

"God, if You come before I've made a million dollars, You're going to have to burn me up."

From Bright Lights to God's Light: Rick and Gwen Shorter

Walking down a New York City avenue one night after a successful game of poker with some buddies, Rick Shorter came across a young man on the back of a camper truck proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ at the top of his lungs. Bystanders were laughing at him. One asked about a recent bus accident in which many children were killed. The young man became quite flustered as he tried to explain why God would permit such a thing.

Suddenly Rick Shorter did something totally unexpected. Maybe his boyhood days came back to him, the times he used to run the film projector for his dad's evangelistic meetings. Perhaps it was all the Christian training he'd had in Adventist schools. Perhaps it was just that he felt sorry for the guy.

But something made Rick jump in and start preaching in the other man's place. By the time he'd finished explaining the plan of redemption, the four men who'd mocked the loudest had tears in their eyes.

Rick Shorter had drifted very far from his upbringing. He'd become quite successful at writing and publishing songs and performing in night clubs. Big names were recording his music; he had contracts with big record companies. He was musical coordinator for the Broadway hit "Hair."

And in his fast-track lifestyle Rick had kept God at a distance. At one point he said, "Look, God, if You come before I've made a million dollars, You're going to have to burn me up. Because I want to make my million."

Still, after that incident with the street preacher, Rick realized that he'd turned a corner in his life. Shortly afterward he met a young woman named Gwen who also had a successful career in show business. She was singing in night clubs, in the theatre, and on television. Although she had wandered a long way from her roots in a church-going family, Gwen had begun to

notice how phony everything was around her. The "beautiful people" seemed quite empty and insecure.

One night Rick and Gwen were watching TV in her apartment when they saw a program called *It Is Written* with George Vandeman. Gwen recalls, "I was amazed by this program! This man spoke so differently, he seemed like a person from another world. He would often say you could find this or that in the Bible. I would think to myself, 'I've been going to church all my life; why didn't I know this before?'"

After they'd watched a few more telecasts, Gwen began to study her Bible to check on the things Pastor Vandeman had said. She was impressed, and asked for the book, *Steps to Christ* when it was offered on the program.

Later the couple received a follow-up invitation to attend Ron Halvorsen's evangelistic meetings. After they'd attended about 10 sessions, this couple met their moment of truth. Rick recalled, "I found

myself trying to decide whether I should forget the \$70,000 per year I was making or keep going. In the midst of my mental anguish, Elder Halvorsen extended the gospel call. The struggle was intense, but I found myself jumping from my seat, followed by Gwen. We cried like children. I felt all the guilt of sin I had accumulated over the years. I regretted every moment I had been away from God." Soon afterward Rick and Gwen were baptized.

After their marriage, this enthusiastic couple started a vegetarian restaurant in the East Village of New York City as a way of reaching people for Christ. Later they began a successful wholesale health food business.

Today they live on 14 acres in Upstate New York with their three children. Rick has been developing Christian music in the recording studio on their property. Recently they sold their wholesale business to devote more time to what they love most: sharing the good news about the abundant life they've found in Jesus Christ. ■



The Shorters, ministering as a family through music. From the left: Rick, Gwen, Christian, Promise, and Hope.