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3-2003

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Recommended Citation

MCALLISTER, RAY, "A Song in the Night" (2003). *Lake Union Herald*. 736.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/736>

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A Song in the Night

BY RAY MCALLISTER

One of the most meaningful acts of worship is singing the hymns, that is, for those who can read the hymnal. Many people, such as the blind, are unable to do this. As a result, they often are made to sit or stand bored, listening to everyone else praise God and joining in once in a while on a familiar chorus.

Some institutions offer worship music in Braille, but Braille books are slow to read, large, and heavy.



Photo by James Fisher

Ray McAllister is now able to sing hymns with the congregation by using his special lap-top computer system which he developed for the blind.

For many years I prayed and thought about how the blind could easily sing during worship services. In May of 2002, I finally had the breakthrough I was seeking.

Late one Friday night, I was sitting and thinking when it dawned on me exactly what to do. I have a special lap-top computer that will read any printed material that is loaded or typed into it. If I could have the hymns typed into my lap-top, I could take that system to church, and with a good headset, I could hear both the words to the songs and the accompaniment.

The next step was to do a simple experiment. I pulled out a Steve Green CD, and, while listening to it, quickly transcribed the words to "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee." Replaying the song, I was able to sing along by reading line by line on my lap-top.

The next morning, I had one of the Sabbath school leaders choose that hymn. We began singing, and it worked perfectly. I was able to follow along with every line of every verse. I knew God was providing so I could worship Him.

The next day I went to the ABC and purchased a special hymnal that has only the lyrics. Without the musical notation to confuse my computer system, I began the long and difficult task of scanning

every hymn in the hymnal. After about a month, the entire hymnal was organized in simple blocks of twenty-five hymns which my slow, but battery-efficient lap-top could quickly access. I discovered that if I could move fast enough, I could reach the first line of any hymn in under ten seconds, which meant that I could find hymns about as quickly as anyone else.

The feeling I had during Sabbath school and church was nothing short of excitement and gratitude. God had finally given me a way to unite with fellow believers in song-filled worship.

During the next few months I continued to improve the system, and now that the project is finished, I am working with Christian Record Services to make the system available to the blind. God has answered my prayer and assures me each day that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13. NKJV).

Ray McAllister is a first-year Ph.D. student at Andrews University Theological Seminary. Though totally blind, he sees his blindness as a gift from God to help him more easily explore spiritual truth and inner beauty. Ray's hymnal on disk is available through Christian Record Services at (402) 488-0981. On April 12, a special offering will be taken for Adventist ministries to the blind.