

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC)

JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST: Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I'm Jonathan Rogers, your host.

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

JR: Singer-songwriter Jeremy Casella is one of those people who know what to do with loss and hurt and brokenness. He sees beauty and hope even in the midst of apparent ruin, and he gives voice to them.

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

JR: Jeremy and I sat down and had a great conversation this past Valentine's Day. You're gonna be glad you listened to this one.

Jeremy Casella, I'm so glad you're here! We've been trying to get together for a long time and here we are.

JEREMY CASELLA: Yeah, it's great to be here. I'm excited about this.

JR: I wanna start with what may have been one of the first songs you ever had, um... recorded. I don't know, you can tell me if this is true or not. But "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah."

JC: Right.

JR: What you did with Kevin Twit as part of the uh... uh...

JC: Indelible Grace.

JR: Indelible Grace. Yeah. And was that the first Indelible Grace record?

JC: No, I think it was the third? Um, I came along around the second

album. They had made the first record, and I was aware of what they were doing because I was ending my time at Belmont there.

JR: Mmhm.

JC: And uh... and so yeah, I think that was either on the third or fourth record, but I came on board with Indelible Grace around the end of the second record.

JR: Uh huh. But so, of course, very old hymn, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

JC: Yeah, 1773, when it was written.

JR: Okay! Alright.

JC: Mmhm.

JR: And the traditional tune is this, you know, kind of triumphal — (sings) “Guide me, ohhh thou great Jehovah...”

JC: Yeah, right.

JR: Which I love, by the way.

JC: And when I was a kid, that song we would sing in church and it had a horn section.

JR: Oh, wow!

JC: Which I always thought was kind of odd, even then. Way before I even thought of setting it to something else.

JR: Yeah. So you gave it a new setting, this kind of minor key. (sings a little

bit) This is a— I'm considering this kind of a bit of an audition. I'm hoping you don't— that's why I'm singing.

JC: Yeah, man! (laughs)

JR: Um... but as I said, I've always loved that — I love the original. And I love yours. And your setting sort of awakened me to things in that song I didn't know were there.

JC: Hmm!

JR: Right? You know, this... this longing.

JC: Mmhm.

JR: Instead of... you know, the original sounds like, hey, we've got this all figured out... don't we? (laughs) You know, guide me. You just show me where to go and, I'm... here we go.

JC: Everything is clear.

JR: And by the way... I had known you for a little while, I'd known the song for a while, and then when I found out that was you, I was like, what, this is... A, this is great! And B, this makes so much sense, that Jeremy Casella is the one who did this.

Um, so... (pause) what's the question? I just wanna talk about... you say even as a kid you thought it was kind of strange for this song to sound so upbeat?

JC: Well, I... when I was a kid, I grew up — and you know, in piecing all this together now, 43 year old, father of 5 and everything, but uh... I grew up... my background is pretty ecumenical. You know, I didn't realize. (chuckles) You never know when you're young.

JR: (laughs)

JC: But I grew up in the Presbyterian church, and I went to Catholic schools.

JR: Okay.

JC: But then for a good chunk of my youth we were involved in a Christian Missionary Alliance church, which is like, you know... also Presbyterian-ish. But that's the church where I first heard "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah." We were living in Dayton, Ohio, and I was probably 13, maybe 14 years old. And yeah, they had a horn section at church on Sunday and a choir and all that stuff, and so... I remember the text. Umm, or the tune.

And then years later Kevin Twit had handed out these, um... he'd gone on Amazon and he ordered like fifty copies of this book called Our Own Hymnbook. It was Spurgeon's hymnal from his church in England. And it had no music, it was just words. I'm not kidding, there was probably a couple thousand hymns —

JR: Really!

JC: Texts, yeah, that were just in there. And Kevin said, you know, we would leave RUF, and he would hand out, he was handing out these — standing by the door with this big huge box of Amazon books, handing out these books to anyone who wanted one. And I, uh... wanted one. (laughs)

JR: (laughs)

JC: And so that was how I came across that text without music, and I remembered it. William Williams wrote it in 1773, and it just struck me as a minor setting, minor key.

