

GNT Christmas Episode

Bekah

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Caleb

We used to take that for granted -- I did -- that singing in harmony is the default. Like, it's just the way it happens. But now that's not true, now that we're in the great big world, we realize it's really special.

**Excerpt from "It's Almost Christmas."*

Linda Espenshade

That was Bekah and Caleb Liechty. They and their brother, Joshua, make up the musical group, Girl Named Tom. Last December, they won The Voice, a U.S. singing competition.

For our Christmas episode we're doing something a little different. We're bringing you an interview with Girl Named Tom. These sibling musicians from Pettisville, Ohio, are known for their exquisite harmonies, their charisma, and down-to-earth friendliness. They've performed at large venues across the U.S. this year, and they have also been long-time supporters of MCC.

I am Linda Espenshade and today I'll be your host. You are listening to Relief, Development and Podcast, a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

**Intro Music*

Before and after Girl Named Tom gained national acclaim, they supported MCC by performing at several MCC relief sales, which raise funds for our relief, development, and peace work around the world.

In October, as they were preparing for a big Christmas season on stage with Pentatonix, we chatted with them about what the last year has been like as they rose to fame while also dealing with their father's death. We heard what snacks they like in the green room and why they like to support us at MCC. I hope you enjoy this behind-the-scenes conversation with Girl Named Tom.

And if you stick around, you'll hear one of their new Christmas songs at the end of the episode.

Joshua

Let's do it Linda.

Linda Espenshade

So full disclosure, I am a huge fan of yours. I started, I heard about you a little bit from my pastor when you did a backyard concert in Lancaster. And then next thing I know you're on The Voice. So, I follow everything on The Voice. And then next thing I know you're like touring all over the country. So I just have to wonder, what's that been like for you?

Caleb Linda, you're an OG fan! Yeah.

Bekah

at a backyard concert.

Caleb

Yeah, you knew about us a long time ago. That's special.

Bekah

Yeah, it's a lot of change, you know, and we're taking it day by day and grateful for all of the opportunities and being able to share our music on a more widespread level. And yeah, there's, we've just been having a great time ever since we were in the backyards, you know. So every step of the way has been wonderful.

Joshua

But The Voice definitely changed our lives. And you all voted, the huge Mennonite core of voters. We were talking like, how fun would it be to see like a heat map of where all the votes came in? Unfortunately, we couldn't ever see that. But all the Mennonite core places I bet, I bet lit up pretty good. So we can't thank you all enough for your support. And it's been a wild ride.

Caleb

Yeah, like you said, we've been performing all over the country since, and it's been amazing to see, even in the not-so-Mennonite pockets in the country like Birmingham, Alabama, there's people selling out like, people buying out our tickets for those little shows down there, which is just crazy to know that we now have fans all over the country.

Linda Espenshade

One of the things that I thought might help people to picture what your last year has been like, is for you to talk in snapshots. You know, like when I think about memories, I tend to picture a moment like it's a snapshot in my photo album, or a picture of snippet of a video. So if you think back over the past year, what are the snapshots? What are the videos that come to your mind first?

Bekah

This time last year, we were watching on TV, The Voice airing, which was wild to see that.

Caleb

Yeah, a flashbulb for me is sitting on a bed in Bekah's room in the hotel with a bunch of other contestants. And we're all watching ourselves air on TV for the first time together. That was very strange and surreal. I remember getting like chills. We were singing Wichita Lineman and I was like, what is happening?

**"Wichita Lineman" plays in background*

Bekah

Is that really us?

Joshua

Super special too. Because those people are like dear friends to us at that point because like the, all the pressure that all of us were going through really brought us together. Obviously, for the three of us, it was super, super nice to be able to have each other to lean on and to go through those pressure-packed moments with. But lots of the solo artists, it just takes so much courage and there's so much pressure all the time, and so it was nice to be able to you know, work through things with each other in that in that environment.

Caleb

More snapshots.

Bekah

Another snapshot is when we won the show. It was just like surreal, like the confetti was released; all of the cameras were all around. We were being flooded by producers, assistants. John Legend, Kelly Clarkson, Blake Shelton and Ariana Grande -- they all came towards us and you know, we were given the trophy. It was just a wild, wild turn of events, and then they took some pictures. And then we were whisked off to interviews in front of TV networks.

Caleb

That was another like slow-motion moment. We were just like floating through space.

