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The Candy Man

By Ruth Schenk | rschenk@secc.org

Two years ago, with the economy on life support, Southeast member Bill McGee felt the weight of failure.

Waking up in a cold sweat at 3 a.m. happened often. So did the drumbeat of cardiac stress. Foreclosure was a possibility. So was closing down Heart and Soul Candies, the business he had started in 2005.

By then, McGee had been on the mountaintop and in the valley. A longtime member of Southeast, he moved to Malibu, Calif., in the 1990s, believing

God had opened the door to produce family-friendly feature films.

He'd been a familiar face at Southeast, writing and starring in dramas that illustrated sermon topics.

Church members laughed until tears ran down their faces when they watched McGee's skit on financial freedom. To illustrate the point, two men tried to make the envelope system of budgeting work as they tried to buy a boat. He also starred in early Easter Pageants and sang with the worship team.

Bill and his wife, Hillary, moved to California in a U-Haul truck.

"How many wives would drive that far in a U-Haul with a 2-year-old and being six months pregnant," Bill said. "She had to have even more faith than me."

In California for 11 years, McGee talked faith with big movie producers, actors and musicians.

"It was a landscape for sharing faith," McGee said. "So many had never had a church experience. They'd never seen the reality of faith or been to a Bible study."

The McGees were far different than most of the people in their path.

They never had the trappings of life in Malibu—not the big house, the toys, the gold fixtures or mansions with thousands of square feet of living space.



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But they did have something that money or fame couldn't buy—a personal relationship with God.

Time and time again, it seemed that success was just a breath away as McGee met with Disney, with 12 different major production companies and heard big excitement about his work. Agents told him to stay close to the phone and fasten his seatbelt for Hollywood success, but it never happened.

Looking back, McGee still sees purpose in those years.

"Life is a journey," he said. "While I was there, I had incredible opportunities to talk about faith with major filmmakers. I spoke at the Director's Guild and at big black-tie affairs. I still stay in touch with many today."

At one big event when McGee was slated to speak on a panel about violence in films before "The Passion of the Christ" debuted with an R rating, McGee told the crowd, "I'm sick and tired of seeing films about my Savior, my best friend, where there are little drops of blood on His face as He suffered and died. That's not how it happened."

Thinking he had alienated the entire crowd, McGee started to leave the building when he noticed a crowd of about 30 people who stayed afterward to talk about faith.

McGee returned to Louisville in 2005 and founded Heart and Soul Candies, a company that sells boxed candy with Scripture verses.

He is careful about design and marketing. His goal is to have a "touch of excellence and a touch of faith." The vision of the company is to give cheerfully and generously to good works. Their mission is to "love God with all of our heart, soul and strength."

For a while, McGee "just got by."

"I was at rock bottom, unable to sleep at 3 a.m., when I pulled out my Bible and began to read," McGee said. "I'd been so worried. I had to take my eyes off myself."

That's when things began to turn around.

On Oct. 30, 2010, McGee met with a representative from Walmart who recognized him from a day he'd told his faith story at a youth event. The two talked about faith as much as business. McGee left that meeting with a \$549,000 order for Christmas chocolate.

"I was bawling when I called Hillary," he said. "It doesn't happen in my life often, but I felt that God had gone before me to that meeting."

Three weeks later, McGee met with a buyer who saw the Christmas boxes. His team needed an inspirational heart box. McGee left the meeting with another big order.

He cried again.

Now Heart and Soul Candies are in retail stores such as Meijer, Walmart and LifeWay and were the national fundraiser for the American Heritage Girls.

A good team allows him to spend a lot of time with his C-Group of young teen boys at Southeast. He and Hillary are Discovery coaches, helping new members get involved in the church.

McGee and Lead Team Pastor Greg Allen have been accountability partners for decades.

"Bill is a genuine goofball and clown, loving humor in almost every situation," Allen said. "But more important, Bill is a genuine Christ-follower who lives out his faith with everyone he meets. God put him in California with big-name celebrities. He never made a movie or recorded a famous song, but movers and shakers in the industry still call Bill because they know he is a true Christ-follower."

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