

Verse Two

We started meeting once a week at Norms. The four of us had no experience in music, or at least playing in a band of any kind. We had two things going for us. The first was our faith. We all loved the growing Jesus Movement. The coffee houses down by the beaches, the bible studies, the Campus Life and Youth For Christ rallies. We were totally committed to becoming a part of the music scene of this movement. We were excited to write and sing songs about Jesus.

The second thing was that there was nothing to compare us to. You either got 'come buy ya' whatever that was, or you got Children. Oh there were other groups popping up, but for the most part, they came from churches that were eager to cash in on all these youth looking to Jesus. Their songs were for the most part popular hymnal songs with an acoustic sound.

We had all originals and we didn't perform to sell a church, we were strictly singing songs for Jesus.

I remember early on that the discussion became getting Jim Smith to play bass in our band. I was unfamiliar with Jim - no surprise there - but from what Jerry, Norm and Stan were saying, it sounded to me that if we got Jim in the band, we just might have something going for us. Jim was a beloved individual with a humble, gentle spirit, Sounded like everyone loved Jim.

I remember when we found out that Jim was in thinking that we were set. Children was Stan and I on vocals, Norm and Jerry on guitar and Jim playing bass.

We started practicing and creating new songs for the new movement. A movement that said it doesn't matter what church you go to, it only matters what your relationship with Jesus was. Children was a perfect fit because we had a Catholic, Community, Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist. We were not selling any church, we were singing about Jesus.

Our music really grew fast, because we had no egos. Heck, none of us had any experience to boast about, so we all simply worked hard to create a sound that would make Jesus sound good. Stan and I would work hard on the vocals - Stan the lead and me the harmonies that would best fit with Stan. Jerry and Norm worked hard to make their guitars sing and blend together, with Jim keeping the pace on his bass.

But mostly, we became a brotherhood. We could spend all night at Norms in fellowship talking, laughing and praying. Those nights were always too short as we had to really force

ourselves to call it a night (or early morning in many cases).

We started out as five unlikely characters who wanted to build a band with no musical resume that would suggest we would have any success, to five brothers working hard to play songs for Jesus. Five creative young men who only wanted to create great music for Jesus.

That was our goal from the beginning.

Our very first performance in front of people was at Stans church.

Not many people, which was good. Our performance was forgettable but not a disaster, so we felt good about it. Being the first performance in front of people for all five of us also made it the best performance of our lifetime!

But we knew we had work to do, though I remember that we all felt good about being 'out there' and how we didn't mess up any of our songs. A polished performance, not so much, but certainly a good start.

I do remember how Norm was also getting into sound equipment. He was always adding equipment to our sound system. It seemed like a bit much to spend so much time setting up all the microphones, speakers and mixing board for the hand full of people that night, but Norm needed the practice too, so we just went with it.

It was a good start for us and made us want to work harder on our sound so we could be even better the next time out.

I'm not sure what kind of time frame we are talking about, but I believe it wasn't long from that first night at Stans church before we were starting to get booked at more and more places around San Diego.

It seems like a blink of an eye for five guys going with no performing experience down in that basement room, to being booked nearly every weekend at coffee houses, rallies and churches.

For three or four years in the early '70s, Children had become one of the top bands of the Jesus Movement in San Diego. We were writing so many songs that we could play for two hours and play nothing but originals. We had a play list that we could use at coffee houses and big rallies, as well as play lists for the more traditional church and worship services.

We quickly became so busy performing that we really didn't have time for practice.

I was learning to play the guitar so I could do more than just the lyrics. Jerry, Norm and I were the main writers, but Stan and Jim were always able to contribute as well. There were many times when one of us would present a new song back stage as we waited to go on. We'd all agree that we should work on getting that song into our play list, but it seemed to be tough to find the time to work on these songs and polish them up. I can't speak for the other boys, but I think it's easy to say I had a lot more songs waiting to get worked, than I did songs on our play lists.

We were a very creative group of young men, that's for sure.

But what made us special was the five of us. We truly became brothers who simply loved what we were doing. There were no egos. There were no ambitions to become 'stars'. When people came to see Children, they saw five guys having fun singing songs about Jesus.

We had a solid run for about two years or so. We were playing every weekend and many week nights. We were becoming a big part of the Jesus movement in San Diego.

But our time together was interrupted by President Nixon's draft lottery. Jim and I were in the first draft lottery that would determine who could go on with their lives uninterrupted and who needed to excuse themselves and help Uncle Sam out in the military.

Jim's birthday was chosen very early, meaning he would no longer be our bass player. He was okay with it and was happy to do his part. He joined the Army and served two terms in South Korea without ever being in harms way (praise God!). My birthday was chosen very late, meaning if they invaded San Diego, they wanted me to get out of the way (you don't win wars with Andy Smith on your team). I became the new bass player.

We added two females vocalists to our group and took a short break to get them up to speed.

Musically, we were even better. We had the girls and myself to add harmonies to Stan and by this time, Norm and Jerry had become a beautiful mix of styles that gave Children a very solid musical experience.

Adding the girls gave Children a couple more years in the Jesus Movement.

But as we were growing out of our teens and becoming young adults, our career choices and college closed the books on Children.

Jerry was off to Harvard Medical School that would lead him to becoming a top surgeon in San Francisco.

Stan would become Dr Stan DeKoven and President of Vision International University.

Jim would get out of the Army and begin his work in the ministry as Pastor Jim in Texas.

Norm would take over the family business while developing his own business of a recording studio and stage lighting ministry.

And I would take my publisher mentor, Sonny Gordans advice and move to Nashville Tennessee to become part of the songwriting scene.

It was a good run.

An enthusiastic new guitar player, a poet, a third basemen, a smart guy and the beloved Jim Smith created Children to simply sing songs for Jesus.

I think we did better than 'Kum-By-Yah' and 'Michael Rowed a Boat To Shore'

But we were no 'Cream' or 'Janis Joplin'