

Longview News Journal

RELIGION



"I love developing relationships with people. I just like making people feel better. I also feel it's important to remember that God has blessed us as a nation."

— Beverly M. Bernson

Longview woman's tragedy turns into musical testimony

Posted: Saturday, November 8, 2014 4:00 am | Updated: 7:17 am, Sat Nov 8, 2014.

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Beaten with a iron, hiding in her bedroom closet, crying and fearing for her life, Beverly Matthews Bernson could have easily given up as a young child. Instead, she turned her fear and anger into songs of hope and praise. The nationally known singer, who grew up in Kilgore, has performed for U.S. presidents and was on the Nashville scene for a while. Today, she lives in Longview where she continues to sing and play the piano on the verge of releasing a new album.

“I’ve had a lot of tragedy in my life, but I wouldn’t let it stop me because of my faith. I felt God had a bigger plan for me than to wallow in pity,” Bernson said. “The tragedy in Bernson's life began even before she was born. Eighteen years before her birth, her mother had a roller skating accident that left her with some



brain damage to the point that she often didn't recognize her own daughter. When Bernson's mother became pregnant, doctor's advised her that the pregnancy should be aborted, saying mother and baby had no chance of surviving the birth. With prayers from friends and the church, both made it.

As an 8-year-old child, Bernson took care of her mother while her father worked. She suffered abuse from others, including a neighbor, and recalled being beaten with an iron. Her bedroom closet was her refuge where she would hide and cry as pain and fear filled her heart. She always wanted to sing, but was told she was tone



deaf. She learned to play the piano and clarinet instead, but soon began taking voice lessons. In high school, as her voice changed, and she improved with her lessons, she made the a cappella choir. She majored in voice in college, studying at Kilgore College and then at the University of North Texas. She was offered an apprenticeship in New York and had the chance to audition for the Metropolitan Opera, but turned it down because her father was still in Texas.

On July 4, 1990, while singing "God Bless America" at the Heartland Celebration in Longview, a representative from Ronald Reagan's office heard her and invited her to sing at a Reagan speaking engagement. After that, she went on to perform the song during the inaugural prayer breakfast for President Bill Clinton on Jan. 20, 1993. She has also performed at conferences in Washington, singing before George H. W. and George W. Bush. In 1995, she moved to Nashville where she performed before notable people in country music, such as Irby Mandrell, the father of Barbara, Louise and Irlene Mandrell.

She got set up with Loretta Lynn's manager to sing at the Bluebird Cafe, but her mother got sick and she came back before she could perform at the iconic Nashville location. "I chose to leave Nashville to take care of my mom," Bernson said. But she continued making music in East Texas. "The joy of the Lord keeps me going" she said. "I sing to him, sometimes, for two or three hours a day." Bernson has released three albums — one in 1986, another in 1996 and another in 2007.

She writes all types of songs from pop to jazz to gospel. "My goal is just to make people feel better," she said. A few months ago, on her and her husband Craig's wedding anniversary, and while visiting her son, she feel better." A few months ago, on her and husband Craig's wedding anniversary, and while visiting her son, she fell on wet ground and hit her face and then her knee. She lost complete mobility. Bernson has had spinal problems throughout her life and was born with scoliosis.



The fall a few months ago put her in the hospital where it was found that there was a tiny piece of bone between her fifth and sixth vertebrae. Doctors told her that when those vertebrae pinch together on the bone, it can cause mobility loss. She couldn't walk. She couldn't swallow. She couldn't sing. Bernson said through faith and months of rehabilitation, she regained her mobility and her voice.

"My faith in God has meant my survival. Total survival," she said. Bernson said she has experienced glimpses of heaven and is writing a book called "No Words Needed." She is also preparing to release a new album soon. More information about her endeavors can be found on her website, www.joyfullegacy.com. She said

her biggest goal is simply to continue inspiring other people through her work and her story. “I love developing relationships with people,” she said. I also feel like it's important to remember that God has blessed us as a nation.”

