



## DON SCHLITZ: FROM “THE GAMBLER” TO THE GRAMMYS

After five years of trying to get his songs recorded in Nashville, Don Schlitz hit the jackpot with “The Gambler.” The 1978 country single by Kenny Rogers shot to #1, earned a Grammy, and became a classic. Its success allowed Schlitz to quit his night job as a computer operator at Vanderbilt University in Nashville so he could make music full-time.

Born in 1952 in Durham, North Carolina, Schlitz grew up loving to read. He became interested in the family’s set of encyclopedias (books with facts about many different subjects arranged in alphabetical order), which he says helped him become “very familiar with words.” During church, he studied the hymnal, figuring out different beats and rhyme patterns of the songs. Although he says his first writing was “really bad poetry,” he kept trying to put his own words to music.

At age twenty, Schlitz dropped out of college and moved to Nashville. He worked at Vanderbilt at night and spent his days trying to get his songs published. One day his friend, Bob McDill, gave Schlitz some advice. Don said he waited for inspiration and only wrote ten songs a year. McDill responded, “You’ll always get those ten songs. Your job is to write forty more a year that can be sung on the radio.”

That advice paid off. In the 1980s, Schlitz’s many credits included “Forever and Ever, Amen,” a



Grammy-winning song for Randy Travis. Schlitz also has composed hits for Alabama, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, and George Strait, all future members of the Country Music Hall of Fame. Schlitz was inducted

*Continued on back*

### LISTEN

“Forever and Ever, Amen,” written with Paul Overstreet (Randy Travis); “Deeper than the Holler,” (Randy Travis); “The Greatest” (Kenny Rogers); “When You Say Nothing at All,” written with Paul Overstreet (Keith Whitley, Alison Krauss)



## DON SCHLITZ: FROM “THE GAMBLER” TO THE GRAMMYS (CONTINUED)

into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1993, the national Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2012, and the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2017.



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. In paragraph two, what does Schlitz say helped him become “very familiar with words” and what helped him learn about rhyme patterns?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Circle the word “composed” in the fourth paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word. Then, define the term in your own words.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. According to Schlitz, “The most important thing a writer can do is read.” What impact did reading have on Schlitz’s life?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_