

Notes on *A Lover's Ghost*

This is my 3rd CD, produced by Jed Marum at Rockin' T Audio Ranch and engineered by Travis Ener. The fifteen acoustic songs are all originals. I know that I appreciate being able to access notes and lyrics to original songs, so I wanted to make these available.

"300 Poems"

I began writing this song in September of 2008. I was booked as a storyteller at the Celtic Fest in Jackson Mississippi, looked up at the beautiful night sky with a full moon and the first verse and melody came to me in the magical way that songs sometimes do. I published this song on iTunes in another acoustic version previously as "Mobile Bay." That first version was produced by Waigne Cryer at Red Lion Studios. I like both versions very much.

Verse 1:

They say we run from what we fear,
Maybe that's why you're gone,
300 poems,
Too many tears
And now the words of this song.

CHORUS:

Now you're down in Mobile Bay,
A blue moon in the sky,
300 poems,
Too many tears,
You're gone, but I don't know why.

Verse 2:

The oak trees there,
Hold you in their shade,
Like the secrets that we've shared,
I walk the streets,
And whisper words,
Words I never should have dared.

Verse 3: (The producer elected to omit this verse from the CD)

A year of poems,
A year of love,
I gave to you alone.
I loved you more
Than you'll ever know,
I can't believe you're gone.

"Red Ribbon Day: A Song for Kiki"

This is a song I wrote especially for the Red Ribbon Day programs I do in schools. Red Ribbon Day programs typically are scheduled in the third week of October. The programs are designed to call students to make a commitment to live a drug-free life and to honor the memory of Kiki Camarena, a DEA agent who was brutally murdered in 1985 in Guadalajara. There's much about him on the Internet, but the best source of Kiki's story is found in Elaine Shannon's book, Desperados: Latin Druglords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can't Win.

Verse 1:

Today, I heard your story,
As my eyes were opened wide,
And though I never met you.
I know how hard you tried.

Verse 2:

You exposed all the lies,
The payoffs and the greed,
To bring down *los narcos*,
And for that, they made you bleed.

Verse 3:

Sometimes in the Valley,
A sad dark rooster cries,
Teaching us that it matters,
How you lived and how you died.

Verse 4:

Now red ribbons tell your story,
And honor your memory,
One man can make a difference,
I know you did for me.

CHORUS:

And the wind carries your ashes,
To the place where heroes go,
From the top of Signal Mountain,
To the borders of Old Mexico

“Ghost Train “

The idea for this song came to me as I reflected on some of the very creative, but manic depressive friends I've had in my life. Insomnia seemed to be a common characteristic. Those of you who remember your Periodic Table will know what LI7 represents.

Verse 1:

Sometimes late at night,
Between midnight and dawn

I'm on a lonesome highway,
And I'm walking it alone.

Verse 2:

The LI7 Ghost Train,
I can hear its whistle at times,
I chase it down abandoned tracks,
Seeking for a sign.

Verse 3:

My friends think I'm half crazy,
My wife knows I'm insane,
Because I stay up late at night,
Waiting for that train.

Verse 4:

I know others travel this road,
But I always feel alone.
Maybe I'll see Jimmy here,
Though I know he's dead and gone.

Verse 5:

I always knew I'd be a hobo,
In the dark corners of my mind,
Hopping trains and walking,
What's there is what I'll find.

"Harrison County Bridge"

This song came to me after I read The Covered Bridges of Madison County, a sweet little love story. I wanted to write a Texas version of it, so I researched the covered bridges in Texas and found one that was built on private land in Harrison County, a county where I often work. I thought I'd use that bridge for a central image of the song. You can see a photo of the bridge (it's on private land) here: <http://www.dalejtravis.com/bridge/texas/htm/43102a.htm>

Verse 1:

The Bridge in Harrison County
I crossed sometime ago with you,
Photographs and a letter,
Are all that tell the truth,
Of a love I keep inside me,
And a woman I can't forget,
A voice inside warns it time to let go,
But it's too late for that I guess.

