



Follow Your Dream...

By Josh Noland

FOLLOW YOUR DREAM

Preface

“HOW CAN I FOLLOW MY DREAM?” Throughout my professional life, I have been asked this question by an endless number of young people who want to make it in the music industry. Many come to me with the idea they want to become stars. Others just hope to make a living in the business. I walk a fine line and try hard not to encourage or discourage them too much. Instead, I try to get them to look more at the practical side of the business, such as having another career to fall back on if necessary.

As I look back on my life and how certain events had affected my dream, I have found that you never give up in spite of the odds stacked against you. **PATIENCE, HARD WORK, TALENT and LUCK are all factors.** For some reason you may never reach your highest dream, but that's ok; there is a level on the staircase to your dream that is reachable. Don't give up! I know many that did and have lived to regret it.

These nine short chapters tell how I got started as a shy youngster to climb up the ladder of my musical dream, one rung at a time. Hopefully, this may encourage you to **“FOLLOW YOUR DREAM,”** whatever it is, and with **GOD AS YOUR CO-PILOT,** attain that level on the staircase of your dream that is reachable for you.

Josh

Chapter 1

Discovering Music

Walking home alone from George Rogers Clark Grade School on an autumn Kentucky afternoon in 1946, I could feel the wind pick up and swirl the leaves on the ground. It seemed like the mile and a half trot home would take forever as I was bringing home the first note from my teacher to my mother since I had started first grade. I was tempted to let it fly and swirl with the leaves but I knew that wasn't right and I must deliver this note to my mother.

I arrived home and was met at the back door by my grandmother. Uh-oh! Something's up! She never waits for me at the back door. My dad had died when I was three and my grandmother was more like my mother and my mother was more like my dad, because she worked to support the family. The suspense was killing me. What was that note all about? My grandmother said, "J. A., dinner will be a little late tonight because your mother's working late." I hated being called J. A.! The kids at school would make fun and call me Jack Ass. I was named after my dad, Joshua Anderson Noland, and my mother couldn't bear to call me Josh after he died, so J. A. it was!

After dinner that evening, mother read the note the teacher had sent. **"DEAR MRS. NOLAND, YOUR SON WILL NEVER MAKE A MUSICIAN! WE'LL HAVE TO REMOVE HIM FROM THIS CLASS."** Wow! That was such a shock to know that you're no good at something, even at the young age of seven. The music class was being taught on cardboard with piano keys painted on them. There were no musical notes to hear! I felt lost! That was my first introduction to music.

During my early school years I was very much a loner. Some would call me shy and others a scaredy cat. I'd walk a mile out of my way to avoid the bullies. I remember an incident when one of

my teachers accused me of stealing her lunch from the cloakroom. That afternoon she decided to walk home with me to talk to my mother. I told her mother was at work, but she'd decided to walk anyway. Well, I took her the long way home that afternoon by way of a very deep wooded valley called Wildwood. I don't believe she ever walked another student home again after that.

Two or so years went by without any musical influence in my life other than my older sister Dottie listening to the pop hits of that era and my older brother Bernie banging out "Rhapsody in Blue" on the old upright piano.

Then one summer when I was about nine or ten, our relatives from Long Island came to Louisville for a short visit before traveling on. My cousin Gail Gough brought with her a ukulele (uke) like the one Arthur Godfrey used on his TV show. I became entranced with it and started playing it on my own. Wow! This was a musical instrument I could play and hear. It was so easy. As they were getting ready to leave, Gail noticed how attached I had become to her uke. She agreed to leave it with me until they returned to Louisville on their way back home to New York.

Hours upon hours I would practice her uke. Our TV set was a black and white five-inch screen with a magnifying glass to make it seem larger. I would watch Arthur Godfrey on TV to see how he placed his fingers on his uke and then I would try to copy it. I tried and tried but somehow I couldn't get the same chord sound Godfrey was getting. I became discouraged thinking my first grade teacher was right after all.

