

VFW Member Illustrates 'Beautiful Struggle of Life' Through Song

Navy vet hopes his music is an 'agent of fellowship' to those listening

Oct 14, 2024

When Navy veteran Chris Nurthen turned 16, he was gifted a guitar that sparked a passion he retains still today. Throughout his time at Great Valley High School in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, Nurthen wrote songs.

He also played football and baseball. His brother, John, played football at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, graduating in 2013. That led to Nurthen attending the U.S. Naval Academy Prep School in Newport, Rhode Island, after graduating high school in 2010.

Nurthen, a member of VFW Post 5066 in Collierville, Tennessee, went on to play football as a defensive lineman at the Naval Academy, where he graduated with a degree in economics in 2015. On graduation day, Nurthen proposed to his wife, Keri.

The Nurthen brothers followed in the footsteps of two uncles — Bob Amundson and Bill Nurthen — who also attended the Naval Academy. Amundson and his wife, Patience, or Aunt Pay, as she was known, were Nurthen's sponsor family while he was in college.

They lived in nearby Arnold, Maryland, and Nurthen spent a lot of time there, calling it a "sanctuary" away from the Academy.

"We are very family-oriented," Nurthen said. "After Aunt Pay passed away from cancer in 2016, I wrote 'Bay Dale,' as a tribute."

Bay Dale is the exit off Highway 50 Nurthen would take to get to the Amundson home. He wrote the song with his family in his Aunt Pay's living room. Verse two of "Bay Dale," as shown below, names Aunt Pay specifically:

Smell of snickerdoodle, neighbors abandon poodle

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***I ain't surprised they took her in
The scene changes with the season but the people never leavin'
I got Patience waiting on me my friend
Navy football games, drinkin' at tailgates
An American fall play
Load up the Lincoln, what is Elissa thinkin'
We all know what Aunt Pay would say...***

During his five years in the Navy, Nurthen kept up his songwriting. As a service warfare officer, he earned his VFW eligibility while aboard the USS Oak Hill with the Navy's 5th Fleet.

Nurthen was deployed off the coast of Yemen, near Djibouti and Oman, and was deployed to Puerto Rico in support of Hurricane Irma humanitarian efforts.

‘THERE IS SWEETNESS AT THE END’

Today, Nurthen and his wife have a home in Memphis, Tennessee, with their four children. Together, they own and operate a small business called “SweetNur’s Home of the Iron Pies.” It is a food truck housed in a converted horse trailer.

The name “SweetNur” pays homage to Nurthen’s nickname in college. As for the iron pies? Those are named for the pie irons Nurthen and his friends and family back in Philadelphia used to cook over campfires.

SweetNur’s sells just about any combination of iron pies a patron wants at events, such as weddings, school fairs and engagement parties.

Now, the Nurthens have created “HouseShows,” which includes live music by the Navy vet, and of course, the iron pies.

“I want my music to serve people,” said Nurthen, who was selected as one of the Top 10 Finalists in the 22nd Annual Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) Song Contest, presented by CMT. “I hope my music is an agent of fellowship.”

Nurthen said his music is about the “beautiful struggle of life.” His song, “The Other Side,” was written about his 8-year-old nephew, Campbell, who died in a sled accident. Another song, “Josephine,” was dedicated to his daughter. He said he wrote it while he was still at the Academy, long before he met his wife, let alone became a father.

“I want to be good at this and provide for my family,” he said. “This has been humbling as well as slow and steady. My wife has been the champion of this whole thing.”

The NSAI named Nurthen as “One to Watch.” In 2021, he was nominated for the 2021 Best

Song Award, with one of his songs named among the NSAI Top 40 Songs of the Year.

While some may classify Nurthen's music as country, it is every bit Americana. His song "We Won't Give Up the Ship" is a good example of his Americana sound and is sure to resonate with U.S. veterans, if not Americans in general.

"God will allow this how he can," Nurthen said. "The closer you get to God, the sweeter it is — there is sweetness at the end."

Nurthen's music is on Spotify and Apple Music, as well as on YouTube. Follow @sweetnurmusic on Facebook for his latest music and to keep track of where you can try one of SweetNur's iron pies.

This article is featured in the 2024 October issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.