

Grubb family Christmas: faith, family and music

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"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."

Proverbs 17:22.

Tucked away on a wooded piece of property nestled into the trees of west Grayson County, John Grubb and his family have staked a claim. "We fell in love with the land," John says, in his soft, modulated voice. He speaks from the center of this amazing family's small, but comfortable house. A decorated Christmas tree—a real cedar cut from their land—twinkles its lights from the front window. A fire crackles cozily in the corner. Stockings frame the doorway. An assortment of tapes and books line the walls. An entertainment center, which was recently constructed by John features two cedar posts and houses the TV that hangs on the wall over the electric piano. Various musical instruments rest in their cases about the room. A young kitten whose name is Butterscotch curls up on the couch.

John and Shawn Grubb along with seven of their eight children relocated north from the metroplex a little over a year ago. John still works in Lewisville and makes the commute daily. The family made some definite sacrifices in the move. They gave up a larger house with more living space, which also featured a music room. In return they gained almost 13 acres of land where they are establishing a farm. They are raising goats,

chickens, and boarding a baby calf for friends. They are building fences and repairing barns—as a family. They are also making music, both literally and figuratively, as a family unit.

"My parents met while they were both playing music," John relates. "They fell in love and later married. I learned to play the drums when I was young, and my brother played the guitar. Then at the age of 16, I took the guitar one day, and started playing it, and I've been picking ever since." However the music John Grubb elicits from the guitar is far removed from "picking."

John took formal guitar lessons for perhaps two years, starting in 1969. "The teacher asked me if I wanted to learn by ear or learn by music. He would type out the words and write the chords above, and I would listen to the recording. That's how I learned." Along with guitar, he now has added bass, mandolin and banjo.

He played bluegrass, blues, jazz, and rock. He grew up and continued to play his music. "I was playing in the clubs," he says, "and at 33 years of age, I was on my way, I believed. In 1985, I was living in Denton, and I placed an ad in the paper for a drummer. The one and only call I got two days later was from Jim McCrain. In talking on the phone, he seemed to be just what I had been looking for in drummers. He came over on a Tuesday night and we jammed with David, my bass player. After the session, we talked about goals, directions and female vocalists. Jim said that he had met a lady recently that fit

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(© Staff photo by Brad Stone)

Grubb Family

Pictured are, from left, first row, James, Joshua, Abigail, John and Melodie; second row, Faith, Christina, John and Shawn Grubb pose in front of the family Christmas tree at their home in rural Collinsville. The tree is a hand picked cedar tree from the family's farm.

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what I was looking for, and I told him to bring her over. The following Tuesday, I was overwhelmed when I saw her step out of his car. Shawn was more beautiful than expected and sang very well indeed," he recalls.

After two additional sessions, John asked Shawn out to go see Shake Russell perform in Dallas. She had already made other plans for the evening. "I was disappointed," John smiles, "but not discouraged. I gave her some tapes of me to listen to, in between our practice sessions. She came back with them and told me she liked 'New England Lullaby' by M. Katikus, which I had done on the tape. Later we started dating, and well—the rest is history."

Shawn grew up in the metroplex where she graduated from North Mesquite High School. "I have been singing all of my life," she smiles. "My parents were singers at church, and music was always in my life. I signed up for band in the seventh grade after I saw a girl playing the flute. I played for six years. When I was a junior, I signed up for choir, and as a senior I placed as first chair soprano in UIL at district, area, and regional, thus allowing me to sing in competition at the state level." A sudden case of laryngitis dashed all hopes of bringing home a state medal. "I still sang for the competition, but I got really bad marks from the judge," she laughs. "I'll never forget it."

Following high school Shawn attended the University of North Texas for one semester, and then transferred to Richland College. There she had the opportunity to travel on a college cruise with the choir director of UCLA. "He taught me empathy," she recalls.

"He always focused us on the idea that you must become one unit when you sing as a choir." Shawn obviously learned this lesson well, and has taught the philosophy and practice of empathic singing to her three oldest daughters.

Shawn was a young single mother when she met John. Their shared love of music and their common ideals brought them together. Their deep commitment to one another, their concept of family, and their unshakable faith in God have kept them together.

Besides being a wife and mother, Shawn home schools the children. She sings all vocal ranges, and plays the guitar. And of course, she can play the flute.

