

A Mother's Songs

There are songs that ride the airwaves deep in the woods of Winnsboro. They originate in the heart of a simple and unassuming farmhouse that is wallpapered with abundant love. Some of the harmonies are coaxed alive with a nostalgic nod to the music of the past. Others—original new songs—are nurtured and birthed right there at Ramsey Farm, just waiting for the world to receive them. Whatever the tune, each emanates from a place where family is central, creativity is not only encouraged but expected, and a mother's love and a father's guiding hand are never far away.

The music makers are seven siblings, and one has to take a deep breath before naming them all. Firstborn 26-year-old Samuel is followed by James (24), Emma (21), Johanna (19), Grace (16), Sarah Anne (11) and Matthew (7). They are the musicians, vocalists, lyricists, and the children of Cary and Bonny Ramsey.

The family story begins about 30 years ago when Cary and Bonny were introduced to one another by Bonny's brother and Cary's sister. Bonny, a native of Washington, was attending Oral Roberts University while Cary was studying music at Rhema Bible School, both in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After their studies, they married in 1982 and moved to Dallas, where Cary went to

work in his brother's custom cabinet-making business, while Bonny began the tasks of homemaking and becoming a mother to their growing brood.

From the start, they'd always had a dream for their family, which was for Cary to be able to work where he'd be constant and present in the lives of their children during his workday and for their family to live and grow up in the country.

In 1995, Cary and Bonny found a piece of land near Winnsboro, and they spent weekends living in a tent while they began construction on a barn. At the time, they had four children, and the fifth was on the way. With some hard work, tent living eventually turned into barn living.

The comforts, as one can imagine, were meager. At first they only had one outside water spigot for the whole of their plumbing.

Making their permanent move in 1996, the family lived in a third of the barn. Two months after, a cabinet shop was built. Initially when they moved, it was because Cary had the promise of a job. However, once they were moved, the job did not materialize. Rather than despair, with his strong background as a cabinetmaker, Cary was able to connect with a homebuilder, and he contracted to build cabinets for a new home. After that successful job, just by word of mouth, new jobs came in and kept Cary in work. This allowed him to build and outfit a professional

From right are: Samuel, Bonny, Cary, Matthew, James, Emma, Sarah Anne, Grace and Johanna Ramsey.



SAUEL D. RAMSEY PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM.

cabinet shop, which Cary said was initially funded with credit cards. As the business progressed, the rest of their dreams were also slowly fulfilled. Bonny designed her ideal dream house, and Cary built it.

In addition to being their home, it also serves as a schoolhouse, fulfilling another one of Cary and Bonny's dreams. Before Cary and Bonny ever had children, they knew they wanted to be fully present in their children's lives. They'd researched homeschooling ideals by attending a seminar. For them it was important to be able to incorporate their moral standards, and, Cary said, there was another advantage.

"Homeschooling gave them time to yield to their creative side," he said. "Not every child is given the opportunity to indulge in that side and bloom."

"Many of the creative projects that the children have accomplished have started off as school projects," said Bonny, who is in charge of most of the homeschooling.

But here is where the Ramsey family's rubber meets the road. What most people envision as a school project

might entail a poster and a report, and if they were "going all out," a companion diorama. A Ramsey school project is infinitely much more! A Ramsey school project is a PRODUCTION.

One time, when the family was studying history, they became enamored of the mid-1800s. They, when asked by neighbors Karl and Nancy Falster, joined in sponsoring, decorating and promoting a ball such as would be held during that time period. The Ramseys took the ball and ran with it. This became the third annual "Bonnie Blue Ball" that included period dress and music. Not only did the Ramsey's study the history, but also Emma and Johanna modernized the promotions for the event by creating a very inviting blog about it that included all the information a guest would need to know, including tips and patterns for period costumes.

"These guys don't do anything halfway," Cary said. The Ramseys infuse that same enthusiasm, as well as a mix of old and high tech, into just about everything they do.

In addition to blending old world

with new, the Ramseys delight in working with each other on creative endeavors, drawing on the best talents of each. One of their more visible ventures, an acoustic folk and rock band called Rambellwood, was formed that way, and it features the five oldest siblings.