JR: Yeah.

JC: And it did, you know... it all kind of came really fast, the music for that. And I have been joyfully amused at the life that that song continues to have. (laughs) It just keeps going, and I actually heard from a guy in Wales. So William Williams was a Welsh pastor, and what he would do is from parish to parish on Sundays, preaching at as many as, from what I've read, 4 or 5 churches every week.

JR: Mmhm.

JC: He also wrote over— like, 6,000 hymns.

JR: Really!

JC: Yeah.

JR: He's an energetic guy.

JC: Yeah! And this is one of them, and I think it's probably his most popular hymn. And um... he uh... was from Wales. And so years later, with this song, I heard from a guy in Wales who emailed me, and he sent me a recording of another hymn with my tune set to it. And he was saying that the tune for "Guide Me, O Great Jehovah," do you know that it also works for these 4 or 5 other hymns?

JR: (laughs)

JC: Which was crazy! So, I love it. And I love that it resonates with people. That text definitely resonates with me, and uh... it's uh, I'm glad that it does.

JR: And so... yeah...

JC: It's a gift, man. You know, it's a gift.

JR: I've been thinking about, the um... your choice to... you sing a lot of songs in a minor key. Grief, sadness, loss is a recurring theme in your music. Which feels like a choice... by choosing to do that feels like a choice... what you're basically saying is you've given up on radio play. (laughs)

JC: Sure, uh, I guess. I mean... so I've primarily kind of worked and traveled in Christian music circles. As an independent artist. I'm flirting with a mainstream label. I had a mainstream deal for about 9 months with this record label called Universal South, and they were trying to sort of break into Christian music as a business back then. But I went back to being independent. Yeah, I think because I'm independent as an artist — I've played primarily churches and colleges in recent years. Um, house concerts. I've never felt any pressure to, um... outside of whatever involvement I have with the music industry, Christian music industry here in Nashville, to try to, um... (pause)

Well, I did at first, right? Like, when you're younger, you start out, you think you're gonna try to be what people want you to be. Which means, what are you gonna talk about? Mmm... (long pause) But I don't necessarily think that being honest and talking about things that we all experience is a bad business decision.

JR: (laughs) Yeah.

JC: Maybe in some ways it has been. But I don't know, man, it's um... I guess I just wanna try to be as truthful about things as I can. And I've used songwriting, I've realized now, I've used songwriting for many years as a way to process life, to process what I was thinking and feeling and learning, even without knowing that's what I was doing. And so... I've been fortunate that that's been something I can sell and make a living from. But at the end of the day for me, peeling all those layers back, I'm still mostly just interested in trying to get at the truth of things. And... you

know, I think just like anybody else, I also don't want to look at the truth of things with everything in me, right? So... but... I kind of can't avoid it.

JR: Can you... so... you mentioned early on that when you were young, you wanted to be what people, you know, said success looked like, or whatever.

JC: Yeah, or what I thought it was...

JR: Yeah. And so... how did you settle into, umm... how did you get from that to... actually, I'm just gonna give an account of what I've seen in the way... you have a distinct voice, it seems to me.

JC: Well thank you, that's very kind.

JR: And for you to settle into that instead of— I mean, that voice that you've settled into, or that you've let out. I don't know what the right verb is there. But probably not what you thought people originally wanted from you.

JC: Sure. Well, a whole lot of failure is how I got there. Right? I mean, I think. My record deal fell through. We had put a record out together. It was \$130,000 that they spent on this record.

JR: Wow.

JC: Produced by — still to this day, one of my close friends — Monroe Jones. Grammy winning producer. We had the Blind Boys of Alabama on it.

JR: Wow, so great.

JC: Yeah! It was mixed, sequenced, mastered. They did the photoshoot. Everything was ready to go. And the record label, like, imploded before the

record could come out. They lost a bunch of money on another artist, and so, you know... that was failure by proxy, I suppose. But failure. I was off on my own. And couldn't really — I think by God's grace — couldn't really seem to get a fire going with the commercial side of the industry with my music.

