

Robert DeBusk, chair of the Nebraska chapter of the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI), has come a long way since he penned his first lyrics at the age of 12.

Susie, Susie, I love you, I love you
Susie, I love you
Susie, I'll be true
I love you, Susie oozie, I love you

It's apparent Robert was enamored with Susie. She, on the other hand, wasn't quite as smitten, he admitted.

Robert didn't let his first love song—which failed to produce anticipated results—squelch his songwriting dreams.

Throughout his teen years, he wrote a series of rock 'n roll songs, and at 18 turned his focus to folk and gospel music, writing about specific people in and experiences going on in his life.

For his son Travis' fifth-grade class, Robert wrote a math-related song. He performed it live, and the teacher recorded the song. Later, the kids would listen to the song as they worked on their math assignments.

Robert began a serious pursuit of the songwriting craft in 2002 after watching the movie, "Your Cheatin' Heart."

"During the part where George Hamilton sang, 'I Saw the Light,' I watched the crowd reaction and the excitement, and I guess you could say I got the bug," he said.

It was at this time he wrote "Colorado Mountains," a favorite of his and his daughter Charlene, who sings the song with him. This song was one of two he recorded as demos in Nashville using his vocals.

Another song he wrote at this time, "Way of Holiness" was his first song put to sheet music. A student studying music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln did it as a class project.

"Songwriting is a release for me," Robert said. "I can say things through songs that I can't say through some everyday conversations."

This is evident in his song, "I Wonder When," a song he wrote in 2002 for Keeleigh, a little girl battling leukemia. Her family took the song to a cancer walk, and throughout the day, event coordinators played it over the loud speaker as people walked around the track. The event raised \$20,000 to go toward the fight against cancer.

"I wasn't able to make it that day because I was performing somewhere else," Robert said.

"Keeleigh's family told me there were tears as it played over the loud speaker."

Now, about five years later, 10-year-old Keeleigh's cancer is in remission.

"Somebody asked Keeleigh what was the greatest gift she received through this time. She told them that someone wrote a song about her," Robert said proudly as he held a photo of the little cancer survivor.

While Robert has had many memorable songwriting



ROBERT DEBUSK

experiences, his favorite to date occurred in 2003 when he performed at the world-famous Bluebird Café in Nashville, Tenn.

"I played 'Paybacks Are Hell' and 'Turn It Up and Tune You Out,' and it was an awesome experience," Robert said. "The room was packed, and Toby Keith was there, too."

Robert makes regular trips to Nashville to take advantage of opportunities to improve his songwriting and to build relationships with the Nashville music industry.

He attends workshops through the NSAI, as well as song camps, symposiums and songposiums. And, in addition to the Bluebird Café, he has performed his originals at the Hall of Fame Lounge, the Commodore, Broken Spoke, Pub of Love, 3rd & Lindsley, Maxwell House and the Ramada Inn.

He made another trek to Music City in spring 2005 to participate in Marc-Alan Barnette's "Magical Nashville Tour"—a tour that included behind-the-scenes meetings with publishers, songwriters and entertainers. While there, each attendee teamed up with other writers, including at least one pro writer, and co-write a song.

Toward the end of the three-day event, songs written by each participant were placed in a drawing with the winner receiving a free, Nashville-recorded demo of his/her song.

Robert's "Paybacks are Hell" was the lucky one, and Marc-Alan Barnett produced and sang the demo.

"I would encourage anyone to attend this tour. It was an awesome learning experience."

Until Robert reaches the point where he is able to write songs as his

profession, he continues to write every chance he gets—even at Nash Finch Company in Omaha where he works.

"My favorite songwriting spot is in my shag truck at work," he said, "where I write most of my songs."

"While I'm washing out a trailer, I get an idea and go write it down."

Robert knows the importance of setting goals and then doing everything within reason to meet them, including involvement in the Nebraska chapter of the NSAI.

"I really like the camaraderie we have in our group," he said. "Even though songwriting is a competition amongst other songwriters, I'm amazed at how supportive, encouraging and helpful our group is toward each other."

"My goal is to get a song recorded and on the radio and help someone else do it."

Robert realizes this process takes time.

"Like Hugh Prestwood says, 'think in terms of years and not overnight,'" he said. ■

FINAL NOTES

Family
Suzette, Trevis, Charlene, Kim,
Anthony, Andrew and Abriana

Hobbies
Yardwork, walking around his acreage,
fishing and camping

Favorite Song
"Long Time Ago" by Jim Croce

Favorite Songwriters
Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard,
Jim Croce and Hank Williams

Favorite Original
"Paybacks Are Hell"

Instruments
Guitar and electric bass