Chapter 2

My First Guitar

Evidently the news spread throughout my family of how I enjoyed Gail's uke. At that time in my life it seemed to my family that I didn't enjoy anything. I was a frail kid and not into sports like the rest of the boys in the neighborhood and I spent a lot of time alone. But I did enjoy going to the movies on Saturday afternoons to see Roy Rogers and Gene Autry play their guitars in their movies, when we could afford it. One movie that stands out in my mind is "Smokey." The last scene shows Burl Ives playing the guitar and singing "Welcome Home Smokey." I knew I had to play a guitar some day.

One day my brother's friend Layne Michler and his buddy Fred Stromburg bought an old beat-up guitar at an auction. It was a six-string guitar that had only four strings on it. They thought of me because the uke had only four strings. Since my mother couldn't afford to buy me a uke, they decided to give the guitar to me. As I remember, Fred was the one who brought it over to the house. He was a much-decorated war veteran and I thought he had brought it back from the war. It looked much like Willie Nelson's guitar after Pearl Harbor. But it had four strings! So I tinkered with it to make it sound more like a uke. I played and messed with it till I suddenly realized it sounded more like Authur Godfrey's uke. The chords were in harmony with the first four strings on a full six-string guitar. Later I found out Godfrey was playing a baritone uke tuned like a guitar. Gail's uke was tuned to a "my dog has fleas" uke tuning.

I couldn't wait for the very next Authur Godfrey show to play along with his songs, but they were much more difficult and had too many chords for me. Again I was feeling maybe my first grade teacher was right after all.

Later that summer a new family moved in two doors down from our house. Louisville is a big city and these folks, the Kellys, were from the country. Evidently times were hard and they had to sell their farm and move to the city to get jobs. I believe there were three different families living in that one house. The Kellys had a son my age named "Doc." I think they named him after the doctor who brought him into the world out on the farm. They had so many kids they were just running out of names. Doc Kelly became the first kid I could really call a friend. We would pitch and catch baseball back in the alley behind our homes. Other kids made fun of his country accent so we just stuck together.

One thing the Kellys brought with them to the big city was their music. Their radio was always turned on to hillbilly music. I'd be visiting their house and listening to the chord progressions on their hillbilly station and would run home real fast to see if I could play them on the guitar. I even tried to add rubber bands for the bottom strings that were missing but that didn't work. Wow! I'd finally found a music I felt I could play and was determined to prove my teacher wrong!

We had a beat up old Silvertone radio and I tried to find the hillbilly station the Kellys listen to but the static was too erratic. I finally asked my mother if it was possible to combine my birthday and Christmas so I could get a Halicrafter shortwave radio set that I could hook up an antenna to and get better stations. Christmas came and the shortwave set was the best present I could have ever received. I hooked the antenna to a big oak tree in my backyard and turned on the radio. Wow! What a great sound I got!

Chapter 3

Learning to Play

One Saturday morning my grandmother took me on a bus to downtown Louisville where I visited my very first music store and drooled over all the beautiful guitars. She bought me my first set of guitar strings and I couldn't wait to get home to put them on. Since my guitar now had six strings, the only way I felt I could tune my new strings was to listen to a country radio station. Back in those days country music was called hillbilly music by the city folk. I never liked the name hillbilly so I stuck to the name most country folks called it, country music. WGRC in Louisville had a fellow by the name of Jimmy Osborne who would play a song live on his guitar before playing country records. He'd always play an open E chord before singing his song and that's how I learned to tune my guitar, to his E chord!

Besides local country radio stations, my shortwave's AM band would pick up 50,000 watt stations around the country, such as WJJD in Chicago, Illinois; WLW in Cincinnati, Ohio; WRVA in Richmond, Virginia; and of course WSM in Nashville Tennessee (home of the Grand Ole Opry). Every Saturday night I would tune to the Grand Ole Opry and try to play along with every song till they went off the air. First, I would tune up to each band and then figure out the chords they were playing. Back in those days, bands were not always in standard tuning so I found myself constantly tuning. I'd like to chuckle, I only learned the last half of songs because I was too busy tuning up with the first half. MY DREAM was someday to actually visit the Grand Ole Opry in person and watch those musicians play. Till then, I would spend many hours each day playing my guitar along with all these different radio stations to become as good as I could. Neither my

friend Doc Kelly nor his family nor anyone else other than my family knew of my love affair with the guitar and country music.

