



Paige Armstrong

Wants to Wake You Up!

Find out how this contemporary Christian artist is making a difference.

By Patrick Dunn

Happy birthday—you have cancer. Blowing out the candles on her eleventh birthday, Paige Armstrong didn't feel like celebrating. Just weeks earlier she was diagnosed with bone cancer. Would she even see another birthday cake? The girl who loved to sing, dance and act watched her energy, body and life wilt away. Home became a children's hospital, where she endured 14 rounds of chemotherapy and a bone replacement in her right leg. When she ventured outside, she got sick and ended up back in the hospital. Her immune system was devastated.

"I was completely bald, and I looked like a skeleton," Paige says. "I was so tired that most of the time I had to use a wheelchair. People would stare at me wherever I went."

At one point Paige was so weak and so fragile, doctors were ready to give her a feeding tube.

"I didn't understand why everything had happened. I thought God was punishing me," Paige says. But God was far from punishing her. In fact, His plan was quite different. And He was just getting started.

Fast Forward

Paige is 19 now. She's writing a book, she speaks in front of audiences, and she's even toured with iShine (alongside artists such as Jasmine, the Rubyz and Luke Benward). Oh, and she still sings. In fact, Paige rocks. Forget fragile and weak. Paige's debut, *Wake Up*, will knock you over. It doesn't slow down until the sixth song, then it ramps back up with Paige's strong vocals, catchy pop and blazing guitars.

"There are some crazy guitar solos," Paige says. "Some of those songs are really hard to play. The timing in them is nuts."

Her music and her message are intense. As a bonus, she manages to use "supercalafragalisticexpialadoshus" in a song.

The Turnaround

Paige's transformation from an 11-year-old fighting off death to a celebrated multimedia artist is a miracle—in more ways than one.

"It has been such a journey how God even worked this out," Paige says. "Sometimes I look back and I'm like, 'Lord, You're crazy!'"

First, God stepped in and brought healing. After a year of surgeries, chemotherapy and hospital stays, a biopsy finally came back with no active cancer cells.

"That was such amazing news," Paige marvels. In April 2002 Paige had her last chemotherapy, then began regular checkups that gradually decreased. Plus, God worked on Paige's heart, helping her to see how He was closer than ever during her darkest moments.

"God began to show me, 'Paige, this has nothing to do with what you've done,'" she says. "He was working through it."

After realizing the bone replacement would leave her unable to dance like she used to, Paige turned more to writing while she was in the hospital. She also began listening to more Christian music and realized that's what she wanted to do. One of the first songs she wrote was proof she was letting God change her.

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"I wrote a song with words, 'I want to thank You, Lord,'" Paige says. Then a friend she met in the hospital died—from the same cancer Paige had.

"It really hit me hard, and I wrote a song for her and her family called 'A Reason for Everything,'" Paige says. "It was strange—I was writing songs of thankfulness during this time, but God clearly had His hand in it. He was instilling His truth in my heart, infusing the creativity I had with a new depth because of what I was going through."

God Takes Over . . . By the Numbers:

Then God took hold of Paige's music, setting off an amazing series of events.

ONE: A man named Woody would regularly come to the children's hospital to sing and cheer up the patients. "One day he coaxed me into singing a Christmas song with him," Paige remembers. "He recorded us singing two songs and put them on a CD for me to give my family as a Christmas gift."

TWO: Paige's family decided to make copies of the CD to send out to all of the friends and family who had supported her through her cancer. The encouragement she received moved her to want to record a professional CD.

THREE: Linked to the Make-A-Wish® Foundation, Paige submitted her wish to make her own CD. The organization surprised her and made it happen, flying her to Nashville where she recorded two songs with top musicians.

FOUR: The Make-A-Wish folks liked Paige enough to ask her to perform at their other events. The more she sang and spoke, the more requests poured in from others wanting her at their events.

"My dad would get calls asking if I would come speak at a conference—and these were corporations and audiences of men," Paige says. "I'd think, *Um, are you sure, because I'm like 13.* We'd just look at each other and laugh." Soon Paige was speaking at churches and youth groups too.

FIVE: Bath & Body Works retail stores partnered with Make-A-Wish® Foundation on a fundraising holiday album and asked Paige to record new Christmas tunes for the CD. The experience was another example of God showing her how big He is—and another test of her faith.

"I was scared out of my mind when they called. I felt completely inadequate—I was just this little girl who had cancer and was trying to get her life back," she says. "I just had to give it to God and say, 'If you want this to happen, You have to be my strength.'"

God came through, and suddenly Paige was on a CD that was in stores across the nation. Not only that, she was asked to appear on national TV shows to talk about the CD—even on NBC's "Today."

"It was kind of like the Moses thing," she says. "I was thinking, *God, wouldn't you want to use my brother instead? He speaks better.*"

SIX: While speaking at a Christian music conference in Nashville, Paige met Robert Beeson, who had helped bands including Jars of Clay and Third Day. He invited Paige to speak at the iShine events his company produced.

SEVEN: After her family moved to Nashville, Paige continued to speak and pursue music. And now she has her first CD.

EIGHT: Paige is writing number eight now, speaking and singing about what God has done to her and through her.

"My family and I can't believe all that has happened. We still wonder how," Paige says. "There's this never-ending sense of surprise and amazement."

And you better watch out—she has something to say. Lyrics on *Wake Up* are all about making your life count, not wasting time and finding God's purpose.

"When I was sick I didn't have a choice. I couldn't get out of bed. I would have given anything to live a normal life," Paige remembers. "So to see healthy people sitting around, complaining they're bored, and not doing anything with their lives drives me crazy."

Paige decided if she got better, she wouldn't just sit around.

"We were all created to do something. We all have gifts meant to be used and something to offer. Life is a gift—it's precious," she says.

Paige has also made it her passion to help others find theirs. For some, that means helping them figure out what they like to do or what they can do. For others, it may mean helping them see God's purpose for their lives and leading people closer to Him.

"I love talking to people about their dreams—even if they seem far-fetched," she says. "Life is more than growing older, getting stuck in a monotonous job and working just to pay the bills."

In short, Paige Armstrong is telling people to *Wake Up.* 

For more on Paige, go to our website and read "Paige Armstrong Speaks Out!" at susiemag.com.

Patrick Dunn writes a monthly humor column in SUSIE Magazine called "The Way Guys See It." (Turn to page 48.) Patrick lives in Colorado Springs, Colo., with his wife, Sally, and son Brendan.



More on Paige

• Even though she sings and speaks in front of audiences, Paige says she's really an introvert! "I love one-on-one conversations, but I have to step out of my comfort zone when I perform and pretend I'm an extrovert."

• Paige has two older brothers and two older sisters.

• Her fave music: Anberlin, Flyleaf, The Wedding, Blindside

• Paige grew up acting and singing. She was in her first theater production when she was only 4 years old!

• She was born in Florida but grew up in Pennsylvania. She now lives in Nashville.

• Paige is a June birthday gal! She turns 20 this month!

