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## NOT GIVING UP

Songwriter tells his story of not giving up, in life and in his career



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## FOR THE LOVE OF KIDS AND PETS

Eagle Scout project aims to help "book buddies" and pets looking for a home



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## GOOD OLE SUMMERTIME

It's hot, It's summer and we are all looking for things to do, check out our events calendar

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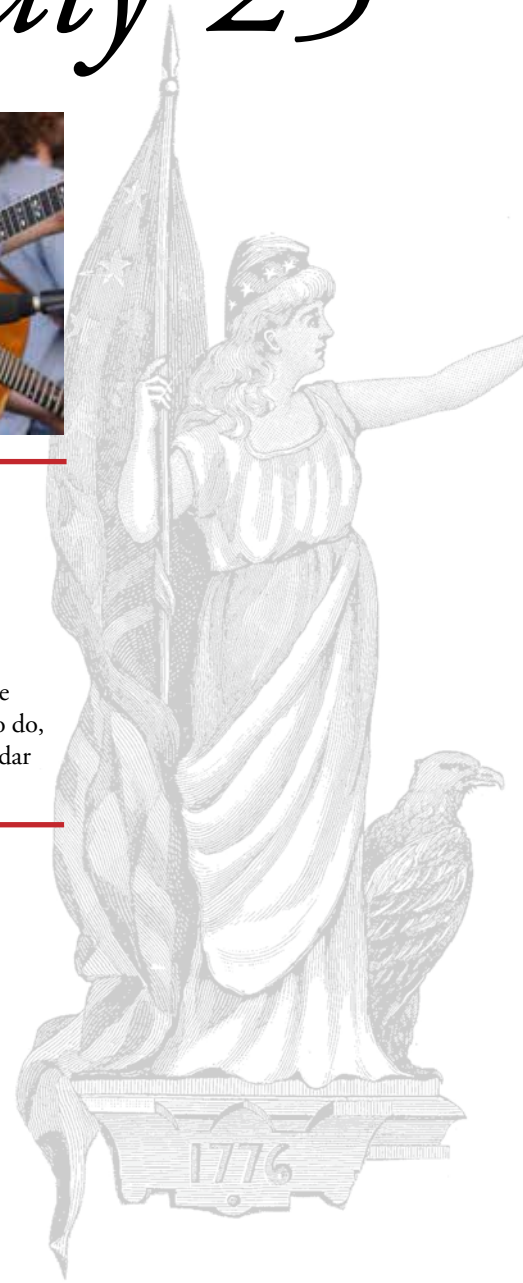
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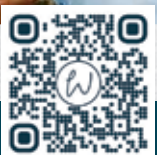
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Hit songwriter Monte Criswell at home in Spring Hill. Photography by Michael Tedesco

# THE CHANCE TO WRITE ANOTHER LINE

## JASON ZASKY

"I started coming to Nashville when I was in high school," begins Satsuma, Alabama native Monty Criswell, about the initial pursuit of his dream—to become a professional songwriter. Success didn't come right away. In fact, it was several years before he secured a writing deal—and many more years before he had his first Top Ten song.

"I started getting cuts in 1995, and for the next 10 or 12 years, I was king of the album cuts," offers Criswell. A big hit remained elusive until 2007, when he had his first Top 10 record ("Tough" by Craig Morgan), followed by his first No. 1 song, "I Saw God Today" (George Strait), the latter of which he co-wrote with Rodney Clawson and Wayne Kirby.

"'I Saw God Today' was the big one," he adds, a song that gave him the opportunity to go to the Grammy's and to the Country Music Awards.

More No. 1 songs followed, including "Five More Minutes" (Scotty McCreery) in 2018 and "Hell of a View" (Eric Church) in 2020, plus "Handle on You" (Parker McCollum) in 2023.

Then, all that success was interrupted when he was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer.

"At age 54, I did eight rounds of chemotherapy and a five-and-a-half-hour surgery. It all could have been avoided if I had gone for a colonoscopy at 45. Forty-five is the new fifty," he notes, talking about the current recommended age for a colonoscopy. Colon cancer is relatively easy to prevent and relatively easy to cure—if it is caught before it spreads," he advises.

The good news is that Criswell is now a year-and-a-half into his recovery.

