

# LEANING ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS

*Anthony J. Showalter, Music; Showalter & Elisha Hoffman, Lyrics; 1887*

“*Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*” is a hymn published in 1887 with music from the tune: SHOWALTER written by Anthony J. Showalter (1858-1929) and lyrics by Showalter and Elisha Hoffman (1839-1929); Showalter wrote the refrain for the song.

There was a time in when only those who could afford private lessons were able to sing by music. Through the persistence of a musician called Lowell Mason, music became an official subject in the schools. Songbooks were published and trained music-masters were sent into rural America to teach. Professor A.J. Showalter was one such music-master. One day in 1887, after music class had been dismissed, he made his way back to his boarding house where he had two letters from former students in South Carolina. Coincidentally, both letters brought tragic sad news that each student had just recently and suddenly lost his wife. He wanted to console his two young friends with the Bible verse, Deuteronomy 33:27, “*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*”. He paused, and realized in that single line of Scripture lay the theme of a great hymn. Since he had taught them to read and they could sing then why not write them a song of comfort instead of a letter? Quickly he wrote the chorus:

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms,  
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

He sent the chorus off to the Rev. Elisha Hoffman in Pennsylvania. Hoffman, himself the author of over 2,000 hymns, very soon produced three beautiful verses. When Showalter received Hoffman's finished work he wrote the music for it and another great hymn was born.

This hymn has been used in several movies, including, “*The Human Comedy*” (1943), “*The Night of the Hunter*” (1955), “*Wild Bill*” (1995), “*Next of Kin*” (1989), and “*True Grit*” (2010). It was also used in a Guinness Beer commercial titled “*Empty Chair*” which was produced by Human Worldwide Inc. It has been performed and recorded by such artists as Iris Dement, George Jones, Alan Jackson, and Mahalia Jackson.

~Tull