It started when Sam, a guitarist, lyricist, composer and vocalist; and Emma, a lyricist and vocalist, worked to create some original songs. As their music matured, James, a drummer and cellist; Johanna, a vocalist and bassist; and pianist Grace, each became contributing and integral members of the band.

Rambellwood's music, just like the family, is firmly centered on the family's Christian beliefs. In addition to writing and performing their songs in the studio at the farmhouse, the sibling band has also produced an album. "Color Me," one of the songs on that self-titled album, "Rambellwood," won second place in the 2009 "Song of Faith" contest held by the Tyler Morning Telegraph.

Over the years, the band has worked on perfecting its songs and

From left are: Johanna, Grace, Sarah Anne and Emma Ramsey.



recording new ones, and has performed throughout East Texas and in Dallas/Fort Worth.

“Some of the lyrics are like a poem,” Cary says. “They are about a relationship with God, and also a relationship with people.”

One original song, “Sailboat,” is a metaphor for letting God’s winds shape and lead. That theme runs strong throughout all the band’s songs, and also in the band’s slogan, “Finding life by letting go our hold.”

Because of hectic schedules, Rambellwood’s activity has slowed. This is in part because Sam, in addition to running a photography and video production company, is attending the University of North Texas, where he is studying radio, television and film. James is attending the University of Texas at Arlington, where he is studying mechanical engineering, and Emma is studying creative writing at Stephen F. Austin State University. Even so, the band is still working hard to gain exposure for its songs, which are available on iTunes.

Just because some of the members of Rambellwood are otherwise engaged does not mean that the family is not still making music, and still in a very public way. That’s where The Ramsey Sisters enter. This is a newly formed group that incorporates the singing talents of the four sisters, with a little bit of picking and grinning from youngest brother Matthew, who plays the guitar and ukulele. This group has been performing at various private and public venues throughout the region and receiving enthusiastic responses from their audiences as they revive a golden era of music with tunes from the 1930s and ’40s that were made famous by The Andrews Sisters, Nat King Cole, Doris Day and more.

While Rambellwood’s musicality is more on the ethereal and introspective side, The Ramsey Sisters know how to



In a typical Ramsey moment, some of the clan gathers to sing and make music together as 7-year-old Matthew takes center stage with a particularly jaunty spirit that all enjoy.

zip-a-dee-doo-dah. Their enthusiasm, rhythm and harmony are the only things needed to light a room.

The individual and collective accomplishments of the two groups would be enough to qualify them as extraordinary. But the artistic and academic talents of the Ramsey family almost seem endless.

One of their other truly astounding accomplishments was the production of a prize-winning film, “The Photographer: How The Rain Falls.” This project was once again led by Sam, but it used the writing, research and acting talents of the rest of the family. There was scripting, costume manufacture and set design, and all of the other things that go along with making a movie. And for this one, James even restored a period car. The resulting original film, which was edited in the third-floor sound studio at the farmhouse, is pretty amazing.

Summarizing this story and this family is not an easy task. Every creative art form, from graphic arts to sewing to writing, is represented in one or the other of these remarkable individuals. Together, they make great art with acting, song and other uncommon talents. What’s most evident, though, is their love and respect for each other and their great admiration and respect for their parents and teachers.

Bonny glows with a quiet, lovely joy as she delights in each of her children’s accomplishments. And Cary radiates that same humble pleasure as he talks

about her. While Cary is the evident and distinct head of the household, he makes it just as clear that Bonny is the quiet star that the household orbits. Her influence, from her love of old movies to her passion for books and music and even simple and orderly homemaking, manifest in her children’s artistic creations. And that influence reaches far beyond the Ramsey farm to touch the lives of many people.

In May 2010, the Ramsey family was given some grave news. Bonny, the mom, the wife, the revered teacher, the star around which the family orbits, was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. Even on this heart-wrenching journey, the family’s faith has been unshakable. Through the storm they have chosen to continue to count their blessings and rejoice in song, even as they take one day at a time to concentrate on Bonny’s health care.

The essence of the family is captured so well in a blog created by Emma. She writes about her mom, “She has blessed so many people, beyond count, and she continues to bless them, giving all that she can give. Blessed is she who walks in the name of the Lord.”