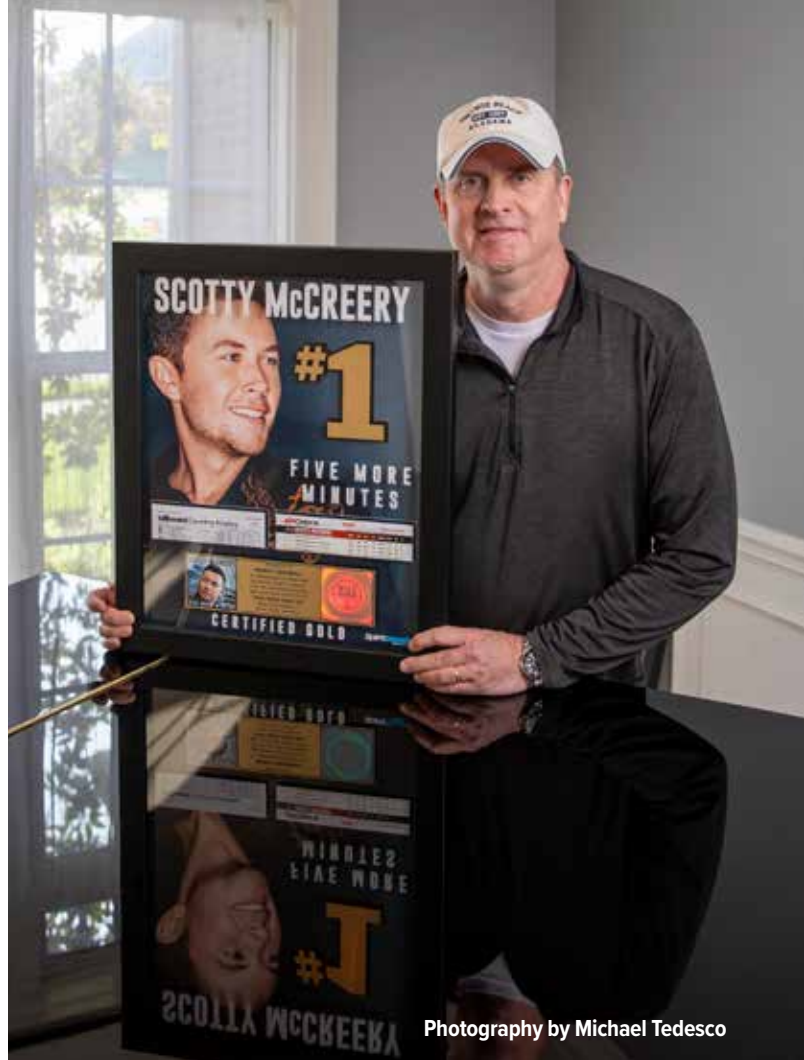
"All scans and scopes have been clean, and blood work has been great, so I am on the path I need to be on. After three years, the chance of it coming back goes way down, and by year five, I'm back into the normal pool," he says.

Meanwhile, his illness led him to pursue a new initiative.

"When I had cancer, my case nurse said: 'You have a great attitude about this and a great perspective. If you could share this with people, it would help those in the same situation—and maybe help those not in the same situation,'" he recalls her saying.

**NEXT PAGE >**





Photography by Michael Tedesco

That led Criswell to build on his experience doing Songwriter in the Round events, in which he talks about the stories behind his songs. These days, he also does speaking engagements that feature a healthy dose of life coaching.

“First, I talk about how I became a songwriter; second, is the stories behind the hits, and the last piece is about overcoming adversity at an elite level. There is also a lot of humor. I’m a very self-deprecating person. I have many flaws and faults, and I don’t mind talking about them if I can make a point that might help people,” he says.

“In fact, I had a lady come up to me after an engagement in Orlando. She said: ‘I felt like for 90 minutes I went to a rock and roll show, a Songwriter in the Round, standup comedy, and church, all at the same time.’ I thought, that’s perfect, that is exactly what I’m after,” he says, before highlighting a few core pieces of advice.

“I have been a professional songwriter for 32 years and I have been with multiple publishers, but I’ve never changed publishers because I was having a bad experience. I left publishers when things got comfortable, and there was a chance to do better (elsewhere). Getting out of your comfort zone and challenging yourself to be better is uncomfortable, but the end result could be great,” he says.

Criswell also encourages people to use the negativity of others as fuel to motivate yourself, recalling how a lot of observers expressed doubt that he would make it as a professional songwriter.

“Anytime I felt like things were getting difficult, I remembered I didn’t want to go home (to Alabama) to face the doubters. I didn’t want to hear, ‘I told you so.’ That makes you dig in and grind a little harder to get where you want to be. There are a lot of secrets to being successful, but the biggest one is not giving up,” he concludes.

