

A long talk, tears on my cheek and toes that won't stop tapping

About a week ago I had a long conversation with Austin Wahlert. In my business you sometimes talk to people who have been interviewed a lot and most of them develop a sort of stump-speech interview talk. That was not the experience I had with Austin Wahlert and I suspect it hasn't been the experience of other media people who've covered him. There is genuineness, a certainty, an authenticity that Austin emits that's absolutely contagious. It's almost impossible not to get caught up in the magic of his effusive personality. This is a simple story about a complex young man, his family, his ambitions, his undeniable talent, his heart, grit and determination and how he's driven to share it with the rest of us. Austin Wahlert, first and foremost, is a cowboy. That's his foundation, his DNA, his moral compass, his genealogy and his training. And in the end, that's every bit as important as his explosive arrival on the country music scene - at least to you and me. If you happen to be one of those people who thinks today's "younger generation" is a collection of seriously flawed, self-entitled, earring-wearing, metro-sexual, tattooed devils with no goals, no direction, no ambition and no brains - well, you haven't met Austin Wahlert. He IS motion. He IS personal power. He IS energy. There are a few more adjectives I should add to this list - because it's there, it's all there. And amidst it all, Austin has a sense of real gratitude that literally permeates from him. In a commercial sense Austin Wahlert is on something of a global roll, he's a remarkably popular country artist in many parts of Europe - which is a long way from Eaton, Colorado - a two stop light town 7 miles north of Greeley, Colorado, where he and his family live - a tiny community lined with grain silos and the kinds of restaurants that open at 6:00 am and close at 2:00pm. His fans in Germany and France actually have Austin Wahlert dance parties. He wrote a song with hero turned friend Baxter Black called "Long Live Cowboys", that song just hit #8 on the international chart this week in Europe and broke the top 100 on the pop chart. And he's not doing too bad in North America either. The 2014 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo opened the 10th and final round of the NFR with a live Austin Wahlert performance, predictably replete with sexy long-legged Las Vegas showgirls surrounding him and pyrotechniques blasting fireworks lighting-up the Thomas and Mack Center. A

stage that has at one time or another been occupied by most every big name in country music.

At 27, it's become obvious to the big names in Nashville that Austin's "got it." And in Nashville you've either got it or you don't. He has the ear and support of some of the greatest songwriters and music executives in the country music world and they're not making any secret their enthusiasm for him.

Wahlert spends a considerable amount of time in Nashville where he does his recording sharing the exceptional talent of the same big studio musicians most everyone who makes it big in country music do. "The level of professionalism you deal with in Nashville is amazing," Wahlert says, "they know their part and you better know yours."

Wahlert went to Odessa College in West Texas influenced by Ty Murray's presence there not so long ago. He was a talented bull rider who was eventually faced with the choice between full pursuit of a bull riding career or making his way to country music.

"I was a good bull rider and grateful for that time and experience but for me, it was music," he explains. With that, Wahlert hung-up his bull rope, picked up his guitar and has been kicking ass in the country music business ever since. (My words, not his – his would have been better!) Austin married his sweetheart Justine, and the two started a family. Their daughter Raegan was born in 2012 opening a new dimension to both their lives.

Little Raegan came into this world with down-syndrome AND a serious heart problem that required open heart surgery at just 3 months of age. As the parents of children down-syndrome often do, Austin and Justine stepped up to the challenge and have slowly developed the magnificent wisdom that comes from that kind of life circumstance.

Raegan came along with some large and serious decisions for the Wahlert household. "So much of her development comes from our attitude, it's like a lot of things – you can lay down and feel sorry for yourselves and cry every night – or – you can script her life for success – and that's the choice we made."

Now 3 years old, Austin and Justine have learned the enormous difference between happiness and pleasure as few people do at their age and have cemented their life together with the powerful glue Raegan has become.

In a heart-stirring tribute to his family Austin wrote the song and did the video, “Daddy Would Give You His Heart” which is a video everyone should see. You can see it at www.Youtube.w1201ko.com. I will warn you, I cried half way through. It’s pretty much unanimous in Nashville; Austin Wahlert is both a prolific songwriter and a gifted lyricist. If you’re interested watch a short YouTube “Behind the Music” video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug_CNr1Mlio&spfreload=10 and you’ll see what some of Nashville’s biggest producers, musicians and songwriters have to say, including legends Songwriter Wynn Varble and Producer Chris Liepe.

The Wahlert’s faced another mountain of adversity in November of 2015; when wife Justine had a minor stroke while she was 5 months pregnant with their second child a son, Lincoln Wahlert. The odds didn’t look good for her to make it through the birth, one doctor acknowledging a 50/50 chance. But once again rather than let self pity take over, they went to work putting together the best team of brain, and vascular surgeons they could find, as well as a high-risk delivery team. Having to shut life down and move next to the hospital in Denver until the delivery date, all they could do was wait. Sometimes that waiting can seem like a lifetime, but it can also be a chance to reflect and realize what is most important in life. Wahlert says, “As scary as things got in the delivery room, we are just thankful to Dr. Hodges and her team for their split second thinking and their amazing work, we will be forever grateful.” Everyone is home now happy, healthy and ready to get back to living life to the fullest.

Austin writes a song most every day and uses such descriptive lyrics he qualifies for “wordsmith” status. He writes sad songs, happy songs, hard-driving songs, traditional country songs, rodeo songs, love songs and on his new album, which was released December 3rd– “I WILL WIN” – an 18 song collection – there’s even a “golf” song! And it works. Austin seems to get it. He seems to sense that being a cowboy today is less about a career on the back of a horse trailing cattle from Texas to Montana and more about a

“culture” of like-minded people who hold to the traditional cowboy values while living a new and less difficult world. “I WILL WIN” his latest, is a big album – as basic as this may seem it was designed that way because Austin wants people to feel like they got their money’s worth. It’s loaded with great music, the kind of music you just leave in the player in the truck and listen to for a week or two. It’s a ballsy album with songs that challenge your realities and make you swell inside, some even make you re-commit to things that you’ve left behind. Which brings me to this. In my own humble opinion Austin Wahlert is more than a breath of fresh country air, he is a “standard” – he is motivation – he is a reminder of who we all need to be, he is a walking attitude that we all need to adopt – he is AN INSPIRATION. Austin Wahlert knows that what kind of person you are, what kind of contribution you make and what kind of example you set are THE most important things. And he works at those things - I suspect by default. His mind is a fluid, healthy, uncorrupt mind – he’s a young man with a grasp on the future without an ounce of entitlement in him, willing to do his part and then some. He possesses an uncanny clarity of what really moves people inside – the guy can reach down inside you and make your heart smile – he is an example of the kind of person we all need to be.

Buy his new album. You can get it on iTunes. Buy it for someone you know – maybe someone who needs a kick in the butt, maybe someone who needs a little inspiration – maybe someone who just loves great country music, whatever your reason, buy it! <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/i-will-win/id1055050449>.

For more information visit www.AustinWahlert.com or find him on Facebook. Finally, I would like to thank Austin for the time we spent together – the fact is Austin Wahlert touched me in a profound way. And he’ll touch your heart too.