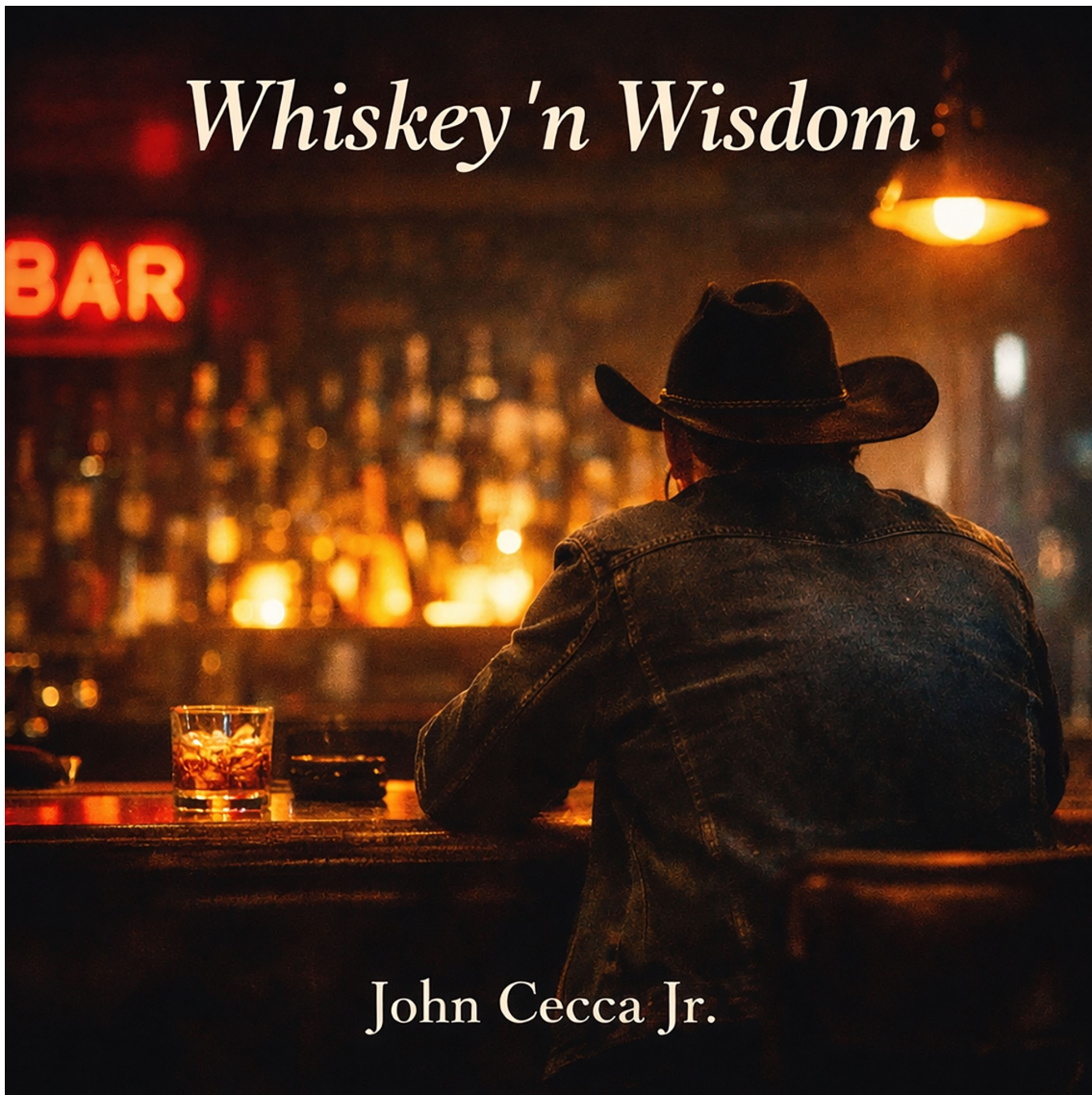


WHISKEY & WISDOM

John Cecca Jr.



Whiskey & Wisdom

Whiskey & Wisdom is a collection about finding your own road and discovering what the miles leave behind.

The songs move through independence, characters, memory, humor, friendship, loss and acceptance. Some look back at the people and moments that shaped a life; others push forward with the realization that eventually you have to take the wheel yourself.

Musically, the album moves comfortably through country while several of the songs have also found lives in reggae, dance and other interpretations. The recordings may change their clothes, but the stories remain at the center.

The journey begins with a declaration - *This Bus Is Mine* - and ends with the title track, *Whiskey & Wisdom*: a little older, perhaps a little wiser, and still moving.

Movement. Characters. Memory. Loss. Acceptance. Wisdom.

