

Bob Jordan



If This Dream Stands

Lyrics: Illustrated and Annotated

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Old Black Snake

Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting fat
Dress em up and give em their own tv show, a chipmunk's still a rat.
Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting bold
That old black snake kept em back on their heels, but that black snake was old

One day, he's stretched across the garden, one day, he's gliding along the wall
One day, he's hanging from the screen door, you didn't see him there at all

Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting brave
Everyday another one shows his head, like he rose up from the grave
Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting near
That old black snake kept em running for their lives, when that black snake was here

One day he's curled around the ficus, one day his nose is all you see
one day he crawled up to the window, you saw him looking in at me

Was he saying goodbye? Was that a star in the black of his eye?
Was he saying goodbye? Was he sly, or was he high, or was he dying to fly?

Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting close
Scrambling like crazy for the nearest hole, like they've seen an old black ghost
Something must have happened to that old black snake, the chipmunks are getting smart
The old black snake lost his appetite or life, or did he just lose heart

One day he's slithered up the pear tree, one day he's draped across the welcome mat
One day he's there, the next he's not
Hey Mr. Chipmunk, do you know where he's at?

The old black snake
Something must have happened to
The old black snake
Something must have happened to
The old black snake
Something must have happened....



One day I was floundering around for song ideas so I stepped onto the deck for a break. I looked across the yard and saw chipmunks everywhere. Scampering about, in and out of holes, chasing each other like giddy kids at recess. I said aloud, "something must have happened to the old black snake, we are getting overrun with chipmunks." One of those Aha moments. I went inside, wrote down that line, and the rest of the song followed.

I'm happy to report that the old black snake, or his offspring, has returned. In fact, on two different occasions, a pair of mating snakes has fallen off our roof, intertwined like a caduceus, coiled together in apparent ecstasy. I'm not sure. It's hard to read a snake's face.

But I wonder where the babies went.....

1965

People marching in the southland
Black and white walking hand in hand
Risking their lives to take a stand
Freedom for every woman and man

Take me back to 1965

When dreams seemed real and hope was still alive
That spirit's weak, but it can be revived.

Take me back to 1965

Thousands rallying in Washington
Trying to put an end to war gone wrong
Chanting for peace in the face of guns
Feeling the strength of the many as one

Take me back to 1965

When dreams seemed real and hope was still alive
That spirit's weak, but it can be revived.

Take me back to 1965

Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Motown floating on the air
I Feel Fine and Rubber Soul The Beatles everywhere
Sam Cooke sang, "a change is gonna come" are you aware
The music always takes me there.

Take me back to 1965

When dreams seemed real and hope was still alive
That spirit's weak, but it can be revived.

Take me back to 1965

Take me back to 1965



I know what you're thinking: "Dude you were only 11 in 1965. And you were just a country boy from the backwoods of north Louisiana. What did you know about what was going on?"

Well, not much of course. But seeing the Beatles on TV the year before, I got interested in what lay beyond my limited horizons. I started absorbing as much music as I could, and with it a great deal of cultural awareness. This coincided with the explosion of television news. Suddenly the world, in living color, erupted from our screens into our living rooms.

To me, the 60s were the most interesting decade I've lived in so far. Although this one is getting there. But the 60s saw regular people standing up for what they believed in, demanding an end to war and social injustice, and pushing popular music farther than anyone had imagined to that point.

What's not to love about 1965? Take me back.



Photo of Angie taken in the Shennandoah National Park by my old friend Robert Jacobs, another person who found his art later in life. Love you brother.

My story with Angie is far too long for this space. If you haven't heard it, let me know.

This is the first complete song I ever wrote, with the help of my son-in-law, Ryan Stout, a fine songwriter himself. When I played it for Angie, she said, "that's really beautiful! I love it."

Later she came to me and said, "Wait a minute. Aren't you saying that you can't sleep at night because I won't close the blinds and the moonlight streaming through the window keeps you awake?"

I thought about it a long moment.

"Yes, that's true. But it's still a love song."

I have to tell you though, I love sleeping with the blinds open and the moon shining through the window.

It's magic. So is she.

