



Making movies with Ken Carpenter

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL JORDAN

Most people in search of “the dream” make the westward pilgrimage to L.A. with their cameras, headshots or simply ideas tucked under their arms, joining the race up the ladder, whose last rung is the Hollywood spotlight.

It’s a familiar story, though a tough game, but the conquest continues nonetheless with more and more people continuing to spill into California valleys. Yet while the exodus is typically westward for filmmakers, local talent Ken Carpenter did the unexpected opposite.

He and his family were entrenched in “La La Land,” doing the Hollywood thing, but when friends invited them to the Nashville area in 1994, they fell in love with the landscape and the emphasis on family values and decided to make it their home. They moved out to the Leipers Fork area five years ago, and the family quickly grew to 10. (Yes, that’s eight children.)

“We feel like we’re still on our honeymoon with Franklin. We just love it,” Carpenter says. “We had our first couple of children in L.A., but we were smitten with the notion of raising a family here. We also knew that vocationally there was a good chance of creating a thriving production company here and a good fighting chance of

building a career in Nashville. Thankfully God opened the doors and rescued us from L.A. and delivered us to Franklin.

“We never take for granted what a blessing it is to fly back into a civil airport and to travel through the square, out to Leipers Fork and back on to the farm. After a couple of days in bumper-to-bumper traffic, I feel deeply fortunate to call Franklin home.”

Carpenter made good on his entrepreneurial ideas of founding his own business in this area. He realized and absorbed the ideals of the Bible belt’s buckle and built his production company with an emphasis on family and faith, calling it Franklin Films.

Success has followed. Over the past 12 years Carpenter has done projects with Max Lucado, Steven Curtis Chapman, eHarmony, Michael W. Smith, Compassion International, Casting Crowns, Veggie Tales and Big Idea Productions, Jeremy Camp, Integrity Publishers, DC Talk, The Gideons, Point of Grace and many more. He was awarded the 2007 GMA Music Award (Dove Award) for his “long-form” DVD Amy Grant – Time Again. He also won the Dove Award in 2006 for his Mark Schultz “long-form” DVD.

He has recently completed production on a new television broad-

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cast special for John Tesh, "John Tesh: Piano, Gospel, Dance," which will air nationally in this spring. He produced and directed a one-hour dramatic pilot for PAX TV entitled "The Sullivan Sisters," as well as 15 half-hour episodes of "Sundays with Simon," a discussion show. He also recently directed six episodes of "Front Row Live" for the Gospel Music Channel.

Located on Main Street above Mellow Mushroom and down a narrow corridor are a couple of rooms dedicated to viewing and editing footage. A handful of Franklin Films employees sit in the dimly lit areas, studying and reworking bits and pieces of film to produce a watch-able medium. Those projects include documentaries, music videos, commercials and TV programming. They also aspire to enter the feature film arena and are reviewing screenplays and talking to writers and financiers.

"The success of recent films, such as 'Facing the Giants' and 'The Passion of the Christ' have finally turned Hollywood's attention to family, faith-friendly entertainment," he says. "We're trying to dream the dream, while keeping one foot firmly planted in



The Carpenter Family

bringing bread to the table."

In the meantime they are busily operating a steady production environment and currently producing and directing 13 episodes of a new half-hour human-interest television show hosted by acclaimed author/speaker Joni Eareckson Tada. The high definition show features families from around the U.S. who have triumphed over extraordinary circumstances.

Carpenter's first professional Christian gig involved a video for DC Talk, just prior to moving to Tennessee.

"I had the good fortune of coming along right when the Christian industry was exploding," he says. "Working with DC Talk certainly opened the door to other work."

He admits he doesn't do as many music videos as he did a decade ago, saying it's more of a "younger man's game," but says there's a wide variety of programming here to focus on.

"Over the last several years I've focused a high premium on being home around the family meal table," he explains. "I'm blessed with eight children, who I adore, and don't want to miss out on their childhoods in pursuits of film. This is a business that is notorious for chewing people up and spitting them out and destroying families along the way. I love what I'm doing, but I love my family more so I've searched out the right balance."

Carpenter recently created a second production company called Franklin Springs Family Media, which is developing a line of DVDs that are designed to appeal to the home-centered marketplace. A home-schooling father of eight children, Carpenter's award-winning work with Franklin Springs sets forth a "triumphant vision of Biblical family foundations," as he explains it.

"We're developing our own line of product, both because it gives us an ongoing revenue stream, and also because it gives us the chance to talk about things that we're real passionate about – things that focus on the family," Carpenter explains.