And I... there was a lot of like... I took a lot of hell on myself at the time. This was 2003, 2004, you know. Many years ago. You know, "Oh, I'm a failure. I've wasted my life." Or whatever it was when you're in your twenties and you can't see the forest for the trees.

JR: Yeah.

JC: But uh... (pause) I think like I said a minute ago, you peel back the layers and what I'm really interested in — which is why I love your podcast — what I'm really interested in at the end of the day is saying and connecting to the truth of things, and doing that in a way that will hopefully serve people and allow me to grow by using the gift that God's given me to do that with. And that feels like success to me.

JR: Yeah...

JC: And that's always been there, right? But I've refused to look at it as the viable... you know, central, integral, main throughway to growth, or whatever you want— throughway to growth, if you wanna call it that. To get older and realize man, all these things have been shaken off of me. This is really where my heart is. And it's always been here, I just didn't understand.

JR: Wow, that's good.

JC: And I think that's just grace. A whole lot of failure.

JR: Um, you said something a minute ago that I actually want to return to. You paired two things together that I'm not sure I've ever thought about

pairing together. And that is... you know, producing things that serve and love the audience — listener or reader or whatever — and that help you to grow, or something like that.

JC: Yeah. Um, forms you and shapes you.

JR: Can you talk about that a minute, the relationship? Cause those... you know, I'm always pushing writers to love and serve and forget about yourself. But on the other hand, what you're saying here makes perfect sense. As you love and serve, there is growth.

JC: Yeah...

JR: Can you talk about that a little bit? Why do you put those two together?

JC: Yeah, two thoughts come to mind, and two writers that I really love, and I know you probably love too, maybe people listening to this. So, Wendell Berry. I've heard him say that he's thankful to his work...

JR: (laughs)

JC: For how it's shaped him and formed him. So, he's not his work.

JR: Yeah.

JC: He's thankful to it.

JR: Mmhm.

JC: *Really* healthy.

JR: Yeah!

JC: I mean, it is.

JR: Yeah.

JC: When I heard that, I thought, I don't get that. What does he mean? So I had to sit with that, and I had to own it.

JR: Mmm.

JC: And then, Eugene Peterson. My friend Greg, who is in Ireland, is a great filmmaker. Little short films. He makes these really brilliant films. They're on YouTube. And I think it's called Tiny Ark Productions if you search on there. But he's interviewed and done little mini-documentaries on Eugene Peterson and Phyllis Tickle...

JR: Really?

JC: Tony Campolo. Yeah. But the one with Peterson is just gold. And he flew to Montana from Ireland to spend some time with him, um, about a year before Peterson died. Last fall, I guess it was. And he said that um, the end of this whole long interview about Peterson's life — it's like a 20 minute little video about his work his life and his family and his writing and pastoring work — he said, you know, at the end of this, like, documentary he asks him, um, "How do you feel about all this stuff?" You're in the twilight of your life, and you're looking back, and we've about all these things you've done and been about as a writer and as a pastor and really as a follower of Jesus, which that's something that I'm really interested in. He just kind of paused, real quiet, and goes, "I just feel like Eugene."

JR: (laughs) Ohh, wow!

JC: Which is such a beautiful, simple way of saying I've becoming and I've become... myself.

JR: Yeah...

JC: And then healthy, Christ-centered, serving, loving other people. I've given so much of the crap away, got rid of all that stuff, and I can actually — and I can bring my full self to others. And I don't know, I just thought that — that just struck me as so beautiful. It's worth seeing the video. It's really powerful.

JR: Yeah...

JC: So anyway, that's... I think that's what I would say... just trying to love and serve other people the best that you can. It takes a long time. You gotta make peace with yourself to do that first, I guess.

JR: Yeah.

JC: And writing, for me, has been a place where some of that has happened.

JR: Yeah. Um... well it feels like it works both ways, right? You can love, serve others when you've got some yourself, but loving and serving others is formational and gives you more of yourself.

JC: Oh yeah, right. Exactly. You give yourself away, but you're not... it fills you up.

JR: Mmhmm.

JC: It feels you up.

JR: Everyone wants to say this line, "You gotta lose it."

