

## Visual Imagery

by Rick Lang

Back in the late 1980's, when I became very serious about songwriting, I happened to ask Sharon Horovitch of the band Southern Rail what they looked for in a song. One thing that she emphasized was "Visual Imagery." Since that day, what Sharon said has had a major impact on my own writing. Visual Imagery is "painting a picture" with words. If you look at a good portrait, it will make a lasting impression in your mind, as it will clearly show the detail of what the scene is all about. A well written lyric can accomplish the same thing.

One of my early heroes in the field of songwriting was Randall Hylton. He was one of the only writers I knew of in Bluegrass Music who was writing primarily for other bands to record, rather than for himself. His songs have been covered by the Lewis Family, Larry Sparks, Country Gentlemen, Lester Flatt, Bluegrass Cardinals and Doyle Lawson, among many others. Randall wrote some truly great songs, one of which was "Thirty Two Acres," recorded by the Bluegrass Cardinals. The first verse and chorus of this song are a good example of Visual Imagery.

"I sawed the timber for the cabin floor  
I built a plank fence out of locust boards  
I worked the corn rows in the early morn  
And raised a family on a poor mans farm.

### CHORUS

Thirty two acres of bottom land  
Bought and paid for with my own hands  
worth a fortune to a working man  
Thirty two acres of bottom land."

If you close your eyes and listen to the lyrics of this song being sung, I'm sure you can imagine a cabin floor, plank fence, corn rows, and a farm. Each of us can, to some degree, visualize the setting here. Randall's approach really works well, as the listener can easily understand what the song is all about, and through the use of Visual Imagery, will leave a lasting impression.

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In crafting our lyrics and choosing words to develop the main idea of our song, try to "paint a picture" that will help draw the listener into the song, hold their interest, and leave a lasting impression. If you accomplish this, you have written a great song. At any rate, it's food for thought, and until next time I'll leave you with the lyrics and MP3 version of a song I wrote entitled " Great North Woods " recorded by a terrific New England Bluegrass Band, Ham Branch Bluegrass a few years back. This tune was written as a tribute to those who work in the woods cutting timber, inspired by the death of a twenty-three year old local logger, killed in a tragic logging accident. I tried to incorporate the technique of Visual Imagery to more effectively tell this story.

Until next time, take care and good writing!  
Rick Lang