[LISTEN TO WHISKEY & WISDOM](#)

Track List

1. This Bus Is Mine
2. Howling With The Wolves
3. Feeling Blue With Joni
4. She's An Astrological Freak
5. Rah-Rah-Sis Boom-Bah
6. Sometimes Friends
7. Love Gets Left Behind
8. The Victims - Sad To Say
9. Flour Child
10. Oh, Christmas Tree
11. Good Alone
12. Whiskey & Wisdom

LISTEN

THIS BUS IS MINE

Track 1 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

This Bus Is Mine answers the poem Compliance 101 (the follower), from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads. The poem lives under a cloud of compliance - being molded, diminished and conditioned to follow. The song turns that idea around. The narrator has found his own road and taken the wheel: I'm me now. Step aside, or if you want, jump aboard my bus.

The composition has traveled through country, reggae and dance interpretations. The style can change, but the statement does not: independence, self-direction, and the realization that the key to freedom was there all along.

Music / Style: Country, with reggae and dance interpretations.

LISTEN

Answering the Poem

Compliance 101 (the follower)

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

Life under an ubiquitous cloud,
Diminished by its omnipresent shadow,
Defected demagnetized compass,
Genetically programmed to acquiesce,
Waiting for a command.

Good Boy!
Sheep!
Damned!

Unable to break free.

You seduce me in my dreams,
Pleasure scenes.
What is the secret
To be set free?

Having others
Follow me.

Strapped into a wheelchair,
Paralytic brain,
Fading into insanity.
Dissolving into nothingness.

Lyrics

Verse 1

They tried to hold me, tried to mold me from the day I was born,
That's just how they're wired.
Told me sit still, play along, don't stir up a storm -
But my soul caught fire.
A shadow cloud with a hand on the switch,
Sayin', "Good boy, roll over," - man, I'm done with it.

Chorus

Clear the path, step aside,
Clear the path or come for the ride.
This bus is mine - I've had enough,
Pedal down, I'm callin' the bluff.
No chains, no leash, no referee -
This road belongs to me.

Verse 2

Had me livin' in Plato's cave, believin' their truth,
But I found my light and my own proof.
I paid my dues, I cracked the code,
Got the map to my own road.
Followin' you was a dead-end street,
But the key was always here with me.

Chorus

Clear the path, step aside,
Clear the path or come for the ride.
This bus is mine - I've had enough,
Pedal down, I'm callin' the bluff.
No chains, no leash, no referee -
This road belongs to me.

Bridge

I was strapped down, paralyzed by words,
Gaslit and broken, but now I've learned -
The lock was mine, and the key was me,
Yeah, it was me who set me free.

Final Chorus (lifted)

Clear the path, step aside,
I'm takin' back this runaway ride.
This bus is mine - I've had enough,
Freedom's burnin' in my blood.
No chains, no leash, no referee -
Yeah, this road belongs to me.
This road belongs to me.

LISTEN

HOWLING WITH THE WOLVES

Track 2 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Howling With the Wolves is fictional songwriting built as an anthem for one of those nights you wish could simply refuse to end.

Friends are together, the drinks are flowing, the dance floor is alive, and nobody particularly cares if a little of the night gets spilled along the way. The wolves and the tribe become playful images for that shared feeling of being temporarily untamed - dancing, laughing and living entirely in the moment.

Underneath the celebration is one simple truth: tomorrow is coming, but none of us really knows what tomorrow brings. So for tonight, the answer is to dance a little longer, laugh a little louder, and howl under the moon with the people who make the night worth remembering.

John's Note: Another anthem. Out with your friends - what could be better? We're dancing and drinking, spilling our drinks, and we just don't care. We're hoping the night never ends, because tomorrow never knows.

Music / Style: Country and Dance interpretations.

[LISTEN](#)

Lyrics

We're sittin' at the bar, tossin' back a few drinks,
Just a heartbeat away from the dance floor's heat.
I'm feelin' good - I wink, she smiles, yeah, she knows,
I wanna dance this night 'til the last song goes.

Like an old tribe chantin' on their final days,
Round a bonfire blaze where the wild hearts play.
She's movin' like a stallion, untamed and free,
We're ridin' the fire of eternity.

Chorus

We're howlin' with the wolves,
Under a full moon sky.
Howlin' with the wolves -
Don't ask how, don't ask why.
If I could stop time, I swear I would...
Howlin' with the wolves feels too damn good.

My tribe is dancin', prancin', feelin' the beat,
Shakin' our souls from our heads to our feet.
We're spillin' our drinks, but we're lost in the sound,
Laughin' and livin' 'til the sun comes 'round.

Chorus

We're howlin' with the wolves,
Under a full moon sky.
Howlin' with the wolves -
Don't ask how, don't ask why.
If I could stop time, I swear I would...
Howlin' with the wolves feels too damn good.

Bridge

Tomorrow's comin' - that's guaranteed,
But it might not be there for you or me.
So let's live this night like it's all we've got,
And burn every second, ready or not.

