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DOING IT GOD'S WAY

Story By
Linda Owen



Clifton Jansky & Randy Travis

While Clifton Jansky was parking his Suburban at the Municipal Auditorium in Lubbock, Texas, he could hear the unmistakable baritone voice of Randy Travis singing "Shall We Gather At the River." Inside, in the center of the stage, Travis gripped the microphone gently. He was smiling, having a good time, dressed in casual attire. Around his band were technicians asking questions and requesting more sound checks.

As stage lights flickered, Jansky waited his turn. The excitement was building. He was opening for an artist he had admired for years. In the 1980s, when Jansky had his country band in San Antonio, he had sung Randy's early hits. When Jansky was dating his wife Barbara, "Forever and Ever Amen" became their song. He smiled, settled in a front seat, a myriad of Travis memories flooding his mind.

When Travis finished, Clifton stuck out his hand and introduced himself. "I'm opening for you tonight," he said. "We've met before. In fact, we shared a stage once before you got famous."

Jansky was talking about their meeting in Nashville in 1985, shortly after Travis' manager (later wife) Lib Hatcher began managing The Nashville Palace. Travis had cooked cat-

fish and washed dishes, as well as singing on stage. In 1983, while performing at the club, Travis had recorded his first album independently and called it *Randy Ray - Live at the Nashville Palace*. The album, now a collector's item, was mostly sold at the club between shows.

Jansky, who was already in country music, had come to town to record a single, with Pam Tillis as his background vocalist. After the session, the band invited him to accompany them to the Nashville Palace, where they played at night. Once there, Jansky was brought up on stage to sing several songs.

"Randy and I were just two guys looking for a recording contract," Jansky remembers.

Nearly twenty years later, in April 2004, as the two artists stood together on the stage after the sound check, Jansky also reminded Travis of their second meeting in the LA Airport in 2000. Jansky had been returning to San Antonio after singing at the Los Angeles County Jail when he spotted Travis in the airport.

"I had heard him share his testimony on Dale Evans' TV show, and knew that he had a relationship with the Lord," Jansky says. "I reached into my bag to give him an *Amarillo By Morning* CD, and found that I was out. But Randy knelt down in the airport and wrote his address, so I could send it to him," Jansky recalls. "I doubt that he remembered me but he was real friendly. I could tell that success hadn't changed him."

At their reunion, the artists found that they had much in common. They had both struggled for years, recording mainstream country music. After varying degrees of success and notoriety, they had conversion experiences. God had touched their hearts and given them a new purpose.

Travis, who began reading his Bible and attending church after a spiritual awakening in the mid-1980s, was the first country artist to break the multi-platinum sales barrier. He has sold more than 21 million albums and won five Grammys, five Doves, two Christian Country Music Awards, five CMA awards, and eight from the Academy of Country Music.

In 2000, his musical career took a new turn when he released his first album of country-gospel songs, *Inspirational Journey*. In 2002, "Three Wooden Crosses," from his second inspirational album, *Rise and Shine*, gave Travis his first Number One hit in four years.

"It surprised me," Travis says. "I thought a lot of radio programmers might try to avoid it because it came from a gospel label, but the reception was incredible."

Although Travis still considers himself a country singer, he admits that his most recent albums have given him something of a parallel career. The experience has his band playing in churches for the first time.

"It's just a new world for me," Travis says. "We've received comments from so many places about people coming to churches and listening to us play because they're country listeners. We hear stories about them getting saved, getting baptized, joining churches and changing their lives."

Travis, whose latest musical offering is *Worship & Faith*, was especially excited when a woman told him that her son gave his life to Jesus Christ after seeing him perform at her church.

"I'll never be a preacher," Travis says, "but if I can go in and play these songs and make people consider where they are in their lives...man, I feel I'm certainly doing what I should be doing as a Christian."

Jansky remembers a time when the desire for stardom had left him empty inside. He had had twelve regional hits and opened concerts for popular recording artists. Most importantly, he had something that most performers only dream about: singing country music and making a living doing it at South Texas nightclubs. Still, the sought-after recording contract eluded him. Then, one night in 1983, his uninsured band trailer with all his equipment was stolen. A few months later he went through a divorce, unaware of God's plan for marriage or his life.

At his lowest point, he went to a Bible study where he studied the Word of God for the first time. The things he read in the Bible about sin, repentance, and God's redeeming grace suddenly touched his heart. He got down on his knees and asked Jesus to come into his life.

