

Tribute to Johnny Cash by Kris Kristofferson –
9/15/03 at First Baptist
Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee

“I’d like to begin with a prayer; Thank you Father for blessing us with the presence of this wonderful man whose life and work has been an inspiration and salvation for so many all over the world. Comfort the members of his beloved family who are experiencing the shock and grief of losing both John and June in what seems like the blink of an eye, and let us find strength in the knowledge that their love and kindness and generosity live on in the hearts of those whose lives they touched. We ask this in the name of your son and our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

“John once accused me of writing *The Pilgrim: Ch. 33* about him. He was surely a walking contradiction. A deeply spiritual, compassionate man, willing and able to champion the voiceless, the downtrodden, the underdogs, who was also something of a Holy Terror. Abe Lincoln with a wild side. He was a dark, dangerous force of nature that somehow seemed to stand for Freedom, and Justice, and mercy for his fellow man. And he always has. And he always will. All over the world. Over the years he evolved into the patriarchal figure that well-hid the wild boy and revealed the heart of a man in love with his wife and his kids, and your kids, and my kids, and eventually everybody. He represented the best of America. We’re not going to see his like again.

I can’t really talk about John without talking about June because they were a team. When I was a janitor at Columbia Records I pitched him every song I ever wrote, giving them to June or Luther Perkins. They took me in like part of the family. They did that with a lot of us. Guys like Mickey Newbury, and Shel Silverstein, and Vince Matthews, and Chris Gantry. When we got too starved of any positive feedback, we would work up the courage to call and see if we were welcome to visit them. I don’t recall them ever turning us down. And we always left them with our spiritual batteries recharged and ready for the battle for acceptance in the magical world of music. They were kind and generous people, as they would later be with our families. My kids love them like grandparents and my wife thinks they are the sweetest people on the planet. I’d like to sing this for John, June and the family...”

(Song: “*A Moment of Forever*”)