When Little League baseball started, Doc and I signed up. Our practice in the back alley must have paid off because we both made the team. He became pitcher and I made right fielder, which is no glamorous position. My hitting was good and I was placed in the cleanup batting position for a while. The team was called the Saint Louis Saints. I remember after each game our coach Bill Lawrence took us all out to a Dairy Queen and treated us whether we won or lost. His leadership has always been an example I've tried to follow. In the playoffs I sprained the pinky on my left hand and found myself having to make a choice. Being right-handed, that pinky is vital for a guitar player. I enjoyed playing baseball because I was able to mix better with kids my own age and earn their respect. But my love for the guitar had grown to the point that I never would want to jeopardize my fingers. Yes, it was just Little League but it was still hardball. It wasn't easy telling Coach Lawrence that I could no longer play baseball. I sensed he was disappointed, but I was too.

Shortly after my pinky healed up, my grandmother had my sister take me to downtown Louisville to check out the pawnshops for a new guitar. We couldn't afford the guitars in the music stores, so for twelve dollars she bought me a Stella guitar, which was like the Sears Roebuck version of guitars. This time I felt like I had a real guitar. It had no holes in it except where the sound hole was supposed to be. I even didn't have to turn the tuning pegs with pliers like I thought all guitars had to be tuned. Needless to say, I doubled and tripled my practicing time so much that my mother and grandmother sat me down and threatened to send me to a foster home if I didn't straighten up.

Now, I really didn't believe I was an unruly child. Sure, I had brought one note home to my mother several years earlier and had a teacher accuse me of stealing her lunch, but that was it. I was taught by my grandmother to be courteous and speak politely. Why would they want to send me to a foster home? Both of them

were not in particularly good health and had spent some time in the hospital. I guess that might have been part of their reason but I still was feeling guilty about practicing my guitar so much. Maybe they didn't want me to become a musician. I was only ten or eleven by then, but I had already developed my DREAM to be a guitarist and go as far as it would take me. My guitar was my only true friend now. Doc had developed his own circle of friends in the baseball league, as he was their star pitcher.

Chapter 4

Mr. Snyder

The Crescent Hill Methodist Church was next door to the grade school I attended and had been my family's church for years. My dad had been skipper for the Sea Scout troop at Crescent Hill, and his funeral had been there too. The church had sponsored my Uncle John Lewis into the ministry and I attended Sunday school there. I guess my mother and grandmother felt they should find someone from the church to sit down and talk to me. Mr. Snyder was the logical one because he lived just down the street. He was also our family insurance man and that made the visit more official.

The next Saturday morning he came over to our house to visit my mother and to talk to me. He must have stayed outside my closed back bedroom door for longer than he planned to. I was strumming away on my guitar and didn't know he was there until I heard my mom call me. I opened my door and saw Mr. Snyder. I quickly took my guitar and pushed it back under the bed. No one had ever heard me play before and I was embarrassed. Mr. Snyder was also the leader of the Boy Scout troop at our church. He said he would like me to join his troop because many of his kids went to my school. I had no interest at all. I wasn't close with any of the kids that went to my school and besides, that would take away practice time from my guitar. He said next Saturday morning he would pick me up and I could bring my guitar along too. That did it. "No one has heard me play the guitar and for sure they're not going to now." Or so I thought!

The next Saturday morning when Mr. Snyder came by our house, I felt that if I didn't go to the Boy Scout meeting I might be headed for a foster home. I asked, "How many kids are in your troop?" He answered, "Six or seven." I decided I could live with

that. After he spoke an extra long time with my mother and me, we started down the steps to his car and he stopped. "Aren't you bringing your guitar with you?" he asked. "No," I answered!

The drive to our church was a short 10-minute drive, even by the cars back then. When we got near the church, he turned off on a road that went in another direction. "Aren't we going to the Boy Scout meeting at our church?" I asked. He didn't say anything. Uh-oh! I knew I was headed for a foster home. Why at least didn't they tell me? How could they do this to me? Finally, Mr. Snyder said, "You better sit back and relax J.A., we're going to be driving for awhile." I was tired, not sleeping much the night before, and found myself dozing off with my head on the armrest.

