



RIVER OF CHANGE

A CONFLUENCE OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS

By Kevin Renick

In the years since my last full album release, *Clear The Way*, I have been writing songs at a steady pace. Circumstances may have kept me from releasing my work in a focused way, and that darn pandemic sure didn't help matters. But it wasn't like I didn't have new material to work on. I came up with ambitious songs like "Hoping For An Alien Invasion," "Something So Wrong," "Broken Joe and

Broken Jane,” “A Question For You” and many others. But another thing was taking place these last few years: my discovery of older songs that were mostly finished but that I hadn’t chosen to release yet. Many were originally slated for a “Mom-themed” album that never materialized. Songs in that category included “The Letters They Wrote,” “Everything Reminds Me of You,” “Thoughts For When You’re Anxious” and “Carol’s Song.” I became weary of my own reluctance to put something out there unless it had a thematic *home*. And to keep finding old CDRs of good songs that deserved to see the light of day but that I had buried in boxes through various moves, finally became unacceptable to me. I realized that CHANGE was the hallmark not only of my adult life but of my entire music career. The whims of fate, unexpected losses, and shifts in my artistic focus all converged to help me produce an album with various creative “strains” that longed for an outlet, much like rivers meeting in one place. I thought I should just put these songs together to tell several stories at once, all about the way change is an enormous factor in what happens to us...yours truly included. So yes, some songs intended for that original *Mom album* are here at last, and so are a handful of songs that feature the talented Annalise Raziq. One of the “changes” that determined the course of this album was something that occurred a decade ago, an unforeseeable event that caused friction between my old friend and me, which I don’t need to explain here in detail. But it was something I could not control, and it produced unwanted consequences, much like the way that putting a dam in a certain river may cause problems down the road. So I gathered up some songs on which Annalise had done beautiful performances with me, and I remixed a couple of others during the pandemic, such as “There For My Life” and “Escape From the Cage.” There’s also a rare live recording of my popular old tune “The Sorry Song,” which Annalise and I performed together at a concert way back in 2010. The song appears for the first time on an available platform, and it is laced with all sorts of irony that served my theme. I find it to be quite a delightful performance. And “Carol’s Song,” written about the heartbreaking passing of Annalise’s mom in spring of 2009 and tangentially about my own mom’s imminent loss (and how these two events changed my living situation dramatically), is a deeply emotional recording that had disappeared for a while. I was thunderstruck when I located it again during a search of old sessions. I was deeply affected all over again by the mood this song captures and the historic detail that now seems so far, far away. Gretchen Hewitt, another old friend of mine whose contributions at the time were crucial, plays piano and sings a bit on this song.

There are new songs on the disc, also...it is NOT just a compendium of old recordings. "Walkin' Along" and "Disappointed" feature vital contributions from my colleagues Denise Chappell and Caroline Steinkamp, and "Scared of This River" features the players in my Neil Young tribute band Shakey Deal. "I Might Want Out" is a crucial song about depression and staring into the darkness; it features just me and Ted Moniak, working with gifted producer Adam Long. Taken together, I truly believe all these songs fill in many gaps in my story. I'm glad to have them out there at last, and I hope that the eternal theme of ongoing change will resonate with most of my listeners...

Kevin Renick, July 2023



About the Songs...

The Letters They Wrote

My parents Mark and Annabelle had a fateful first meeting and a delightful courtship. I heard all about it through the years when they were alive, and I tried to capture the romantic mood they must have felt at the time, falling so deeply in love, in a simple waltz tune. This was a pleasant recording made by me, Annalise Raziq, Ted Moniak and Gretchen Hewitt, and would have appeared on the planned "Mom album." But that project never came out, and I couldn't bear to let this lovely tune linger unheard in my vaults.



Everything Reminds Me of You

A key song that was planned for the Mom album, this one is a narrative about all the many ways I missed my mother in the awful weeks after she died. A solid recording that features only Annalise and me, and one of the first where I play the xylophone.

