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Country Singer Rodney Atkins

HOLSTON HOME is why I am me'

BY LISA WARREN
The Greeneville Sun

The Rev. Charles Hutchins has been affiliated with Holston United Methodist Home for Children for more than four decades.

During that time, he has been involved with numerous adoption cases, including one involving the rising country star who performed Aug. 3 at Greene County Fair.

Rodney Atkins, whose hit song entitled "Honesty" reached No. 4 last year on the country charts, was adopted as an infant through Holston Home.

Hutchins, along with other representatives of Holston Home, including the agency's

president Art Masker, were on hand at the fairgrounds to hear that "child" who was once cared for through their organization and has now grown into one of country music's hottest new stars.

During his show, the 35-year-old singer recognized Holston Home and the support the organization gave to him and his parents, Allan and Margaret Atkins, the couple who adopted him when he was just a few months old.

"There is a man here tonight who said he held me even before my parents did," Atkins told the audience as he told of his adoption.

Prior to his show on the fair's main stage, Atkins, along with his parents who were in town for his concert, took time to speak with *The Greeneville Sun* about his experience as

an infant and the positive role that Holston Home had in shaping his life.

Born in Knoxville, Atkins was immediately given up for adoption by his birth mother.

Eight months prior to Atkins' birth, however, the couple who would one day become his parents, Allan and Margaret Atkins, had experienced the worst tragedy a parent could face: the death of a child.

Their infant son, Jeffrey, had died within days of his birth.

Although the couple had another child, a daughter named Tammy Lynn, the death of their son created a deep void in their hearts and lives.

About six months after Jeffrey's death, a co-worker of Allan Atkins suggested the couple consider adoption and recommended Holston Home.

The Atkinses gave careful consideration to the idea and soon decided to contact the children's agency about adopting an infant.

They completed the paperwork to be considered adoptive parents and in just a couple of months, they were contacted by Holston Home. They were told there was an infant boy who had just been born and was available for adoption.

As fate would have it, however, Margaret Atkins had undergone surgery and was suffering from unexpected medical complications.

Because of her health, Margaret's doctor advised her to not adopt at that time, until she was physically capable of caring for a baby.

The Atkinses were heartbroken that they could not take the baby and reluctantly told the social worker that it could not happen at that time.

The baby boy went home with another couple – only to be returned to Holston Home soon after. The baby was seriously ill with a staph infection and the couple said they couldn't care for him.

Another couple took the baby home for adoption – and, once again, he was returned to

foster care at Holston Home.

About the same time the infant boy was returned for the second time to Holston Home, the Atkinses called Holston Home once again.

Margaret Atkins had now fully recovered from surgery and was ready to care for an infant child. "Were there any more babies available for adoption?" they asked.

To their delight, they were told, "Well, we still have that same little boy available."

This time, that little baby boy, who had twice been taken from the care of Holston Home with the promise of adoption, now went home for good and was given the name Rodney.

Looking back on his early start, the humble singer who grew up in Cumberland Gap, Tenn., said he strongly feels that the "hand of God" had a part in it all and he ultimately ended up with the parents the Lord originally intended for him to have.

"My parents did the greatest thing that I think a couple could ever do," Atkins said.

"That is ... to take a complete stranger and make that person your own."

A strong believer in the power of God and his divine intervention, the country singer said he felt that God wanted the Atkinses to be his parents. "I feel that Holston Home played the biggest hand in making that happen," he said.

"Holston Home is why I am me," he said.

Backstage with Atkins before his show was a 15-year-old, named Russell, who is now under the care of Holston Home and is available for adoption.

A handsome young man with an interest in music, Russell was treated to a brief guitar lesson by Atkins.

"When I talk to kids who are waiting to be adopted, I tell them that it's hard to believe there is a greater plan for you," Atkins said.

While Atkins believes God still gives us the ability to make choices – good or bad – for ourselves, he added that he still believes that God always has his "plan" in place for us, if we choose to accept his way.

For those children and youth who are waiting and wondering if they will ever be adopted, Atkins said to always remember that God loves them and he has a plan for each of us.

Whether the child is adopted as an infant, as a teen-ager, or not at all, Atkins encouraged the child to trust in God and open himself or herself to him.

"I'm thankful for having been adopted," Atkins said. "In fact, I'm humbled by it."

Not only did the Atkinses give Rodney a family and two loving parents, they also gave him another special gift: his love of music.

"I was just always around music," he said. His father continues to perform in a gospel music trio.

As a tribute to his parents, Atkins wrote the song, "My Old Man," which is included on his CD.

"There is a line in the song that just epitomizes my parents ... 'My folks are just like mountains. The closer I get to them, the bigger they are.'"

Atkins' parents, along with his sister, were on hand in Greeneville earlier this month to watch him perform at the fair. The singer also had his wife, Tammy Jo, and their three-year-old son, Elijah, with him.

While growing up, Atkins said, he always knew that he had been adopted, and it was something that he really had not thought much about – until the birth of his own son. After Elijah's birth, Atkins said the nurse brought his newborn son into the room where he and his wife were and laid the baby in the country singer's arms.

She proceeded to tell the newparents that Elijah was doing well and, as she turned to walk out of the room, the nurse said, "Oh, and by the way, his blood type is A-positive."

Atkins, who has the same blood type, said, "I finally realized at that moment that I was holding the only blood relative that I know – and I had never experienced a feeling like that before."

In addition to working on a video for his next single release, "I Will Come to You," Atkins said he's also writing songs for his next CD.

Holston Home for Children, on the other hand, continues in its ministry of finding homes for children in need of adoption or foster care.

"Adoption work has been a part of our ministry since our founding in 1895," the Holston Home Web site reads. "We have worked with state governments on adoption law and helped many men and women make heart connections with children."

"When you think about it ... adoption is not nearly as unique as you may think," Charles Hutchins said. "Everybody who is married adopted each other. When you take a child and adopt him ... he becomes a part of your family." ■

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Atkins (below, right) gives Russell a guitar lesson. Russell, age 15, is under the care of Holston Home and available for adoption. Photos by Homer Marcum, Holston Home for Children



Rodney Atkins (at right, center) is shown with his parents, Allan and Margaret Atkins, backstage at the Greene County Fair. The singer is holding his three-year-old son, Elijah.

