





# BEVILL-MAY-CARE

**A**t the inaugural girls camp she launched last summer, "A Place in the Sun," Lisa Bevill conducted a workshop where she illustrated that "things are not always what they seem." Thirty curious teenage girls were shocked when they saw the artwork from Lisa's album—before and after the pictures had been retouched. The comparison was enlightening, especially for a group who constantly compared themselves to the latest cover model gracing *Seventeen* magazine. But then they already knew what Lisa looked like without primping. For Lisa's steadfast camp rule was absolutely no make-up—a rule she gladly applied to herself.

Some artists may be uncomfortable stripping down the teased hair, make-up and movie-star glamour that transforms the girl-next-door into a camera-ready musician. But not Lisa Bevill. "We as artists need to do everything we can to tear down the word 'artist' and put in the word 'person.' As entertainers and as artists, we have the responsibility to say, 'Hey I'm just like you,' and to make ourselves accessible and real to people."

Accessible? Lisa embodies accessibility. Dressed for her interview in knit pants and a shirt while sheepishly shrugging away the folded laundry on the couch, her hair held back with a barrette, framing her bare, unmade face—a talk with Lisa is like visiting an old friend.

Yet underneath the spontaneous smile and infectious laugh lies a strong woman—a woman of integrity and character. It is character derived from struggles, pain and hardship.

But from her childhood, to the genesis of her music career, to the contentment she radiates today, it is obvious that God's hand has been in Lisa's life—pointing her to the next step when she asks, "What now?," prodding her to obey when she asks, "Is it your will?," comforting her when she asks, "Why me?"

It's hard to match those past struggles with Lisa Bevill 1996. "I'm so happy," she sighs. "I've got two great kids, a wonderful husband and a career." And don't forget a new album, *Love of Heaven*, and headlining a tour.

*Love of Heaven* contains the mix of ballads, dance tracks and hip hop tunes a listener expects from a Lisa Bevill record. Her trademark simplistic lyrics speak for themselves without tangling listeners up in musical metaphors. "When I look for songs, lyrics have to sound real and conversational to me. Poetic stuff goes right over my head," she

laughs. "I don't want someone to have to explain the song to me, I want it to be real cut and dry."

If there is anything that separates this album from her past two, it is that *Love of Heaven* is more personal—more Lisa. "I was more drawn into the project this time than ever before. I got to offer my opinion, and I got to co-write four of the tunes on the record. I found out that I definitely have an opinion—almost like wearing the producer's hat." Lisa was also more selective about the songs and the sound of her album. "My producers get to walk away from it and go on to the next project. But I have to live with it for the rest of my life. I'd better make sure I love every bit of it because if I don't, I have to sing the songs over and over again."

And the music is clearly about what personally matters most to Lisa—her God, her children, her husband and her ministry to teen girls. "Tender Reed" is for her "girls." "Safe Inside" is dedicated to her children.

Lisa's affection for musical expression is deeply rooted in her life. Growing up south of Nashville in suburban Franklin, Tenn., Lisa always dreamed of being a singer. After attending Belmont College (now Belmont University), a Nashville college noted for churning out musicians, she plunged head first into the music business, performing on Star Search and then singing back-up for David Meece.

Touring almost non-stop for three years with David Meece and Russ Taff, Lisa visited every state, Europe and even South Africa. "My family thought I lived the most glamorous life—especially for a small town girl."

A fairy tale life? At first glance. For Lisa's easygoing smile disguised a lot of pain. Her father, who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, died suddenly when she was 19. And her mother, who had been ill with cancer since Lisa was 12, died the day after Lisa returned from her honeymoon.

But God had not forgotten Lisa. His hand, a comforting hug, encouraged her through that difficult time.

Lisa had her first son, Cody, and she began thinking more and more about pursuing her music in a pop, not a Christian, music career. "That's where I felt like where I was supposed to be—the pop world doing positive lyrics," she explained. A bit cynical from what she saw on the road, Lisa resisted a career in Christian music. A lack of Christian pop music—"everything sounded like old gospel to me"—cemented her decision to look at the mainstream market. But

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B Y K A R L Y R A N D O L P H



then God called her. And Lisa listened—if reluctantly. “I will never forget my calling—the night He put it on my heart to sing Christian music. I fought Him all the way—saying ‘No, I don’t want any part of Christian music.’ I said ‘Yes, I would do it,’ but kicking and screaming the whole way.”

A chat with friend and prolific producer Brown Bannister—who had recently started a pop record label with Sparrow Records—culminated in her first album, *My Freedom*.

But just when her future looked bright, dark skies clouded the horizon. Lisa miscarried a baby, had problems with her booking agency, changed managers two separate times, and lost money when her lawyer embezzled money from her earnings. “Almost as soon as my career got started, all of these horrible things started happening. I just kept crying to God, ‘Am I not supposed to be singing Christian music?’” But God’s hand was there—a gentle squeeze of reassurance, saying, “Press on, you are in my will.”