STAR STRUCK LOVER

The sun goes down, she raises the blinds
She likes to hang on to the light
And she dreams in her bed, with stars overhead
Wrapped in the dazzling night

I close my book, turn down the lamp
Lie with her under the cover
The moon fills the sky, and opens my eyes
To wonder at my star struck lover

Some folks shut the door on the dark
Hide behind latches and bars
She embraces the night, as if she'll take flight
My lover, struck by the stars

Some folks fill the night with demons
That crawl out from under their beds
She rides with the moon, on its Milky Way swoon
My lover, with stars in her head

When Orion stands tall, I often awake
Zodiacs forming above her
Try as I might, I can't sleep in the light
Rising from my start struck lover



EMPTY TRAINS

Took a drive past our old place
Someone had torn your greenhouse down
Where you stood lost in a jungle of ferns
Nothing but bare ground

Down the street, where we used to walk
Trees seem so much taller
Houses fall back in deeper shade
They seem so much smaller

I have to stop in the middle of nowhere and wait on a train
Hieroglyphs on open boxcars I can't explain
No brakeman waving from the window, guess that they're gone too
Nothing but a nearly empty train passing through

On the bluff, above the lights
Where we saw things clear
The world looked so far away
Now it feels too near.

By the road headed out of town
Is that sign still there
Says, "Good to see you, come back soon"
Like anybody cares

I have to stop in the middle of nowhere and wait on a train
Hieroglyphs on open boxcars I can't explain
No brakeman waving from the window, guess that they're gone too
Nothing but a nearly empty train passing through
Nothing but me and this empty train passing through



This song of love lost isn't about a particular person. When my mother passed away in early 2019, I spent several weeks by her bedside. When it got to be too much, I would get in my car and ride around all my old haunts: houses where I'd lived, roads I'd driven, places that held cherished memories. This ratcheted up the emotional intensity of an already difficult time.

I knew that when mom was gone, I wouldn't be coming back to north Louisiana very often any more.

So I took those feelings and transferred them to an imaginary romantic relationship. Some of the detail here is imagined, but the sense of loss is real, and I hope it rings true.

JOHNNY SHINES

You may not know me, my name is Johnny Shines
You may not know me, my name is Johnny Shines
I followed Robert Johnson
Up and down them highway lines

We played on city streets, we played in backwoods bars
Played on city streets, played in backwoods bars
Ate whatever food they gave us
Drank their whiskey out of jars

Then he'd move on
Wouldn't say a word and he'd be gone
A man made of the blues don't stay too long
Move on, time to move on

Woman catch his eye, he'd play just to make her smile
Woman catch his eye, he'd play and she would smile
Her man would want to kill him
We'd be gone a hundred mile

Guitars in a juke joint, place burned to the ground
Left our guitars in a juke joint, place burned to the ground
He played his harp and danced and sang
Crowd of people gathered round

Then he'd move on
Wouldn't say a word and he'd be gone
A man made of the blues don't stay too long
Move on, time to move on

Heaven in his music, hellfire in his eyes
Heaven in his music, hellfire in his eyes
When he was dead at twenty seven
Wasn't much surprise

He's gone, I keep moving down the line
Robert Johnson's gone, I follow him down the line
His music runs like lightning
Up and down my spine

Then he'd move on
Wouldn't say a word and he'd be gone
A man made of the blues don't stay too long
Move on, time to move on

So remember me, my name is Johnny Shines
Remember me please, my name is Johnny Shines
I saw Robert Johnson standing
At the crossroad signs

I'm not a huge blues fan but I love acoustic delta blues. I hadn't heard of Johnny Shines until I saw a documentary about Robert Johnson on Netflix. They interviewed Shines, who was Johnson's musical partner in his heyday.

His stories were so compelling I took notes and, when the movie was done, went into my studio and wrote this lyric.

The music came later, while I was working on this recording. I liked the song so much it bumped another song from the record.

ORPHAN'S DOOR

Your mother died when you were only four
Your father left you at the orphan's door
And drove away
He just drove away

You spent your youth in loveless foster homes
Working for room and board on stranger's farms
You couldn't play
They wouldn't let you play

And when a son appeared before your eyes
I guess it must have come as some surprise
To see the child lost inside, looking up at you

You became a man in World War II
Bullets filled the air, searching for you
You didn't run
There was nowhere to run
I can't imagine how a man of peace
In constant terror with no release
Didn't come undone
You stayed 'til it was done

And when a son reached up to take your hand
You couldn't find the strength to help him stand
So in your heart you left him where your dad left you


You spent your last days, silent in your bed
The voice you never found trapped in your head
You slipped away
You just slipped away
How many stories did you never tell
How many really knew you well
So much to say
You left so much to say

And when a son tried to let you go
He wished there was a way to let you know
We're all left standing at the orphan's door
The orphan's door



My dad and I didn't have the easiest relationship. And he died when I was 30, long before I figured out I was as much to blame for that as he was. I never got a chance to talk with him about it. I needed more from him than he was capable of giving. But he gave me more than his father ever gave him. His story in the song is true, I changed his age from two to four because it rhymed with door. So it was even worse. He had an unbelievably tough life. I doubt I would have done as well. Here's to you Pop.