Bekah

What is going on?

Caleb

What is happening?

Joshua

Should we talk about the Thanksgiving one?

Caleb

Do you want to?

Joshua

Yeah. Also having Thanksgiving at The Voice was very different and strange. We were all just sitting. Like there were 10 contestants left, I believe at this point. And we were all sitting in the hotel hallway eating our turkey dinners out of like cardboard. And we're just kind of joking and laughing about like, you know, this is not exactly what any of us envisioned or would hope for Thanksgiving to be, but it was, it was a special, one-of-a-kind moment.

Bekah

One-of-a-kind.

Joshua

So we all embraced it. And might have the grumbled a little bit about, yeah, the turkey was a little dry.

Caleb

It wasn't as good as our aunt's turkey.

Bekah

Mashed potatoes may have tasted a little bit like machines. I was grateful for it.

Joshua

Yeah, that was a funny one.

Caleb

Another snapshot is definitely going back to the hospital back in Michigan where our dad was, and our parents both were watching the last couple weeks of The Voice since our dad was really sick in the hospital. And coming back and he's laying in his bed. And we all went up and hugged him. And at that point, he was still very lucid and so excited to see us, and we were so excited to see him. It had been long time.

Linda Espenshade

Yeah. Yeah, that was the hard part of your year. It's like you've had to live in a world of grief and a world of excitement. Has that been really tough for you this year?

Bekah

Yes. When you asked what the flashbulb memories were from the past year, that's the first thing I thought of.

Joshua

And how intermeshed they were with our celebration, and with our grief, like the whole time, while we were, like going through The Voice process and moving on week to week, dad's health was declining. So it was, there was this weird, like, different trajectories going on inside of us, too. We would call back with Mom and Dad to the hospital, and things kept going worse and worse. And so a number of times, we thought about just leaving the show and to spend the time with dad.

I mean, obviously Dad was not having that. He was like, "No, you're gonna stay out there. You're gonna keep on doing what you're loving to do." But yeah, and then to like, directly after we won, normally, there's a couple days of press interviews and stuff after you win. But we just got on a plane, the first plane we could and came back. And so it was so strange to have, yeah, all these mixed feelings. It really wasn't like, fully celebrating one moment, and then full, like, grief mode the next. It was all happening at the same time. And it was a confusing, difficult time, and again, just so grateful that we had each other.

Bekah

Yeah, having each other bear that heaviness together, because it really was heavy. I mean, winning the show, we saw it through we knew that we had done our job and done it the best we could, and we were very proud of ourselves. But just immediately after stepping off that stage, we all wanted to be right with dad and that was clouding my joy.

Caleb

For sure. Sure. Yeah. Even while standing on stage. I was like, I really don't care.

Bekah

Yeah. To tell you the truth.

Linda Espenshade

Yeah, that's a whole ... Thanks for going that deep. That's a whole level of pain you guys are carrying as you're portraying this persona -- you're also embracing the moment of the excitement that's going on around you but deep inside your heart is with your dad. Do you feel his presence with you as you tour this year? In any way?

Bekah

Yeah. Especially our first shows after he passed. It was really you could almost reach out and touch him.

Joshua

Palpable.

Bekah

He was onstage with us. He was. It took a lot to sing the song he wrote Psalm 23 without breaking down crying, right. Because the emotion is so heavy in that song for us. He sang it to us as we were going to sleep as kids, and it's been such a comforting song for so many other people, especially in their end of life. We've sung it for people in hospital rooms and as, as they're going to heaven, so to sing it to a crowd of adoring fans, having our dad just freshly passed away, was really, really difficult. But we also felt privileged to sing it and honored to carry on his legacy in the way that we know he wants us to, doing what we love, sharing our God-given gifts. And yeah, we're so thankful for his influence in our life up to this point and going forward. It's different, but it's there.

Joshua

A couple times, didn't you like see, like, see dad in the crowd, like, sometimes our minds will, like, find a face in the audience that kind of resembles dad, and it will like transform into dad's face because he saw us so many times in concert. And it's a cool, little gift, I guess, when that happens, just that his memory is still so alive in all of us.

Linda Espenshade

One of the questions that I had been thinking about asking you was, how do you stay grounded? Maybe your dad's part of that. Maybe there's other things?

