



The Album

Detached, suspended and truly lost in the stand still motion of transit. In essence that is what my train trip around the country was about and what led to the making of Slow Set of Track. The year following my pops' death a few different things converged and came to a head in my life and the change that needed to be addressed seemed best done on a train. My heart had grown cold and my head loud with a 15 year old secret I'd been living with. Also a life time of bad posture had caught up with me in the form of a frozen right shoulder. For a long time prior to this happening, my days were spent either hunched over a guitar, in front of a computer clicking away on a mouse or at the ballpark throwing a baseball. When my shoulder froze up and my body shut down my physical therapist (after teaching me how to stand erect, sit proper and trade in the mouse for a roller-ball) told me I needed to take a few months off from my normal routine. Not an easy task since I'm not one to sit still too long but the timing for it was good since I was also in need of getting out of town for a bit to air out my head and heart. I bought a rail pass on Amtrak and set out to visit what friends and family I have scattered across the states. Obviously it would keep me away from a guitar, computer and baseball but it would also force me to sit still, catch my breath and center myself.

There is a grave mistake in thinking that growing up happens just by growing old and I had a good long sit with that realization while on the train. History, through time, strips events of their nuance and reduces them to simplified memories like a piece of Swiss cheese with its' sharp distinct taste but full of holes. As well, one single memory can be shared by many and for each holder of that memory there is its' own narrator. As for the narrator of this piece of cheese, 15 years prior to me taking passage through time on a train, I was in what I guess you could call a love triangle of sorts and when the woman involved became pregnant she decided to go with the partner she had been with the longest and asked me for the gift of my absence. Now one thing that has stood clear through time is that there is no right or wrong, there is only consequence and in the valley between the holders of memory, a river of truth flows to an ocean we'll never swim. At least not on this earth. These poetic ramblings are fine for staring out the window of a train, safely protected from the world but when the trip ended and the the reality of life crawled back in to the drivers seat THAT is what I saw. I also saw the emotional decision I made in my youth in giving a gift that set a pattern in motion of life being decided for me. My father was dead. Never to know the daughter that didn't even know I existed. For the better part of 15 years I hovered close while I watched from afar through a god damn computer screen at a life unfolding. I believed the conversations that were happening only in my head and feared that my time in exile justified them. When I rolled back in to Tucson I put my belongings in storage and I moved back to Seattle to meet my daughter- and I'm a lucky, thankful bastard full of gratitude, because I got to.

To me, making albums has always been about documenting a moment in time and expressing gratitude. Never has that sentiment been more realized for me than on this album.

The Players

Michael John Serpe
Graig Markel
Jon Hyde
Vannessa London
Terri Moeller
Carolyn Wennblom
Mara Cifronti
Nicholas S. Markel
Nick Baker

Thank you

Michael & Melinda Hallett - Nick Baker & Mapleleaf Screen Printing-
LoLo Craft - Cookie - Graig Markel - Jeremy Michael Cashman - Dan
Twelker - Don Jennings - Dani Hawley - The Mighty Joel Ford -
Michael P. - Brian Field - Dave Norwood - Hana Kasm & Chris Sand -
Vannessa London - Joey Brown - Mark & Mel Mason - Kris Kerry &
Cathy Rivers - KXCI - Everyone who helped me along during my trip
- Everyone who played on the album - And everyone who took an
interest....ever.

Credits

Slow Set of Track ©2014 Heathen Call

Executive Producer: Michael John Serpe

Recorded, Mixed and Mastered by Graig Markel

All Songs Written by Michael John Serpe except West of the Tucson
Mountains and The Old Guardian of Gates Pass, written by Michael
John Serpe and composed with Graig Markel

Album design, layout and packaging by Michael John Serpe ©2014
Heathen Call

Insert Photo: Daniel Hawley

Sample at the end of Dead A Long Time recorded in Mandaree, North
Dakota; home to the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, during its
annual Pow-Wow.



The Lyrics

DEEP EDDY-

Pops gone, how long?
I'm here, how long?
Spinning around the sun, how long?
Let time tell just how long..
Are we there? Well there is here.
So now you're home, are you gonna stay?

