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## Ahava Springs Farm Produces Music to Strengthen Families

by Suzy Lowry Geno

The "crops" harvested at Ahava Springs Farm grow much deeper than the produce in the family garden or even the meat sheep gazing contentedly in the pasture. And the cultivation of that special yield has resulted in twice-annual bluegrass festivals, a recording and teaching studio, campground and even a small historic church which was moved there last year.

The Carrell family's primary goals are to glorify God while helping to "grow" stronger Christian men, and thus stronger Christian families.

As David Carrell simply explained, "As men grow strong in Christ, their families grow stronger together. As their families grow stronger, our churches grow in strength. And as our churches go, so goes our nation."



The Carrells, Alice, 16; Lamilla, David and Isaac, 18, pose in the music store Isaac has begun on the family farm near Gallant.



**Clockwise from above, David and Lamilla Carrell; Alice Carrell's fingers fly across the mandolin; Alice on the mandolin, one of many of the instruments she plays; and Isaac Carrell performs on banjo, one of the many instruments he has mastered and teaches, at his own music studio/recording studio on the farm.**

It's that simple tenet that guides the Carrell family through every aspect of their lives, but in particular in their family's love of bluegrass gospel music. What better way to bring men and their families together than music?

The story of Ahava Springs Farm and the Carrell family goes back more than a quarter of a century.

David and Lamilla Carrell both attended the University of Alabama in Birmingham, Lamilla obtaining a math degree and David set on a career in computers.

Twenty-five years ago this April, they married and began their life together in Birmingham, but quickly saw they wanted more for their family than city life.

They drew a 100 mile radius around Birmingham, since David was the "computer guy" at BBVA Compass Bank—a job he still

holds.

After much searching, they felt God led them to the nearly 70 spring-filled acres they now own, in the "foothills of the Appalachians," on Sumatanga Road in the Gallant Community just inside Etowah County.

But why the name Ahava? David and Lamilla's search reminded them of Ezra leading several Israelites, priests, Levites and others from their captivity in Babylon back to their home in Jerusalem.



**The beautiful winding entrance to the Carrells' Ahava Springs Farm off Sumatanga Road in the Gallant community.**

King Artaxerxes had issued a decree allowing the Israelites to go and offered to provide them with an army for protection, but they'd boasted their God would protect them.

But just outside of Jerusalem they began to doubt. They camped for three days and nights of fasting and praying because they were fearful to go on their journey without

protection. God heard their cries and noted their humbleness and protected them on their way.

"We want to offer Ahava Springs as a place for men, the leaders of their homes, to fast and pray; to be encouraged and strengthened in their endeavors to bring leadership, stability and unity to their families; and to equip them to uphold the whole Word of God and teach it to their children," David explained.

The idea of music as a way of bringing people to the farm and helping to publicize the help offered came about as almost a natural progression as the Carrells began raising Isaac, now 18, and Alice, now 16.

Isaac began asking to learn to play guitar. His parents, both musically inclined, promised him if he'd learn the theory and fundamentals of music by learning to play the piano, they'd help him get a guitar later.

Not only did he continue that progression to guitar, he learned to also play the banjo, bass, mandolin, dulcimer and "a little fiddle."

Alice followed in quick succession and now also plays piano, mandolin, flute, fiddle, penny whistle, Irish whistle, harp and dulcimer.

Since the teens were both homeschooled (with Isaac graduating last spring), they had additional time to work on their musical pursuits. About three years ago, Alice casually asked David and Lamilla why the family didn't form a band.

The results are amazing.

Watching Alice's fingers as they seem to fly across the mandolin strings and Isaac make a banjo do seemingly everything but speak English, it's clear there are musical "gifts" involved not learned from textbooks.

"It's all about being open to what God wants and being willing to step out when He opens doors," Lamilla said.

Being able to HEAR when God opens those doors is easier when you live a simpler lifestyle like the Carrells. Although David is an expert at "all things computer," the family does not have Internet access at home and does not have a television.

In addition to her music education, Alice enjoys sewing—making many of her clothes—cooking, and studying history and genealogy.



**Above, Alice, Lamilla, David and Isaac Carrell perform at their farm's bluegrass festival last year as friend Jimmy Ledbetter, second from right, plays the spoons. Below, the Carrells' Ahava Springs Farm's music area, a different but vital "value-added" farm product!**





**Isaac Carrell adjusts a display of some of the CDs his family has recorded on the farm.**

Isaac has opened a professional recording studio on the farm, recording the family's music selections and those of others. His latest project has been putting in written musical form the songs of a gifted Birmingham musician who doesn't know how to read music. Isaac is writing down her music so her songs will be available to her children and even later descendants. Music lessons are also offered and Isaac repairs and hopes to build musical instruments.

The Carrells regularly sing and play at area churches and they do so to honor God. The smallest congregation they played for was only

seven people but the largest was more than 1,000!

They also play at historically prominent music venues like the Troubadour Theater in Nashville (where Isaac also played backup for music legend Charlie Louvin) and at the historic Bean Blossom Festival in Indiana (where the family was awed to get to sign their names as those who had played there under the autographs of Earl Scruggs and others).

Alabama's Sullivan Family has also taken the Carrells "under their wings" and even came to play at the Carrells' bluegrass festival three years ago.

Currently there are rough campsites, but David is hoping to have electrical and water hook-ups to at least some of those before the May 13-14 festival this spring.

The Balos Family from Michigan and Free Indeed are the confirmed special guests thus far (bands on stage from 4-9 p.m. on Friday and on Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.) with "pickin'" from everybody encouraged on Friday from 1-4 p.m. and on Saturday from 5 p.m. until dark.

Everything is family-oriented with absolutely no smoking, alcohol or drugs.

To provide a place for quiet reflection, small groups, counseling and religious services on the Sunday of the twice-annual festivals, the Carrells were donated the historic Mountain Joy Primitive Baptist Church building last year and had it moved to their Ahava Springs Farm at the end of the winding roadway and overlooking one of the spring-fed ponds.



**Left, Isaac, Lamilla and Alice Carrell on the front steps of the former Mount Joy Primitive Baptist Church which was moved from atop Straight Mountain to their farm on the edge of Etowah County. At right, Alice Carrell sits on one of the beautiful old solid church pews.**

Lamilla noted the church was founded in 1912, but the original building was blown away by a

tornado. The current 30 x 40-foot wooden building was built in 1970 and contains beautiful, solid wooden pews arranged in the old-time traditional way of shorter benches on either side of the pulpit, with longer ones facing the front, either as a way of separating men and women at prayer time or by separating the altos and sopranos from the basses and tenors during singing.

The Carrells would love to hear from anyone who has more history about the small church or who once attended church there.

"There was such a sweet spirit here, just thinking about all who worshiped, the first time we had a service there, I couldn't say anything for crying," Lamilla remembered.

If you have information to share about the small church, would like more information on the Bluegrass Gospel Festival, Ahava Farm or about the family's four musical CDs (this reporter's favorite is the instrumental Farmland Fiddle Tunes by Isaac and Alice!), you may contact them by phoning (256) 538-2602, visiting the website of [www.ahavasprings.com](http://www.ahavasprings.com) or writing them at 1040 Sumatanga Road; Gallant, AL 35972.

Can you think of a better way to spend an afternoon than listening to music with your family while fishing in a spring-fed pond as sheep munch happily in the pasture beside you?

*Suzy Lowry Geno is a freelance writer from Blount County.*

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