Chapter 5

First Performance

The car had stopped and Mr. Snyder, opening the car door, suddenly awakened me. It was dusk and I could see that we were somewhere out in the woods. Behind us was a covered bridge we had just driven through. He said, "Son, we're now in the Covered Bridge Kentucky State Park. This is where my troop is camping tonight." We started walking up a winding steep pathway to the top of a very large hill. "Where's your troop?" I asked. "Just over the hill," he answered. As I peered over the top of the hill, I saw at least a thousand or more Boy Scouts gathered on this large slope. Looking down into the valley, at the bottom, I saw a stage and loudspeakers. "I thought we would be with only seven scouts," I said. He replied, "We are. Our troop is over there. This is the annual greater Louisville and Jefferson County Boy Scout Jamboree with all the troops from the area meeting here at Covered Bridge."

Uh-oh! Just then, I saw my guitar down on the stage and heard my name being called out as the entertainment for the evening. Oh nooo! A lot of kids from my school were here and I'd be embarrassed if I performed and more embarrassed if I didn't. What do I do now? And how did my guitar get up there anyway? Someone must have snuck it into the trunk of Mr. Snyder's car before we left. Boy, was I mad!

I slowly made my way down the hill to the stage. When I reached the bottom, I stopped for a moment, as my stomach was either sick or full of butterflies. I slowly strapped on my guitar with both hands shaking, walked up to the microphone, closed my eyes, and started playing and singing the only Hank Williams song I knew. I wasn't half way through the first verse when I heard the whole camp singing along with me. I continued singing country songs I'd learned from the radio. "Wow! They must listen to the

same radio station that I do!” After singing a few more songs with the camp singing along, I opened my eyes, put my guitar down and ran off into the woods as fast as my legs would carry me.

At first I thought I’d get sick. Long rides in cars give me motion sickness anyway, and adding the extra stress of performing, I thought I was doomed. My head was pounding as I sat down on a rock. One of the scouts from my school came over and asked me how I had learned to play the guitar. Another asked what kind of guitar I had. Several more wanted to know if I knew certain songs. All of a sudden I remembered the rousing applause I’d gotten! “Wow! These kids actually liked my performance!” My very first performance was in front of a thousand Boy Scouts and was a success! This was the most important FIRST STEP UP THE LADDER OF MY DREAM, thanks to Mr. Snyder. I slept well on the long ride back home that night.

Chapter Six

Cherokee Music School

As I look back on my early music days, I've come to realize that my family really didn't like "hillbilly music" and my playing it embarrassed them. I related to songs like Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry": "Hear that lonesome whippoorwill, he sounds too blue to fly, that midnight train is whining low, I'm so lonesome I could cry." I was very much a loner and wasn't about to stop playing the music that I loved! My family began to look for ways to expose me to better music. Somehow they heard about a successful music school in downtown Louisville and decided for me to check it out. I had no desire to go to a music school. But to keep peace, my sister Dottie took me by bus one Saturday downtown to the school. We had to change buses to get there. When we arrived, I was taken upstairs to audition with a man named Mr. Berkley. He asked me my name and I said "JOSH!" He had me read some music that I could hardly do. Then he asked if I could play any chords. That's when I took off and showed him my stuff. He told me that on Saturdays they had a regular radio show featuring their students and he would like me to play today if I could. "I don't know if I can do that," I told him. "You'd have no problem," he said, "I need someone who can play chords." I asked Dottie if we could stay and she said "Yes." Behind the large door at the back of the school was a band room filled with chairs, music stands and some microphones. There was no one in there yet and Mr. Berkley showed me to my spot in the very back. I thought, "Whew! I can hide back here if I have to fake it." He left some music on my music stand and I started to check it out. The name of this band was the "Pee Wee King Junior Band." The music was country songs that I already knew and the radio station we were broadcasting on was my good ole WGRC country station. Wow! Just then the students started coming in and taking their places.

There were at least a dozen lap steel guitar players, about the same in accordion players and a large number of electric lead players that played only one note at a time. Just when the engineers from WGRC were putting one mic over the whole band and a single mic on me, I realized that I was the only one playing the rhythm guitar chords holding it together. I started getting that sick feeling but it went away when I started playing.

