

Therapeutic singing

Theresa Campbell theresacampbell@dailycommercial.com | **Posted: Thursday, June 25, 2015 6:00 am**

LADY LAKE -- Following extensive cancer treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Terry Hamilton focused on his dream to go to Nashville to record an album of beloved old hymns – the songs he cherished hearing as a young boy.

“It was a huge inspiration for me, it was a goal,” said Hamilton, 54, of Lady Lake. “You start working on your bucket list because you realize once you have this kind of diagnosis, there are no guarantees of tomorrow.”

The retired sales manager and former real estate trainer for The Villages first dabbled in music decades ago, and he believes setting personal goals can help a person through health hurdles.

Hamilton was in remission for nearly nine years before his cancer returned. Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma starts in the cells called lymphocytes, part of the body’s immune system, according to the American Cancer Society. The cancer is noted as being more common in men, and a person’s risk of getting NHL is about 1 in 50.

“It was tougher the second time than the first time because I was 52,” he said. “I could tell the difference, and the drug was much harsher. It was like a napalm bomb going off in me.”

The inspirational words “God chooses his bravest soldiers for his toughest battles,” sent by a friend, helped him cope. He read it each day for strength.

His high school sweetheart wife of 25 years, Donna, also was by his side. “She’s an absolute angel,” he said.

“When we think about cancer, and having gone through it twice, a lot of people focus only on the cellular healing and the clinical side of it, the doctors, nurses, the needles,” Hamilton said. “But I think we need to look at ways to heal ourselves psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.”

Hamilton felt music would be therapeutic and he recorded the album “Life’s Railway” at the Nashville home studio of his friend and country music singer David Frizzell, brother of



Terry Hamilton

Singer Terry Hamilton poses in front of New Song Church in Lady Lake where he debuted his album “Life’s Railway.” The album was recorded as part of his therapy for cancer.

singer/songwriter Lefty Frizzell.

The album was recently chosen a winner of the 2015 Communicator Awards from the Academy of Interactive and Visual Arts, an international competition among the 600-plus member organization of communications professionals from Disney, Lockheed Martin, Time, Inc., Yahoo!, just to name a few.

“To win an award was amazing to me,” said Hamilton, showing his gold statute. “I never expected to win anything, and that is just a byproduct. God’s blessing. It tells me when you do things for the right reasons, good things happen.”

“Life’s Railway” was recorded after Hamilton had finished chemotherapy from the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute in Tampa. He found the side effects from his medications made it challenging to sing as well as he wanted.

His voice trembled as he sang “I Rather Have Jesus.”

“At that point in the studio, that was the one song that really just tore me up,” he said. “I actually had to stop the session and I told them I better do this over.”

David Frizzell thought otherwise. He found it moving to hear Hamilton’s voice crack a bit. “It’s perfect, it’s beautiful just the way it is,” he told the singer.

It’s now Hamilton’s favorite on the album, while the first song, “Life’s Railway to Heaven,” is an old Appalachian tune the singer remembers his mother sang when he was a child.

Hamilton bonded with children and adults battling cancer.

“I could never ask ‘Why me?’ because cancer does not discriminate,” he said. “So every time I see a beautiful lady with a bald head or I see a little child, I know the fear that’s there and what they have gone through. I want them to know there is always hope and to never give up.”

These days continue to be brighter for the singer. He completed 24 months of maintenance therapy at Moffitt last month and soon will have another scan.

“I’m very happy now that each day as I get stronger, and I’m able to breathe a little deeper and sing a little better,” he said. “The doctors are optimistic that I will get another remission.”

He also relishes the chance to share his story with prisoners at the Sumter Correctional Institute with his friend, Pastor Tom Ash of New Song Community Church in Lady Lake.

“The men there really love him,” Ash said. “He has a good broad ministry.”

“I shared with them what I was going through and my situation,” Hamilton said, adding he was touched when they prayed for him.

“It was incredible. Here are the guys behind bars who were praying for me. As I walked away I remember one young man yelled out, ‘Terry, I’ve got your back.’ When I heard that I just lost it. It ripped my heart out,” he said. “If anything this (cancer) battle has brought me closer to God. I have never felt closer to my creator. It enriched my life.”