anything for about six months or so and then Collin Reed became the new head of Gaylord. He invited me to dinner and asked me to help him with the sale of Word.”

Veteran Nashville attorney Malcolm Mimms was the head of Word Entertainment at that time, and he and Curb began to look at options for the company’s future. “Malcolm and I had worked together on many artists,” says Curb. “He’s a friend and I have a lot of respect for him. Malcolm really had the talent to put together the prospectus for the sale. I started working with Malcolm and Collin Reed on the sale of Word and we narrowed it down to three companies – Warner/Curb, Sony or Provident. Deutsche Bank was handling the transaction in New York and we were supposed to have all of the bids in by six o’clock New York time on Sept. 10, 2001 and then we were going to have a meeting the

next day at Deutsche Bank. The next day was Sept. 11, 2001. Deutsche Bank was right next to the Twin Towers and many of the people in the Deutsche Bank building were killed on 9/11.”

One of the parties involved didn’t have their bid ready, so the meeting was cancelled, which likely saved the lives of the parties involved. Nashvillian Donna Hilley, former longtime head of Sony’s Nashville publishing division, was scheduled to be at the meeting and Curb had called to tell her it was postponed. “Fortunately she got the message and

she wasn’t at Deutsche Bank,” Curb recalls, “but we almost ended up right in the middle of 9/11. So that’s how this whole thing started. At the end of the day, we all realized how fortunate we were just to be alive.

FAVORITE WORD SONG

I love gospel music. Shirley Caesar did a duet with Kirk Franklin called ‘I’m Ready’ back in 2004 and I love that record! When I heard ‘Music Of My Heart’ by Nicole C. Mullen, I about had a heart attack. That would be right up there! ‘Three Wooden Crosses’ meant a lot in the fact that we were able to cross it over and it went all the way to No. 1 on the country chart. Another song that I really, really love from the day I heard it was ‘Free To Be Me’ by Francesca Battistelli. I thought that song captured so much. ~ Mike Curb



We then put the transaction together very quickly and Warner/Curb became the highest bidder. When you look at the Word Entertainment Building there and it says ‘a Warner/Curb Company’ underneath it, that’s the story of how it became a Warner/Curb Company.”

It was written into the contract that Curb would be lifetime Chairman of Word Entertainment, a position that means a great deal to the veteran entrepreneur as he already had a long association with the company. “The first time I went to Word it was 1964,” he remembers. “My parents were transferred to Houston and I was in my second year of college at Cal State. I went to see my parents and then



I drove to Waco to play a song for Jarrell McCracken. I was only about 17 or 18-years-old at the time. He gave me some advice and then he said he'd like me to continue to work on my music and meet again."

Curb returned to California and started his own record company, but kept in touch with McCracken. "We were a West Coast rock & roll label, but I had the Mike Curb Congregation," Curb says of his vocal group. "Jarrell was intrigued by them because it was a multi-racial group. We had Hispanics and African-American members. He said 'I'd like to hear the development of your group,' so about four or five years later, still in the '60s, I went back and met with him and I played him more music by my group."

The Mike Curb Congregation landed a coveted spot

performing weekly on Glen Campbell's network television show and McCracken signed them, releasing their Word debut album in the '70s. Curb also began working with such groundbreaking West Coast Contemporary Christian artists as Larry Norman ("I Wish We'd All Been Ready"), Christian rockers DeGarmo & Key, 2nd Chapter of Acts (which he brought to the attention of Billy Ray Hearn in the early days of Myrrh Records) and Debby Boone's "You Light Up My Life," Contemporary Christian's first multi-platinum single.

"I was going to the same church as Pat Boone, called Church On The Way in California," says Curb. "Pat and I went to the Sunday night service and there was a group called 2nd Chapter of Acts playing. I signed them and I put out their first records on my label and then I played those for Billy Ray and then he ended up signing 2nd Chapter of Acts to Myrrh."

Curb recalls Chris Christian (who was a Curb recording artist at the time) calling to tell him about finding a young singer named Amy Grant, but by then Curb had become Lt. Governor for the state of California. "I've told Chris, if I hadn't become Lt. Governor I might have ended up with Whiteheart, Amy Grant and B.J. Thomas," Curb says of Word artists he wishes he had signed. (And actually Whiteheart later signed to Curb



Records.) In addition, Curb entered into a co-venture with INO Records for the group MercyMe, which resulted in the massive cross-over hit, “I Can Only Imagine.”