Verse 2:

We've laid love on the table,
It's time now to walk away,
And leave it all behind me,
But memories won't go away,
I feel your touch upon me,
And I can see your face,
I can recall nearly every word,
And time and look and place.

Verse 3:

For myself I don't feel sorry,
I'm glad you came my way,
There was magic, there was passion,
Special nights and special days,
Your brown eyes still haunt me,
And fill my dreams at night,
I need to see you one more time,
And try to make things right.

CHORUS:

The covered bridge in Harrison County
Is burned in my memory,
An image of a one-time love,
I still need so desperately.

"A Lover's Ghost"

This is the title song for my new CD. It's easy to be haunted by the past, by regret, by loss, by our choices, by feeling unappreciated. I wanted to capture that feeling.

Verse 1:

All those years, you did what you're supposed to do,
As a wife and mother, but no time for you,
No one noticed, how hard you tried,
There's no fame or honors, only sadness in your eyes.

No one noticed, how much you changed,
No one gave a damn that you weren't the same.
Ruts, job, and family, just waiting round to die,
It's so hard sometimes, all you do is cry.

CHORUS:

Caught between the rocks of truth and lies,
Between fading dreams, and those clear Texas skies,
Hurting those you love or the one who loved you most.
Caught between life and a lover's ghost.

Verse 2:

At least there's memories, of a love that was true,
He the only one, who knew the real you.
You close your eyes and feel his kiss again,
But when they open, what you see is not him.

You try to remember, that this life is what you chose,
But you still look for him, everywhere you go.
It's hard sometimes to say what you miss the most,
When you're caught between life and a lover's ghost.

CHORUS:

Caught between where you've been and where you are,
Between holding back, or going much too far,
Hurting those you love or the one who loved you most.
Caught between life and a lover's ghost.

"1993"

This song was inspired by a very good friend of mine who had a hard year.

Verse 1:

Well, I thought that I had made it through all the hard times,
I thought the worst was over and that everything was fine,
I never ever thought that this could happen to me,
But the roof fell in, back in 93.

I didn't think lightning could hit me twice,
I chose to ignore a good friend's advice,
I never really thought that she'd ever leave,
But that's what happened in 93.

CHORUS:

1993,
What she did to me,
1993,
The year that finally broke my heart,

Verse 2:

I fell in love with a girl in Mexico,
I should have known better, but I just had to go,
I booked us a room in a Holiday Inn,
Things were fine till her daddy barged in.

You might say things didn't go so well,

I ended up in a Mexican jail,
It took a lot of money but they let me go,
And I got myself out of Mexico.

Verse 3:

Well, this storm blew in and it wrecked my life,
The rain kept a pourin' on me every night,
I still hear her words, "Well, you're finally free,
So enjoy yourself in 1993.

Well, a bad year's comin' but it won't be the first,
I really doubt that anything could make things worse,
I've done some thinking and I finally see,
That the worse year of all was 1993.

"Jessie's Heart"

This song was inspired by two women, my mother, Jessie Fae Pittman, who really was born in Karma, Oklahoma, a town along the Red River that ironically was washed away by a flood, and by a writing friend in Austin.

Verse 1:

Jessie was born in Karma,
A town along the Red,
Washed away by a flood,
At least, that's what folks said,
Her father left them,
Slipped into the dark,
He never called to ask,
What was in his Jessie's heart.

Verse 2:

Jessie moved to Austin
When she was just eighteen,
There she started writing,
Building on her dreams,
Alone but not lonely,
Determined to make her mark,
But she never let anyone,
Look into Jessie's heart.

Verse 3:

She stands before the camera,
Her smile makes her glow,
But she's more than what's standing there,
There's much that doesn't show
She writes the stories

Elegant is her art,
And I'd give anything,
Just to look into Jessie's heart.

Verse 4:

I met her in Austin,
At a coffee shop I knew,
She read some poetry,
I sang a song or two,
We left together,
But she slipped away in the dark,
Now I'll never know,
What was in Jessie's heart.

CHORUS:

Jessie's heart may be lonely
Jessie's heart may be cold
Jessie's heart may be broken
But it's one thing you'll never know.

