

# He's Goin' Places Now

**Vern Jackson was a truck driver going nowhere. Then God gave him HIS BIG BREAK-and his music career began to soar.**

Before Vern Jackson was a famous voice, before his first record topped the gospel music charts for six months and before he was named Vocalist of the Year by the Southern Gospel Music Association, he drove a catering truck, certain he would never have the singing career he dreamed of. To his own surprise, he has gone from truck driver to gospel singer-and his career, which happened unexpectedly and thrust him to the top of the gospel music charts, didn't begin until he turned 52.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine all this," Jackson says, his smooth baritone rumbling like summer thunder.

Forty-three years ago-tired of repeated rejections from the music industry-Jackson said goodbye to his hopes of becoming a country singer. That lost dream found its way home in the early '90s when Jackson got an invitation to sing on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN).

"Truly, it's God's blessings," Jackson says today of the remarkable change in his life that he never saw coming.

## California Dreamin'

In 1958, just out of high school, Jackson packed his life's belongings into his car, waved goodbye to his folks and left his farm-town home in Iowa for Hollywood to fulfill what he was sure was his destiny-he was going to be the next Johnny

Cash.

"I went to California to become a star," Jackson said. "I left to seek fame and fortune. That's the only plan I had for my life."

Jackson was going to become a country singer-not a truck driver. Instead of finding fame and fortune, he got an evening job at Knotts Berry Farm singing country music with a group called the Wagon Masters, a spin-off of The Sons of the Pioneers, the sextet that defined popular cowboy music. By day Jackson knocked on the doors of nearly every music studio in Los Angeles, auditioning and hoping.

"Nobody was interested," he says. "They hadn't heard I was supposed to be a star."

Out of money, luck and hope, Jackson quit his job at Knotts Berry Farm and in late 1962 began driving a catering truck, buzzing from construction sites to factories selling sandwiches, coffee and desserts. His singing career was over.

Jackson had, however, a job that paid the bills. For the next 28 years he drove a catering truck, often pulling 12-hour shifts that began at 5 a.m.

"It was a good-paying job," he recalls. "Long hours, but good pay."

Gradually, he forgot entirely about his musical dream.

That began to change in 1981, when, at the invitation and persistence of his wife, Sandra, Jackson attended a Sunday

evening church service in Anaheim, California, at which evangelist Dwight Thompson was preaching.

To appease his wife, Jackson had been going to church on Sunday mornings. He didn't attend Sunday night services because he had to wake up at 3:30 a.m. to go to work.

"One Sunday afternoon my wife said, 'Honey.' Right away, I knew I was in trouble," Jackson says. "She wanted me to go to church with her that night."

Reluctantly he consented-and Thompson's sermon changed his life.

"He said hell is going to be filled with nice guys," Jackson recalls. "He said you don't get to heaven by being a nice guy. I thought I was going to hell, and I was. He literally scared me out of hell. I gave my life to God that night."

Jackson joined his church's choir and often sang solos. One day his pastor, Phil Aguilar, asked him to make some cassettes of his songs for the congregation. Eventually, one of those tapes ended up in the hands of Jan Crouch, who with her husband, Paul, began TBN.

"Jan heard the tape, and she asked her secretary who was this guy singing on the tape," Jackson says.

Crouch then requested a video recording of Jackson.

"She wanted to see what I looked like," Jackson says-then adds

with a laugh: “I had a stand-in and I lip-synched.”

### **Opportunity Knocks**

Six months passed and Jackson didn't hear anything from the Crouches. He assumed the same thing that happened the first time he pursued a singing career had happened again-nothing.

“Then I get this call,” he adds. “They wanted me to sing on TBN that night.”

Jackson says he just about dropped the phone. Just like that, the truck driver became a gospel singer.

That was at the beginning of 1991, some 28 years after Jackson gave up on his music career. At age 52, he was about to realize the dreams of the teenager who had left home almost 34 years before.

“My life did a one-eighty,” Jackson notes. Three months later he was on his way into full-time music ministry.

“I give God all the credit,” he says. “It was nothing I was aspiring for. I didn't even have the desire to sing anymore.”

For the next few months, Jackson performed on TBN's flagship program, Praise the Lord, three or four times a week. The exposure he received threw open the door to recording.

His first record-“Higher Than I've Ever Been”-topped the gospel music charts for six months. He was named Vocalist of

the Year in 1992 by the Southern Gospel Music Association. He's also won three prestigious Angel Awards.

Jackson has released 14 CDs. His most recent, *Lookin' Back* (Gold Label), is a collection of inspirational songs from the 1950s.

"If someone 15 years had ago told me I was going to have a ministry in music, I'd have said to him, 'Who-me?'" Jackson points out. "I had given up on music."

### **'It's All God'**

Reflecting on the journey that brought him to his unlikely destination, Jackson says his 28 years of driving a catering truck actually helped prepare him for his singing and recording ministry.

"It brought me out of my shell," he explains. "Before, I was really shy. I couldn't sit and talk with people. I was powerfully shy.

"Customers want to talk. If you don't talk, they don't come back. That got me to talking."

Now, he's singing and talking. Jackson travels to churches throughout the country, sharing his faith in Jesus and his unexpected journey. He's found that a Spirit-filled life has made all the difference.

Dreams pushed Jackson from his farm-town home to Hollywood as

a wide-eyed 18-year-old in 1958. Reality shoved Jackson behind the wheel of a catering truck for 28 years. In the process, he's gone from dreamer to driver to delivered minister.

"I never saw it coming," he says. "Who would have guessed this would have happened to me? It's all God."

Jackson, who now lives near Salem, Oregon, and attends New Life Foursquare church in Stayton, has performed as many as four concerts a week, driving from one church to the next.

"I have been blessed to minister in hundreds of churches across America, singing for the Lord and touching hurting families with a testimony that I pray builds faith for their situations," Jackson says. "God's power to heal eternally exceeds Satan's power to destroy."

Although surprised by his gospel-singing career, Jackson says that, in fact, his destiny is an answer to his mother's prayer.

"When my mother was pregnant with me, she asked the Lord to bless her with a son. She also prayed that son would sing for His glory," he says.

"Well, it only took some 52 years, but the second portion of her prayer was answered when I began to do just that. God is faithful." ?

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