Word Distribution benefitted from other Curb artists such as multi-Dove winning artists, **NATALIE GRANT**, Michael English and **SELAH**, as well as MIKESCHAIR.

After the acquisition, Word continued to flourish as Mullen, Schultz, Travis, Point of Grace and other acts scored radio hits and sold records. Industry veteran **BARRY LANDIS** was put in place to head up the label group at Word from 2002 through 2004. In late 2004, Curb lured



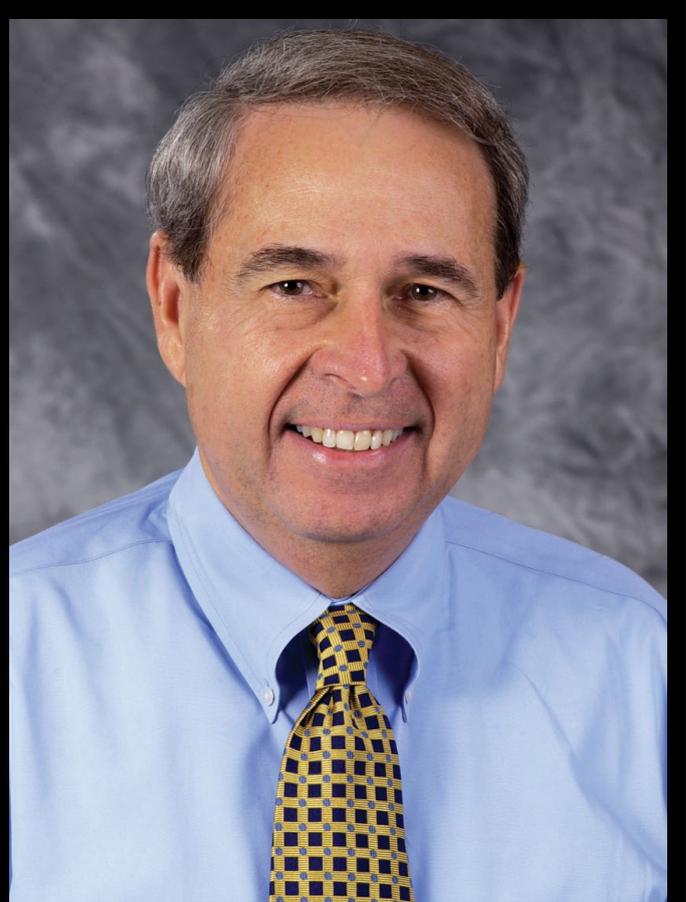
veteran executive Jim Van Hook to Music Row to be the CEO of Word Entertainment. Formerly chairman/CEO of Provident Music Group, Van Hook had been serving as the first dean of Belmont University’s Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business.

“For over a year and a half I had both jobs at the same time. That was a little too much, so I gave up the Belmont job and stayed full-time with Word,” says Van Hook, who started at Word in November 2004 and left four years later.

During his tenure, Van Hook says he made a conscious effort to bring Word into the digital world. “My plan was to try to maximize the resources we had by shifting assets to the new realities,” he notes. “It carries over into marketing, still doing advertising where it makes sense, but shifting to other digital opportunities such as social media. When I first got there, we had one person dealing with anything to do with new media and she was being shared with the country division. When I left four years later, we had six full-time people.”

In November 2007, **JIM VAN HOOK** was preparing to lead a staff meeting when he got news that Word founder Jarrell McCracken had died. “We had a time of honoring him and his role,” Van Hook recalls. “I talked about ‘The Game of Life,’ the first record and in fact, we put out a special edition of the CD. We had prayer time and honored his legacy. We have something to be grateful for because it is a legacy that carries on today. We’re still here. It’s still the same calling. It was really neat to be together at that meeting and express our appreciation for the legacy. It was a sweet occasion.”

After four years, Van Hook opted to retire and “spend more times with grandkids and on the golf course,” he says with a smile. Executives at Warner called in Country record producer Mark Bright, known for his work with Carrie Underwood, Rascal Flatts, Sara Evans, Billy Ray Cyrus and other top acts. Bright steered the company for nearly two years before leaving to focus once again on his production career.