"A Song for Johnny"

I wrote this song in memory and in honor of Johnny. I never knew his last name. He was Hispanic, and he was hired by the Pittman family to take care of my grandfather in his last months, when we knew he was dying. A hospice worker of a sort, I guess, who lived with them. Their house was just outside Rochester, Texas, in a part of the country known as the Texas Badlands. The water there tasted like sulfur. I liked Johnny and got to know him well. I still remember vividly his telling me how his mother made tortillas. My cousin Sammy didn't like him and was very vocal about it. In West Texas a prejudice exists among some that is directed against Hispanics. It is a prejudice that is equal to the prejudice against blacks in the South. One night my mother called me and told me about Johnny's suicide. Grandmother had told her what she knew. He killed himself with a shotgun outside at my grandparents' storm cellar. He had left a suicide note. The event traumatized my grandmother, but my grandfather barely understood. My grandfather was so inward and withdrawn at that point, that I don't know that he even missed Johnny, but I did. The grief we all felt was too deep to be forgotten, so I wrote this song.

Verse 1

Johnny was born in Texas,
But his folks came from Mexico,
They settled close to Haskell,
And swore they'd never go.
They drank the Badland water,
And worked a Badland farm,
They'd gather at their table,
And sing this arm in arm.

CHORUS:

We'll always have each other,
We'll never say goodbye

We'll always be a family,
And I'll never make you cry.

Verse 2:

Johnny worked the oilfields
And was the toughest boy in town.
He spent time in the Army,
Then tried to settle down,
One night he met Maria,
She became his everything,
She promised that they'd marry,
And that every night they'd sing.

Verse 3:

But things seldom work out
The way we want them too.
Maria moved to Dallas,
And Maria was untrue,
She said she loved another,
And could not be his wife.
Johnny's demons found him,
And one night he took his life.

Verse 4:

On moonlight nights in Texas
Between coyote songs
I think of how we miss him,
His death just seems so wrong,
I think about the friend he was,
And the friend I could have been,
When I visit with his family,
We sing this song for him.

"Biscuits & Blues"

I started this song on a night when I was performing in Natchez, Mississippi for the Scottish Society here. I had just heard the story of the Biscuits and Blues restaurant owner who had returned to Natchez. This was also the night when they turned on the lights on the bridge connecting Vidalia, Louisiana to Natchez. The crowds for this event were huge and the imagery so rich I just had to write a song about Natchez.

Verse 1:

New York was always too busy,
In L.A. I couldn't breathe,
San Francisco was a little too weird,
Even for a boy like me.

I always dreamed of Mississippi,
Couldn't shake that part of me,
I kept looking for a way to come back,
I'd seen all I wanted to see.

CHORUS:

I wanted biscuits and blues in the morning,
Walking hand in hand with you,
I need a forever love,
I'll give you a heart that's true,

Now it's biscuits and blues in the morning,
And singing the blues at night,
Blue moon in that Natchez sky,
Tells me we'll be alright.

Verse 2:

They turned on the lights this evening,
On that Mississippi bridge,
We saw it from under the hill,
Then from the cemetery ridge.

I could see the streets of Vidalia,
And the bluffs above the town
Hot air balloons anchored and waiting
For the dawn to come around.

Verse 3:

Some come to look for ghosts,
Others for the history,
Artists pushed here by hurricanes,
Writers for the mysteries.

I remember Angels on the Bluff,
A bright night much like this,
We were walking by the Turning Angel,
Who turned her head when we kissed.

“6th Street Blues”

I've had occasion to visit Austin a few times in my life, and I've always enjoyed the music there. I wrote this song based on a couple of musicians I knew of who were blues musicians there.

Verse 1:

I'll tell you a story,

About a man you might know,
lost in the city,
And lost in the cold.
Hangover misery
From the whiskey and gin,
Leftover heartbreaks
and memories of sins.

He said, Blues, please don't leave me,
I can't be alone tonight.
Blues, please don't leave me,
Stay until the morning light.