Dottie called my mother, grandmother and other relatives and had them tune in. The show was a success and a first for me. Mr. Berkley invited me back any Saturday I could make it. After Dottie and I got home and she told my family how well I did and how proud she was of me. I guess mother and grandmother finally accepted my playing country music. However, Dottie didn't tell them I said my name was Josh! My mother also knew how serious I was and broke down and bought me my first electric guitar, a National, on time payments, hoping that if I made any money I could help pay for it. I had no amplifier to plug my new electric guitar into so my brother Bernie rigged our brand-new RCA console radio so I could play my guitar through it. It sounded like I was playing with the bands on the radio. Wow! I was happy! I thought, "If only my first grade teacher could see me now!" I had reached the SECOND STEP UP THE LADDER TO MY DREAM!

Chapter 7

The Bluegrass Ramblers

After several Saturdays doing the radio show, I had become friends with rhythm guitarist Bob Montgomery and steel guitarist Ray Ship. Now that my family felt comfortable with me riding and changing buses each Saturday, they didn't mind me staying after the show and practicing with my friends. We formed a trio band called "The Blue Grass Ramblers." As I think back, it was not the best name, because we played country music, not bluegrass. However, bluegrass was the nickname for our state and not a form of music that I knew of at that time. After we practiced on Saturdays, we would go down to the bottom of the hill from the Cherokee Music School and wait at a corner sandwich shop for our buses. We all three traveled in different directions, as transportation was a problem for us. The sandwich shop had a jukebox in the corner and half of the records were country. That is where we learned most of our songs, by playing the jukebox over and over again. One Saturday I heard an instrumental song on the jukebox by a guitarist named Chet Atkins. The song was the Carter family's "Wildwood Flower." There was an eight-measure verse that Chet played with a bass beat I had never heard played on a guitar before. Wow! It would influence my guitar playing forever! Ray and Bob had gone home on their buses. I stayed, playing the jukebox over and over again till I ran out of nickels. It was getting late and I had just enough money for bus fare. After getting off the first bus and waiting for the second one I looked at the schedule on the bus stop and realized the last bus had come and gone. Uh-oh! What was I to do? I'd used up all my money. I was going to have to walk home. It was after dark as I started the five-mile walk carrying my guitar. The October weather was a bit nippy and I could see lighted Halloween pumpkins along Grinstead Drive on the way home. As I rounded the curve I saw Cave Hill Cemetery

ahead. I was going to have to walk next to Cave Hill on my route home. I was getting a bit jittery and nervous, as I had never been near a cemetery by myself at night before. My new electric guitar was getting extra heavy and I needed to stop and rest. While I sat on the stone fence that bordered Cave Hill, I realized that I was very near the location where my dad was buried. I suddenly felt a burst of comfort that I had never felt before. No goblins would get me this night, and I got up and walked the rest of the way home in peace. Needless to say, I never missed the bus again, ever!

Our band practiced a few months until our first gig on the outskirts of Louisville. We borrowed some equipment from Mr. Berkley to play at Ray Ship's church, a Church of God. They had a Sunday afternoon cookout and we didn't know many gospel songs so we played what we knew: a mixture of gospel, country and Hawaiian songs. Bob was our singer and rhythm guitarist, Ray played lap steel and I played whatever it took to hold it all together. I guess it worked. The congregation was from the country like Doc Kelly's folks and wanted us to play many of the same songs that I'd learned from the Kellys, so we had a big sing-along.

Chapter 8

Discovering God

The spiritual feeling I got next to Cave Hill Cemetery that night I had never experienced before. I belonged to the Crescent Hill Methodist Church and attended Sunday school there ever since I had been baptized as an infant. In the summer months my grandmother, mother and I would take a train down deep into Kentucky's countryside to visit my uncle, Pastor John W. Lewis. Even though we attended his churches, I still didn't feel the spiritual feeling that I felt next to the cemetery. The Louisville church was much too stiff for me; I was afraid to move. My uncle's churches were more loose and relaxed. I say "churches" because every two years they moved him to another country church. Uncle John's sermons were easier for me to understand than those in my own church. But the spiritual feeling I so long desired was not there until I started listening to and singing the old country church hymns his churches sang. There, I found my Lord, in every verse, in every chorus and in every melody. I had discovered God! From the country gospel songs Ray Ship's church sang to the old country church hymns from my Uncle John's churches, I fell in love with country gospel music. Uncle John even surprised me when he told me that he listened to Hank Williams' early morning radio show from WSM Nashville each day. Hank would close every show with a gospel song. He also said Red Foley's "Peace in the Valley" was one of his favorites.