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

In the early days, Jarrell McCracken’s ‘The Game of Life’ was a reflection of what was going on in the local church. Word began with a strong sense of the church and that has served them well. I believe that there is no conflict in serving the church while, at the same time, impacting culture. They want to do both. Their artists and songwriters want to have impact on the church and the world. Kurt Kaiser is Mr. Church, through and through. Those roots worked well for Word early on. And then there were people like Amy Grant, who had a chance to impact the mainstream market, and they took advantage of those opportunities as well, without losing their connection to the church. ~ Jim Van Hook

FERVENT RECORDS ACQUIRED BY WORD



In 2005, Fervent Records became part of the Word Entertainment family, which provided an infusion of talented artists such as BarlowGirl, **BY THE TREE** and Big Daddy Weave. Fervent had been launched in 2001 by husband and wife team, Rod and Susan Riley. “Overnight Susan and Rod changed Word’s image from being more of a middle-of-the-road label to being a label that was doing

Contemporary Christian rock music,” says Curb. “Within six months of the time we had purchased Fervent, we had hits by BarlowGirl, By The Tree and Big Daddy Weave.”



fervent
RECORDS

Starting as a small, scrappy indie label, Fervent’s staff and artists were a tight family, a bond that had been cultivated by the Rileys early on. “We tried to be very intentional about who we got

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

You’ve got to go back to the founder, Jarrell McCracken. He believed in artists and believed in Christian music and over the years that’s never really changed. I can’t tell you how many different ownerships and changes it’s been through, but it always seems the core values haven’t changed. The guys that are now running it for Warner still have those same values and have done a great job of keeping it an island inside a big company. ~ Dan Harrell

behind, and how many new artists we signed each year,” says Susan Riley. “We were working with limited funds, so the artists would help by living with us, driving our cars to promo tours, etc. We all leaned on the Lord and each other to make the label work. In many ways we grew up together as well.”

That family vibe appealed to Becca, Lauren and Alyssa Barlow of **BARLOWGIRL**. “We fell in love with Susan Riley as soon as we met her,” says Becca of the siblings’ decision to sign with Fervent. “We had looked at a couple of different record companies, but as soon as we met with her and we saw who she was as a person, we really couldn’t go anywhere else. We knew that was going to be our home. We loved the choice that we made and we are so glad that we are still a part of that family.”

Portions of BarlowGirl’s first album were recorded at the Riley’s home. “We got signed and we knew nothing about the industry or how anything worked,” Becca recalls. “Susan said, ‘You can stay at my house.’ They were

so good at keeping us comfortable and making us feel like we were a part of a family, and it just meant the world to us. We took mattresses and propped them up against one of the walls in the attic and recorded all the background

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD’S LONGEVITY?

I would say the people that they put into leadership, and the people that they hire. They surround themselves with quality people that love the Lord. Yes, it’s a business, but it’s all about how to merge the two things and how to be people of character. It’s been amazing getting to know the people at Word and a lot of them have become friends and I think it just overflows from there to a great business. I love brainstorming with them. They have some of the most brilliant ideas. You can give them the tiniest sliver of information and they can dream up so many amazing things. I love their creativity. ~ Becca Barlow



vocals for the first album there. We were trying to cut costs. It turned out perfect and we had so much fun.”

Becoming part of the Word family infused Fervent with more funds and a broader family of support for their artists. “I remember the first sales showcase we did,” recalls **SUSAN RILEY**. “It was an introduction of the Fervent artists to Word. Each artist had singles that were work-

ing on radio at the time and it was an honor to be able to present our family, the Fervent family, and have Word embrace us so much. We all felt so welcomed. I remember



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

I've been a fan of Word artists my whole life, as they have had a huge impact on my life and so many others. Music styles have changed through the decades, but Word has continued to release songs that will stand the test of time. It's humbling to play any role in a company that has such rich heritage for encouraging people with the message of hope through Christ. It's also been very encouraging to see Mike Curb's passion for Word through the different changes over the years and how he truly cares about the mission of Word. I've learned a lot from just watching him. I have so much respect for him. ~ Susan Riley

feeling like we are a part of something bigger now; we can take a deep breath.”

The Rileys say Mike Curb's belief in each of them and



his genuine enthusiasm for Fervent’s artists was the catalyst to them selling the company. “Susan and I were not looking to sell Fervent when we had our first lunch meeting with Mike Curb,” Rod Riley recalls. “We sat in his house and he had a stack in front of him of every single album that we had released at Fervent. He was referencing track 10 of **BIG DADDY WEAVE**’s first album and we realized he had listened through every song across our roster. He wanted to know what else we were working on and we played him “Never Alone” by BarlowGirl before that first album ever released, and he got it. We were blown away when we finished that first meeting and he said he believed in what we were doing and he wanted us to be a part of what was going on here at Word.”