Verse 2:

He once met a woman
Out late one night,
6th Street in Austin,
In dim neon lights.
Heart-aching lonely
Sad music, did he play,
She pulled him closer
And this is what she said.

Please, please don't leave me,
I can't be alone tonight.
Please, please don't leave me,
Stay until the morning light.

Verse 3:

He might be a legend,
He might be a ghost.
He might be homeless,
But he's paid the blues the most.
He'll wake in some alley,
Behind some dark bar (clutching his guitar?)
With too many memories,
And too many scars.

And he'll sing, Blues, please don't leave me,
I can't be alone tonight.
Blues, please don't leave me,
Stay until the morning light.

“Magic Moon of Laredo”

The first time I played in Laredo, I stayed downtown at the La Posado hotel. In the bar I met a couple of engineers who frequently came to Laredo. They took me on a late-night tour of Laredo's nightlife. The next morning I started on this song.

Verse 1:

She was sitting in the restaurant with eyes so blue
And a smile that cracked my heart.
I was playing my guitar in the town of Laredo,
Trying to make a new start,
Patricia, don't you think if we had the time,
You might want me too,
Patricia, you might think I'm crazy,
But I think I could fall for you,
They say there's magic in the moon of Laredo,
And I believe it's true,
But the greatest magic I ever felt,
Was when I first looked at you.

Verse 2:

We walked downtown through the streets of Laredo,
And danced until nearly dawn.
We kissed outside your La Pasado room,
And then I moved along,
Patricia, don't you think if we had the time,
We might kiss some more,
Patricia, put your arms around me now,
And heal this heart so sore,
They say there's magic in the moon of Laredo,
And I believe it's true,
But the greatest magic I ever felt,
Was when I first looked at you.

Verse 3:

I returned to Louisiana
And you to Austin town,
I'm still playing in restaurants,
But now you're not around
Patricia, if things were different,
We might be together now,
Patricia, you might think I'm crazy,
But I think it would work out somehow,
They say there's magic in the moon of Laredo,
And I believe it's true,
But the greatest magic I ever felt,
Was when I first looked at you.

"Love's Always in Color"

I was in a hotel somewhere in Texas when I started on this song. Reflecting on how important photographs are to the memory and the heart, I wrote this song. This was the producer's favorite song in this collection and we almost made it the title song. It's a long song, so we had to shorten it for the CD by omitting one of the verses.

Verse 1:

Every night I look at your picture,
Every night I sing you a song,
Every night I kiss your memory,
It seems to move the night along,
They say a picture's worth at least a thousand words
A picture holds the truth, even if it's blurred,
So tonight I hold your picture
And sing this song you've never heard.

Verse 2:

I think love's always in color,
Seldom in black and white,
Capturing secrets of our secrets,
Clear in day but fading at night,
There's two people in every photo,
They say the camera never lies,
This photo reminds me of our story
And how I loved those sad green eyes.

Verse 3:

I guess we frame all our memories
Like photos behind fragile glass,
Then we hang them on our heart-walls,
Hoping that they'll always last,
This photo may one day be faded,
May be torn or may be tossed
But it's how I'll always remember,
The green-eyed girl that I lost.

Verse 4:

This picture was developed
In the darkroom of our hearts,
A mirror of our memory,
Life and love divided into parts,
It was a time when we were happy
It was a time when we had souls,
And it's how I'll always remember,
The green-eyed girl that I loved so.

Verse 5:

This photo captured you forever,
A portrait painted by the sun,
Layers of the past and present,
Before it all came undone,
All I have now is this picture,
Just this moment from long ago,
But that's how I'll always remember,
The green-eyed girl that I loved so.

"Don't Drink the Water"

During my first visit to Rio Grande City, I performed at a school. When I commented on how much I liked that part of Texas, Liz Perez, the school librarian, said, "Well, don't drink the water, or you'll never leave." That gave me the key line I needed to write this song.

Verse 1:

Don't drink the water
Of the Rio Grande
Don't look for treasure
In this hot desert sand
Don't drink the water
Or you'll never leave,
Don't drink the water,
Don't be a fool like me.