Caleb

And for me, the last couple weeks, I've been really thinking about ancestors, and how important our family is to each other, and our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, our community back home. Like success is no person's, like, we don't have success. It's the success of the community, of our ancestors, of all this that has come together to create whatever's happening right now, which is, you know, it's very exciting. But it's also, it's not our success, I guess, is the best way I can put it, and it's... So the three of us ground each other because, you know, we grew up just playing naked in the yard.

Bekah

Oh, lands!

Caleb

And getting really muddy a lot. You know, we're not gonna put our like, there's no pedestal that exists or anything. And then also, it's hard what we do. It's like a grind. So sometimes people say, "Wow, you're talking about your life, like you have a job. And I'm like, Well, it kind of is sometimes. Let's be honest. It's not all parties and rainbows and stuff. It's hard work. So that's also a grind that keeps us grounded.

Joshua

And to see the steps ahead of us that we want to keep pursuing and keep achieving. You can't keep climbing if you have a swollen head, you know, or like...

Bekah

if you think you're already at the top? Yeah, yeah.

Joshua

But yeah, death. I think death, too, does have a way of refocusing what's important. Yeah, yeah. To live through that great success of winning The Voice with death on our minds. It kept the whole like, life is a marathon, and it's not a race. It's just day by day, doing your best. And it's long. There's ups and downs to life. And so we're living in this moment, while it is an up moment and embracing that and working as hard as we can, but also realizing that it's not always going to be like this. And you know, in the entertainment industry, people fall in and out of love with folks. And that's just to be expected. So, yeah, to take advantage of this moment that we're being given and do our best with it, but not act like it's always going to be here.

Linda Espenshade

Hey, thank you guys for sharing so deeply, I really didn't know if you would want to, to talk about your dad's death and talk about how that impacted you. And I feel like you're sort of being so real with it. And, and I, I really appreciate that. I value that.

I do want to take us back to your concerts. One of the things that I've read about or that I followed of course, being the fan girl, I follow your Facebook fan groups and so forth. And one of the things people talk about is the incredible energy that you give at your concerts. And yet, like if I were to describe your music to people, I would say that it is often soulful, lyrical, like your harmonies are almost excruciatingly beautiful. So how do you put the soulfulness and the energy together in your concert?

Bekah

Like, wow, I've never heard it put like that. That's very inspiring. Um, I think we just, we just really love what we do. So that's a natural energy of this is, this is us. This is what we love to do. And we are living life to the fullest right now as we stand on this stage. And sharing about our life brings us a lot of joy too, and I don't know, where do we get the energy?

Caleb

Well, I think I think we are intentional about the way we craft a set.

Bekah

Yeah

Caleb

And we are most known for our soulful, pristine harmonies that are really clean and beautifully blended. And to be clear, we can't be exuding tons, of like, physical energy, while we're doing that, you know. So we pick our moments, we start the show with more of a bang. Let's run around the stage. Let's have fun, let's have boom, bop, bop, like a nice beat. And then we start drawing it in and making it more intimate. And so then we can get into all that soul you're talking about, and the depth and those harmonies. And then we open it up again and have a big beat and loud electric guitar and big riffs by Bekah.

Joshua

Party.

Caleb And Josh was just like jumping around. And so that's why I love the show we're doing right now is because there's room for both of the things. There's room for a youthful energy that's just joyful and kind of silly, almost, at times. And then, then there's the somber, serious soul part of it as well.

Joshua

And I would say in the somber, serious soul parts of it, you can pack so much energy into every line when you know it like the back of your hand. And we've been singing lots of these songs, hundreds of times. And so just really focusing on every syllable, and every just packing as much emotion as you can, and to be able to look into the audience's eyes ...

Bekah

Yeah.

Joshua

It's fresh every time. It really is. Because you're singing it with a new group of people. And so yeah, that's what really feeds my energy in like, Oh, yes.

Bekah

Yeah, we just played a show a couple days ago, where we could see people's faces because it was outdoors in the light of day. And sometimes the theaters are dark. And you know, you can't see people's eyes, but I love, you know, to sing right to people's hearts. And that's where we get a lot of our energy - the people, you know, invested. You know, they showed up, they paid their money for a ticket and they, they're supporting us, you know. We get a lot of energy from that.

Linda Espenshade

I think the audience feels it too. It feels like you've gift wrapped the song and you're giving it to the audience. How do you then refill? I mean, you have to. You're giving and giving. What is it that fills you?