But blessed, too, are all of those who have ever had the great pleasure of her company, or the delight of hearing even one of her children’s songs. Because these are her songs, too. They are songs that will continue to unfurl upon the airwaves. They will touch generations with their message of faith and love.

The Ramseys are members of Wood County Electric Cooperative. You can find more about this wonderful family, as well as the band, at www.rambellwood.com. Here, there are links to many of the family’s “school projects,” as well as a link to information about The Ramsey Sisters. For information on custom cabinetry, call Cary’s cabinet shop at (903) 629-7086.

Safety First, This Spring and Always

It's spring! The weather has finally warmed up, and Texans are out and about, tending to their yards and enjoying many other outdoor activities. No matter what's on your agenda this spring, electrical safety should be an important part of your plans.

AT THE POOL OR LAKE? Keep power cords and electrical equipment away from water and other wet areas.

SPRING CLEANING? Look up and look out for overhead power lines. Be sure you're aware of any nearby lines before you climb a ladder to clean the gutters or before you extend the handle of a pool-cleaning tool. Try to stay at least 15 feet away from power lines.

PLANTING A SPRING GARDEN? Call 811 before you dig to make sure the area is free of underground utilities.

WORKING IN THE SHOP? Before plugging them in, inspect your power tools and electric lawn mower for frayed power cords, broken plugs and weathered or damaged housings. Don't use damaged equipment until it has been repaired properly. Keep tools

unplugged and stored in dry areas when they are not in use.

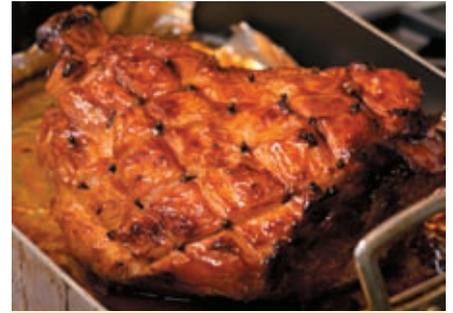
PLAYING WITH THE KIDS? Heed power lines and antennas when flying kites or model airplanes. If your kite does get tangled in overhead lines, do not attempt to get it down. Call Wood County Electric Cooperative.

TRIMMING TREES? Watch out for power lines that could be hidden by foliage. Contact Wood County EC if you have concerns about tree limbs growing into or around overhead power lines on your property.

MOWING THE YARD? Do not use electric-powered mowers on wet grass or around water. Always use an insulated extension cord designed for outdoor use with the correct power rating for that equipment.

WEED-EATING? Don't forget to trim around the large, green, ground-level box that houses components of an underground electrical system—co-op employees may need to access that equipment during unplanned outages and routine maintenance.

Before doing any tree trimming, be sure the tree and surrounding area are clear of power lines.



BARQ'S ROOT BEER GLAZED HAM

1 whole or butt-end, bone in, "city" cured ham

1 can root beer, divided

2 cups root beer glaze (recipe follows)

Whole cloves

Heat oven to 250 degrees. Line a large roasting pan with foil. Place ham in roasting pan, fat-side up for shank-end or whole hams, or cut-side down for butt-end hams. Add ½ cup root beer or enough to cover bottom of pan by ¾ inch. Let sit awhile to come to room temperature. Tent ham loosely with foil. Bake undisturbed until thermometer inserted in center reads 110 degrees (1 to 3 hours, depending on size and cut of ham). Meanwhile, prepare glaze. Remove ham from oven. Increase oven temperature to 325 degrees. Pour off accumulated pan juices and reserve for sauce. Cut away excess fat. Score ham in diamond pattern. Spread glaze over scored surface of ham. Insert whole cloves at intersections of cuts.

Bake at 325 degrees until center temperature reaches 120 degrees, approximately 1 hour. Let ham rest for at least 15 minutes before carving.

ROOT BEER GLAZE

1 cup root beer

½ cup ketchup

½ cup dark brown sugar

Zest and juice of 1 lemon

2 tablespoons prepared mustard

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan. Simmer, stirring often, over low heat for 10 minutes until glaze reaches a thin, saucy consistency. Use to glaze ham. When ham is done, pour accumulated juices into remaining glaze. Return to a simmer and cook until thickened. Defat and serve as a sauce with ham.