Final Chorus

We're howlin' with the wolves,
Dancin' 'til the night won't end.
Howlin' with the wolves,
With my girl and my friends.
Yeah, the night's too sweet to let it slip by -
Howlin' with the wolves under that sky.

LISTEN

FEELING BLUE WITH JONI

Track 3 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Feeling Blue With Joni is the same composition and lyric as *Blue With Joni*. At the time, I had not yet learned how to negotiate the release and remix process the way I do now, so this interpretation was released under a slightly different title.

The song grew from the same poetic roots as *Blue With Joni*: the poem *Chilling* and the haiku *Pretty Little Lies* from *Misfortune Cookies*. The setting is an eighth-floor balcony above the ocean: cool air, Chardonnay, stars, waves and Joni Mitchell's *Blue* accompanying someone through the last stages of heartbreak.

What changes here is not the story but the interpretation. This version uses a male voice and a more upbeat country-rock approach while keeping the emotional center intact. The hurt is still there, but the music pushes forward toward acceptance rather than lingering entirely inside the sadness.

Music / Style: Male vocal; upbeat country-rock interpretation of the same composition as *Blue With Joni*.

LISTEN

Lyrics

Cool wind drifts from the shoreline tonight,
Chardonnay lips in the pale moonlight.
The Big Dipper's scooping the dark out of view,
And I'm *Blue with Joni*, still tangled in you.
From this eighth-floor balcony, high above the sea,
I'm watching the waves where we used to be.

Covered by your smile, fooled by those eyes,
I built all my dreams on your pretty little lies.
Now the truth drifts in like a breeze I can't see,
And I'm chilling with the memories that don't own me.

Thoughts drift slow like smoke on the breeze,
I reason with ghosts and small mercies.
Mother Nature's curtain is soft and thin,
And I'm slipping toward a peace from deep within.
Still taste the hurt on the edge of my tongue,
But the ache fades away with each song that's sung.

Covered by your smile, fooled by those eyes,
I built all my dreams on your pretty little lies.
Now the truth drifts in like a breeze I can't see,
And I'm chilling with the memories that don't own me.

There was a time no light could break through,
No hope in the silence, no getting past you.
But the night has a way of setting things free,
And the dark ain't so dark when it's just holding me.

So I'll stay here a while with the stars and the sea,
Blue with Joni and finally - just me.

LISTEN

SHE'S AN ASTROLOGICAL FREAK

Track 4 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

She's An Astrological Freak was written decades ago as a lark, at a time when there really wasn't an outlet for a song like this. It simply waited.

The character is a quirky, irresistible woman whose romantic life is ruled completely by the stars. Venus may be burning, passion may be waiting, and everything between two people may seem right - but if the chart says no, the answer is no. Her faith is the zodiac, her scripture is written in the heavens, and getting too close could be dangerous.

The lyric never asks to be taken too seriously. It's playful, exaggerated and built around the fun of a character who can attract you, confuse you and possibly destroy you - all while consulting the cosmos.

Decades after it was written, the song finally found several musical lives. The same composition has traveled through country, reggae and dance, each style bringing out a different side of its humor and attitude.

Music / Style: Country, Reggae and Dance interpretations.

LISTEN

Lyrics

She burned like Venus in her own sky,
A goddess of love, you couldn't deny.
Her touch could melt you,
Like fire on glass,
A passion so wild no mortal could last.

If the stars aligned on this velvet night,
Dreams would rise and take to flight-
But if the signs were wrong,
The love was gone.

She was an astrological freak,
No faith,
no creed,
no church to seek.
Just the heavens above and the fire below, below-
Living by the zodiac, letting it show.

It wasn't the best of signs;
No, it was the curse of signs.
The chart was cold, the night was bleak,
No love tonight,
no kiss on the cheek.
A definite no-
Not even a maybe.

She was an astrological freak,
With no religion so to speak.
Her scripture was written in cosmic glow,
The stars above and the stars below, below.

LISTEN

RAH-RAH-SIS BOOM-BAH

(Whispering Through My Head)

Track 5 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Rah-Rah-Sis Boom-Bah (Whispering Through My Head) grew from the idea behind the poem *Treasure* in *Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads*.

The poem imagines high school as buried treasure: memories covered by years and dust until an old friend or an old song suddenly digs them up again. The lyric follows that same path. A song on the radio opens a forgotten door, and the narrator is daydreaming again about those high-school days when life seemed easier and forever still felt possible.

The poetry drives the verses, but the rah-rah chorus gives the song its immediate hook. That contrast - reflective memory against a simple school-day chant - also makes the composition especially open to reinterpretation. Another singer, band or producer can take the nostalgia and make it their own.

Music / Style: Country and Dance interpretations.

LISTEN

The Poem Behind the Song

Treasure

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

High School
Has been buried,
Keener than pirates' booty,
Concealed,
Under dusty, lost, lazy memories,
Waiting to be rediscovered,
Uncovered,
By an old friend,
Or song,
That has recorded
Time in perpetuity,
Jolting images from sleepy cavern walls,
Shivering the soul,
About time's passage,
And getting old.

