



Laura Story's life is her song

by Lori Hatcher

“I hated singing in front of people,” admits Laura Story, the Dove Award-winning musician and composer of the popular worship song “Indescribable.” It is the title track on her first solo CD and was later recorded by Chris Tomlin. “I never would have done it if God hadn’t put stuff in my heart that I had to share with people.”

Last April, Story shared that “stuff” at a concert for Spring Valley Baptist Church’s Express Faith program. Brainchild of music minister Rick McCollum, Express Faith is a musical outreach designed to give church members a creative way to share their faith with their community. McCollum was motivated by the realization that, “Southern Baptists have had a history of being evangelistic, but in recent years, not so much. We needed a 21st century approach. Express Faith was one way we could do evangelism by connecting with our community using the arts.”

McCollum chose talented musicians from his church to perform in different venues throughout the community. Each musician partnered with fellow church members who engaged listeners in conversation before and after the performance. Their ultimate goal was to share their own faith story and invite people to other Express Faith events.

Wanting a nationally known musician to headline the weekend performances, McCollum chose Story, in part, because she was a South Carolinian and a Southern Baptist. “She had a unique story to tell,” says McCollum, “one that would appeal to anyone, whether they attended church or not.”

At her headlining concert that weekend, more than 1,400 people heard Story perform. “It was almost as if we were in her living room,” McCollum says of the evening, “like she invited us to sit down and chat about how God is working, and specifically, how He was working in her life.”

Story’s personal testimony had as much impact as her music. Married to her high school sweetheart, Martin Elivington, their journey has been fraught with challenges. She says the greatest trial was when Martin was diagnosed with a brain tumor just one year into their marriage. “When you’re standing at the altar promising ‘for better or for worse, in sickness and in health,’ you think that part is for when you are old,” she says. Martin underwent multiple surgeries, experienced severe, life-threatening complications, and has been through extensive rehabilitation. Though still troubled by vision and memory problems, he travels with her when she performs. All

continued on page 8

continued from page 6

during his illness, Story says her husband never lost his sense of humor. "In the hospital he had so many memory problems. I would show him my engagement ring, and he would say, 'Who are you married to?' And I would say, 'I am married to you!' And he would say, 'Yes! Yes! You are my wife!'"

Story says that many times she was angry at God. "I wondered why, if He had the power to heal Martin, why He didn't. But God, in His gentleness, would peel my fingers out of the fist I was shaking at Him and say to me, 'I love you, and I am walking through this with you.' I reached the place where I realized that if He could heal Martin and He hadn't, then He must have a very good reason. He does not owe me an explanation this side of Heaven."

Some of the spiritual lessons that Story learned through Martin's illness are in her most recent CD, *Great God Who Saves*. In the song "Perfect Peace," she sings, "In this time of trials, there's pain that no one sees. So trust Me when I say, 'I will give you perfect peace. And you'll never walk alone. You'll never be in need. Though I may not calm the storms around you, you can hide in me.'"

As a performer, Story faces common struggles. "When you're standing up here with a microphone and a spotlight, it can be deceiving, even to me. But I remember that it's really all about Him. He deserves the glory." Story credits her home church, Perimeter Church in Atlanta, for keeping her grounded. "I can do a show on Saturday night and (people are) bringing me bottled water and fruit trays. Then I drive home and go to church the next morning, and I'm the one (serving) the bottled water and the fruit trays." She points out

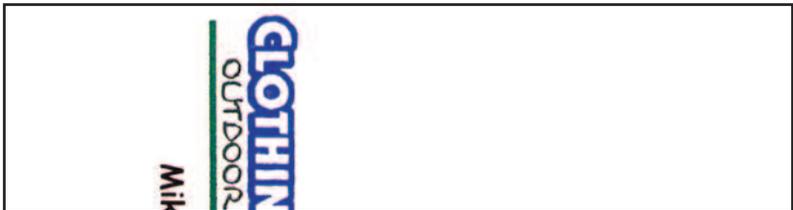
that this demonstrates that both are ways of serving God. "One way is out in front of an audience with a microphone, and the other is behind the scenes. Both are needed in the Kingdom. It's not the job you do; it's the fact that God has called you that makes it important."

Story was impressed with the vision that Spring Valley Baptist Church has for reaching its community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. She told her Express Faith audience, "Why a church would go to all the trouble to do something this amazing is because having a relationship with Jesus is the most important thing in your life." **ROC**

Express Faith 2011 will be held March 25 – 27. Dove Award nominee Brenton Brown will perform. Composer of "Your Love is Amazing," "Hosanna (Praise is Rising)," and "Everlasting God," Brenton now has five songs on Church Copyright License International's top-100 list and leads praise-and-worship in venues around the world. For more information, contact Spring Valley Baptist Church at 736-0624.



Lori Hatcher is married to David, a youth pastor. She has two children, Kristen and Mary Leigh. A support group leader of Forest Acres Christian Educators, a support group for home-schoolers, Lori works part-time as a dental hygienist and full-time in Kingdom work.



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