Verse 2:

Poncho Villa
And Juan Cortina too
Drank from this river,
As they were passing through.
It made them crazy,
It made them mean,
Their ghosts still ride this valley
Like shadows in a dream.

Verse 3:

Don't kiss the lips
Of that brown-eyed girl,
Don't give your heart to her
Don't give her gold and pearls,
If you think you love her,
You ain't gonna leave,
Don't drink that water, son,
Let that woman be.

Verse 4:

La Llarona walks the river

Walks the river late at night
Crying out so sad
In her gown of white,
If you see her
You better run and pray
Don't drink that water,
She'll steal your soul away.

“Don Bernado Guitérrez de Lara’

by José Antonio López and Rickey Pittman

*At a book festival in Laredo, I met Mr. Lopez. He shared with me his book, **The Last Knight** The Story of Don Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara Uribe (1774-1841), a Texas Hero. I decided I had to write a song about this little known Texas hero. I used parts of a poem Mr. Lopez had written, so I've listed him as a co-writer of the song.*

Verse 1:

A priest made a proclamation
In September 1810
That Creoles and mestizos
Were as good as other men.
That Spanish-conquered Indians,
The slaves and common men,
Had rights equal to
Highborn Spanish men.

Verse 2:

Don Bernado answered the grito,
And volunteered for the fight,
To help the priest and his peasants,
Obtain their needed rights.
They made him ambassador,
And to Washington he was sent,
To obtain weapons and soldiers,
From America's President.

Verse 3:

The priest's army was defeated
The leaders all were lost,
Don Bernado vowed to carry on,
No matter what the cost.
He and 14 others
Left the Rio Grande,
The Spanish hunted them down
Deep in Louisianne.

Verse 4:

He left his wounded in New Orleans,
And pushed on in his quest,
Reached Washington in December,
In need of food and rest.
The first cowboy in Washington,
A vaquero from the West,
He caused quite a stir
In chaps and boots and vest.

Verse 5:

Blessed by the President
He raised an army of men,
To fight for independence
And return to Texas with him.
August McGee was named commander,
Under a flag of emerald green.
His Tejanos fought with Jackson,
In the battle of New Orleans.

Verse 6:

He signed our first declaration,
The first Constitution too,
The first President of Texas,
His heart was bold and true.
A soldier and a leader,
To Spain, a dangerous man,
His exploits and his enemies grew,
As he carried out his plans.

CHORUS:

The seventh flag of Texas,
Was a banner of emerald green,
The spark that lit our liberty,
Came from Don Bernardo's dream!
A flag of self-rule
A beacon of our rights,
A symbol of Texas beginning,
Came from this Revilla knight.

"Welcome Home, My Son"

Our veterans are close to my heart. I've frequently performed music for Memorial Day Veterans Day events as well as for veterans homes and the Blue Star Mothers. I was coming out of Shreveport on the road to Arkansas one afternoon when I passed the driveway that I describe in

my song. This is one of those songs that almost wrote itself. The song was also inspired by a book I read, entitled 400 Days, by Mitchell Waite.

Verse 1:

My tour in Iraq was over,
And at last I was going home,
The sun was setting to my left,
As I drove on alone

I came to my parents' house,
On highway 71
A sign stood by the driveway,
Saying, Welcome home our son.

Verse 2:

Balloons and American flags,
Danced in the Southern air,
Yellow ribbons were tied to trees
And to the mailbox there.

My dad met me at the door
Grinning big as you please,
My mother started crying
The moment she saw me,

Verse 3:

After supper we took pictures,
And talked till it was late,
But we didn't talk about the war,
Or mistakes we all had made

I lay down on an old iron bed,
That I'd slept in as a child
In days when life was simpler
And I roamed free and wild

Verse 4:

I heard a lonely whippoorwill
Coyotes and Bob Whites
But no rockets or rifle fire,
Troubled me this night.

CHORUS:

Welcome home our soldier,
Your tour of duty's done
You've been gone 400 days,
Welcome home our son.

