

I'd Rather Have Jesus- November's Hymn of the Month 2023

By Bill Dagle

Who hasn't heard or engaged in singing the words of the most familiar song, "I'd Rather Have Jesus," written by Rhea Miller? Yes, Rhea Miller, not George Beverly Shea, for he is the composer, not the writer, even though many think he wrote it. This probably is caused by the fact that the hymn has become his signature song; and certainly, he will be best remembered for it. It was George's mother who started the whole course of events when she left a copy of Miller's song on the family piano in their home in New York City. Years later, Bev wrote:

Instead of practicing the hymn I had intended to play that Sunday morning in Father's church, I turned to a poem that Mother had placed on the piano. Melody just seemed to form around the words. When I had played and sung it through for the first time, Mother came from the kitchen where she had overheard. She wrapped both arms around my shoulders and placed her wet cheek next to mine. In church that morning, I sang for the first time, "I'd Rather Have Jesus." (George was only 21 years old at that time.)

Born in 1909 in Canada, young George was raised in a home where each morning he was awakened by the voice of his mother singing and the piano playing, "Singing I Go." Little did either one know that 30 years later that song would be the theme for George's radio program on WMBI in Chicago. In addition to growing up in a home of music, God's word was always present too because George's dad was a Wesleyan minister.

Because of a throat infection, young George missed most of the third and fourth grades and was taught at home by his mother who read Biblical passages and poems aloud at the kitchen table. Bev recalled, "Sometimes, moved by a particular hymn, Mother would take me into the living room, where our Bell piano sat, and play and sing the song to me. Though I was no child prodigy, I could hack my way through a song at a fairly early age; and because of her coaching and compliments, I kept practicing and improving."

Because of a providential meeting in Chicago many miles from his boyhood home, George Beverly Shea, Billy Graham, and "I'd Rather Have Jesus" have gone around the world and back again convincing our generation of the need for Christ. From the opening prayer to the closing strains of "Just As I Am," the music and voice of George Beverly Shea have prepared the heart for the message of Billy Graham, and millions have agreed with Rhea Miller:

**I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be
His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than
Houses or lands, I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.
Than to be the king of a vast domain Or be held in sin's dread sway;
I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today.**