Lyrics

Verse 1

Sittin' here lost in another time
That old song on the radio rewinds my mind
Spins open a door I forgot was there
Dusty old memories hang in the air

There's a crooked grin on yesterday's face
Wavin' me back to that sacred place

Chorus

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

It's whisperin' through my head

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

High school - the life we led
Back when forever felt carved in stone
Now I'm dancin' with ghosts I used to know

Verse 2

Joy and heartbreak, the wins and the scars
Frozen in Polaroids under the stars
Those faces and places still pull me home
Through the halls of my heart I still roam

They were hidden away, but they're knockin' again
Like the voice of a long-lost friend

Chorus

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

It's whisperin' through my head

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

High school - the life we led
Back when the world was ours and the night felt slow
Now I'm dancin' with ghosts I used to know

Bridge

The song fades out, and I'm back in today
Tryin' to hold on as it all slips away
It shakes my soul just to realize
Time's still the thief in a clever disguise

Final Chorus

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

Those memories stay true

Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah

They still belong to you
The faces may fade, but the feelings remain

LISTEN

SOMETIMES FRIENDS

Track 6 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Sometimes Friends is about the roads that separate people without truly removing them from one another's lives. Friends get scattered by distance, work, family and time, yet they continue to surface in memory - sometimes through a thought, a laugh, a song, or a place.

The lyric grew from two poems, *Best Friend* and *Sometimes*, from *Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads*. One captures the strange collapse of time when old friends finally meet again: decades can pass, yet suddenly 31 feels like 21 or 17. The other follows friendships down diverging roads, hoping those roads will someday intersect again.

The song brings those ideas together in a simple conclusion: friendship can survive absence. The years may disappear, people may lose contact, and life may carry everyone in different directions, but some friends never really leave our thoughts. When they return, it can feel as though very little time has passed at all.

John's Note: Friends get lost in the roads we take, but they never leave our thoughts. When we meet again, it can feel like no time has passed. Friends are eternal to the end.

LISTEN

The Poems Behind the Song

Best Friend

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

Oceans away,
Long time no hear,
The heart flutters.
With fear,
Tears.

Meetings
Space stations apart.
Closeness.
Telepathic thoughts of love.
We must be traveling
In light years,
For 31 seems
To be 21 or 17,
When we are together.

Sometimes

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

Friends get lost,
Tossed from today,
Like daily news,
Never forgotten,
Like the Baltimore Catechism.

Sometimes,
Friends
Are separated by time,
And mythical diverging Frostian roads.
Hopefully intersecting.

Sometimes,
Friends,
Circulate your thoughts,
A rhyme in need of improvement.
And forget me not,
Haunting, taunting,
That lazy side,
Making time its master.

Sometimes,
Feelings are never expressed,
Suppressed
Through small talk and fears,
Filtered, distilled

By time,
Clarity is framed.

Sometimes friends
Are eternal.

Lyrics

Verse 1

Sometimes friends get lost in the day,
Yesterday's news just fades away.
We drift apart down different roads,
Living our lives in separate codes.
Memories fade, but one look back,
Brings that laugh, and a bittersweet flash.

Chorus

*Long lost friends,
Still run through your mind,
Like wilted forget-me-nots in time.
Long lost friends,
Were meant forever,
Not ghosts that fade in the weather.*

Verse 2

Sometimes friends are oceans apart,
Still keeping time with your heart.
When you reminisce a lot
You feel that pull, that old sweet spot.
Maybe a smile, maybe a tear,
You still feel 'em close, even when they ain't here.

Chorus

*Long lost friends,
Still run through your mind,
Like wilted forget-me-nots in time.
Long lost friends,
Were meant forever,
Not ghosts that fade in the weather.*

Bridge

Time can steal the days away,
But hearts remember anyway.
No matter where the road bends-
There's no such thing as "the end" for friends.

Outro

*Sometimes friends get lost,
Sometimes they come back home.
Yeah, sometimes friends... come back home.*

LISTEN

LOVE GETS LEFT BEHIND

Track 7 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Love Gets Left Behind grew from a small haiku in *Misfortune Cookies* and one deceptively simple question: when does *when* become *if*?

Love rarely disappears all at once. More often it grows stale so gradually that two people barely notice the distance forming between them. The hugs become distracted, the conversations thinner, and the certainty of "when" quietly changes into the uncertainty of "if." By the time the change is visible, much of the magic may already feel far away.

But the song does not treat that fading as inevitable. Its final turn is toward repair: go back, find the flame, patch the tear, and remember that lasting love sometimes requires work after the effortless magic has passed. Love may begin with chemistry, but keeping it alive asks something more deliberate from both people.

John's Note: Love has a tendency to get stale, and you really don't notice it because it happens slowly. You have to work at love. It isn't always all of that magic.