Three Chords and the Truth



I dreamed that I saw Johnny Cash step through a ring of fire
He said I'm sorry, son, to bother you but the situation's dire.
A simple song about what's true is all that we desire.
What they're playing on the radio makes Harlan Howard a liar.

Country music used to be three chords and the truth,
Now it's rap and pop, bad rock with fiddles, prefabbed for the youth
Don't need heavy metal riffs, don't need no hip hop grooves
Just play me a song with three chords and the truth

He asked me if I drove a truck, I had to tell him no
Is that a beer you're drinking, I said, No it's diet coke
He begged not to write a song, just to make some dough
But without them country cliché's that is one tough row to hoe

Country music used to be three chords and the truth,
Now it's slicker than the cow manure on my thousand dollar boots
Don't need heavy metal riffs, don't need no hip hop grooves
Just play me a song with three chords and the truth

What's the use of writing songs if they can't be a hit
A song makes money who's to care if it ain't worth aspit

Drove myself to Nashville to the country hall of fame
Rotunda full of bronze plaques bearing country's greatest names
The songs they wrote came from the heart now it's just a numbers game
For this current crop of country crap they'll need a hall of shame

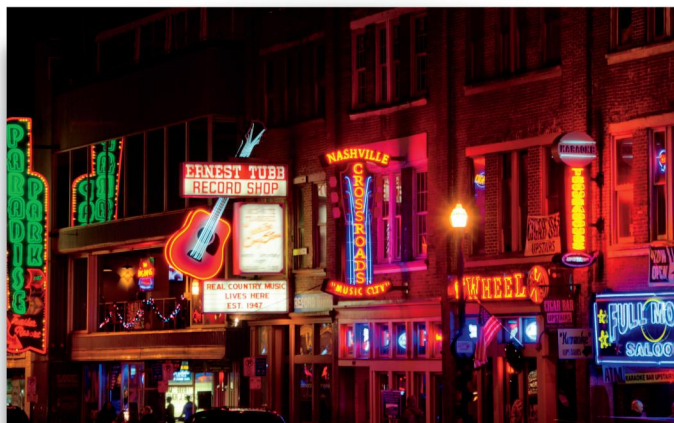
Country music used to be three chords and the truth,
Now it's L.A. models grinding in designer Daisy Dukes
Don't need heavy metal riffs, don't need no hip hop grooves
Just play me "The Ring of Fire" it's three chords and the truth
Just play me "The Ring of Fire" it's three chords and the truth

I'd like to comment on this song but my tongue is planted too firmly in my cheek. You may have noticed the extra chords at the end. It's complicated to pronounce judgment on music that many people seem to enjoy.

Lots of people everywhere, including Nashville, have written songs for money. Nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with catering to popular taste.

I can't say it's wrong. I can't even say it's bad.
I can only say I don't like it.

The quote about bad rock with fiddles comes from the late great Tom Petty. A flat out rocker who could appreciate a really good country song.



Things That Keep Me Up at Night

Sheet's too cold, pillow's too hot
I can't stop thinking about all I'm not
All the should haves and could have beens
I can't get settled in this bag of skin

Is this heartburn or a heart attack
Who's out there talking behind my back
I see you by the bed, I see you at the door
I see you in the dark, more and more and more

The things that keep me up at night
Thoughts that creep up when I turn out the light
I cannot sleep when something's not right
These things keep me up at night