JC: You gotta lose it.

JR: So, in one of your songs — which one was it? I've got it written down here. Uh, yeah. "The Slow Surrender." I've got the line: "You've blessed my failure by design." Is that what the line is?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

JR: "You've blessed my failure by design." What does that mean?

JC: Or, "Blessed with failure by design."

JR: "Blessed with failure by design."

JC: Well, it means the process is not fragile.

JR: (pause, chuckles)

JC: Like, I don't know if you've ever heard of Joe Henry. He's a musician that lives out in L.A. Really great producer and songwriter. He's kind of an Americana artist. But I read this interview with him last year in *Tape Op*, a recording magazine that I love so much.

JR: Mmhmm.

JC: And he said, you know... he's talking about his production style, his recording style, and his approach to work basically is that the process is not fragile. That, that... you know for me, what that means is, what I took from that is that I kinda came into this whole thing thinking that everything has to line up, right?

JR: Oh, yeah...

JC: I've gotta be in the perfect financial place, the perfect spiritual place, work myself into this condition to where now I can pour out of myself, whatever it is. Maaannn, that's just a bunch of garbage right?

JR: (laughs)

JC: Like the process isn't fragile! Like if you're exhausted, you know, get some sleep, wake up, brew yourself some coffee, and put your derriere in the chair and see what happens. Like, this is not a fragile process. Now, we are — I'll speak for myself — *I'm* fragile!

JR: (laughs)

JC: I'm a mess! Right? But the work... (pause) isn't, is not fragile. The process is not fragile. And I think that's really helped me. And so that line there, "The Slow Surrender," is just kind of— the whole idea of the song is, there's a lot going on in that song — but the whole idea there is that we don't have to be so precious about this stuff, 'cause it's not that fragile. *We're* fragile, but we can surrender to what is here and relax and work in that, and rest into that. Work into that from rest. So.

JR: Yeah, that is... man, I love that!

JC: Thanks. Yeah. Hope it made sense. (laughs)

JR: It made sense to me! And so... what are some ways in which that realization, that the process isn't so fragile even if you are...

JC: Yeah.

JR: Can you think of situations where remembering that has helped you move forward?

JC: Well, sure. I have this record that just came out in November called *Spirit*. And I wrestled for many months now working on these songs, and sometimes I'd get stuck, and stuck again, and then come back the next day and still be stuck. Um, I think you just keep— for me, the faith that the

process, the faith I have... (pause) developed or that's been... that I've... (pause) The muscles of faith I've been exercising with this idea that the process is not fragile means I can show up tomorrow, just like I did to day.

My emotional condition... man, it waxes and wanes, right? Some days I feel like I can take on the world. Some days I feel like I wanna crawl under my couch and not come out. Some days I'm somewhere in between. But the gift and the talent, the spark, whatever you want to call that... it burns every day. I think we show up to warm ourselves by it. So, you know... that's what I'd say.

JR: Mmhm. Yeah, the...

JC: It just gives me faith to show up every day. And I've learned to try to — and also, extrapolating from that, I've tried to learn and remember. So, I wrote down — I had a journal for this record of the process of writing and all the things I was thinking and feeling in the process of making this record. Because I knew when I was done I would forget, and I would put myself through this whole awful process next time.

JR: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: And so I thought, well, I'm not gonna let that happen, so I'm gonna write all this down so I remember how much of a struggle, and how much internal dialogue that was going on, just to quiet all that stuff. Because that's just part of the process. I think it's when something's being born. So to have the faith to show up. That's what it means.

JR: Yeah.

JC: Just show up. Trust the process.

JR: So, next time you write — by the way, do you write all the time? Or do you just write for a record?

JC: Well, um, I used to just write for records. But now I'm writing on Mondays and Fridays, period.

JR: Okay. I'm currently interrupting your writing.

JC: No, nono, this is great! I don't write *all* day Friday.

JR: (laughs)

JC: I write in three and a half, four hour chunks.

JR: Okay.

