

Praise for Gerald Rasmussen

About His Writing:

AWARDS:

The Gate of Beautiful: Stories, Songs, and Reflections on Christian Life
THE NATIONAL BEST BOOK AWARDS 2009 Finalist, USA Book
News “EVVY” Book Awards 2010, First place: Religion.

REVIEWS:

“As I read though the chapters of *The Shepherd’s Watch*, two things jump out at me. First, Jerry loves Jesus and second, Jesus’s love for “even the least of these” is reflected through Jerry’s life in his daily encounters with the people the Lord brings along his path.”

—Reverend Dr. Kenneth W. Smith
Pastor, First Baptist Church of Shelton

“There are many ways people express themselves, and author Gerald Rasmussen taps into a wealth of them. *The Gate of Beautiful: Stories, Songs, and Reflections on Christian Life* is a collection of creative exercises. Christian in focus, Rasmussen’s songs, stories, and essays provide much insight into man’s faith, which is sure to give readers much to think about. *The Gate of the Beautiful* is quite a pick for Christian readers, highly recommended.”

Midwest Book Review
(Oregon, WI USA)

“Jerry Rasmussen is one of those rare writers who makes it look deceptively easy to express wisdom, employing wit, homilies, and poignancy to show the deeper values that lie within the everyday

comedies and tragedies of life. His writing is lively, engaging, and utterly delightful.”

Miriam Hospodar
Author of *Heaven’s Banquet*

ABOUT HIS SONGS:

“Your music was sincere and reached down into the mind and soul to minister and uplift our spirits. You focused on the abounding grace of God through Jesus Christ with every song.”

—Rev. John Hagin
First Baptist Church, Ansonia, CT

“This album (*The Secret Life of Jerry Rasmussen*) is like a visit with an old friend, so pull up a chair.”

—Tom Paxton
Folk recording artist

“A songwriter of rare warmth and humor, a gentle realist with a fine and wiley wit.”

—Gordon Bok
Folk recording artist

“Jerry brings an intimate, homey sort of perspective to his youth and childhood in the Midwest, describing through his songs the same sort of environment that Garrison Keillor eulogized in the *Newsies*.”

—Clyde Tynsdale
Woods Hole Music Society

“Rasmussen is a great songwriter. Period.”

—Gene Petit, John Henry’s Hammer, Worcester, MA

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SHEPHERD'S
WATCH

the

SHEPHERD'S
WATCH

Stories and Songs
OF FAITH

GERALD RASMUSSEN



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DEDICATION

For the Shepherd



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INTRODUCTION

The Bible is full of wonderful stories. The first line of Genesis sets the tone: “In the beginning, God created Heaven and earth.” It could have as easily started out, Once upon a time, God created Heaven and earth. Long before there was a Bible, when few people could read, God’s story was kept alive by storytellers. The best of all the storytellers in the Bible was Jesus.

How I wish I could have been there to hear him tell his tales:

*Those gospel nights, and the tales he told
Could warm the heart, and touch the soul
Oh what I’d give. It’d be my heart’s delight
To hear him tell those tales he told,
those gospel nights*

Gospel Nights – words and music by Jerry Rasmussen

In the Bible, the tales Christ told are called parables. Parables are stories with a punch line. Christ used parables to teach important issues of faith. Like all good storytellers, Christ used vivid imagery. His stories were about ordinary people, like fishermen, farmers, sowers, and reapers. He told his stories early in the morning on the shores of Galilee, or late at night around a glowing campfire. If

he were here today, you'd probably find him in a Walmart parking lot, or at the railroad station, talking to the morning commuters.

My family has a history of storytelling. My father had the knack of taking a simple experience and embellishing it through time, until it was as burnished as a brass knob. He passed that gift on to me. Over the years, I've told my stories in songs and letters. Letters are a good form of storytelling. That's what the epistles were.