LISTEN

The Haiku Behind the Song

When When Is If

from Misfortune Cookies

When when is if

Spring births dreams pursued to when

Winter whispers if.

Lyrics

Were the questions unanswered,
Or not heard at all?
Did we say "I love you"
Without meaning the call?
Was it just a paper heart,
With an emoji smile,
That marked the start,
Of love's long fall?

Were the hugs a ghostly touch,
While our minds were miles apart?
We never meant to lose this much-
But somewhere down the line,
Love gets left behind.

When did *when* become *if*?
Where did the passion drift?
Time dulls the blade,
Cutting deep-then fades,
Yeah, love fades away...

Endless days and restless nights,
Waiting for magic, losing sight,
Of how to find the spark again-
We dressed in sadness, called it pride,
Hiding the hurt we felt inside,
Two magnets turned away in the dark.

When did *when* become *if*?
Where did the passion drift?
Time dulls the blade,
Cutting deep-then fades,
Yeah, love fades away...

Our eyes still meet with inner screams,
"Let's give it one more try."
To walk away would make love a lie-
Let's go back to where we started,
Patch that tear in our hearts,
'Cause my soul can't say goodbye...

When did *when* become *if*?
Hidden in life's myth,
Let's find that flame we left behind-
'Cause love don't fade,
If hearts stay kind...

LISTEN

THE VICTIMS - SAD TO SAY

Female Country Version

Track 8 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

The Victims - Sad to Say developed from the poem *In Memoriam*, published in *Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads*. The poem confronts the suddenness of violent loss: people whose ordinary lives end without warning, the horrified strangers who witness it, and the helpless realization that there may be no answer capable of making sense of what happened.

The song distills that raw imagery into a country-soul lament. It begins at a distance - watching the news - but refuses to let the victims become just another story. Behind every headline are futures stopped, families changed and lives that were supposed to continue.

A male country interpretation closes *Ashes and Shooting Stars*. This recording returns to the same composition with a female country voice. The words and story remain the same, but the softer, emotional delivery gives the song another perspective - less like an observer describing the loss and more like a lament being carried for the people left behind.

Other interpretations of the composition also exist, including an operatic version. The arrangement can change; the central thought does not. There are losses for which we have no explanation. Sometimes all that remains is remembrance, compassion and prayer.

Music / Style: Sad, emotional female Country / Country-Soul interpretation.

LISTEN

The Poem Behind the Song

In Memoriam

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

To temples cracked,
Crushed under pestles of violence.
Victims of the day.
Vanish like dreams.
Sudden, sudden, so sudden ending.

No final good-bye,
No last kiss.
"I love you," lost in the dripping madness,
Oozing to the gutter.

The husband, wife, child, mother, father, or friends,
Vacant from these eyes for eternity.

The Victims!
The Victims!
The victims of violence.

Sprawled on a cold, damp, lonely cement sidewalk,
Life's last breath clogged
In blood's metallic flavor,
Whispering eyes of sympathetic, horrified onlookers,
Thanking God, it wasn't them.

A rumbling ambulance
Sirenning to a Save Center.
Strange faces of body mechanics,
Whose love belongs elsewhere,
The last worldly contact.

All too much like a dream.
All too real.

To those who had nothing to say
To madness and insanity,
Not quite martyrs,
Just victims,
Sad it is to say
There are no answers
Today.

Lyrics

Verse 1

I watched the news today,
Lord, I should've stayed away.
Seems every season brings its reasons,
But none make sense anyway.
It bends my mind how it happens day to day -
Innocent hearts just blown away.

Chorus

The victims,
The victims of violence,
All they held,
Gone in a flash.
The victims,
The victims of silence,
Futures still,
Reduced to ash.

Verse 2

Oh, the world don't stop to grieve,
Just another name that leaves.
And strangers stand around,
While sirens fill the town.
No comfort there, no peace to be found.

Chorus

The victims,
The victims of violence,
All they held,
Gone in a flash.
The victims,
The victims of silence,
Dreams gone cold,
Turned to ash.

Bridge

Life's a fragile kind of dream,
Reality cuts clean.
And though we thank the stars it wasn't me,
That shame still burns unseen.
We all pay a price for what we see.

Final Chorus

The victims,
The victims of violence,
All they held,
Gone in a flash.
The victims,

The victims remind us -
Love's the only thing that lasts.

Soft Outro

Sad to say,
There's no answer today.
All we can do...
Is pray.

LISTEN

FLOUR CHILD

Track 9 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Flour Child begins with a real neighborhood landmark and then lets imagination take over.

Betty Ann's Bakery was built into the neighborhood on the first floor of a three-decker at the corner of Bennington and Moore Streets in East Boston. Family-owned and operated for generations, it opened only at certain hours, and people would line up to get inside. Like many true neighborhood places, everybody seemed to think of it as partly theirs. The people who worked there were familiar, friendly and loyal; for some, the bakery became a large part of their lives.