JC: Yeah. I got that from *The War of Art* actually, and that really works for me. But yeah, I used to just write... you know, to be honest with you, when you messaged me about coming on here, I thought he doesn't wanna talk to me, cause I have the worst... I'm the poser writer. Now that's not true. But I can so easily succumb to just months and months of just internal silence with writing. Which is just fear.

JR: Yeah.

JC: And so I'm trying to stay in the soup with writing. And I've got a lot cooking right now, which feels really good. So I'm encouraged I've, you know, started to cross that barrier of staying in the process.

JR: Yeah.

JC: I think that's what Tom Douglas told me to do.

JR: Uh huh. I wanna get him on this podcast.

JC: Gosh, oh he'd be fantastic.

JR: So much wisdom.

JC: You know what he told me? He said, “When the song is done, I hate the song. I’ve moved on to the next one.” He goes, “I don’t *hate it* hate it. But what I mean is I have to stay in the process. You’ve gotta stay in the process.” And I’m like, yeahhhhh okay. You need to find out what that means. So I’m gonna put on my backpack, go camping, stay in the process.

JR: Yeah. What is the backpack imagery? I don’t understand that.

JC: Well, just... (sigh) Stay... on the trail.

JR: Okay. (laughs)

JC: You know? Like stay... so when my record was finished, I allowed myself like a month to just enjoy that. Take a deep breath. I had a lot leftover that I didn’t put on the record that I knew were starts for what was next. But I took a month to rest and then dive back in.

JR: And was this— this is a new thing? This is a new thing for you to dive back in?

JC: It is, yeah. Because I would just go— well, I tour a ton, cause that’s how I make my living. I sell my music online, but I sell it at shows. So I have to go play shows. And it’s easy for me to just do that and not write. And I’m doing both now. That may seem so small, but it’s huge for me to stay in the soup. And what I mean by “put on my backpack,” like... you know. You haven’t arrived. Stay on the road.

JR: Yeah. Um... this is an odd question, but if you’re making a living touring, how is it that Fridays can be one of your writing days.

JC: Well, I only tour, um... I tour every other weekend.

JR: Uh huh.

JC: And every other week. So like, the fall is my busiest time. Spring is pretty busy. Summer's pretty light. I don't tour at all in the winter. So I have a schedule, and I schedule so if I'm — I guess I should say if I'm on the road I'm not writing, really, but if I'm home, I am.

JR: Okay.

JC: So that's how it works.

JR: I love it. So does it feel like you've turned some corner or gotten over some hump?

JC: For me, it does. And um... (pause) I uh, I love... it's just an internal goal I had, and so far, so good.

JR: Yeah.

JC: You know, it feels like growth.

JR: That's great.

JC: Yeah, I'm thankful.

JR: All right. Um, before I run out of time, I wanted to ask about — there's a writer about writing that you've talked to me about before.

JC: Mmhm.

JR: And I wanna talk about her just a little bit before I ask you my last question, which you know what that is.

JC: Right. (laughs)

JR: Any regular listener to this podcast knows what the last question is, I hope. But tell me about your — now I forgot the name of the writer.

JC: Yeah, Pat Schneider.

JR: Pat Schneider, yeah.

JC: So, I came across Pat Schneider. Has a book called *Writing Alone and with Others*. She has another book she wrote called *Where the Light Gets In*. I first heard about her from Leslie Jordan, who is a great songwriter here in Nashville. She runs an organization called The Fold, which I've joined this year. It's a writer's collaborative that meets on Tuesday mornings from 9am to 11, and it's just writing prompts, free writing.

JR: And is it both songwriters and other kinds of writers?

JC: Yeah, it's everybody. It's like poets, you know, authors, bloggers, musicians, songwriters... just anybody who wants to just — journals.

JR: Really.

JC: Yeah, so the point of it so far is it's a six week collaborative and runs in six week cycles. The point is to discover and get really well-acquainted with your own original voice. Which I've spent most of my life trying to avoid.

JR: (laughs) See, I find that so hard to believe. I mean, just knowing your music. But anyway.

JC: Well, that's kind of you. I mean—

JR: I'm not being kind. I'm just telling you what I think.