Scared of This River

My full band, Shakey Deal, performs on this song. St. Louis is a historic river town, and I've experienced and witnessed many major floods through the years. The two big rivers that converge here affect the life and culture of the surrounding area in many different ways. But the "river" I speak of is also a metaphorical one, the never-ending current of CHANGE that can often bring pain and loss. Admittedly, as I grew older, change brought sorrow and frustration far more often than it brought joy, and that is the mood I tried to evoke here.

Something From Your Heart

I began teaching a Songwriting class in 2017, and the particular group of students I had in spring of 2019 were an absolutely inspired, energetic bunch. Real magic took place in that class, and we ended up recording an album together, which I actually produced. I contributed this song about how we all get so busy in our lives, we barely have time to search for what's in our own hearts. My gifted student Caroline Steinkamp, now calling herself Bea James as she makes a new career in Nashville, shares the mic duties with me. I remixed it a little bit for this album.

Walkin' Along

Truly one of the most fun, satisfying recording experiences I've had in the studio. This lilting song about a restless long walk features my close friend and performing partner Denise Chappell along with Caroline Steinkamp and guitarist Ted Moniak. We recorded in a sort of "pop country" mode, and I loved how it came out, honestly. It's so rewarding to make music with people you adore!



There For My Life (2022 remix)

This was a big, popular song on my 2013 release *Under the Wishing Tree*, and it was co-written in a very surprising way by Christa Juergens, a historic guest star in my life. I felt this song kept gaining in relevance through the years, and I received nice comments about it on one of my music websites. It also features Annalise Raziq on beautiful backing vocals. So I had engineer Adam Long do a fairly thorough remix to bring the sound up to more modern standards. I wanted the vocals and the overall sound to "sparkle" as much as possible. Thematically, this song is 100% about the theme of CHANGE.

Thoughts For When You're Anxious

This breezy little tune was originally written for the Mom album but soon became a kind of ode to the “insecurity of those who love you and don’t see you enough to satisfy them.” I think it has an accessibility to it that not all my songs succeed in achieving. It seems to go over fairly well when I perform it live, which I’ve been doing with Denise Chappell at our shows for quite a few years. Simple and unpretentious, I think...

Disappointed

A newer song, a pretty straightforward statement about disappointment and self-doubt. Again features the team of Ted Moniak, Denise Chappell, Caroline Steinkamp and me. I wanted a sort of “grungy” feel to it, like being stuck in the mud in your car. And the line “How low can you go?” was something I’d been asking fairly often in recent years.

Call It, Friend-o (Pandemic remix)

This is a pretty significant rocker in my repertoire, inspired directly by the movie *No Country For Old Men*. I had the conceit that it would be interesting to have a friend like Anton Chigurh in your life if he was NOT a psychopathic killer as in the film, but merely an eccentric friend who was always telling you to flip a coin to make important decisions and appreciate the “surprises” along your journey. The original recording was done in 2010 by an ace group of my fellow musicians (no pun intended), and it had great energy. But I thought my vocal needed to be stronger and that some other elements would benefit from a good remix. So right in the middle of the pandemic, Adam Long and I remixed this track thoroughly. I love the lyrics and energy of this piece, and Ned Watson played probably the finest lead guitar part of his recording career here. I think this is one of my “signature” rock songs, containing all the youthful sonic bravado I could muster at the time.

I Might Want Out

I’ve talked about this song quite a lot, and I placed it at the center of my 5-song EP in 2022 which I called FORECAST. The song is about depression and contemplating the periodic seeming futility of life and hope. I’ve long wanted this song to reach its audience, as I think it is an honest and genuine song about the darker aspects of mental illness and ongoing loss...

Up in the Air (live at the Grove Deli 2009)

I am still amazed that this recording exists. It comes from a live recording I had the foresight to make RIGHT during the time I got the official word from Hollywood that my little song about uncertainty would grace the closing credits of Jason Reitman’s Oscar-nominated movie. It was taped where I began performing in public, at the small but atmospheric Grove Deli in Webster Groves. Boisterous laughter and comments can be heard from my group of close friends, who’d shown up to cheer me on at the very start of my music career. I was still feeling humble and awkward, yet appreciative. A bit of absolute history right here!