Source: Screen Doors and Sweet Tea: Recipes and Tales from a Southern Cook. For more great recipes, visit TexasCoopPower.com.



SEVERE WEATHER ARE YOU READY?

Lightning strikes kill more Americans than tornadoes or hurricanes. Don't take chances with this deadly force of nature.

Lightning Safety Rules:

- Move to low ground.
- Avoid open fields.
- Do not seek shelter under a tree. Trees are easy targets for lightning.
- Whether at the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water immediately.
- Go inside a building and stay away from windows and doors.
- Stay away from metal objects.
- Avoid electric appliances and metal plumbing.
- Get off the phone.
- Do not touch metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.
- Inside a car is relatively safe, but do not touch interior metal.
- If your hair stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and try not to touch the ground with your knees or hands.

Stay aware and play it safe during thunderstorms. Don't be a lightning rod.

How To Buy Energy-Efficient Appliances

You go shopping for a new refrigerator, and you're on a budget. The best buy is the fridge with the lowest sales price, right?

Not necessarily. If you buy the lowest-priced refrigerator, you may end up spending more than if you buy a more expensive one. The reason? The cost of owning a home appliance has three components: the initial purchase price, the cost of repairs and maintenance, and the cost to operate it.

To figure out how much you'll spend over the lifetime of the appliance, you have to look at all these factors. The appliance with the lowest initial purchase price, or even the one with the best repair record, isn't necessarily the one that costs the least to operate. Here's an example of how an appliance's energy consumption can affect your out-of-pocket costs.

Suppose you're in the market for a new refrigerator-freezer. Different models of refrigerators with the same capacity can vary dramatically in the amount of electricity they use. For one popular size and configuration, for example, the annual electricity consumption varies across models from about 600 to more than 800 kilowatt-hours a year. Based on national average electricity prices, that means the annual cost to operate this refrigerator can range from about \$50 to \$70, depending on which model you buy.

A \$20 difference in annual operating costs might not sound like much, but remember that you will enjoy these

savings year after year for the life of the appliance. However, you save the difference in purchase price only once. As a result, you may actually save money in the long run by buying the more expensive, more energy-efficient model.

You can learn about the energy efficiency of an appliance that you're

thinking about buying by reading the yellow-and-black EnergyGuide label. The Federal Trade Commission's Appliance Labeling Rule requires manufacturers to put these labels on these appliances:

- refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers;
- water heaters, furnaces, boilers;
- central and room air conditioners, heat pumps; and
- pool heaters.

When you shop for one of these appliances in a dealer's showroom, you should find the labels hanging on the inside of an appliance or secured to the outside. The law requires that the labels specify:

- the capacity of the particular model;
- for refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers and water heaters, the estimated annual energy consumption of the model;
- for air conditioners, heat pumps, furnaces, boilers and pool heaters, the energy-efficiency rating; and
- the range of estimated annual energy consumption, or energy-efficiency ratings, of comparable appliances.

Some appliances also may feature the Energy Star logo, which means that the appliance is significantly more energy efficient than the average comparable model. To compare how updating appliances and making other changes around your home can effect your electric bill, visit www.energysavers.gov.

Sources: Federal Trade Commission, U.S. Department of Energy

HOW TO READ THE ENERGYGUIDE LABEL

Appliance manufacturers are federally required to provide an EnergyGuide label so consumers can compare energy use among different brands and models.

Appliance features that affect cost range

Product make, model and size

Amount you might pay to run the appliance for a year based on energy use and the national average cost of electricity

Range of operating costs for models with similar features

How much electricity the product uses. (Multiply this by your local electricity rate for an idea of your actual operating cost.)

Source: Federal Trade Commission, ftc.gov/appliances

FOR AN ENERGY-SMART DEAL:

- Read the EnergyGuide label (required for refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers, water heaters and select HVAC systems)
- Compare the energy use of competing models.
- Estimate their differences in energy costs.
- Consider both purchase price and estimated energy use when deciding which brand and model to buy.

Source: Federal Trade Commission