One Sunday morning, friends from Ray Ship's church invited our band to play at a little ole 5,000-watt radio station down deep in the country. We had to leave home in the middle of the night to get there on time. There was an old country preacher they called Reverend Hicks, which I felt was appropriate. He was hell, fire and damnation and we were the break he took for water before he

would hell, fire and damnation again. We were invited to go back again but declined. We did perform at a Church of God way down deep in the country once. They were holy rollers jumping around, falling down and raising their hands. I heard once a month they brought in rattlesnakes. I prayed that this wasn't the Sunday. Needless to say, we never went back there either.

I attended classes to become confirmed at my church. I was confirmed but never really felt comfortable there. I didn't go as often as I should have. But on Sunday mornings I would play and sing all the gospel songs I knew. That's how I worshiped my Lord.

By now I also had developed a fascination with trains, maybe from some of the train songs I'd been playing, or riding them in the summer to Uncle John's. I don't know, but I felt that if Jesus came back to Earth, he'd be riding on a train or even be the engineer. The railroad tracks near my home handled the Baltimore and Ohio (B & O) railroad with the George Washington Special. I remember seeing his portrait on the last car as it went by. On the other side of town ran the L & N (Louisville and Nashville) railroad. **MY DREAM WAS TO RIDE THIS TRAIN ALL THE WAY TO NASHVILLE SOMEDAY.**

Chapter 9

Midnight Train To Louisville

DON'T BE AFRAID TO DREAM! I wasn't. At this early age in my life I had already reached several steps up my dream ladder.

Unknown to me, Bob Montgomery's father worked for the L & N railroad at their downtown office in Louisville. One week at our practice Bob said his dad asked if we would be interested in playing on a special Grand Ole Opry train from Louisville to Nashville. We would board at 9:00 a.m. Saturday and play music for the four-hour trip in one of the train cars. We would arrive in Nashville early in the afternoon, visit the tourist shops, and attend the full Grand Ole Opry show. After the midnight jamboree at Ernest Tubb's record shop show was over (at 1:00 a.m.), we could walk down the hill and board the train and sleep all the way back home. This would be a **DREAM COME TRUE!** We all said, **"YES."**

This was especially different for us because they had to hook up a generator for our electricity on the train. Boy, that motor was loud! They tried to move it outside the door between railroad cars and that seemed to help a bit. Also, they were somehow able to pipe our music to the other railroad cars on the train through their P.A. system. The quality wasn't all that great but neither were we. But we had loads of fun. I bet there haven't been many bands, if any, who got to Nashville this way, even if it was the early fifties.

When we arrived at Union Station in Nashville, we stored our instruments on the train and walked up the hill on Broadway towards the Ryman Auditorium. The scene was very similar to the "Coal Miner's Daughter" movie when Loretta Lynn performed in the used car lot at the bottom of the hill from the Grand Ole Opry. There were many wannabes singing this particular afternoon and

most of them were bad, bad, bad! Across the street you could see Tootsie's Bar and Hank Snow's record shop. Across Broadway from Hank Snow's was the Ernest Tubb record shop. Boy, we were in hog heaven!

That evening we entered the Ryman Auditorium to see the Grand Ole Opry Show. Wow! We were really there. I was very surprised to see the seats were church pews. This must have been a huge church at one time. One by one the country stars performed their hits on stage. Late in the evening a lone guitar player came forward and performed his magical style. Yes, my hero Chet Atkins played the Carter family's "Wildwood Flower," just as I had heard it on the juke box down at the corner sandwich shop back home. That made my trip complete!

Later that evening, after we had gone to the Grand Ole Opry and Ernest Tubb's Midnight Jamboree, we again boarded our train for the midnight ride back to Louisville. Not a bad day for three fifteen year old boys who would fall asleep on the train this night caught up in the **MOMENT OF THEIR DREAM!!!**

WOW!

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE?

Josh