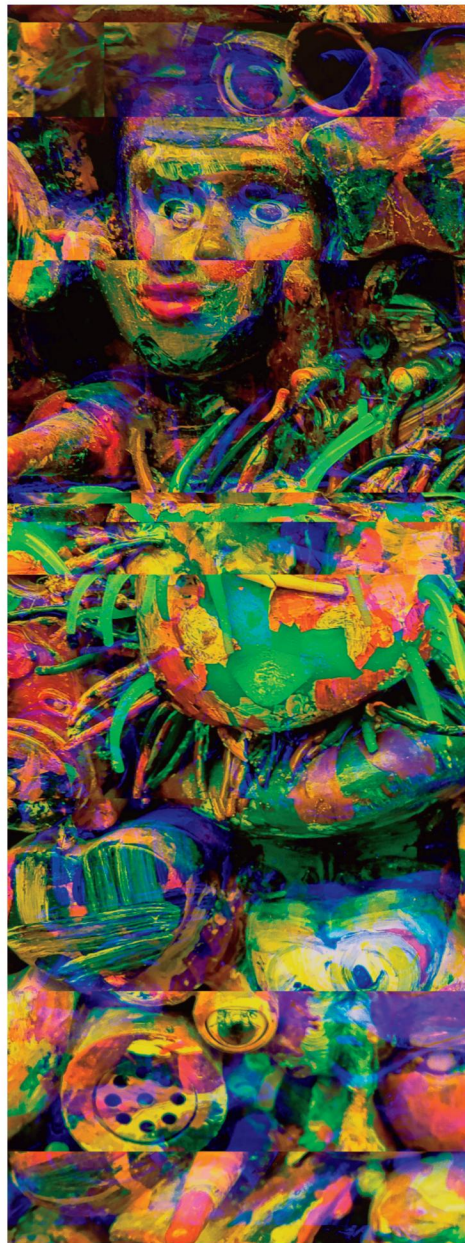
My legs are cramping, my ears they ring
Songs are playing in my head, I have to sing
Did I lock the door, what was that noise
Sleep is a gift, it's not a choice

The things that keep me up at night
Thoughts that creep up when I turn out the light
I cannot sleep when something's not right
These things keep me up at night

I toss and turn, and I get tangled in my head
You could never rest in such a messy bed

My mind grows quiet I can hear you say
You had a feeling it would end this way
Hard words and harder smiles
I lie here, wonder was it all worthwhile

The things that keep me up at night
Thoughts that creep up when I turn out the light
I cannot sleep when something's not right
These things keep me up at night
These things keep me up at night
These things keep me up at night



I wrote this song as an exercise in John Gorka's class my first year at the Swannanoa Gathering. He gave us the prompt, things that keep me up at night. I made a long list (I'm a part time insomniac), and it quickly became a song.

The Swannanoa Gathering is like fantasy camp for musicians and songwriters. You take classes with some legendary recording artists. Gorka has always been one of my favorites.

My best Swannanoa moment came the next year, in Tom Paxton's class. He asked us to write a modern protest song. When I played mine for class, he exclaimed, "that's a great song!" I want to believe he meant it.

Tom Paxton, by the way, was in the room when Dylan wrote "Like a Rolling Stone." At least that's how he tells it. He was already in the village singing his own songs when Dylan arrived in the early 60's.

The Gathering is truly amazing.

SUMMER MORNING (End of the World)

Summer morning, sunrise early
make it to another dawn
Dreams chase the night, head swirly
Put the kettle on

What to make of this day that is calling?
Should I try to keep everything from falling?
Or let it flow. Flow down

Spending money, spending time,
Can't keep track of all I spent
Waste the moments, save the dimes
Don't remember where it went

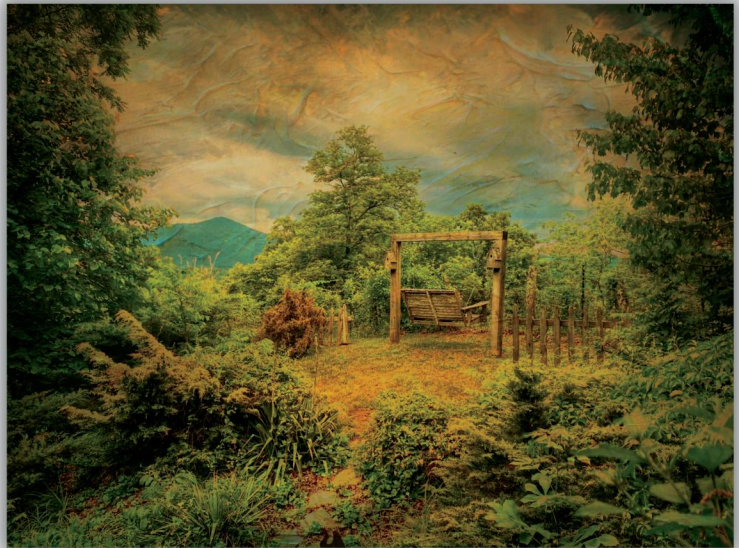
What to do when I'm caught up in worry?
Why do I tell myself, I have to hurry
Let it slow. Slow down

I could see the end of the world,
Right outside the door
If I wanted to turn my head that way
Or I could see wonder never seen before
And wonder why it cannot stay.

