

Debby Boone Still Lights Up Our Lives After 40 Years

Forty years ago this summer, Debby Boone set a record by topping the Billboard Hot 100 chart for 10 straight weeks with the title track of her first solo album, *You Light Up My Life*, which eventually became the biggest hit of the 1970s.

And she is still lighting up our lives after all these years.

Debby, now 60, commemorated the occasion by performing the iconic song on Friday, Aug. 11, 2017 at Biola University in La Mirada, California, at an event dubbed “Icons of Aging,” which was staged as part the Season of Life conference series, founded by well-known gerontologist Di Patterson.

In fact, time seemed to stand still as she sang on the same stage as her dad, Pat Boone, who also performed his hit song, “Love Letters in the Sand,” which, 60 years ago this summer, spent five weeks as No. 1 on the Hot 100.

Tears welled up in many eyes in the audience as Debby sang the mellow love song that had led to her winning a Grammy for best new artist in 1977, and while performing with her dad is rare these days, Debby Boone says she still regularly sings “You Light Up My Life.”

Before her appearance, I was able to grab a few minutes with Debby, who still looks great, and also with Pat and her sister, Lindy Boone Michaelis, who still sings and is a member of The Chordettes, best known for their hit songs “Mr. Sandman” and “Lollipop.”

Debby began by talking about the conference, and said, “We are happy to be here, knowing that this Seasons of Life conference is taking place to help older people learn a lot of things. I’m at a stage where this kind of conference is so

appropriate. My parents [Pat and Shirley Boone] are in their 80s, and I care a lot about them as they get older. I also care a lot about what I can do now so that my quality of life, when I get to be their age, will be better, and those things are important things, and they take some preparation."

Then she moved onto her how her hit song came about, saying, "The family had sort of broken up the Boone Family Singers, because my older two sisters had gotten married. So we had put aside the Pat Boone family show, and Mike Curb, who was the head of the record company that we recorded for, was also involved in the soundtrack for the movie *You Light Up My Life* and brought the song to me and asked if I was interested in recording it, which of course I was. And the rest is history."

I wondered if she had recorded "You Light Up My Life" in one take, and she replied, "No it was not a one-take thing; in fact, there was a lot of tension in the studio, and Joe Brooks, who wrote the song, was very specific about how he wanted me to sing it. I was given absolutely no freedom, and that was hard. But obviously something worked out alright in the end (laughs)."

How did it suddenly zoom to the top of the charts?

"I wish I knew," she laughed, "as I'd do it again. There was a combination of things including the X-factor that can't be properly explained. There was the movie, which meant that commercials were running on radio and television for it. So people were inundated with the song, which had a simple identifiable melody and a lyric that could mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. So there was a lot of crossover potential."

Did a lot of Christians feel the person you were singing about was the Lord?

"I don't know if they felt that in the beginning," said Debby. "I actually came out and said that's who I was singing it to."

I had not ever expected anybody to ask me that question, so I didn't have an agenda; it was just my own interpretation of the lyric."

I then moved onto the incredible story of Lindy's son, Ryan Corbin, who on Tuesday, June 19, 2001, when he was 25 years old, fell through a skylight on the roof of the condo where he was living in Southern California and came extremely close to losing his life.

His skull was crushed as he fell three floors to a cement floor below. Many thought Ryan would never awaken from the deep coma of his mind. But then, the ASSIST News Service, and many other media outlets and individuals, including veteran TV host Larry King, launched prayer campaigns for Ryan, and slowly but surely, he has been making an astonishing recovery.

I asked Debby if she had seen Ryan recently, and she said, "Of course. I see him frequently. He is doing amazingly well, especially in light of what was said shortly after his accident that he would most likely be a vegetable if he survived. He's so far from that. He's learning new things every day, and my sister, Lindy, is my hero. She keeps him involved in every kind of new therapy, and so he's learning to walk. He is delightfully funny and smart, and he brings a lot of joy to a lot of people."

I then asked Debby if she is still recognized in the street and, if so, how she responded to that.

"It doesn't happen as often as it used to when I was more in the public eye," she said. "Usually what people say to me is. 'Do I know you? You look familiar.'" I've also been told, 'Does anyone ever tell you that you look like Debby Boone? That's a big one,"

Do you long to go back to those big days?

"I don't long for it," said Debby. "I'm very grateful for what

I've had and, as long as I still have the opportunity to sing somewhere and somebody enjoys the music I'm doing, I'm content."

What do your kids think about their mom having been a pop star?

"I think they enjoy that part of my life, but also the fact that I've been able to be there for them," she said. "I made choices early on so that I wasn't just gone all the time, and that is something they appreciate. It was a juggling act, and I didn't always do it well, but I did it the best that I could, and I think we've all benefited."

What do they think of your music because today's is very different?

"Yes, it's very different," she agreed. "My kids have very eclectic tastes and, because their grandmother was Rosemary Clooney and their grandfather Pat Boone, they love that kind of music. In fact, we all love his music and also hers, and now I do something a lot closer to what Rosemary did, and they love it. They sometimes even suggest material for me."

I concluded by asking Debby what she would like to say to someone who is depressed at this time, and she replied, "I think sometimes it's just a choice you know; you can feel sort of lost and in the dark, but you've got to keep reaching for the light. I was reminded of a quote this morning in my own quiet time that people think that happy people are grateful people, but really it's the opposite—it's grateful people who are happy people!"

With that, Debby began preparing to light up the lives of her many fans, and I moved onto interview her dad. {eo}

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