

**This interview with
CONNIE SMITH
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on April 6, 2021**



Library of Congress: What was your first reaction when you first heard the song “Once a Day”?

Connie Smith: I first heard the song at a country music show in Ohio where both Bill Anderson and I were performing. Bill Anderson and his wife Betty sang the song to me and asked if I liked it. I did. Not long afterwards, Chet Atkins signed me to RCA Victor Records. We agreed that “Once a Day” was to be one of the songs that was to be a part of my first recording session, which was July 16, 1964. After we had finished working that day, it was obvious that “Once a Day” was the best thing we had done. At that time, I didn’t know what qualified a song to be a hit. However, I felt like “Once a Day” should be a single.

LOC: What was the actual recording, in a studio, with a producer like for you the very first time you did it?

CS: I was scared to death! That first session was a RCA’s Studio B in Nashville. Studio B is a small space and everyone plays and sings in the same room. I stood behind a sound baffle with a window in it so that I could see everyone, and I had one little monitor speaker where I could hear what everyone was playing. I didn’t know anyone at the session that day but we became fast friends. I grew to love them all, especially Weldon Myrick who played steel guitar and Pig Robbins, who played piano. After the first sessions I used Weldon and Pig on all my work that they were available to do.

LOC: How many takes did you do? Did you rehearse?

CS: The demo of the song was played for the musicians in order for them to make their charts. We then ran through it once. Before we actually recorded the song, Bob Ferguson [the producer] walked over to Weldon Myrick and said, “Let me adjust your amp a little bit.” We were recording in mono and Bob wanted more treble, like the edgy West Coast sound. His opinion

was that that type of steel guitar sound cut through radio speakers better. Bob knew what he was doing because the song was released in August and was number one by November.

LOC: Bill Anderson wrote “Once a Day” and some of your other biggest hits: what makes Bill such a good songwriter and so suited to writing for you?

CS: Well, he’s a versatile writer. Bill Anderson writes well for everybody. I’ve recorded 33 of Bill’s songs. I’ve always accused Bill of finding out what worked [for me] and then keeping the songs for himself! He’d have a song and we’d want to do it and then he’d say “Sorry, I’m doing this one myself.” *[laughs]* I’ve always kidded him about that. Like I said, I’ve cut 33 of Bill’s songs over the years. He’s second only to Dallas Frazier—I’ve cut 72 of his!

LOC: When you sing “Once a Day” now do you sing it differently than you did years ago?

CS: Oh, yes! I was just learning how to sing back then. I had never sung with a real band. The first time I ever sang in public was at a square dance at school. I did Patsy Cline’s “My Happiness.” I kept waiting for the band to set the tempo and they kept waiting for me to set the tempo. It finally got so bad everyone stopped dancing! But I got \$3.00!

Yes, I do the song differently, both musically and emotionally. It has changed by way of singing with different bands over the years. I’m a singer and I know lyrics and melody and I know what I feel but each band is a little different.

That recording goes back to 1964; I’ve experienced a lot of life since then. As I said, I was so scared then. I do it a little different now and maybe every time because I love to sing it. That’s one of the reasons I’m not good at pantomime—singing along with a track—because I don’t sing it the same way every time. When I sing the chorus the second time, it has to be different, you are repeating yourself, you have to add emphasis. It’s all a form of communication.

LOC: Why do you think your original recording of “Once A Day” connected with people so much at that time?

CS: Honestly, Weldon Myrick’s steel guitar playing had a lot to do with it. And, it’s a really good country song. Country music is the cry of the heart. It’s a reflection of what’s happening in the world. We all have something: lost our dog and we’re cryin’; lost a loved one, and we’re cryin’; or broke a nail—but, we are all cryin’ from the heart. In “Once a Day” the girl has a broken heart. She only thinks about the person that left her just once a day, every day, all day long.

Great country songs are something everyone can identify with. I sing them from my heart. That’s how I get my feelings out.

LOC: To be a good singer you, of course, have to have a good voice but what else do you need?

CS: I can only speak for myself. One of my heroes was Jean Shepard. She was always right on pitch and you heard every word she said, and that touched my heart. As singers, our job is to touch hearts and communicate, and to say “Me too, I understand.”