Bekah

I personally like to sleep a lot before shows.

Joshua

Sleep is very important.

Bekah

We make sure we have healthy habits of drinking a lot of water.

Joshua

Tea.

Bekah

This might be a interesting little fact about Girl Named Tom: on our tour rider, what we request to be in every green room. We don't ask for just the red M&Ms. We ask for a veggie tray with hummus.

Joshua

LaCroix.

Bekah

Yeah. But yeah, that that helps us stay available.

Caleb

But when we get breaks, how do we refill?

Bekah

Oh, my word. I mean, being with loved ones, spending time outdoors. Taking time to listen to other music that really feeds our souls. Writing music, journaling, scrapbooking, trying to process what's happening is really important.

Joshua

Sports, I love sports, just mindless, mindlessly watching or, or playing, just, just getting outside. Active. Love that.

Bekah

Josh can play sports and be mindless, but I can't.
It takes a lot of me.

Linda Espenshade

Gotcha. I was listening to another interview with you where it seemed like Joshua was the competitive one. The Monopoly player. Yeah.

Caleb

Yeah, he goes for blood for that kind of stuff.

Joshua

I mean, I wouldn't say I'm competitive, but I always win. So.

Caleb

There you go.

Joshua

Just kidding.

Bekah

He doesn't have to be competitive; he always wins.

Linda Espenshade

Well, while we're in that frame of mind, I have some sort of popcorn questions to ask that might help people get to know you a little bit more. Like you're all in this band together. But you each have individual roles. You each have individual personalities. So I'm wondering which one of you is the planner, the one that makes sure all the details are taken care of?

Joshua

Probably Caleb

Bekah

Caleb

Caleb

Or it's Jenni, our manager.

Linda Espenshade

There you go. Who's the big picture person, the dreamer, the shoot for the moon person. Let's try it.

Caleb

I think usually it's Josh.

Josh

I often have the big picture in mind. I try to.

Bekah

And I think that Josh would take the most risks in that big picture. You know?

Caleb

Maybe. It's close, we all have moments, but Josh, is more that.

Linda Espenshade

Who's the worrier? Who's the one that thinks of all the things that can go wrong?

Caleb

Bekah

Joshua

Definitely Bekah

Bekah

Me

Joshua

Bekah has dreams, often.

Bekah

I do have dreams. Oh, no, Chicago's gonna hate us. Yeah. Oh, no, we're gonna... No, I do have dreams. I wore the wrong outfit tonight and I don't feel like myself. And I can't sing well, when that happens. Yeah, I do. I do spend a lot of time worrying even when, and I've gotten better at this, but even when I'm singing in the middle, is this a round enough tone? Is this too piercing for the audience? Is it too loud? And are they gonna want to walk out?

Caleb

Is it loud enough?

Bekah

Is it loud enough, can they hear me? Does it feel like I'm whispering... so I've gotten better with that, especially in the recording aspect. I used to be my own worst enemy in the recording booth.

Joshua

But she's gotten so much better.

Bekah

Yeah, the way you speak to yourself in your mind matters so much because it happens a lot.

Linda Espenshade

I can totally relate to that. Which one of you needs the time alone after you've just had too many concerts? And you just gotta have that time alone to regroup?

Caleb

Us both.

Joshua

Yeah, Caleb and I.

Caleb

Or before concerts, or all the time. No, I'm just kidding.

Joshua

Alone time is magic.

Caleb

Yes.

Bekah

I love being with people. That's where I find my energy. But the boys often disappear.

Linda Espenshade

All right. Who is the one who is calming everyone down before the concert? You've got the pre-stage jitters, I assume. And you're like, who? Who breaks the tension? Who calms everyone down or breaks the tension?

Caleb

Well, yeah, we have a ritual pre-show. And Josh leads us in a deep breath. And always has some good words to center everyone. We're usually all pretty calm. Yeah. But Josh, Josh likes to center us. And that's important.

Joshua

We were not calm on The Voice. We've gotten much more calm as we're going along here.

Caleb

On The Voice it was our vocal coach. She would calm us all down.

Joshua

I think that's in my mind. Like, we need to, we need to focus, we need to take deep breaths. But I'm, even though sometimes I'm leading that, I'm not super calm either in the moment, but just trying to calm myself, along with all of us, and just get our minds in the same place.