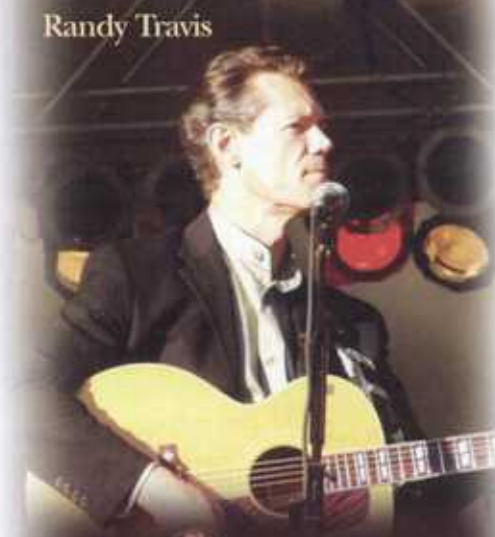
In 1989, after a 22-year career in country music, Jansky took off his cowboy hat, gave up the dancehalls and devoted his life to saving souls for Jesus Christ. Soon he had written more than 120 gospel tunes. With a new mindset (no longer seeing himself as an entertainer, but as an evangelist), he began singing and telling his story at churches and revivals.

A few years ago, Clifton, now 46, put his cowboy hat back on and began recording Christian Country music. Christian/Gospel radio stations have embraced his songs and seven releases have topped the charts, including his latest hit "God's Way," from his *Get Off The Fence* CD.

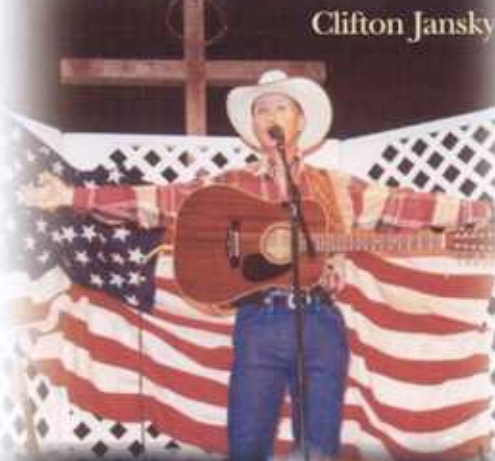
With the help of sponsoring churches, Jansky began hosting free barbecues with his concerts, in the towns where he once performed – but this time in their parks, civic centers, and stadiums. "Thanks to



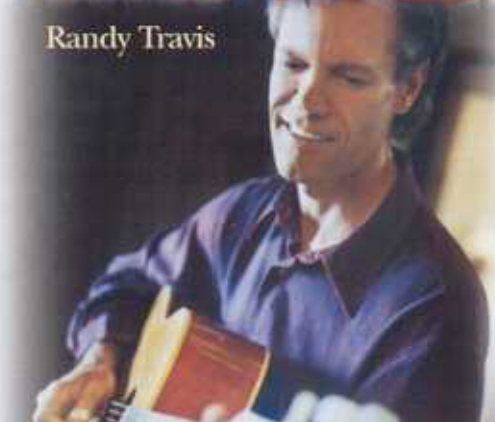
Clifton Jansky



Randy Travis



Clifton Jansky



Randy Travis

the Lord, I have been able to preach and sing without setting a fee," he says.

The secret, according to Jansky, is "turning things over to God and doing things God's way."

"God rings my phone," Jansky says adamantly. "I've always got dates. I don't have a booking agent. God takes me where He wants me to sing."

During his 15 years in the music ministry, Jansky has flown all over the U.S. to perform at concerts and churches. He is also active in Bill Glass Prison Ministry. He has traveled overseas with international evangelist Sammy Tippit to England, Yugoslavia, Siberia, Romania and Scotland. Last year he opened a concert for Ricky Skaggs.

"I've traveled more miles in the last few years than I did in all my years in country music," Jansky says. "When I learned to put God first, everything fell into place." In fact, when the singer stopped pursuing fame and fortune, he won two Christian Country Music Association awards (2001, 2002) and found himself singing at the Ryman Auditorium, something that he had desired ever since his early years in mainstream country. "Country music didn't put me on the stage of the Ryman, but Jesus did," Jansky says.

"The dreams I had, God has replaced with His dreams," Jansky says. "It was only after I started doing things God's way that God gave me fulfillment and the desires of my heart."

He senses that Travis feels the same way. In any case, Jansky sees God's plan at work in their lives. "The two of us keep crossing paths," Jansky says, "and I don't think it's coincidence. We both did it on our own for a lot of years. Now we're doing it for the Lord and it's not just music anymore; it's music ministry."

Travis ponders the thought. "I'd never heard the term 'music ministry' before, but it has turned out to be just that," Travis says with a smile.

Currently plans are being made for Jansky to open future Travis concerts.

To learn more about Clifton & Randy, click on to their websites at www.cliftonjansky.com & <http://randytravis.com>