Cup of coffee, low cloud
Settles on the ground
It wraps the trees in a shroud
And barely makes a sound

What to think of this day I've been given?
Is thinking the same as living?
Let it go. Go down

I could see the end of the world,
Right outside the door
If I wanted to turn my head that way
Or I could see wonder never seen before
And wonder why it cannot stay.
Let it stay.



It was the summer of 2020. By then it was clear the pandemic wasn't going anywhere fast. Gloom was setting in. The recording was on indefinite hold. The election was heating up and people were tense, scared, angry, confused. Could it be.....the end is really near?

I was sitting outside in what we call the sweet spot, captured so beautifully above by my friend Robert Jacobs.

The sun was shining, it was cool and breezy for July, the Rose of Sharon was covered in pink blooms. Carolina blue sky.

I thought, sure, I could lose myself in the news of the day, mostly opinion masquerading as fact, work myself into a lather and convince myself that the end is indeed here.

Or I could take a deep breath and enjoy this incredible moment in front of me right now. The future's always been a matter of speculation anyway. A few minutes later, I went in and wrote this song.

I don't know about you but I love this world. Its beauty never ceases to dazzle me. Miracles occur at such an incredible rate we can't begin to see them all. Let's do what we can to keep it.

Don't Wake the Monkey

Please don't wake the monkey on my back
When he's asleep he likely won't attack
Don't tell me he's now a harmless pet
That monkey may not be done with me yet

The monkey and me, we used to be good company
We never missed a night out at the bar
We're too busy drinking, to see that we were sinking
Passed out in the back seat of the car

Far too many years, we told the time in beers
We didn't leave the party till we staggered
In my twenties I could take it, by my forties had to fake it
Monkey still looked good, but I was haggard.

So please don't wake the monkey on my back
He'll reach around and give my head a smack
Don't tell me he's finally settled down
Wake him and the circus comes to town

One wasted Monday morning, I finally heard the warning
Hit that monkey with an intervention
I said, "I thought I could handle us, but life with you is scandalous
He replied some things that I won't mention

The monkey and I, we started over dry
But he's still there, hanging round my neck
To you he might seem dead, but he rents space in my head
Dreaming of the life he wants to wreck

So please don't wake the monkey on my back
He'll grab my ears and steer me off the track
Don't tell me he's ready to go straight
Alive, that monkey's nothing but dead weight



Shhhh! Don't wake the monkey! **

Those of you who've known me a long time know that I struggled with alcohol and drugs much of my life. I'll spare you the details, but I hit bottom at the age of 49, got some serious help, and am still alive and kicking nearly 20 years later. In fact, these have been the best years of my life, especially since Angie and I re-connected.

I feel like I was given a second chance. That's why I started writing songs. Because I wanted to revive that long lost dream of playing music.. And because I wanted to create something of myself to share with the world.

Addiction is no laughing matter, and I am somewhat ambivalent about the lightness of this song. If you're struggling with it, take heart. There is another way. It's not too late to chase your dreams.

**Actual monkey much bigger and scarier

AMAZED

You remember
The fire I made first morning
We knelt and blew the embers
A moment to be born in

By the lake
Water beat time on the shore
No need for give and take
We gave and gave some more

When I look at you I see so much
I unwind a string of golden days
When I think of you it's like we touched
I stand here amazed

Coming home
Gold leaves spun against the sky
Recalled in Kodachrome
Tears rising in our eyes

The road, it danced
Along the sparkling river
We drove on in a trance
As if we'd been delivered

When I look at you I see so much
I unwind a string of golden days
When I think of you it's like we touched
I stand here amazed

Holy night
Summer shower of the stars
We lie here in the light
Of streaking meteors

And we wonder
What it is we still don't know
Lying here under
This endless magic show