Following the acquisition, the company has blended the best of two worlds – combining Fervent’s independent spirit with Word’s corporate strengths. “It’s a combination of the two cultures,” says Rod, who was promoted to President & CEO of Word when Bright exited. “Susan and I partnered with our artists at a very deep level at Fervent. We brought that into the Word atmosphere and said, ‘We have this great large company and we have run a successful small company. How do we take the best of both worlds and combine them?’ At the end of the day, it’s about our artists and songwriters. How do we partner with them?”

After becoming part of Word, Fervent continued to sign and break such successful acts as **SIDEWALK PROPHETS**, **PURENRG**, **GROUP 1 CREW**, Francesca Battistelli, and Chris August. This commitment to breaking new artists was evident in the fact that Fervent had the best-selling





WORD: THE STORY FERVENT RECORDS ACQUIRED BY WORD

new artists in all of Christian music in 2008 and 2010 and the second best-selling new artists across the industry in 2007 and 2009. The tween artists of pureNRG were working on their debut album at the same time Susan Riley was expecting her daughter, Anna. “I was emailing them while I was in the hospital and it was inspiring to know that we were making a record that my child was going to be

impacted by,” says Susan, “And sure enough, it’s one of the two records that she wants to listen to all the time, still to this day. It took on a deeper meaning when she was old enough to tell me what she was learning from it.”



WORD'S 60TH YEAR

As Word celebrates its 60th anniversary, the company has never been stronger. Word had a dominant showing at the 42nd Annual GMA Dove Awards in April 2011, collecting wins in 19 categories including Artist of the Year, New Artist of the Year, Female Vocalist of the Year, Male Vocalist of the Year and Group of the Year.

FRANCESCA BATTISTELLI was named Female Vocalist and Artist of the Year, making her the first female artist to win the top honor since Amy Grant's win 19 years ago. Her hit single, "Beautiful, Beautiful" was named Pop/



Contemporary Song of the Year.

POINT OF GRACE

brought home three Doves in 2011, bringing their total to 13.

They won Country Recorded

Song of the Year for

"There Is Nothing Greater Than Grace," Country

Album of the Year for **NO**

CHANGIN' US, and

Christmas Album of the Year for **HOME FOR**

THE HOLIDAYS.



TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

They are obviously doing something right. It really is a testament to the way they do business that they are still around after so many years. In this day and age, it's hard for any label to stick around, so I think it's really amazing and I'm proud to be a part of it. ~ Francesca Battistelli

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

Word has had a lot of changes through the years, but there have always been people in place who care not only about selling records—obviously they have to care about that—but they have cared about their artists, who their artists are and who an artist's audience is. Word has constantly been great about caring about us and our audience. Kudos to leadership along the way who have continued to develop teams; and even though those teams have changed, there's always been a team that walks beside their artists. Along the way we've had different A&R people and different marketing people, but they've always invested in our careers and we're so thankful for it.~

Denise Jones (Point of Grace)





FAVORITE WORD SONG

When I was 19, I worked at a Christian bookstore. I can remember getting in the Word shipment and I unwrapped this CD by an artist named Rachael Lampa. It was a CD called *Live For You*, and I thought the whole CD was so amazing. There's a song on there called 'Free' that I've always loved. Actually, when I signed with Word, I'd forgotten about this record. I'd probably lost it; years had gone by. Then I was at Word not too long ago, rummaging through their closet of old CD's and found it. I took it home and put it on. It's still great 10 years later! The songs are still speaking to me in a way. It's like a decade could go by and my life is completely different. I'm pretty much a different man than I was 10 years ago, and still this music that Word made back then is still encouraging me as an artist and as a Christian. ~ *Chris August*



CHRIS AUGUST also collected three Doves, winning in the Male Vocalist and New Artist of the Year categories as well as Pop/Contemporary Album of the Year for his Fervent Records debut **NO FAR AWAY**.

“They gave me a lot of freedom in making my record,” August says of his album, which released in August 2010. “For me that was just the main pull, but also at the end of the day just how nice, real and down to earth everyone was that worked there. From the moment I walked in, there were no games, no ‘Let’s try to persuade him to do this.’ It was ‘Let’s just talk. This is what we’re doing. Let me know if you want to be a part of it. We’d love to have you.’ Now all the people that work there are my best friends.”