The character of Betty Anne and the story that follows are fictional. The poem plays with the language of baking - sugar in her curls, a plain cruller, King Arthur, Candy Land, Angel Cake - while imagining a woman whose identity becomes inseparable from the bakery. She spends her life making something warm for other people, even while her own life is pictured as increasingly solitary.

The song carries that idea forward. It begins sweetly and almost playfully, but time slowly enters the room. The ovens eventually go cold, the familiar face disappears, and years later an obituary unexpectedly brings Betty Anne back to life in memory. What began as wordplay becomes something else: a remembrance of the ordinary people and neighborhood institutions that can quietly become part of who we are.

John's Note: Betty Ann's Bakery served the East Boston neighborhood for generations. The bakery and its place in the community are real; Betty Anne's personal story in the poem and song is fictional.

LISTEN

The Poem Behind the Song

Flour Child

When I was a boy.
Betty Anne was the girl,
The one with sugar in her curls.
The bakery was her world.
Ten to twelve hours a day
Was her way.
Flour Child with the confectionery smile.

Betty Anne was a plain cruller.
Some would say an oddly appealing *puella*.*
With a spirit and heart sweeter than
A hot jelly donut center.
Her only suitor was King Arthur.**

When entering this place
You hope to be waited on
By the girl with the powdery face
And pastry-stained apron.

Flour Child with the confectionery smile.
Delivering the dough in a joyous flow.
In her unique style.

Every song or story has a twist or another take.
Even with this perfect cupcake, there was sadness.
In her home. She was alone.
No man or woman to warm her heart.
No siblings. Ma and Dad were long gone.
No relatives or real friends.
This is where she was at.
Staying in, caring for her cats.
Until morning,
Then, playing in her Candy Land.

Flour Child with the confectionery smile.
Delivering the dough in a joyous flow.
In her unique style.

Then, one day, it came
Suddenly, without warning.
The owner died.
It was sad.
The customers felt so bad.
Many years have passed
Since she first donned that apron.
This was the last!
Sugar curls now painted gray.
Her life, her smile was tipped upside down.
With tears and a frown.
She was gone.
Never to be around again.

Flour Child with that confectionery smile.
Delivering the dough in a joyous flow.
In her unique style.

Years elapsed; I had forgotten her.
Until a caption grabbed my attention.
"Betty Anne's Angel Cake makes for a sweet deal."
It was a life-deserving obituary.
She had died.
With a not-so-dry eye,
I just sighed. "How time flies!"

Flour Child with that confectionery smile.
Delivering the dough in a joyous flow.
In her unique style.

** Puella is Latin for a young woman or young girl.*

*** King Arthur is a reference to King Arthur Baking Flour.*

Lyrics

When I was a boy, Betty Anne was the girl,
Sugar sparkled soft in her cinnamon curls.
Ten hours a day she'd be lost in her art,
Kneadin' the dough with a baker's heart.
And the warmth of her laugh could sweeten a mile -
Betty Anne, with that confectioner's smile.

Some folks said she was a plain little thing,
An odd sort of bird with a crooked wing.
But her spirit ran deeper than most ever knew,
Sweeter and warmer than a jelly-filled chew.
And all of us hoped, when we walked through that door,
We'd see her dust-covered face by the old oven floor.

**Oh, flour child, with your sugar-stained hands,
You made love out of bread, and joy where you stand.
Life never gave you a fortune or fame,
But you sweetened the world, just the same.**

Now every sweet story can carry a tear,
Even perfect cupcakes don't last year to year.
Her house was just cats and a kettle on low,
A clock ticking time by the light's gentle glow.
Then one winter morning, the ovens grew still -
The owner had passed, and the town felt the chill.

But Betty Anne, with her apron held high,
Like a soldier who always marched line.
Through decades of sugar, through laughter and rain,
Her curls slowly silvered, but her spirit always remained.
Till the locks turned that morning, the windows went dark,
And the smell of her baking blew out like a spark.

**Oh, flour child, with your sugar-stained hands,
You made love out of bread, and joy where you stand.
The world might forget, but I'll still say your name -
You sweetened our lives, just the same.**

How the years roll along like an old dusty train,
And faces I loved I can't call back again.
But one Sunday paper stopped time in its track -
"Betty Anne's Angel Cake won't be coming back."
A sweet, simple line in the back of the page,
A perfectly baked obituary, aged.

The girl with the sugar curls has gone from this place,
But I still see her there, flour dust on her face.
And I whisper a prayer as I pass by her door -

"Flour child... may you bake evermore."

LISTEN

OH, CHRISTMAS TREE

Track 10 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Oh, Christmas Tree grew from years of working around Boston's North Station and courthouse area, where arriving early in the morning meant regularly seeing people sleeping outside on concrete, near the Post Office and throughout the surrounding streets.