Linda Espenshade

That's cool. And last question, who is the one that raises the philosophical questions or the ethical questions? Where's the, you know: Should we be doing this? Where's the, you know: Where's the group? How does this reflect on us? That kind of thing?

Bekah

Oh, yeah, that's very important. I think we all ... definitely take part in those conversations. And it really matters to us that our vision, that we're staying true to ourselves, and that we're making a difference for the better in this world. So we enjoy those conversations. A lot of times when we have a full list of things to do, not a single one gets done because we just have a conversation that lasts for three plus hours about who knows what.

Joshua

We all lean into those pretty, without hesitation.

Caleb

I was gonna say we all sometimes pick our own battles, like pick different battles, sometimes when it comes to our brand or how, like ethical dilemmas. Sometimes Bekah will be passionate about something that I didn't think was important, or vice versa. But then usually we talk it out, and then we can get on the same page.

Linda Espenshade

I guess I want to ask you about your Mennonite background. You know, you grew up going to Zion Mennonite Church, I think it is. And Caleb and Joshua, you both graduated from Goshen, which is a Mennonite college. And I have to wonder, how does it, how do you put together the Mennonite upbringing that you had and your mission, your vision as a group? Is there a connection? Is there not a connection? What do you do with that?

Bekah

I mean, I think what a lot of people come to hear at a show is our harmony. And so we have the Mennonite church to thank for that harmony, being in our blood. Ever since we were young, our mom would have us stand on the pew beside her and she would hold the hymn book and trace the lines and sing different parts. She was really good at singing different parts. So just being bathed in that beautiful four-part harmony, often acapella, really sets the tone for what we do on stage, a lot of times.

Caleb

We used to take that for granted, I did, that singing in harmony is the default. Like, it's just the way it happens. But now that's not, that's not true. Now that we're in the great big world, we realized it's really special. So that's one huge connection.

Joshua

Yeah, I would say being Mennonite is one of the core identities that I have as a person, like that has been such a huge part of my life. Being homeschooled, we would sometimes go to Mennonite women at sewing. And that was, that was always so fun. And I, we just love our church's more global mindset that's rooted in us as well. And we learned a bunch of things about different cultures. And we would sing together in French, in Indonesian and all sorts of different languages.

Caleb

Yeah, I would say three big things that we take along with us on the road from the Mennonite church is first of all, service. Because like you said, we are giving a lot of ourselves every night on the road. But that's an important thing. That's, we've been doing, you know, service projects since we were little that we're not getting... we wouldn't get paid for those. But like, just being with people, living with them, like giving part of yourself to help them for a bit is like, that's part of life. That's what makes life beautiful. So don't question that; just keep doing it. It's cool. And then peace and justice. Just the importance of those values. And that comes from the Mennonite tradition, in our experience, and finding little ways to sneak little messages of peace and justice into our show is important.

Linda Espenshade

What are some examples of the little messages of peace and justice that you sneak into your shows? Or maybe you don't want to reveal that because ...

Caleb

Come find out! Bring your Mennonite bingo card to the next Girl Named Tom concert and see if you win a prize.

Bekah

See if you strike it rich. Um, yeah, I think just setting our differences aside, and enjoying music together is really important to us. That everyone who walks through the door feels welcomed and feels valued. And yeah, we encourage honesty in our sets, though it can be really hard to be honest with yourself and others. It's very important. We encourage dreaming and using your God-given gifts to create a better world. We're very intentional about the lyrics that we're singing and that the people can understand our lyrics. This too shall pass is a good one.

Joshua

You covered that, I would say, but we have a Christmas song that's going to be coming out. That kind of approaches this a little bit. It says like, "It's easy to wish for snow when you have someone to hold. It's easy to love the cold when you have somewhere to go." It's like that kind of thing.

Caleb

Recognizing our privilege.

Joshua

Yeah, recognizing privilege and trying to ask for less and give more. It feels like it's very Mennonite value. And ...

Caleb

Actually, Linda, you'll love this song. By the time this podcast airs this song will be out, so you'll be able to listen to it. It's called *Isn't That What Christmas Is For?* And did you ever have a, an Advent candle situation in the middle of your table?

Linda

Sure.

Caleb

With like five candles?

Linda Espenshade

Yes.

Caleb

Yeah. Do you know what those four candles on the outside represent? The middle one is Christ I believe. And then apparently the four on the outside represent something.