When I look at you I see so much
I unwind a string of golden days
When I think of you it's like we touched
I stand here amazed

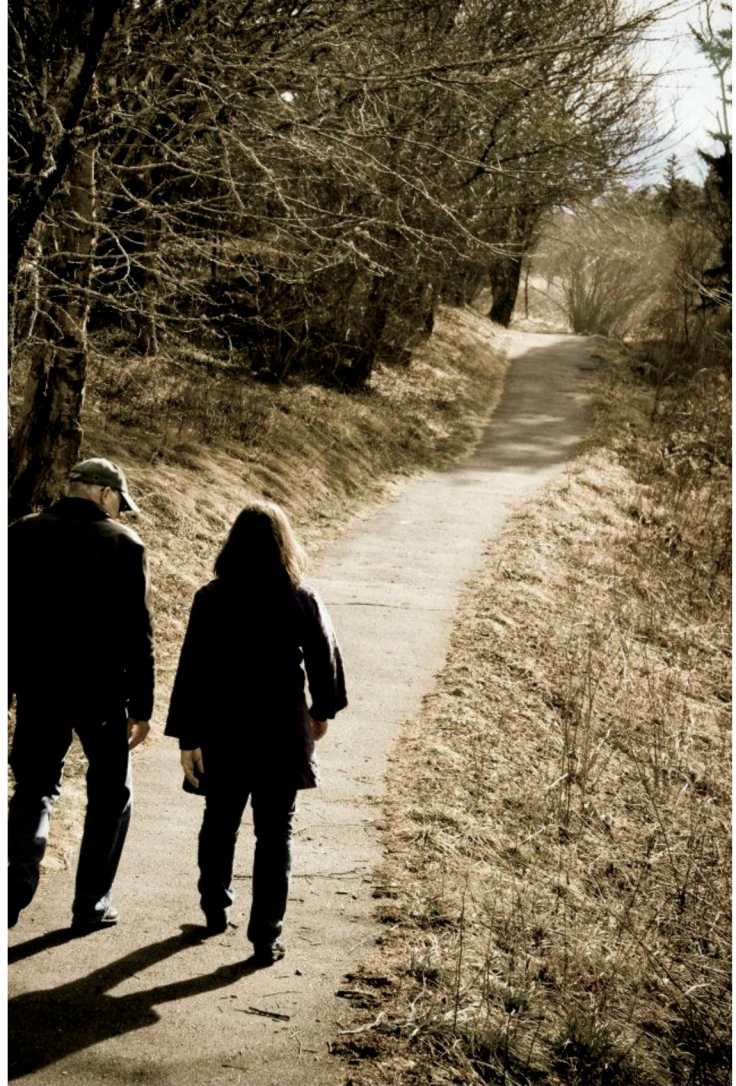


Photo: Brian Folkins

If it weren't for my amazing wife, Angie, you probably wouldn't be reading this. When I found her on Facebook after 37 years apart, my life seemed to take off. It's like I was waiting all that time to get started. We moved to the Great Smoky Mountains, she has published two books and I've written a few dozen songs. Clearly our paths were meant to intertwine and I will always be amazed that she accepted my friend request, even though I didn't even send a personal message. She usually deletes those. I love you, here and beyond, my magnolia.

BREAK ME OPEN

On moonless nights, I sit outside
And I watch the satellites,
One by one,
Track across the silent sky
They move so fast, like the time
I thought would never pass
Day after day
Barely here and then gone by

Break me open, I want to feel everything
Break me open, again, and again, and again.

A child plays, in an open field
Of never-ending days
Stone by stone,
He builds a wall around his dreams
He doesn't know, that growing up
Is only growing old
Lie after lie,
Until nothing's as it seems

Break me open, I want to feel everything
Break me open, again, and again

And again I'm failed by words
Again I've spoken, and I don't know if I was heard

These winter nights, I think about the child
Who faded out of sight,
Step by step,
Did he ever climb that wall?
This foolish race, like satellites
Chase their tails 'round space,
Mile after mile,
Run in circles 'til I fall

Break me open, I want to feel everything
Break me open, again, and again

And again I'm failed by words
Again I've spoken, and I don't know if I was heard

Break me open, I want to feel everything
Break me open, again, and again, and again
Break me open I want to feel everything
Break me open again, and again and again.

Break me open again
Break me open again



I'm not asking to be visited by unspeakable tragedy and sorrow. In this world that's a given.