At the time, I was self-employed and doing work I did not particularly enjoy, although I did it well. I often brought clothing from home to give away and would sometimes help people who asked for money. One man, Michael, became a familiar face. One morning he rushed over asking for money, and I snapped, "Jesus, I come to this job and the first thing I do is give money." Michael burst out laughing. So did I. I gave him a few dollars. That exchange became part of a relationship that continued for years, perhaps close to a decade.

One Christmas week I was heading to lunch with friends when Michael approached aggressively asking for money. I was annoyed and told him no. He began to cry and said, "I thought you were my friend?" Whether I was being played or not suddenly didn't seem very important. I gave my friend a Christmas gift.

The poem *Oh, Xmas Tree*, later published in *Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads*, is not a literal retelling of Michael's story. Instead, that experience and those Boston mornings helped shape its view of homelessness, dignity, faith and value. A Christmas tree that was treasured only days earlier is discarded at the curb. A man with almost nothing finds it and sees not garbage, but a gift.

The song carries that image into country music. The fallen tree and the homeless man briefly reverse places in society's idea of worth: what one world throws away becomes precious in another. The final question - whether a man who believes in God can still believe that God believes in him - leaves the story deliberately unresolved.

Music / Style: Strong, soulful Country; rugged male vocal and emotionally restrained arrangement.

LISTEN

The Poem Behind the Song

Oh, Xmas Tree

from Byron Corner: Crosswalks and Cross Roads

Oh, Xmas Tree,
Majestic prominently displayed.
The pinnacle of religion and pride.
Symbol of the holiday,
Prematurely lying in an
Early winter's wake.
Out with the garbage.

Oh! Xmas Tree,
How the mighty fall,
Gone with a whim.
Irreverently trashed!
Your job completed.

A man,
With less than a home,
Ragged, torn,
A cheap alcoholic
Scent of the season,
Clinging to his mangy beard,
Rummages through the day's sales.

Amongst bottles, recycles, swill, and other,
Without hesitation seizes the early season trophy.
He knows no god but lives in the serpent's belly.

Today,
Was a lucky one.
With a sip of wine and a few crumbs of bread,
Feeling blessed
That the fallen symbol had found him.

Proudly placing the trophy near his mantle,
He wraps himself in his blanket
Transfixed by the icon,
Slowly falling asleep,
To the rhythm of overhead crossing vehicles.

Cupping his frostbitten hands,
His breath looked like smoke
Merrily
Nods towards tomorrow.

Oh! Christmas Tree.

Lyrics

Verse 1

Oh, Christmas Tree, how the mighty fall,
You once stood proud in a window tall.
Stars were shinin', hearts were light,
Now you're lyin' out there in the night.
Wrapped in tinsel, cold and bare,
Thrown away like we don't care.
A diamond treated like glass,
On the curb as the trash trucks pass.

Chorus

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
You can't tell what's in people's hearts.
Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Is it love, or just playin' the part?
Jingle Bells...

Verse 2

A man with less than a home,
Finds you standin' all alone.
Ragged beard, whiskey breath,
Still fightin' off the cold of death.
He hauls you back where the shadows creep,
To a place where angels never sleep.
Sets you up beside that wall,
And smiles like he's got it all.

Chorus

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
You can't tell what's in people's hearts.
Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Is it love, or just playin' the part?
Jingle Bells...

Bridge

Sip of wine, a crust of bread,
Dreams still livin' inside his head.
Blanket full of holes for heat,
Cars roll by in time and beat.
Eyes on that tree, he whispers a hymn,
"Lord, don't let this world forget him."

Final Chorus / Outro

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Livin' in the serpent's belly.
He believes in God, and wonders still,
If God believes in him.
Jingle Bells...

LISTEN

GOOD ALONE

Track 11 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Good Alone is about something simple: sometimes you just want your own space.

It isn't loneliness, and it isn't a rejection of friends or the outside world. The narrator enjoys people, goes out and cuts loose, but also understands the pleasure of closing the door, turning off the demands of everybody else and being completely comfortable in his own company.

At home there are no schedules to follow, no opinions to accommodate and no need to perform for anyone. Crank up your own music, eat what you want, water the plants, dance badly if the mood strikes and let the phone stay quiet. For a little while, the world can wait.

The country version keeps that thought relaxed and personal. A later dance interpretation turns the premise around with *Good Alone - But Not Tonight*: being comfortable alone doesn't mean you always want to stay there. Sometimes the door closes; sometimes you head out and join the party.

John's Note: It's just about wanting your own space. You don't need people, places or things - just home alone, but not all the time.

Music / Style: Country. A later Dance interpretation answers the idea with *Good Alone - But Not Tonight*.

LISTEN

Lyrics

Verse 1

Hangin' with friends, yeah, we cut loose fine,
But sometimes I just need my time.
Back to my place, where I can breathe,
Ain't Neil Young's "Loner," that ain't me -
Just me and the quiet, easy and free,
Where the world lets me be.