Linda Espenshade

I just thought they were for the four weeks before Christmas.

Caleb

That's true.

Linda Espenshade

I could be wrong.

Caleb

Every week has a word. I think it's like hope, love, joy and peace. Yeah, and all very Christmassy emotions. Are those emotions, what are those?

Joshua

Values? Fruits of the Spirit.

Bekah Liecht

They are fruits of the Spirit.

Caleb

I don't know what they are. But in this song, we go around each of those hope, joy, love and peace and that's one of those little nuggets that we've inserted.

Linda Espenshade

That's very exciting, and I'm really happy, really excited to hear that you're gonna have this Christmas album coming out. By the time this comes out, it will be available.

Caleb and Joshua

Yeah.

Linda Espenshade

Can they get it through your website?

Bekah

We will not have physical copies of our Christmas album available. But everything is on streaming platforms like Apple Music and Spotify. Anywhere you listen to music.

Joshua

iTunes.

Bekah

YouTube, it's all free on YouTube.

Caleb

Next Christmas, we'll probably have a print or an actual CD out. Yeah, but there's not enough time this this year.

Joshua

You can just go to our website, girlnamedtom.com and find it there, I'm sure.

Linda Espenshade

Great. Okay. I'd like to ask you a few more things related to MCC. For starters, you performed at MCC relief sales before you were famous. You know, why? Why MCC?

Bekah

Well, they asked us to sing. And we support MCC so we would love to share our music. And we got to perform with Hometown in Kidron, Ohio. That was really fun to share a concert with them. We just love singing opportunities, and we love MCC. So it's a perfect match.

Caleb

Support for MCC runs deep in our family. Our grandparents Wayne and Lavita I think have been supporting MCC. When did MCC start?

Joshua

It was World War 1...

Linda Espenshade

I'm sorry, 1920. We just celebrated our centennial or 100th birthday, the centennial in 2020.

Caleb

So I guess not, ever since like the Great Depression at least and World War II, our grandparents have been involved with MCC. And so like Grandpa Wayne would absolutely love that we're doing this interview with you all right now and that we've continued our relationship with MCC. It's special.

Joshua

Yeah. And I took an "Anabaptism in a Global Context" class at Goshen with the great John Roth. And, yeah, it was fascinating to learn about MCC's roots. And what really sets MCC apart is that they don't really, they started without having the intention of like, you know, building seminaries or schools to like evangelize folks. And they just really saw a need and went in to support and help people because that's what you do. And that's what Jesus would do. And I just love that. I think that really sets MCC apart from other programs that have these, you know other intentions other than just helping people. Yeah, so that's why I just fully support what MCC is doing and love it.

Caleb

And to be clear, we have performed with MCC since we've been quote-unquote famous. We did something in Upland, California, for a relief sale there.

Beckah

That's right.

Caleb

For a relief sale there. There are Mennonites in California.

Linda Espenshade

There are Mennonites in California. And we are very, very grateful for them. And yes, that's right you did do a concert there, and that's fun. So to add to the Christmas fun, I'm wondering if you will participate in looking at our Christmas guide. You know, our Christmas guide lets you choose a gift for a friend. You give the money to MCC. But you send a note to your friend who says, "Oh, you remembered me by giving money to MCC's special project. So on mcc.org/christmas- 16 - there are a lot of choices of Christmas presents you could give to a friend while actually giving them to MCC. So, I'm curious if you would pick, which ones you would pick and who you would give it to?

Caleb

We're scrolling here through mcc.org/christmas and we see you can give a gift of a goat.

Joshua

I love goats for random reasons.

Caleb

Josh loves goats

Caleb

Fish. You could buy a whole farmyard. Wow. You can donate.

Bekah

Keep girls in school.

Joshua

That's cool.

Bekah

Fruit trees, sewing machine.

Caleb

I was looking at it earlier and I saw this eco-friendly stove. It says this gift honors women and the planet. They're designed in Malawi. And I have great memories of camping with a friend named Mark Kreider in Colorado. So I would, I would buy this eco-friendly stove and send it on to him.

Bekah

That's so sweet.

Linda Espenshade

Fantastic.

Bekah

This is such a cool thing because it's personal, like you just said Caleb. You're banking on a memory that you have with your friend. But it's actually making such a difference instead of you just giving him something he might not even need. A warm winter coat. Wow.

