



Hats Off to Our Miss Lillie

by Sue Buchanan

Talking with Lillie Knauls is pure joy. We go waaay back. Before dirt! And even though I called to find out the latest in her busy life, we spent most of our time reminiscing about the good ol' days.

Those first Homecoming tapings when everyone participated just because it was fun, and nobody dreamed it would become the force it is today. The crazy awards show (1976, we think) that our pooh-bah-director-of-entertainment, Doug Oldham, dreamed up and hosted, where we gave turkey awards for the many fall-on-your-face mistakes and *faux pas* that haunted each of us in our early careers.

We wore gowns and tuxedos and gave out plaster of Paris turkeys which we had spray-painted gold. Lillie remembers that her turkey was bronze like her skin, but for the life of us, we can't remember the why of her award.

If there were setbacks and disappointments in

Lillie's life, we never knew. She was known for her unselfishness and her dedication to loving people, regardless of their circumstances. She still is. She listened for God's voice. Still does!

He spoke to her through scripture—Matthew 6:26 to be specific. Her life verse! "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Sometimes God spoke to her through others, like when a pastor in Malaysia, where she was ministering, told her that God wanted her to be a missionary on the beaches of Hawaii. "This is going to be such a dramatic change that you'll wonder if it really is God," he counseled.

Lillie was eight years short of her retirement from the phone company, yet she left her good job, and ... "Let's just say I hung up on Ma Bell!" she says, with that magical laugh of hers! She joined the Waikiki Beach Ministry of Chaplain Bob Turnbull. The next years were a whirlwind of activity for her—she sang, spoke, counseled, led Bible studies, helped set up sound equipment and cleaned up afterward.

Ten years into pouring her life out in Hawaii, a missionary was speaking when she pointed to Lillie and said: "The Lord has a word for the lady in the hat." She then covered the mike with her hand and spoke personally to Lillie. "God says you have gotten too comfortable. He wants your voice to be heard around the world."

Not long after, a call came from Bill Gaither. Doug Oldham had introduced her to Bill after hearing Lillie sing when he was in the San Jose area. The song Doug first heard her sing was "God Gave the Song."

"We just sit around and sing," Bill said. "We'll have a camera there ... we don't know where it's going, but we'd like you to be part of it."

With that she became "our Lillie." Our very own glowin' ... smilin' ... singin' ... hat in place ... LIVE OUT LOUD ... Lillie!

She's sung in 57 countries, in hundreds of churches and arenas, made a zillion fans and friends, and told everybody she came in contact with about those birds of the air and of God's goodness.

"My hats represent a 'hattitude' of joy," she says. "Happiness is about happenings. Joy is what Jesus gives us when our ducks aren't in a row!"

Miss Lillie's most recent project is *Lillie Sings Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. I highly recommend it. I played it all the way through in my car.

We ended our conversation back to reminiscing ... this time remembering the good times when Lillie sang for our Friends Through Thick and Thin conferences.

That led to the story she used to tell from the platform, about her wig flying off as she walked down the street on a windy day. We laughed once again at her overly dramatic imitation of the handsome good Samaritan who chased it. Hilarious!

Wig or no wig ... THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A HAT! 