Pre-Chorus

Yeah, when I'm home, I'll dance and sing,
Laugh, drink, lose track of everything,
There's peace behind that door.

Chorus

Some days there's nothin' I wanna hear,
And nothin' I wanna say.
I keep myself right here
And let the noise fade away.
Don't need no crowd, no callin' phone -
Yeah, I'm good... good alone.

Verse 2

Crank that stereo, play my choice,
Eat junk food, raise my voice,
No opinions, no one's plans,
Just me and my peace, waterin' plants.
It ain't forever, but for a while,
I'm good with a quiet smile.

Chorus

Some days there's nothin' I wanna hear,
And nothin' I wanna say.
I keep myself right here
And let the noise fade away.
Don't need no crowd, no callin' phone -
Yeah, I'm good... good alone.

Bridge

Funny thing is, when I'm by myself,
I feel more me than anyone else.
Findin' space, findin' grace,
Restin' easy in my place.

Tag / Outro - soft with harmony

Ain't got nothin' I wanna do,
Nothin' I wanna hear,
Just "go away," like Oscar would say -

Yeah, I'm good right here.
Yeah, I'm good... good alone.

LISTEN

WHISKEY & WISDOM

Track 12 - Whiskey & Wisdom



John Cecca Jr.

The Story Behind the Song

Whiskey & Wisdom grew from the short poem *Even the Small*. In only a handful of lines, the poem moves from falling and frustration to leaving the bar, getting into the car and looking upward again - driving, flying and striving for the stars. The song takes that small poetic idea and gives the person inside it a history.

The lyric begins after a bad day at work and with a familiar temptation: stop at the bar, order a bourbon and try to let the day disappear for a while. But the man staring back from the mirror behind the bar knows where that road can lead. He has already been down, already fought his way back and already learned how quickly success and stability can disappear.

That is where whiskey meets wisdom. One can numb the day; the other remembers the cost. The narrator realizes he has come too far to start throwing his life away simply because today was difficult. Like the poem, the direction changes: away from the bar and back toward possibility.

As the closing song on the album, it also answers the opening track. *This Bus Is Mine* begins the journey with a declaration of independence and control. *Whiskey & Wisdom* ends it with the harder lesson: taking control of your life is not a one-time decision. Sometimes you have to choose it again.

The composition also appears as a Dance interpretation. The musical clothing changes, but the original path remains visible: poem, lyric, composition, interpretation.

John's Note: Bad day at work, hit the bar, then realize you're better than this. You've come a long way - don't start throwing it away.

Music / Style: Contemporary Country. Also appears as a Dance interpretation.

LISTEN

The Poem Behind the Song

Even the Small

Even the Small,

Can fall.

Playing the hand wrong,
Cards not falling.

Keys not turning,
It's a yearning,
Burning,

Gets me to my car,
Away from this bar,

Seeing how fast
I can drive,
How high I can fly

Striving
For the Stars.

This short poem supplied the seed that grew into *Whiskey & Wisdom*: falling, recognizing the danger, leaving the bar and turning again toward something higher.

Lyrics

Verse 1

The ice in my glass melts slow tonight,
Sweet taste of success, but it don't feel right.
Today took its toll, so I came here to hide,
Just me and this bourbon, some peace on the side.
Then I catch my reflection in the backbar glow,
A ghost from the gutter I used to know.
And he's smirking like he's got something to say,
'Bout the man I was before I found my way.

Chorus

Whiskey and wisdom - they go hand in hand,
One burns it down, one helps you stand.
I've been too high, I've been too low,
Lost everything I thought I'd know.
Yeah, I've stumbled, but I've learned it all -
Even the mighty can slip and fall.
Whiskey and wisdom, tonight they're calling me home.

Verse 2

There was a time when I'd curse the sky,
Swore "rock bottom" was another lie.
But that quicksand pulled me deeper still,
Till the only way out was to fight my will.
I clawed my way back, and I swore I'd stay
Grateful for every damn breath I take.
So why am I here, drowning the day,
When I know I'm too blessed to throw it away?

Chorus

Whiskey and wisdom - they go hand in hand,
One burns it down, one helps you stand.
I've been too high, I've been too low,
Lost everything I thought I'd know.
Yeah, I've stumbled, but I've learned it all -
Even the mighty can slip and fall.
Whiskey and wisdom, tonight they're calling me home.

Bridge

I feel that fire lighting up my soul,
Time to get off this barstool and take control.
A fool in a bottle ain't who I am -
I'm a fighter, a dreamer, a better man.

Final Chorus / Outro

Whiskey and wisdom - they go hand in hand,
One burns it down, one helps you stand.
I'm not broken, I'm not through,

There's still sky I'm reaching to.
Yeah, I've stumbled, but I've learned it all -
Even the mighty can slip and fall.
Whiskey and wisdom... gonna carry me home.

LISTEN