Lisa’s second album, *All Because of You*, yielded hits “No Condemnation” and “Sunshine and Joy.” Baby number two came, Trevor, and Lisa began a tour with Petra. The horizon had cleared—momentarily. When her children and husband were flying out to meet Lisa at one of her concerts, Lisa began having panic attacks. She was terrified that her family would be killed on the plane, and she would be all alone.

On the advice of a friend, Lisa went to some old family friends to be delivered from the paralyzing fears. Afterwards, on an emotional and spiritual high, she began praying. She was still struggling with one more question—whether or not she and her husband should try to have another child. Although they had two boys, the Bevills always wanted a little girl. At the same time, they only wanted two, not three, children.

“Before I could even speak any more, God quickly began to speak to me. He said, ‘Lisa, do you remember your miscarriage? That was your daughter, and your momma’s got her.’ Quickly, two pictures flashed in my mind. I saw my mom throwing her up in the air, and she’s three, four years old, with blonde, curly, ringlet hair. The next scene that I see she’s squirming to get out of my mom’s arms, and she’s running to me as I enter heaven. And He said to me, ‘Your momma’s got her. You would not be as effective for Me if you had to leave her behind.’”

Lisa was stunned—it was as if the puzzle pieces of her life had all come together, and she finally saw the continuity of the completed masterpiece. God’s hand was in Lisa’s life, a confirming answer to so many previously unanswered questions. Some of the pain began to make sense.

But the story does not end there. As Lisa’s popularity grew, she appeared on the cover of *Brio*, a magazine for young girls. After describing the death of her parents, her struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts, and the low self-esteem she had as a teenager, girls flooded Lisa with letters. When the mailbag averaged 20 letters a day, Lisa realized that she needed to do something. She tried a form letter. Nope, not enough, God seemed to say. “You have to take

another step forward. I want you to start a girl’s camp,” He told Lisa. “Before I could even say no, He started planting all of these ideas in my head.” Ruling out an immediate plan, Lisa thought, “I’ll start the camp in a couple of years.” Too busy.

But when Lisa was a guest on a Nashville radio station, she mentioned the camp—and the phones started ringing off the hook. A couple of months later—after some persistent nagging from a friend—Lisa had 14 counselors, a week’s lease at a Christian owned camp in Bowling Green, Ky., free ads on Christian radio stations in Nashville and Bowling Green, and 30 girls signed up for the first “A Place in the Sun” summer camp.

The camp was an incredible success. Since that first retreat, news of the camp has spread “like wildfire,” Lisa said. Now, she plans to have a camp every summer.

Although the numerous letters she received from the girls are testaments to the camp’s impact, Lisa claims that she was the real beneficiary. “It totally changed me as an artist and as a person. I take being an artist much more seriously than ever before—to constantly reach out and be vulnerable and share my story.” Sharing her story has given Lisa both peace and healing. “It’s a great feeling for me, to see that somehow God has used all of this pain. Somehow, He’s turned it around for good—I wasn’t going through it for nothing.”

Lisa’s view of God changed, as well. “He’s not my buddy old pal—He is my Father. He is amazingly huge, amazingly complex, intricate, detailed, organized and beyond my scope of understanding.”

God’s hand is in Lisa’s life, explaining. “I finally understand what those hard years were all about. Because those hard years made me who I am right now. Otherwise, I never could have done this camp.” And God

gave Lisa her daughter—her “girls.”

Lisa’s decision to take her artistry more seriously is a challenge she extends to her peers in Christian music. “If you try to be a real showy artist, kids can never learn anything from our lives and our mistakes. They are never going to gain anything from us if all they ever see is a person on stage who sings, who puts on a show.

“I come away from concerts with other artists, and I just want to quit. I’m so disgusted at some of the stuff I’ve seen, yet I understand it all too well. The artists that I respect the most are those who are real to me.”

God’s hand is in Lisa’s life, leading. The roadblocks have become signposts, points where God used painful experiences to prepare Lisa for His future plans. “The more you strive to be close to Christ, the more He will reveal to you and the more your understanding will deepen and grow. That’s why I’m so at peace now because I really know He’s looking out for me, He has a plan, a major plan for my life. He’s molding me and shaping me for this moment in my life. How can I doubt God?”

When Peruvian Minister Ruth Still wrote these words, she probably wasn’t referring to Lisa Bevill, but it accurately describes how God has used Lisa to accomplish His plans: “If my life is broken when given to Jesus, it is because pieces will feed a multitude, while a loaf will satisfy only a little lad.”

God’s hand is in Lisa’s life. She takes it, thanks Him, and sighs—peacefully content in God’s will. ■

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