Battistelli echoes that sentiment. “I remember my first conversation with the people at Word that are now some of my best friends. I felt like it clicked from the beginning,” she says. “The biggest thing about Word is

that when you are a part of it, you really are family. Now with Rod being at the helm, he's a great boss and CEO. He does an amazing job and it's been really fun to see him rise to that place."

Warner Music Nashville President/CEO **JOHN ESPOSITO** praises Riley's efforts since he took over the reins at Word. "Rod made it very clear to me that if he were to take on the role of president of Word, he wanted to make sure it was driven as a faith-based company," Esposito says. "If there were artists that crossed over that was icing on the cake, never the mission. The mission was to make sure the message was being delivered, and I'm proud of him. He's got that staff enthused and they are delivering for their artists. That team came out of the Dove Awards about as high as you can get, just thrilled that all their hard work was paying off and their dedication to A&R first and foremost was paying off. I'm really very proud of where we are and where we're going with Word."

FAVORITE WORD SONG

Sixpence None the Richer's "Kiss Me." I love songs like that. And I remember managing record stores in Washington DC in the late 70s and early 80s. I was learning a lot of new music and didn't know about Myrrh Records. My boss told me I had to pay attention to this Amy Grant person so we started putting those records on the shelf. The store I managed had a big gospel clientele. We were in Southeast DC and couldn't keep Shirley Caesar and the Mighty Clouds of Joy on the shelves. Then amongst all that—we put it in gospel because we didn't have a Christian section at that point—was this little white gal named Amy Grant. Everybody was buying her record. The same people who were buying gospel records were buying it and the people coming in to buy rock n' roll. It was a joy to watch that career unfold over those first years of my business life. She's gone on to such amazing things. She was an incredibly important artist to Word and its history. ~ John Esposito

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE WORD'S LONGEVITY?

There were key things that they smartly did throughout the years that gave them fresh blood, like when they launched Canaan Records and when they launched Myrrh Records with Billy Ray Hearn. Then they launched a black gospel division with Shirley Caesar and the Mighty Clouds of Joy. They've been very smart through the years to not rest on their laurels. One of the things that positioned us wonderfully for our future was partnering with Susan Riley and Fervent Records. There have been successful acts that have come as a result of the Fervent acquisition like the signing of Francesca Battistelli and Chris August. I think Dara Maclean is going to be a wonderful surprise. She's an up and coming star. You can never sit still. ~John Esposito

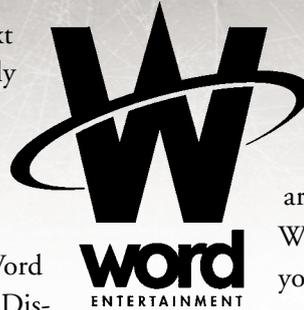


LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

As the company heads into the next chapter, Word Records has truly become **WORD ENTERTAINMENT**, a company that has five focused divisions with one main goal: serving the church through serving its artists and songwriters. In addition to Word Label Group's Word and Fervent Record imprints, there is Word Distribution, the Christian retail sales and distribution arm, Word Music, the print division that handles choral music, worship resources, etc., Word Music Publishing, the songwriting and publishing arm; and 25 Entertainment, the booking and live events division.

"We can't view ourselves as being in the record business anymore, we are a faith-based entertainment company that is focused on the music business as a whole," says **ROD RILEY**. "We're involved with more than just an artist's record. We are now involved with the whole artist career, and we've gone from record deals to true 360 partnerships. Our responsibility is to serve our artists through providing solutions to artist's real needs throughout every aspect of their life. The areas of merchandise, booking, sponsorships and direct-to-fan relationships weren't discussed 6 years ago at Word, but now we have specialized teams working to actively service our artists in these areas. It has transformed our thinking and focused our decision making around what is best for the artist's whole career."

August is a fan of Word's new business model. "It would be a horrible thing if you signed with a label and they wanted to take a percentage of your merch, but they weren't making your



merch. That's the kind of 360 deal I would not be interested in, and that's actually what a lot of record labels are doing," says August, who is also booked by Word. "Some labels are taking, but they aren't giving you anything. Word is saying 'Okay we're going to take part of your merch, but we're going to design it for you, create it, do everything. You can sell it and just pay us for the merch we give you.' It really works out and it's innovative. I could use any merch company. I might as well use them, so the 360 deal for me personally has been pretty awesome."