JC: That's the internal thing, right? And it kind of goes back to the process isn't fragile. Like, I have just realized like oh, all of this internal turmoil that I'm feeling when I'm writing? Is not writing.

JR: Yeah!

JC: It's, like, me! And I'm like, what is that? (laughs)

JR: (laughs)

JC: So, it's time to go to counseling.

JR: (laughs)

JC: Um, so... (pause) yeah, and what comes out of these little 10 minute prompts. So we get together. We have two hours. She gives us a prompt.

JR: I'm sorry, what's the connection between The Fold and this book? Is that the same?

JC: The Fold? Sorry. So the AW — I apologize — the AWA. Or (pause) AAWA. It's Authors, Writers, um... (pause) Amherst Writers and Authors or something like that. But anyway, it's Pat Schneider's method of teaching writing to anyone who's interested, to connect with their own original voice. There's a series of exercises and curriculum that she's developed.

JR: Gotcha.

JC: And so Leslie went to Massachusetts and is, um... ordained now. I said. She's certified —

JR: (laughs)

JC: — to lead these workshops. And I heard about it from her and from some friends who told me about it. And read the books while I was working on my last record. And it was so helpful.

JR: Oh wow.

JC: Oh yeah. And so I was chomping at the bit to do this with a group, even though I was terrified to be in a group where people critique your writing. Personally speaking, I was really afraid. But that has been really helpful for me in identifying and separating the fear I feel and the anxiety that I feel from the actual use of writing and the gift of writing. And... man, it's just been really helpful. So.

JR: Wow, I wish we had more time to talk about that distinction between your anxiety and your writing.

JC: Mm.

JR: But since we don't, I'm gonna move on to the last question: Who are the writers who make you want to write?

JC: Mmhmm. Well, um.... (pause) I'm not trying to win favor with you, but your book on Flannery O'Connor? I loved it.

JR: Aw, thanks.

JC: Yeah. And I loved her stuff, but after I read your book on her — this was some years ago — I remember texting you. I don't know if you remember that.

JR: I do.

JC: I finished it and shot you a whole series of texts.

JR: (laughs)

JC: But it was so helpful for me. And then I went back and re-read a lot of her stuff with new eyes. I love that book by you and I love her stuff, Flannery O'Connor. Um... uh... I have musicians that I would tell you, writers.

JR: Uh huh.

JC: So Gillian Welch, Dave Rawlings, I think are really fascinating writers. Jason Isbell —

JR: Oh, man...

JC: — to me is... he's a Flannery O'Connor type of songwriter.

JR: Yes, I agree.

JC: There's so much going on there, I kinda wonder if he even realizes he's doing it. Probably not. Some of his— I'm sure he gets it when he's done, um... when he stands back and looks at all of it. But that trio of records — Southeastern, Something More than Free, and The Nashville Sound — they are like, um... *quite* a trilogy.

JR: It's amazing. And it's funny, you compared him to Flannery O'Connor, 'cause I was a visitor at a Flannery O'Connor book club a few weeks ago where they always have some music — like they try to get food ready for the author and they try to play some music in the background. And they said, you know, "who should we play?" I'm like, "Jason Isbell!"

JC: Yeah, he's fantastic. And I feel fortunate to be alive while he's doing what he's doing.

JR: Yeah.

JC: That's how I feel.

JR: That song about the vampires — 'cause this is Valentine's Day when we're recording this.

JC: (laughs)

JR: That's just my— it's like the best love song for old people ever written.

JC: It's powerful. I love Springsteen, Tom Petty. And Paul McCartney, I think, is a fascinating songwriter.

JR: Can we talk about Tom Petty for a moment? Because, um... I love Tom Petty.

JC: Yeah.

JR: And it makes me happy that real songwriters like Tom Petty. Like, can you tell me about what you like about him?

JC: He's a craftsman. I think the mark of a craftsman is, at least for songwriting, is he's a master of simplicity. You look at his songs, and it's just that I could pick up a guitar and play them for you. We could figure it out in five minutes. They're not complex musically, but they're so well done. And I love how he turns a phrase, you know...

JR: Yeah!