TURN FALLOW-

Watching you writhe alone in bed - my hand on your chest as death sets in - your soul was itching to leave.
Death doesn't hide in shadows with a cold hand to touch you fallow.
It's not a he & it don't steal a damn thing from you.
Death is you alone in bed - jump from them bones, crawl from that skin - your soul was itching to leave.
Death doesn't hide in shadows with a cold hand to touch you fallow.
It's the bill you pay at the end of the life you lead... One day we go.
One day we go alone.
Saw you out of bed. Sitting in disguise. Showered, shaved & clothed but to look in your eyes; you were tired & then some. Was it in that shower with nurses by your side, under heavy hands of giving that you felt the compromise of life to just living to being done?

SLOW SET OF TRACK-

Georgia you sure are a sight for sore eyes, though I can't tell what's blind from what's seeing.
I fell asleep on this train, stopped dead on it's tracks, under a sky with no moon.
Where I woke up & saw you there. Out through a window that held my reflection & the way that I hung there in you; like a skiff on the night, took the weight from this body, adrift in a sky with no moon.

WEST OF THE TUCSON MOUNTAINS- Instrumental

SLEEPY FOOT- Instrumental

WRONGED NUMBER-

Stumbling around the Puget Sound, cell phones make it too easy man - I'm drunk, I'm mad - I gotta call to hear you.
I don't miss you, I barely knew you.. but the missing part of me came through you. I need a pulse, I'm drunk & I'm calling to hear you.
"Is paul there?"
"I'm sorry, I'm afraid you have the wrong number.."
"I'm sorry..."
"That's alright, have yourself a good night."
Is paul there? What's wrong with me? I'd hardly say there's no problem... but I need a pulse, I'm drunk & I'm calling to hear you.
The funny thing about certain towns & the body memory that keeps us bound to a time & place when we were young & burned there.
Everything has changed, some stuffs torn down, a new batch of youth has come around.
I'm old, I'm cold,, standing in their summer.
I don't miss you, I barely knew you but the missing part of me came through you.
I need a pulse, I'm drunk & I'm calling to hear you.

SNEAKY SUE-

Sneaky Sue you snuck up on me.
The way you threw your curls at me.
Slowly curling around your neck,
softly bouncing down your back...Sneaky Sue you snuck up on me.
Sneaky Sue you snuck up on me.
Threw that warm cool smile at me. Added to the list on my sleeve...
Sneaky Sue was good to me, I'd say professional as I proceeded to be the lonely fool on a bar stool who goes flinging woo.
Sneaky Sue snuck out the back, left my tab to be settled by some waiter jack...
Sneaky Sue snuck out on me.

THE OLD GUARDIAN OF GATES PASS- Instrumental

DEAD A LONG TIME-

Lifes done got me spinning in my head.
Lost my breath trying to get ahead.
Paying no mind or respect to my own rhyme. I don't buy that heading out early is an early too soon.. but have a little fun because your dead a long time.
So life keep spinning, I'm thinking i'll wait.
Pass through thinking to a thoughtless state. Go inside & get in rhythm with my own rhyme.
Let time fly & have a little fun because you're dead a long time.



About The Songs

Earth's orbit freaks me out. Spinning around the sun on this planet of granite - the bloodlines that ties us to it & the physical & emotional gravity of both of those things - has always weighed heavy on me. **Deep Eddy** is a swim hole in Austin, TX - & where I relearned the importance of being simple. We all have our own internal rhythm, & home to me is in the moments I can be suspended & still in my own.

Held between my hand & a hospice bed, my pop inconspicuously left the earth. On watch for the exact moment of this grand final transformation, I stood alongside my brother & his girlfriend, where I saw disease grossly overtake a body under the beauty of late April morning light. I heard a preacher's last rites, a nurse's condolence, & the scorn of a son protesting "deaths theft". I smelled the clashing mix of mucus, sweat, & morning eggs. It was somewhere in all of that, that my pop silently squared his debts & cashed out. Snuck out right from under our noses. We **Turn Fallow** the fields that brought us life & when we go we go alone - for death is a private vision & belief is everything.

Waking up on a train late at night while traveling coach is usually very disorienting; one such night found me finally out of Florida & somewhere in Georgia. I didn't know why the train was stopped, & for a minute there I forgot I was on a train at all. I squinted through the window & into the dark silhouettes of a still & dense Georgia landscape. A slight reflection of my face in the window superimposed me over a moonless sky, where I floated away from myself, up through a dark sky while sitting on a **Slow Set of Track**.