Joshua

Oh man. Wait, what's this? The emergency food basket? I might do the emergency food basket for my friend Isaac Longenecker because he always had this phrase that I thought was hilarious. He'd say, "You got to eat big to get big." So I'd give Isaac the emergency food basket. Although I do love goats.

Linda Espenshade

What about you, Bekah? Which one lights your fire?

Bekah

I mean, I really like the coat. The coat would just be, because it's such a, you know, something that we can take for granted can make such a difference.

Joshua

Who would you give it to?

Bekah

I will give it to my friend Tessa, because we have prided ourselves on having the same coats. I've had my coat since eighth grade. So we're going on eight years.

Caleb

Oh, I thought you both had the same design of coat.

Bekah

Oh, we kind of do. But we like to make them last really long. So that's what I would choose -- the coat.

Joshua

That's great.

Linda Espenshade

I was looking at it and thinking, man, we should have a gift of music on there somewhere and we don't. So next year.

Bekah

I think the goats can sing pretty well.

Caleb

You can skin them and make a drum.

Bekah

Noooo! Don't say that, no, no, no, no.

Joshua

That's great. The whole goat will be put to use.

Caleb

That's right.

Bekah

It will not. Poor guy!

Linda Espenshade

Let's talk Pentatonix. How did that come about? And how awesome an opportunity is that?

Bekah

Oh my goodness, we've been looking up to Pentatonix for years. I think they started putting out YouTube videos soon after, like 2010, 2011. And we would watch every single YouTube video. Their harmonies are incredible. We're so excited to be on tour with them.

Joshua

Caleb and I would sing, well, we would all sing their songs together. But Caleb and I, at a talent show in high school we would, every year we sing the new Pentatonix song with a group of friends. That was always fun.

Caleb

Yeah, it happened because we have a great team here in Nashville that goes to bat for us every day and is just trying to set up opportunities for us that they think would be a good fit. And one of our agents, John Huie, who we got connected to through some random Mennonite connections, by the way, he saw this opportunity and was like, "That would be perfect for Girl Named Tom. Let's try to make that happen."

Joshua

We got so lucky with our team. We're just so blessed. And they help every day.

Joshua

We did have the opportunity to write with a member of Pentatonix, Scott Hoying. And so he, well, it's not a surprise because it's already out.

Caleb

Oh duh.

Joshua

They're like, don't spoil the surprise. But yeah, we were able to write with him and we feel like we've made a really cool song together called "Homesick Melody." And yeah, it's out everywhere. You can listen to it now.

Caleb

It's on the Christmas album. He sings on it, which is amazing.

Joshua

Yeah. And that was just a really, really special moment in our young careers.

Bekah

They're amazing people. We really respect how they treat others and get along so well as a team and as a unit.

Linda Espenshade

I am so ... by the time this airs, I will be anticipating coming to see you guys in Hershey, Pennsylvania. So that's my Christmas, my husband's and my Christmas present to each other. So speaking of Christmas, do you guys get to have a Christmas with your family? What are you looking forward to this Christmas?

Joshua

So it's really nice as the music industry just shuts down over Christmas, for like two weeks. We won't be calling our manager every day, and we love our manager, but like, we can just have some space. And...

Bekah

Yeah, space from work, and to be with the family, make new memories. And this Christmas is going to be really, really different and hard for us. So just to, to process that and rest in the memories together will be really special.

Joshua

And to see our grandma, both our grandmas, very excited for that. Yeah, yeah, we'll be able to be together with with family for lots of it.

Linda Espenshade

I will promo the really cool show that you did with one of your grandmas.

Bekah

Oh, yeah, that was so fun.

Linda Espenshade

I just like watching this and seeing how you interact with your grandma and seeing how your grandma was so proud of you guys. And I was just like... so listeners, go online and look up Girl Named Tom and grandma.

Bekah

That was such a fun show.

Linda Espenshade

All right. Any questions you have for us or anything you want to know?

Caleb

I'm curious, is MCC involved with sending aid or being a presence in Ukraine at all right now?

Linda Espenshade

We are, actually. That's one of our very big responses right now. We're sending, we're sending material aid. So like our very practical kits, relief kits, hygiene kits, canned meat, blankets, comforters that people, a lot of people, hand make them to send to Ukraine. We have partners in Ukraine. And we are able to get the supplies to them through Poland. And so we've been receiving pictures and so forth from our partners there and people are just in real need. Many of them have just lost everything. And so our partners are working to give that emergency response. But they're also keyed into the trauma response. So we anticipate that we'll be working there for quite some time. Ironically, you'd asked earlier about when MCC began and MCC began 100 years ago in what is now Ukraine. So it's kind of ironic that we have this major response in Ukraine, where we first started responding to Russian refugees in 2020 [1920].

