

FOREVER AND EVER, AMEN

Excerpt from chapter 10: Always & Forever

When we first performed “Forever and Ever, Amen,” out in public it had not yet been heard on the radio, nor had the video been shown. But when we did that song at a concert in Kentucky, the audience’s response was incredible. People were hoopin’ and hollerin’ and wanting more. That night, I thought, Yep, we recorded the right song.

A few nights later, we were playing at a club. The audience was enthusiastic, throughout the show. “We have a brand new song we’d like to try out on ya, tonight,” I said. We launched into “Forever and Ever, Amen.” When we got to the last line, I paused before adding the final “Amen.” When I stopped singing for just a moment, the audience went nuts, banging on their chairs as though they were at a rock and roll concert. The response was unlike anything I’d ever experienced from a country audience listening to a country song. But I sure liked it.

By June 13, 1987, “Forever and Ever, Amen” was number one on the Billboard charts. For some reason, people connected with my voice and the lyrics of my songs—some of which included a wry smile behind them. Don Schlitz and Paul Overstreet were masters at inserting just a hint of humor in some of their songwriting, and it really appealed to me. Turns out, it appealed to a lot of listeners, as well. The album, *Always and Forever* that had been released the first week of May hit the top of the charts, too, on June 20, 1987 and remained at number one for forty-three straight weeks. That’s ten straight months as the top album in the nation!

Always and Forever received the Country Music Association’s award for the Album of the Year and I was honored as Male Vocalist of the Year. Bill Mayne, the head of Warner radio promotions, later conducted focus groups that revealed that “Forever and Ever, Amen” changed the perception in America about what country music really was. To me, that was deeply gratifying.

More importantly, everywhere we went, we heard heartwarming stories of what the song meant to someone. “That song reminded me so much of my grandparents who have been married forever. So we played it at their fiftieth anniversary,” a young woman said. “And Grandma and Grandpa danced.”

“That’s the kind of relationship we want to have in our marriage,” a goo-goo-eyed engaged couple said. “Where we keep on loving each other no matter what happens.”

“We were headed for divorce,” one man admitted, “when the words of that song started running through my head. My wife and I sat down at the kitchen table and listened one more time to ‘Forever and Ever, Amen.’ We both started to cry and we realized we were throwing away something truly precious. Then we went to the see the lawyers and tore up the divorce papers.”

Untold numbers of middle-aged couples smiled, I was told, every time the song played, as they looked adoringly at each other and declared their renewed commitment to each other, as they sang along, “I’m gonna love you forever and ever. Forever and ever, amen.”

Letters poured in to our office and to Warner expressing how the song had been an encouragement and an inspiration to one person after another. One letter especially touched my heart. It was written by the mom of a young girl who had gone through chemotherapy treatments and had lost

all her hair. When she heard the line in “Forever and Ever, Amen” that said, “I ain’t in love with your hair, and if it all fell out, well, I’d love you anyway,” it encouraged her to see herself as the beautiful person she was, with or without her hair. Eventually, her hair grew back but our music had helped her through the tough time. I was happy the song was on top of the charts and that we were selling albums, but you can’t put a price-tag on results such as those personal encounters with the music.