That perhaps explains why Criswell says, “some of my favorite songs are the ones that haven’t been cut yet—stuff that I can’t find a home for. It excites me when I find an artist who is equally excited about a song I’ve written,” he adds, one reason why he is so amped up about his latest single, “Paper Umbrellas,” by Tim McGraw.

And why his favorite song these days isn’t a collection of words set to music—it’s his day-to-day life.

“Every day is a chance to write another line or a different verse,” he concludes. “My favorite song is this life I’m living. We’ll see how it turns out.”

**Upcoming Event:** “88 Keys in 90 Minutes”, *An Evening With Monty Criswell*, a life coach show that highlights his journey of becoming a hit songwriter and his resiliency in overcoming stage 3 colon cancer will be held at 7pm on September 7, at the Franklin Theatre in Franklin. Visit [franklintheatre.com](http://franklintheatre.com) to purchase tickets



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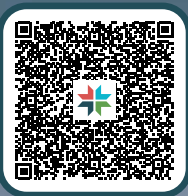


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Ben Hamby built this lending library for the Williamson County Animal Center as part of his project to become an Eagle Scout. Photography provided.

# EAGLE SCOUT BUILDS LENDING LIBRARY FOR ANIMAL CENTER

Eagle Scout Candidate Ben Hamby of BSA Natchez Trace District Troop 13 recently built and installed a lending library for Williamson County Animal Center (WCAC). Hamby chose to do the project because he wanted to do something that helps both children and animals. “The library is a great way for kids to improve their reading skills and to get more exposure for the animals at the shelter,” he said.

Hamby’s library is now an extension of WCAC’s Book Buddies program that claims to benefit both young readers and animals by providing a non-judgmental space for children to practice reading and socialize the cats and dogs at the animal center. After completing a class about animal body language, children ages five to 12 years can then read to selected shelter pets. Registration for the class is on WCAC’s website.

As WCAC’s Humane Educator, Shannon Luna facilitates Book

Buddies and manages the lending library. She believes in the power of reading to inspire empathy and understanding; “This library gives us another way to invite children to explore stories and facts about animals,” said Luna. “Which, in turn, plants the seeds of compassion, advocacy, and responsible pet ownership.”

The library is located near the parking spots for individuals with disabilities in WCAC’s public parking lot and is accessible for public use at all times. Luna encourages patrons to borrow and contribute age-appropriate books that relate to animals and animal welfare.

*WCAC is located at 1006 Grigsby Hayes Court in Franklin, near Franklin Christian Academy. The center is open to the public Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.; it is closed on Sunday. Times may vary due to holidays.*



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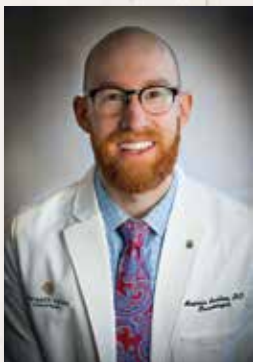
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# EXCITING EVENTS



## SLIME!

**Wednesday July 2, 2:00-3:30 PM**

**Williamson County Library, 1314 Columbia Ave, Franklin**  
**wcpltn.org**

Kids ages 8-12 are invited to join us as we discover the science behind slime and learn to make a batch of our own! Please wear clothes you don't mind getting a bit messy.

## FRANKLIN ON THE FOURTH

**July 4, 2025, Downtown Franklin**

**Franklintn.gov**

Patriotic festival in Downtown Franklin, sponsored by the Franklin Lions Club, with arts, crafts, food, and entertainment.

## 4TH OF JULY FIREWORKS CELEBRATION

**at The Park at Harlinsdale Farms, Franklin**

**Fireworks begin at dark**

**www.friendsoffranklinparks.org**

Friends of Franklin Parks, in conjunction with the City of Franklin and City of Franklin Parks Department, will be hosting a Fourth of July Celebration (music, food, and kids games) at the Tractor Supply Co. Arena at the Park at Harlinsdale Farm. The Tractor Supply Co. Arena will be open to the public for prime fireworks viewing.

**BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB: CODE ACADEMY BOOT CAMP at Franklin Library July 7 - July 11, 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM Franklin Library, 1314 Columbia Ave., Franklin**

**www.wcpltn.org**

Kids in 5th- 12th grade are invited to join Code Academy for a week-long immersive coding experience focusing in core coding concepts and app design. Space is limited. Registration is open now!