Joshua

Wow, it's crazy how history ...

Linda Espenshade

repeats itself. I guess one last thing I think about is I just want to underline, like, the positivity that comes from you guys. Like, we've got a world like Ukraine. We've got a world where we're talking about nuclear war. We're talking about climate change and all those things. And yet you guys exude a sense of positivity that gives us all a little break from that. You know, and I wonder where that, how do you do that?

Bekah

I like to say that it's the light that's been shown to us by so many amazing examples in our church and our family, people who have gone before us, and either, even musicians, like interviews that we read that we don't even know them. But we just tried to soak up all of that wisdom and share it and try to embody what we've been shown, you know, and be that light that we have been shown whenever we come into contact with anyone. Because everyone deserves it.

Joshua

Yeah, and I would say it's the natural state for the human experience is to be positive and and an optimist. And, we see that need in our world today; the need for harmony and just loving each other. That's what everybody wants, really everybody wants that. So it's a gift to ourselves, honestly, to just be able to live into that. And then, yeah, just seeing the need and people walking away with a little bit more hope, a little more love. That's the goal.

Caleb

And I would add, those are all already great. So maybe you don't have to include this. But there's something that came up when you asked that question. And I think it's very important when being positive and gifting positivity, to be mindful about what you're putting in. Right, like what I'm consuming in the media, or in relationships, or with self-talk, like, like Bekah was saying earlier, it really matters. And sometimes I feel like we're in a bubble of positivity, because maybe it's not so real. But where what we experience on a day to day, what we're putting in, is positivity, because people are coming to see us, and they're like, 'Wow, this is our best day of the week. This is the best day of the month. Let's just be happy today.' So it's like, what do we have to be bitter about or complain about now?

If we spend enough time watching the news, now that starts coming back in> And I do believe fully that it's a responsibility, especially people with some amount of public influence to be educated on current events. But there is something to the idea of, of being careful to let positivity in, too, and like, because then you have positivity to give back out to the world. And so I guess since we're, we're given so much positivity from all of y'all on a daily basis. Maybe that's really what makes it easy for us to turn around and give it right back. Does that make any sense?

Joshua

Totally.

Linda Espenshade

It does make a lot of sense. And I just want to say thank you. Not just for talking with us today. But talking with you has been a gift and your thinking, your attitudes, your perspectives. It's been a gift. So thank you for this gift to me and to all our listeners.

Bekah

Thank you so much. We appreciate you

Linda Espenshade

Well, I wish you guys the best. Yeah. All right. Have a great day. Bye Bye.

That was such a fun conversation! I hope you all enjoyed listening to it as much as I enjoyed having it. Now, I like them even more!

I especially appreciate their vulnerability when talking about the death of their dad. This Christmas, many of us carry grief as we gather with family and as we sing our favorite Christmas songs. Let's give each other grace throughout this holiday season as we encounter people who carry pain we can't see.

We can also help to encourage people around the world by choosing an item from MCC's Christmas giving guide, like Bekah, Caleb and Joshua did. We hope you do the same, finding a personal connection or story to accompany the gifts you give in honor of a friend or family member. You can find a link to the Christmas Giving guide in the show notes.

Of course, who doesn't want a Girl Named Tom Christmas album, available on a streaming service near you. It is currently on repeat at my house and hopefully in yours this season, too. If you're here are a fan of Girl Named Tom and don't know too much about MCC, there is a link to our website in the show notes where you can explore our work as a nonprofit that does relief, development and peace for all in the name of Christ.

You have been listening to Relief, Development and Podcast. This episode was produced on the traditional land of the Algonquin, Lenape, Nanticoke, Piscataway, Shawnee and Susquehannock people groups.

This episode was produced by me, Linda Espenshade, and Christy Kauffman. The head producer is Emily Loewen.

Thanks for listening, and I'll let Girl Named Tom sing us out with their new Christmas Song, "Isn't that what Christmas is for?"

**Isn't That What Christmas Is For?" by Girl Named Tom plays till the end of the episode*