Partnering with artists to maximize their opportunities is the key to Word's plan for the future. "Technology changes everything it touches and is absolutely changing the music business," Rod says. "We as a team choose to believe that technology is our friend. We highly embrace the change that has happened with technology in music. We can now reach more people easier and cheaper and have more meaningful connections between the artists and their fans because of technology."

Esposito sees this as a particularly strong time in Word's history. "I firmly believe this company is in some of the best shape it's been in during its entire history," he says. "In this incredibly challenged recorded music environment, Rod is driving new business developments. They developed their own merchandising company. They

WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT WHEN LOOKING FORWARD TO WORD'S FUTURE?

I am honored to be involved in a company with such a rich legacy. The first 60 years of Word have provided the platform we now stand on to carry on its impact on culture. We have a team of artists including newcomers Dara MacLean, for King & Country and Patrick Ryan Clark, songwriters and employees that fundamentally believe what Jarrell McCracken believed, that music has the power to change people's hearts. That belief in the power of music drives us all, every day, to challenge our business model to continue to transform our ability to share the hope in our music with the world." ~ Rod Riley



Dara Maclean becomes Fervent Records' newest signing, flanked by her Word team, (ltr) Josh Bailey, Sr. VP of A&R; Rod Riley, President & CEO; Susan Riley, Fervent Records Co-Founder; Maclean; Andrea Kleid, VP of Promotion & Brand Management; and Chad Segura, Sr. VP of Music Publishing.



developed their own technology company to build fan sites and manage e-commerce and of course, they are in these other unique businesses such as print and publishing. In the Christian business, Word stands alone as the most multi-faceted, multi-business entertainment company there is, and they are executing it very well.”

Rod Riley and his team are excited about the future. “I am honored to be involved in a company with such a rich legacy. The first 60 years of Word have provided the platform we now stand on to carry on its impact on culture,” he says. “We have a team of artists including newcomers **DARA MACLEAN, FOR KING & COUNTRY** and **PATRICK RYAN CLARK**, songwriters and employees that fundamentally believe what Jarrell McCracken believed, that music has the power to change people’s hearts.



That belief in the power of music drives us all, every day, to challenge our business model to continue to transform our ability to share the hope in our music with the world.”

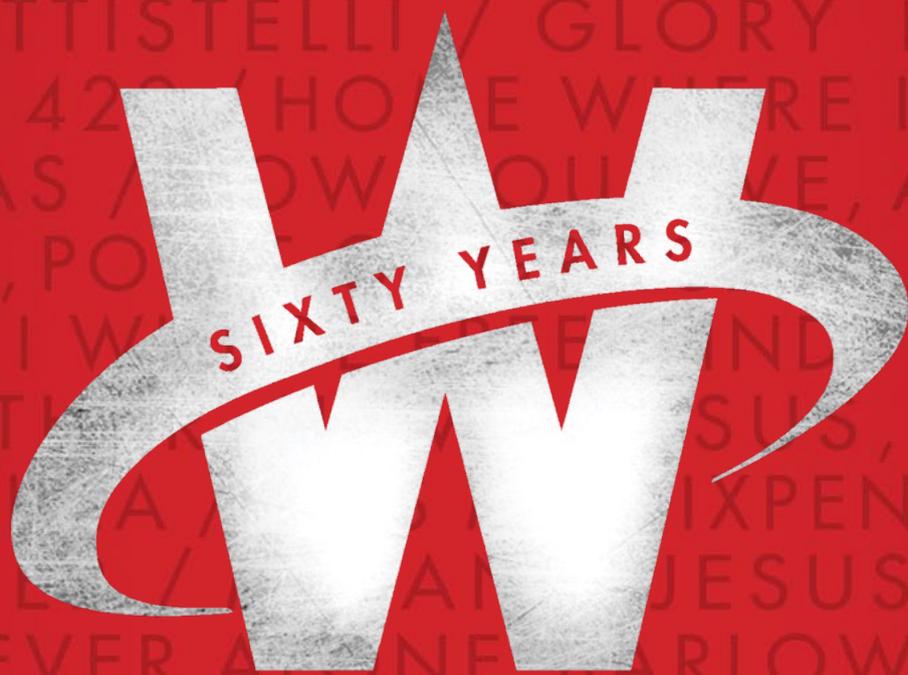
AND THE STORY OF WORD ENTERTAINMENT CONTINUES TO BE WRITTEN...

DEBORAH EVANS PRICE
Christian Music Historian
Author/Entertainment Journalist



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