Some of those projects include: "A Journey Home," a documentary about the Waller family, the story of "the extraordinary path traveled

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An American Adventure The living legacy of Jimmy Gentry

A documentary film on the life and times of Franklin's own Jimmy Gentry will be shown Friday, Feb. 15, and Saturday, Feb. 16, at 7 p.m. at the Fourth Avenue Church of Christ. Tickets are \$10 each and all proceeds benefit the Save the Franklin Theater campaign.

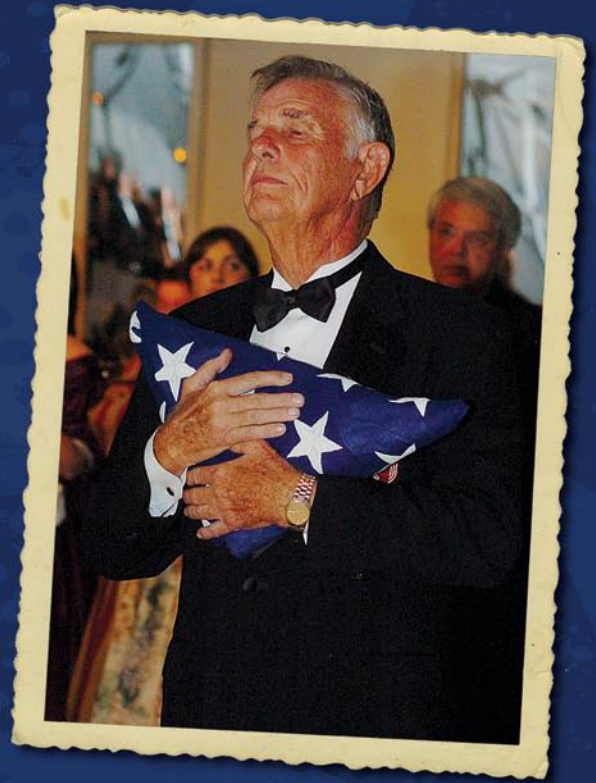
"Jimmy Gentry has had an incredible journey," says Heritage Foundation Executive Director Mary Pearce. "This new film documents the story of a young man going off to war, his experiences in that war and the legacy he came back home to create here in Franklin."

Through high-definition videography and cinematic narrative, "An American Adventure - The Living Legacy of Jimmy Gentry" traces the life of Gentry from his Depression-era boyhood in Franklin, to his military service in WWII, to his life-altering experience as one of the first liberating soldiers through the gates at the infamous Dachau concentration camp, to his over 50 years as a renowned high

school football coach.

"I first met Jimmy Gentry while visiting his family's farm with my wife and children," Carpenter says. "We came to befriend Mr. Gentry in a way that I hope families do, as they get to know him through this film. He's an extraordinary man in the sense that he embodies the simple treasures of life in a rare - and very appealing - way."

Tickets are available at The Heritage Foundation located in the rear of the downtown Franklin Post Office, Williamson County Visitors Center located at Dr. McPhail's office on East Main Street, Battle Ground Academy, Brentwood Academy or on the Web at www.historicfranklin.com and at all Williamson County Recreation Centers. All proceeds from the premier will benefit Save the Franklin Theatre.



"I am looking forward to the documentary premier because I look at it as a homecoming for me and the friends I have had over the years," Gentry says. "Many of those friends have memories both Franklin natives and friends who moved to Franklin have fond memories of the Franklin Theatre."

photo by Anthony Scarlati

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by Tommy Waller, his wife Sherri, and their 11 children." Another is "Still Standing: The Stonewall Jackson Story," which traces the life of Stonewall Jackson - from his orphaned childhood, "to the Sunday School class he taught for African Americans that has resulted in a lasting impact today, to the pivotal role he played as a General in the Civil War."

The most recent film is about iconic Franklin native Jimmy Gentry and his trials as a World War II veteran and the impact that experience had on his life and his continuing contribution to his community. (Ed's note: See sidebar for more details.)

"Family life is usually ridiculed and laughed at and thought of as Pollyanna and antiquated, but we subscribe to the belief that family can and still should function well and be a foundational part of all of our lives," Carpenter says. "It's always exciting to me when orders come in from L.A., Chicago, New York or Miami."

Rather than slice the pie into tiny slivers of profit by using third-party distributors, Carpenter uses the Internet to market and self-distribute his films. He also uses freelancers from the Nashville area as well as from around the country for different projects.

"The best music shooters in the world are right here in Nashville," he says. "I don't think there is anywhere else in the world that would



be a better fit for us."

For more information on Franklin Films, visit www.franklinfilms.com or call 615.599.0950. Franklin Springs Family Media is located at www.franklinsprings.com.