The stories in this book are all true. They may have been embellished a little along the way, but the punch line still tells the tale. As I've written them down, I've gone back to the stories in the Bible, as they have often been my inspiration. Nothing is new under the sun.



THE LEAST OF MY BRETHREN

*I*t was the catchphrase for the movie *The Sixth Sense*: “I see dead people.” If a Christian aspires to a sixth sense, it should be to see Christ in others. That’s not nearly as easy as it may seem. Seeing Christ in Mother Theresa or the pastor of your church is one thing. Seeing him in the people you pass on the street every day is another.

*You pass on the street with no recognition
Lost in your thoughts, you’ve a life of your own
And if she is troubled, she keeps it well hidden
She learned long ago, you must bear it alone*

CHORUS:

*So God bless those who find mercy in sleep
All those who sow, who never will reap
All those who search, and never find peace
May they find rest tonight¹*

It isn’t just other people who have eyes but do not see. If Christ were standing on the corner, we could walk right by him without even noticing.

*If Jesus should come back, just for a day
And preach on that corner to all who pass by
Who'd stop and listen, and who'd walk away
And turn from salvation, and never know why?²*

Christ made it clear that we are to treat others as we would treat him: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Jesus responded with compassion to those who were in need, without precondition or judgment. He helped those who were ostracized by society, regardless of the reason for their need, or the state of their soul. How can we do less?

The day was bone-chilling cold. Looking out the front room window, the early winter sun promised a warmth it couldn't deliver. When I stepped through the doorway onto the porch, the bitter north wind hit me, causing me to involuntarily hunch my shoulders and stuff my hands deep into my pockets. It was no day to be outside.

With a turn of the key my car reluctantly started, and a blast of cold air came through the vents. I was on my way to a doctor's appointment, and I knew it would take most of the drive for the car to get warm. As I neared the office, I passed a cemetery and noticed a man walking along the side of the road pushing a supermarket shopping cart. He was all bundled up against the cold with a long jacket and a scarf tied over the top of the cap on his head. Looking over at him, all I could see of his face were a scruffy beard and long tufts of gray hair sticking out over his jacket collar. The cart was festooned with plastic shopping bags tied to the sides that flapped empty in the wind that was cutting across the cemetery. From what I could see, the cart appeared to be empty. It looked like the man had been out searching for discarded cans along the side of the road hoping to collect enough to buy a modest breakfast with the five-cent deposits. Pickings had been slim. Maybe no one wanted to roll down their window on such a cold day to throw away their can.

I could see that he was having difficulty walking. He was using the shopping cart as a walker to support his weight. He walked hesitantly, taking small steps with one hip hiked up, carefully lifting one leg that seemed to be partially paralyzed. He was making slow progress and had to stop every few steps to catch his breath. As I was driving by him, I felt a powerful urge to go back and give him something to help make his day at least a little easier. I pulled over to the side of the road and turned my car around, heading back to where he was struggling along. He'd barely traveled ten feet.

When I approached him, he was standing on the other side of the shopping cart. I called out to him, "Excuse me," and he turned awkwardly to face me. I had expected to see an old man because his beard and hair were gray. His face was wind-bitten red and still youthful, but it was his eyes that drew me in. "I just wanted to give you this," I said, and handed him the folded ten-dollar bill I'd taken from my billfold. He took the bill from my hand and then reached his arm out to me as if he wanted to take my arm. I laid my hand gently on his arm and looked deep into his eyes. For a moment I was completely transfixed. I was overcome with the gratitude that I saw in his eyes and everything else around me faded away. He didn't speak a word, but his eyes spoke eloquently. I smiled at him and said, "Merry Christmas!" and a warm smile of appreciation spread over his face. As I walked back to the car, I realized that I was breathing shallowly, trying not to disturb the quiet peace that filled my heart.

Now I struggle to recapture the mystery of that moment. I can no longer remember the details of how the man looked, except for his eyes. It seemed like I was looking into Christ's eyes.