All I Want Is...

The last song that I decided HAD to go on this record. It dates from early 2010, when recording the “Mom album” was uppermost on my mind. It was one of a few songs I did with Rich Kruse, a guy I lost touch with for an entire decade. Gretchen Hewitt was the violinist on this session. She, Ted Moniak, Ned and I performed a version of this song at the Grove Deli around that time, and a video of it exists. But thanks to the attentive engineering work Rich did, I like this version better.

The Woods Around That House (2022 remix)

For my second official release in 2011, I really wanted to record this song, which I love and which has something to say that is very personal for me. Despite the “muddiness” of the original recording, I felt the VIBE was there, and having Annalise on backing vocals here was a crucial part of the atmosphere. I just couldn’t see trying to record this song again (although I could have). It belonged to that time period and that time in my musical history. So I not only had Adam Long do the best he could to fix things in the mix (he DID manage to greatly lessen the muddiness), I also had Brad Sarno work a few wonders in the mastering process. The recording is not perfect, and I can hear some of my own mistakes as well as things I might do differently now. But ultimately the overall mood and feel of the piece made my decision to include it here a no-brainer. It is DEFINITELY a song about change, and how patches of woods near suburban neighborhoods often create magical memories for the children who play in them.



Escape From the Cage (remix)

Originally, I titled this “Out of the Cage Part 2.” Annalise Raziq performs the wordless vocals, and this honestly sounds like French film music to me. It’s breezy and enchanting. Despite the pain that my friend and I went through, I tried to imagine this piece as a message from her, that even when some hurt has taken place, redemption can perhaps occur and a sunnier day awaits if you just keep going forward. Annalise’s spirit as both a cool person and a gifted musical talent comes through clearly in this little song, and I knew it would sound more than relevant coming near the end of my album. Good work by Adam Long on the remix.

Carol's Song

Oh there is so, SO much I could say about this piece of music. It was lost for many years. It captures all of my emotions and observations at the time I was moving into the home of Carol Raziq, Annalise's personable, distinctive mother. The two women saved me from a horrible fate in 2009 when I was despairing over the loss of my own mother and leaving a condo I'd lived in for over a decade. I had a profoundly intense experience writing this song, and I needed a REAL piano player to capture my musical vision. So once again, Gretchen Hewitt worked with me to perform this song, and she even agreed to sing a little operatic interlude to symbolize the fact that both my mother and Carol were into opera. Gretchen and I had sketched out a couple of versions of this song, but the GOOD one you hear in this recording got misplaced by me in a pile of inadequately labeled CDRs. I even forgot who we recorded this take with and spent a lot of time trying to track that info down. Turns out it was Jacob Detering at Red Pill studio who oversaw this performance. It means the world to me, honestly. Annalise, Gretchen and I performed this song at the Sheldon Concert Hall in St. Louis, and I think we all teared up. This would've been the essential, CLOSING song on my intended Mom project had I been able to complete that album. I am proud to share this song with all of you now, at long last.

The Sorry Song (live at the Globe Theatre in Greenville, IL 2010)

