

Keith Green's Wife Remembers Andraé Crouch

It's hard to think of the world without Andraé Crouch in it anymore. But there's no doubt Andraé and his music will never be forgotten. Andraé was a true pioneer who paved a road before many even thought about walking on it. Andraé was there before the big swell of Jesus Music took off, and he transitioned right through it to touch and inspire people in all segments of the music world.

Others will speak to his massive achievements and the foundation he built for those in "Jesus Music" to stand on. But I want to speak more personally.

Keith and I met Andraé through one of Andraé's best friends and band member-producer Bill Maxwell. It was 1976, and Keith just signed with a label that wanted Bill to produce Keith's first album.

When Bill introduced us, Andraé was already a gospel legend. Keith and I were brand new to the Christian/Gospel scene and didn't know what to expect. But Andraé didn't disappoint. He was soft spoken and tender ... and filled with a disarming and quiet humility. Andraé's pure lack of pretense struck me immediately. I didn't think a legend would act as if he didn't know, or care, that he was one.

Keith and I had no idea God just dropped us into the deep end of the Christian musical genius pool. Instead of intimidating us, Andraé was warm and encouraging. He inspired us to be more like Jesus. His passionate and joyful songs with bold Gospel lyrics, woven like golden cords into brilliant musical melodies, tutored us in the things of God; God's ways, God's blood and His faithfulness during trials and would usher us into eternity.

We loved Andraé's music, but more importantly, we loved Andraé.

I remember Andraé's generosity. He just gave as a natural part of his life. The stories I know are because I was there or someone else told me. Many people forget their humble roots once they become a household name. I doubt Andraé ever forgot.

Bill, who became Keith's lifelong producer, was first part of Andraé's band when Andraé noticed his producing talent and gave Bill his first producer's credit on, "Take Me Back." Bill said, "He saw something in me that I did not know existed." It's important to note that only a man of large heart and limited ego pulls others up with him along the way. I'm sure there are many similar stories about Andraé.

The musicians Andraé personally selected for his band became the amazing musicians Keith always recorded with. Andraé had done the hard work, searching and praying for the best of the best, and shared them with us to our benefit.

Andraé also shared his fans with Keith by giving him the opportunity to open for him at a large concert in Texas. Everyone came to hear Andraé, but in doing so heard Keith for the first time. Andraé gave us exposure we didn't have.

Andraé didn't feel too important to care about "the little people" in this world. Instead, when a 16-year-old boy hitchhiked from Canada to Los Angeles, it was Andraé who opened his home to him, and gave him his Mercedes to drive around town. That young man drove over to meet Keith and me in Andraé's car, that's how I know.

Once I thought Keith gave Andraé chicken pox. Keith went to Andraé's house to write a song. Just before Keith left we'd cuddled our foster daughter with a high fever, who shortly after, broke out in chicken pox. That night we kept praying Andraé wouldn't get them with Keith being unknowingly exposed. We loved Andraé and couldn't bear the thought of getting him

sick. Andraé didn't get the pox, but Keith did ... a much better outcome as far as we were concerned.

After Keith's passing, Andraé and I had a very poignant talk. He told me about his previous Thanksgiving. Nobody had invited him to dinner that year. Probably everyone figured he'd had numerous invitations. I mean, who wouldn't love to have Andraé sitting at their table? So being alone on Thanksgiving Day, he cooked a huge turkey dinner ... for himself. Then he noticed his gardener unexpectedly working. Andraé went outside to talk with him and told me, "So I invited him in and ate Thanksgiving dinner with my gardener."

I watched as Andraé's eyes swelled with tears. He wasn't feeling sorry for himself or thinking his gardener was an unworthy tablemate. Rather he was being honest and vulnerable by sharing a painful experience most people have at some point—feeling lonely and forgotten. The price of fame is often high. A friend once told me, "The pain of being 'up front' is much higher than the pain of hidden service." I'm sure Andraé felt that truth more than once.

Andraé could not have written the passionate and authentic songs he did without some suffering in his life. His music helped me embrace my suffering. My favorite song of Andraé's is "Through It All," a song of God's faithfulness to take us through the valleys and storms. *"For if I'd never had a problem, I wouldn't know God could solve them; I'd never know what faith in God could do. Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God. ... I've learned to depend upon His Word."*

I was relieved to hear Andraé's passing was peaceful. Bill was at his side when the gates of glory opened to welcome Andraé home. He will be most missed by those closest to him. But the world will miss his declarations of faith in music, which will never be forgotten. Maybe Andraé and Keith will finish that song they started so long ago, and we who linger here will get

to hear it someday ... soon and very soon.