And then there are the children—eight in number. The four youngest were born at home. The oldest, Aaron is 24. He and his wife Olga live in North Carolina where he is attending NASCAR tech school. Dark-eyed and dark-haired Christina is 19. She has completed high school, and recently spent two months in Tamil Nadu, India, on a mission trip where she worked with orphan children. She is one of the featured vocalists in the family singing harmonies and leads. Melody, who is 16, has beautiful dimples and long dark hair. She plays the piano and the fiddle. She also sings, both harmony and lead vocal.

Faith, who will be 14 in January, plays the piano and the mandolin. There are two styles of this instrument—A and F—which each creates different sounds. She also sings, a talent she had to develop while Christina was in India. She wears her light brown hair parted in the middle and in braids. John is 12, the oldest brother at home. He plays both the bass and the

guitar with an ease and grace of an accomplished musician far beyond his years. Ten-year-old James and Abigail, also known as "Abi", who is seven, have the same dark hair and eyes, while four-year-old Joshua, sometimes called "Joshi", has blue eyes and golden hair. These three are "still experimenting with the instruments," says a proud John Grubb.

None of these amazingly talented musical children has ever had a formal singing or music lesson. There are also no organized practice sessions in the household. "I pick up the guitar every night after supper," John Grubb muses. "When I got my first real job, I bought a 1973 Martin guitar, and I paid \$15.00 a month for over three years in order to pay for it. Today this instrument is valued at \$2,500."

During these nightly music jam sessions, son John quickly follows his dad's lead and brings in the guitar or bass. The girls and Shawn follow suit. "The music gravitates down to the others through John," their father remarks.

Several years ago at a bluegrass festival in Mountain View, Arkansas, John and Shawn with a respected musician concerning the assimilation of music into their children's lives. "He said, 'Leave the instruments out,'" John says. "We make it available. Nothing is forced upon the kids. Music is just a part of our daily life and living." The Grubbs worship as a family through their music as well. "God leads our family," Shawn says.

The result of this "hands-on availability" music philosophy is dramatically evident when the family performs. The resulting music and vocals carry a pure, natural quality, which is incredibly rich and beautiful. Their music is rare and exquisite. It becomes a gift to the listener.

The first time the family performed in public was approximately three years ago at the Prairie House in Denton. "The act that was booked canceled at the last minute," John recalls, "and since we lived nearby, they called us. Shawn and I had done a lot of professional stuff together, and that night we just decided to add in the kids." Their expanded number was well received, and the Grubb Family performance as vocalists and musicians was born.

The children learn by listening to the music. John Grubb can hear

a vocal or a melody, and he can "pick it."

John knows more music theory than anyone I've ever seen," Shawn says proudly. "And I'm the one who has taken college classes in theory." A truly delightful demonstration of this unique ability was presented by the family during this interview. The girls recently found an old tape entitled "He Shall Be Born," by Wendy and Mary. After listening to it, he wrote down the words on a single sheet of paper. During our time together, John and son John began playing the guitar, and Shawn joined in playing the mandolin. Christina, Melody, and Faith sang the vocals. Another rendition of an old Ricky Skaggs song, "Mansions For Me," brought tears to this proud father's eyes. The emotion invoked by these young voices is incredible.

The family has performed recently in the area at various events. They were present at the Old Fashioned Christmas held in downtown Collinsville the first Friday in December, and they are regular performers at the Collinsville Care Center.

Shawn Grubb speaks with passion concerning her philosophy about home schooling. "Family is very important," she says. "A family is a circle, all encompassed, joined together as a single unit, and looking in to one another. We are a large family, and we are a group." She and Christina recently started a tutoring service where they offer sessions in reading, writing, arithmetic, and history. The family is planning a celebration ball in February with other home schooling families. Christina and Melody were instrumental in the creation of a self-published magazine entitled "His Wonders" beginning in the winter of 2002. In 2005, Faith joined Melody in the magazine and the two of them now serve as co-editors. The magazine was originally designed "to share the wonders of the Lord's creations with young girls," but has currently expanded its audience "to young women of all ages." The magazine is published seasonally, four issues a year.

John and Shawn Grubb believe that all the sacrifices each has made in their relocation move have been worth the price. Among the many blessings of this Christmas season, and all the seasons of the year, remains the blessing of family.

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community's literacy needs, and Verizon is pleased to partner with the Whitesboro Library through this grant."

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