Undoubtedly "The Sorry Song" was one of the popular tunes on my first official album when I was starting out, but I rarely performed it live. I'm not sure why. But Annalise and I did a duo concert at a Songwriter's Showcase performance in the small city of Greenville, Illinois in May of 2010. The small crowd who showed up were mostly quite appreciative, and we had a fun time. This performance, however, ended up being somewhat historic. It captures the chemistry Annalise and I had back then, it's playful, and it contains a totally spontaneous bit at the end honoring the "spirit of apology" I intended the song to have, and performance-wise, it's the best live take of this song in my possession. And even if this song is no longer a part of my regular repertoire, it is more than relevant to close out this album. Because yes, I AM sorry. It's my apology to Annalise for what happened between us, my apology to other friends who probably have issues with my frequent melodrama and self-doubt at times, and it's kind of an apology to MYSELF for not pushing hard enough in my career or adapting more gracefully to the many changes I experienced. I had initially intended to make this a "hidden track" on *River of Change*, something only patient listeners would discover. But soon enough, I came to see the charm and quality of this performance and the relevance of the theme, as compelling enough factors to give this song its distinguished status as the closing track here. Yes, my life has been all about change (obviously that's the case for MOST people), and my 15 years as a performing musician has NOT always gone the way I hoped. But I'm telling my stories and sharing my work in a context that feels honest and appropriate for me. And I really do see this performance as a little gem, one that makes a nice coda for this winding collection of songs both old and new...

Kevin Renick

SONG CREDITS:

The Letters They Wrote

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Annalise Raziq, vocal

Ted Moniak, electric guitar

Gretchen Hewitt, violin

Everything Reminds Me of You

Kevin Renick, vocal, acoustic guitar and xylophone

Annalise Raziq, vocal

Scared of This River

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Mark Arnold, lead guitars

Ted Moniak, electric rhythm guitar

Stu Massey, bass

Mark Newcomb, drums

Something From Your Heart

Kevin Renick, vocal, keyboards and xylophone

Caroline Steinkamp, backing vocals

Walkin' Along

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Denise Chappell, backing vocals, tambourine, whistling

Caroline Steinkamp, backing vocals

Ted Moniak, electric guitar

Stu Massey, bass

Mark Newcomb, drums

There For My Life (2022 remix)

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Ted Moniak, electric and acoustic guitars and mandolin

Alyssa Avery, violin

Annalise Raziq, backing vocals

Thoughts For When You're Anxious

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Ted Moniak, electric guitar

Disappointed

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar
Ted Moniak, electric guitar
John Vullo, bass
Nick Vullo, drums
Denise Chappell, backing vocals and tambourine
Caroline Steinkamp, backing vocals

Call It, Friend-o (Pandemic remix)

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar
Ned Watson, electric guitar
Ted Moniak, bass
Larry Perlmutter, drums

I Might Want Out

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar
Ted Moniak, ambient guitar
Adam Long, effects

Up in the Air (Live at the Grove Deli Sept. 2009)

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

All I Want Is...

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar
Ted Moniak, electric guitar
Gretchen Hewitt, violin
Rich Kruse, bass

The Woods Around That House (2022 remix)

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar
Ned Watson, electric guitar
Ted Moniak, bass
Andrea Spencer, drums
Annalise Raziq, backing vocals

Escape From the Cage

Kevin Renick, acoustic guitar and backing vocals
Annalise Raziq, vocal
Ted Moniak, electric guitar

Carol's Song

Kevin Renick, vocal

Gretchen Hewitt, grand piano and vocal

The Sorry Song (Live at the Globe Theatre, Greenville, IL May 2010)

Kevin Renick, vocal and acoustic guitar

Annalise Raziq, vocal and kazoo

All songs written by Kevin Renick except "There For My Life," written by Christa Juergens and Kevin Renick.

All songs © 2023 by Annabelle's Gift. Kevin Renick is a member of ASCAP.

Tracks 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10 and 14 engineered and mixed by Adam Long.

Track 9 original mix by Mike Martin; remixed by Adam Long in 2021.

Track 13 original mix by Justin Robinson; remixed by Adam Long in 2022.

Tracks 3, 5, 8 and 15 engineered and mixed by Jacob Detering, Red Pill Studio.

Track 12 engineered and mixed by Richard Kruse.

Scared of This River, Something From Your Heart, Walkin' Along and Disappointed were co-produced by Kevin Renick.

Mastered by Brad Sarno at Blue Jade Audio.

Front cover photo by Christian Gooden, St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Back cover photo by Wolfgang Lehmkuhl.