JC: He's just a fantastic songwriter. And he's a craftsman in the sense that he was a student of the masters. I mean, there's a reason that people like Roy Orbison, and Bob Dylan, Jeff Lynne, and George Harrison, you know... owned him as basically an associate with The Traveling Wilburys. It's because he was and... of course you don't think about that, but if you

look at those records back then, he was the young guy in the mix with these old legends. But he was writing stuff that was cut from the same cloth that those guys were pulling from. I mean, you can't miss that. There's a documentary about the making of those records, and you know, you see him in the room with Bob Dylan and they're working on a lyric, and he's just as comfortable as can be.

JR: (chuckles)

JC: Now, that's a no-brainer because you think of him as Tom Petty, but if you think about where he came from...

JR: I love the fact that he — for his whole life he sounded like he was a North Florida country boy.

JC: Yeah, and he owned it! You talk about writing from your own original voice. When you hear a lick on the — well part of that is Mike Campbell and they're quite a duo. That's one of the coolest things about being in a band, but like — but, you hear a song, you know right away that's Tom Petty. That's Tom Petty.

JR: (chuckles)

JC: And when he died, I was so sad.

JR: Yeah.

JC: And I was so surprised at how sad I was. 'Cause I was like, I've never met this guy. I've never been, like, a stalker fan. But my goodness, his songs, like, worked their way into my life. And they're welcome visitors.

JR: Yeah. You know, every Tom Petty song makes me think I'm in high school.

JC: Yeah.

JR: And I think of — every time I hear it, I think, oh I'm 17 years old at Warner-Robbins High School.

JC: Oh yeah.

JR: And then I'll look up and realize I was a father of three kids when this song came out! And I thought it was from when I was in high school!

JC: Yeah. Right.

JR: It's just... ah, I just love him.

JC: Yeah. Just 'cause I'm a nerd, I wanna make sure I mention all these writers. So I also have down here Rich Mullins, of course. Bob Dylan. Jeff Tweedy. Patty Griffin. Buddy and Julie Miller. And then lately, Lori McKenna. Do you know who she is?

JR: Yeah, I don't know her.

JC: She's a Nashville writer.

JR: Really?

JC: She's a huge, hugely talented... she's written a ton of huge songs, but she's a hugely talented songwriter. Just a craftsman in every possible way.

JR: I'm gonna check her out.

JC: I heard her open for Patty Griffen. My wife and I went and saw Patty at the Ryman last summer. And, um, Lori came out and opened, and I'd never heard her stuff before. I'd heard *of* her, and I was blown away. She has a song called "People Get Old" that is just... it'll just break your heart

in the best way. It just makes you— when the song's over you feel— first of all, you'll feel like you've just watched a 3 hour movie, and it's like 3 and a half minutes long. And then you just... it just pulls emotion out of you. And I love songs that take you to — like you were talking about when you hear Tom Petty, you go back to high school. Those are all sense memories that we have. You know, and I think musicians and songwriters can go to those places in their own life and pull them out and put them in their songs so that when you hear it, they might be talking about their life, but you're pulled into your own life in a more intense way because of it.

JR: Man, why are you bringing up sense memory when we're completely out of time?

JC: I don't know... thank you for...

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

JR: Well, I wish we uh... I wanna talk about that too. Maybe we'll have to do this again.

JC: I would love to.

JR: Hey, thanks so much for being here. I always love talking to you.

JC: Thanks for having me. Likewise.

(THEME MUSIC)

DREW MILLER: The Rabbit Room is partnered with Lipscomb University to make this podcast possible. Lipscomb has graciously given us access to their recording studio in the Center for Entertainment and Arts Building. We're so grateful for their sponsorship, their encouragement, and the good work they do in Nashville.

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Good” as part of this podcast. Visit jessraymusic.com to hear more of her beautiful songs.

JR: The Habit Membership is a library of resources for writers by me, Jonathan Rogers. More importantly, The Habit is a hub of community where like-minded writers gather to discuss their work and give each other a little more courage. Find out more at TheHabit.co.

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(THEME MUSIC OUT)