The Journey to DAWN

How questions carried through a lifetime became a beginning.

The questions that traveled with me

People sometimes ask when DAWN began. Its organizational life is recent, and much of its work is still taking shape, but the questions behind it have accompanied me for decades. They were there before the website, before the current songs and manuscripts, and before I understood that these different interests might belong to one calling.

Why does beauty move us? What makes sacrifice meaningful? Why do relationships matter so deeply, and why does the heart continue to search for Home even when life appears successful? I carried these questions through work, family life, study, disappointment, and the unexpected kindness of people who helped me along the way.

There were notebooks and unfinished manuscripts, ideas written late at night and put aside for another season. At the time, I assumed much of that work existed for my own learning. Looking back, I can see seeds taking root before I knew where they might grow.

When separate streams began to meet

In 2009, I produced an album with the theme For Love of Liberty and Country. Its twelve original songs explored gratitude, sacrifice, responsibility, freedom, and the inheritance we receive from those who came before us. Three years later, I wrote Builders of Our Land, returning to questions of leadership, stewardship, and the foundations of healthy communities.

During that same season, while running for the United States Congress, I felt drawn to begin a community choir. Before acting on the idea, I discussed it with my pastor, who recognized that it was an unusual campaign approach but encouraged me to proceed.

The choir brought together approximately 200 voices for concerts in western and southwestern Minnesota. The concept eventually attracted the interest of Lee Greenwood, who joined the final celebration, attended by approximately 2,000 people. For a time, people from different backgrounds found common ground in music, faith, gratitude, and the responsibilities we inherit.

I understood these experiences at first as separate endeavors. Yet the same concerns were present in the songs, the writing, the business decisions, and the classrooms: what is worth loving, what has been entrusted to us, and what might become possible when people bring their gifts together.

The hunger beneath a career

My years alongside college students made those questions harder to set aside. Many arrive seeking preparation for a profession, yet beneath that practical hope I often hear a desire for meaning, belonging, and a reason to give themselves wholeheartedly to a life.

At the same time, I see people of different ages living amid distrust, loneliness, and confusion. Some have never encountered the Christian Story as an invitation into the love of God. Others know its language but have lost a sense of its wonder. These observations strengthened my conviction that beauty, goodness, and truth must be encountered in ways that touch lived experience.

A story gives a question a human face. Music allows a longing to remain with us. Sometimes what begins as a shared song opens a conversation that neither person quite knew how to start.

When preparation became a question of trust

Around nine months before my father's passing, a Sunday school lesson brought me to the account of the borrowed axe head in 2 Kings 6. The story lingered after the class ended. As I reflected on it, I found myself facing a personal question about trust and obedience: was I willing to move forward before every uncertainty had disappeared?

I understood this as a challenge to my own hesitation, rather than as an additional meaning the biblical passage requires every reader to find. For years, ideas had remained safely within notebooks and unfinished projects. Preparation had its place, but I began to sense that the next faithful step would require using what was already in my hands.

That season inspired When Iron Floats. More importantly, it helped me begin. I could continue to learn while taking a step whose outcome I could not secure in advance.

What remains in people

My father's death at age 91 brought the question of inheritance closer still. As I remembered his life, I found myself thinking about what remains in children, grandchildren, friendships, and faith when a familiar voice is no longer present. A person's work may be recorded in dates and accomplishments; its deepest influence often lives quietly in someone else.

One of my mentors used to challenge young leaders to build for generations they might never see. I appreciated those words then. With the passing years, I have begun to feel their weight. I am increasingly concerned with what can be faithfully stewarded and shared, including things whose eventual fruit I may never witness.

Gradually, DAWN became the name for a meeting of those concerns: stories, music, education, stewardship, and the search for beauty, truth, and Home.

Beginning with what is here

The first collection, A Song for the Generations, is now the immediate focus. Sixteen songs have been written and recorded as demos, while professional recordings, companion stories, illustrations, and narrated resources continue to develop. A ten-song, two-act musical offers another way for the stories to be experienced together.

The website gives this beginning a visible form. AI tools have helped me demonstrate ideas and prepare material that musicians, artists, and other collaborators can interpret and develop. Their purpose is to open room for human gifts and faithful work.

I do not know which projects will flourish or where every part of this journey will lead. I hope it will help an older person recover something worth sharing, a younger person discover a larger reason to live, and someone unfamiliar with Christ encounter an invitation that is more beautiful than expected.

The task before me is to steward what has been entrusted to me and to make room for others to bring their gifts. The outcome belongs to God. I trust that the One who has accompanied the questions will also accompany the work.

A song from the journey

When Iron Floats grew from the lesson of trust and obedience described above, inspired by 2 Kings 6:1-7. For an individual review of available demonstration recordings, please contact Vidar. Demo recordings are not offered for public playback on the current website.

Contact: byberg@dawn.education | 320-905-2887

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