## CELEBRATE TOM HANKS' BIRTHDAY!

**Watch Forrest Gump (1994)**

**July 9, 7:00 PM | Franklin Theatre in downtown Franklin**

**Franklintheatre.com**

Come celebrate Tom Hanks' Birthday here at The Franklin Theatre! The movie, showcases a man with a low IQ that has accomplished great things in his life and been present during significant historic events—in each case, far exceeding what anyone imagined he could do. But despite all he has achieved, his one true love eludes him.

\*Please be aware the Franklin Theatre does not show previews. Movies will begin at the posted time.



## FRANKLIN SUMMER BASH 2025

**Jul 12, 7:30 PM | Liberty Hall at The Factory at Franklin**

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**franklinsummerbash.com**

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# EXCITING EVENTS



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**[www.wcpltn.org](http://www.wcpltn.org)**

We'll be making adorable fairy houses using terra cotta pots and a variety of craft supplies. This event is for teen's ages 12-18, and all supplies will be provided. Come get creative and take home your very own magical creation! Register online at [www.wcpltn.org](http://www.wcpltn.org) beginning June 21.

## SUPER SONGWRITERS

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## JOAN WILKES FINE ART at Franklin Library

**July 26, 3:00 PM-4:30 PM**

**Franklin Library, 1314 Columbia Ave., Franklin**

**[www.wcpltn.org](http://www.wcpltn.org)**

A creative afternoon with renowned local artist Joan Wilkes, painting the iconic Nashville skyline. This event is open to teen's ages 12-18, and all supplies will be provided. Don't miss the chance to learn from an expert and create your own masterpiece. Register online at [www.wcpltn.org](http://www.wcpltn.org) beginning July 5.



## BLUEGRASS ALONG THE HARPETH Fiddlers Jamboree

**July 25-26 | Town Square in Franklin**

**[bluegrassalongtheharpeth.com/festival](http://bluegrassalongtheharpeth.com/festival)**

Always held the 4th weekend in July, Bluegrass Along the Harpeth was started in 1991 and has had several homes in Franklin over the years. Most recently it has made it's home on the town square. The historic backdrop is the perfect place for our weekend of music in honor of Franklin's own Grand Ole Opry stars Sam and Kirk McGee. This festival is put on and operated by old time musicians and dancers. It's their love for the music and its preservation that make this festival special and a not-to-be-missed event every year.

Friday night we have some of the best bluegrass bands around for a relaxing evening and end to the work week. On Saturday, you will find some of the best musicians anywhere competing in our individual instruments and band contests. In addition to all of the music, we have food and craft vendors that are sure to have something to satisfy a sweet tooth or be that one of a kind gift you have been wanting.





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## Strawberry Spritzer

### INGREDIENTS

**1 PACKAGE (10 OUNCES) FROZEN SLICED STRAWBERRIES, SWEETENED AND THAWED**

**2 LITERS LEMON-LIME SODA, CHILLED**

**1 CAN (12 OUNCES) FROZEN PINK LEMONADE CONCENTRATE, THAWED**

### DIRECTIONS

*In blender, process strawberries until blended thoroughly.*

*Pour strawberries into large pitcher; stir in soda and pink lemonade.*

*Serve immediately.*

**Substitution:** *Ginger ale may be used in place of soda.*

*Find more drink recipes at **Culinary.net**.*





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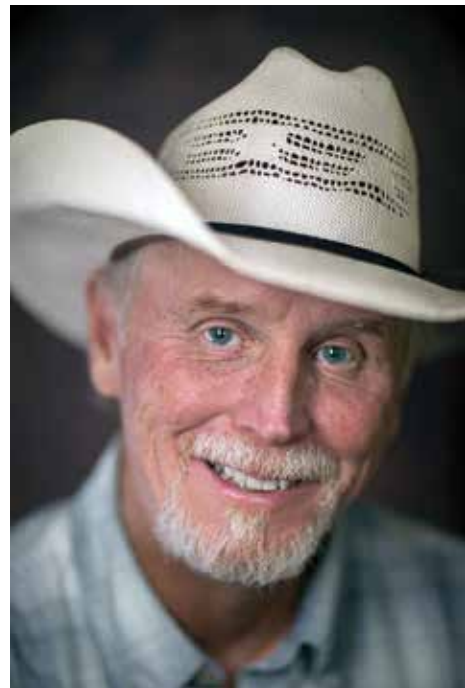
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