This is more of a prayer: "please let me be present in my life. Let me not miss anything. Let me know what it's like to be fully human"

I've wasted enough time already.

Break me open, not like a prisoner on a rack, but like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. Like an ancient amphibian, crawling from the sea to take its first shaky steps in the stunning light of the sun .

A HUNDRED YEARS



If this tree stands for a hundred years
Will it remember when we put it in the ground?
Will it wonder where we went
Branches old and bent
If this tree stands for a hundred years.

If this house stands for a hundred years
Will the people living here know who we were?
Will we leave a trace
A reflection of a face
If this house stands for a hundred years



Memories in the cloud, all the places we've worn grooves
Once you set the air in motion, does it forever move?



If this world stands for a hundred years
Someone finds a paper with our names
Will she find out who we are
Leave us wandering the stars
If this world stands for a hundred years

Memories in the cloud, all the places we've worn grooves
Once you set the air in motion, does it forever move?

If this dream stands for a hundred years
Others pick it up where we let go
Will they have a sense we're near
Or will we disappear
If this dream stands for a hundred years
If this dream stands for a hundred years
If this dream stands for a hundred years.



It should be obvious at this point that I'm a little obsessed with time. The older I get, the more I realize that it is, hands down, the most precious possession I have, that we ever have. I wish I'd figured that out sooner.

I can't make up for lost time, so I try not to deliberately lose any more. It's a work in progress. And I can't help but wonder what we leave behind when the journey of this life takes us beyond time.

This record exists because I couldn't write the great American novel.

That was the plan when I retired from teaching writing. I was going to finally have the time to write that book I was certain was in me. I took a few months off, sat down at the computer, and spent some weeks floundering for ideas.

It wasn't long before I realized that I didn't want to write a novel. And maybe I couldn't. But the effort of piling up all those words, creating from scratch a complete and believable world, seemed daunting, more like work than fun. So I looked around for something else to do.

I thought, "I love music. Playing music was my first dream. I'll just write song lyrics."

I did that for nearly two years, just sitting most days and writing lyrics. I enjoyed it, working in more manageable bites, without the pressure I'd placed on myself to be a great novelist.

On a whim, I sent a couple of lyrics to American Songwriter magazine, which features a contest in every issue. One of my lyrics, "Breakfast Blues", got an honorable mention. Not life changing at all, but just enough to encourage me, to make me think maybe I'd found the right track

About 10 years ago, my son-in-law Ryan, a fine songwriter who helped me with Star Struck Lover, said, "why don't you write the music too? You know how songs are put together."

I started writing songs. Star Struck Lover was the first. Several of those earliest songs are on the record.

After a few years of writing songs, recording them in my home studio, and playing them for Angie, I decided I wanted more people to hear them. So I began trying to learn to sing better and play guitar better. I started doing open mics, first in Waynesville and then in larger venues in Asheville. I went to The Swannanoa Gathering and played my songs for some really incredible songwriters.



MY STORY (Continued from previous page)

I seemed to be getting better. One night at an open mic, a guy came up and said, "that's a good song. I'd like to record it. I have a studio here in town."

So I went up there, nervous as hell, and tried to sing the song a bunch of times. He and another guy there told me my voice was "pitchy" I knew it wasn't good enough but I didn't know why.

I thought about quitting but the songs wouldn't let me. For most of my life, that would have been it. I would have figured they must be right and I'd have just put the music down. I'd already put aside music years before. I didn't want to do it again.

I decided to do something different. I looked for a vocal teacher, found a class at the community college in Waynesville. The teacher was Julie McConnell.

I sang "Old Black Snake" the first class. She said she could already hear the harmony vocal part. Before long she started saying things like, "when you record your first CD....."

That was January of 2018. Little did I know that she and her husband Bryan, a phenomenal bassist, would shepherd me into and through the process of making a record. I started recording demos in late 2019, then the pandemic hit in early 2020, so it was June of 2021 before we began rehearsing and recording.

It's been a wild and incredible ride. I'm so glad I got to do this, to meet and become friends/colleagues with people like Julie and Bryan, Bill Berg, Phil Ludwig, all the other great musicians who played on this record. I cannot believe how this lifelong dream has evolved.

All because I tried something different, said "yes" to things that scare me.

And because I couldn't write a book.

Thank you so much for listening.

Love,
Bob