Of the five mountain ranges that surround Tucson, the Tucson Mountains have a distinct, otherworldly look & feel all of their own. Being in the foreground of every beautiful Tucson sunset, they draw across the landscape a lumpy wall that suggests that this is not just where the sun sets, but where earth & time end. Still mostly unscarred by the mold-like plague that is Arizona's developers, **West of the Tucson Mountains** is a mostly barren land, rich in the essence of all days past.

My pop passed from COPD, a lung condition that slowly ends up drowning you in a bed. My pop never spoke with self-pity about his disease, he actually hardly ever spoke of it at all but I do remember asking him once what the most frustrating thing about his condition was; his answer was the pain of basically being under house arrest & tethered to an oxygen machine. He told me that in his mind he could easily just get up & walk across the room, but it felt as if his body had a mind of its own, like having your leg fall asleep & trying to walk on it. The first time I remembered that story after he had passed was while I was on my train trip. I awoke one night, totally disoriented & got up to use the bathroom. Not realizing I had a **Sleepy Foot**, I went down like a load of bricks right there in the aisle. The only other person awake was an old man, & as I lay there on the floor rubbing my foot awake he just held my gaze - silently but almost mournfully - as if I wasn't even really a person there at all, but a fallen thought from his remembered past. It made me think of age, circumstance, the things that fall into slumber inside us never to awaken, & the slow death of artistic ambition.

People rarely do anything to us that we don't allow to happen. It's a thin line that separates being wronged from allowing others the power over our own happiness. A good part of our youth & early adulthood is dictated by emotion & a greater part of our late adulthood & old age is dictated by making peace with that past. Some actions set into motion cause currents that can set us adrift for a lifetime. I carry with me a **Wronged Number**, 10 digits through a distorted past to an ever clearer future.

Sneaky Sue is my nickname for a beautiful girl; seriously, just a lovely person & an excellent waitress who taught me a valuable lesson...DON'T hit on the help.

Most of us will go through this life without ever being truly tested. Sure, we will all have our share of ups & downs, loves & losses, but being truly tested is for the purest of heart, those who meet their days head-on & own them. My brother Jeremy is of such stock. Should you ever be driving over Gates Pass, hiking through the Tucson Mountains, or get a chance to breathe the air high upon Wasson Peak & see **THE OLD GUARDIAN OF GATES PASS**, don't be timid to embrace him. His soul is old & fractured yet familiar & warm, & the dust he breathes is from the bed of a million beautiful desert wildflowers.

I'm not a god fearing man. The moral compass I travel through my days by is for the love of this earth & my time on it, to better understand people and engage with them, & to basically leave things better than I found them. But please, don't get me wrong when I say that I'm ready to testify. Don't get me wrong when I tell you that the love I have for my part in days is strong but that I am ready to leave - it's not from a gloomy place, I assure you. My Auntie Blue was a great woman - strong, fiery, & wise as she was beautiful. Once at a family function at a banquet hall she was sitting at the table talking with my cousin Theresa, when a waiter came around with a dessert tray offering cannolies. To the offer Theresa modestly declined with an, "Oh, I really shouldn't..." Auntie Blue touched her gently on the arm & said, "Theresa, you're **Dead A Long Time**...have a cannolie & enjoy." Words to live by, right? Life is for the living so while you are, do!



There really isn't anything worse than losing a loved one. My pop was sick for a long time & even though we had plenty of time to prepare for what was coming, the final days were awful. I can not come near to describing just how thankful I am for what hospice did for my pop, my brother, & myself. They took so much out of our hands, letting us just focus on saying goodbye. They got my pop cleaned up & put in a nice, private room; allowing him to die with dignity. The services they provide are the embodiment of what it means to be humane, bar none.

For each album sold 20% of the proceeds will go to Hospice of the Valley.

05/03/2009

Free Agency

The Friday following my fathers death I was back on the ball field. The Yankees had dissolved after our last game meaning I was a "free agent" and the start of the next season found my name back on the players pool. I wasn't picked up by any of the remaining teams in the aluminum bat league but a couple of weeks before my pop died I got a phone call from a guy who had a team that played wood bat ball on Friday nights. I was up in Phoenix when I got the call and ironically enough was at a sporting goods store; my pop was sick of being in a hospital gown and asked me to get him a pair of those sweatpants you see basketball players wear that snap off at the legs so we could get them on and off him while he laid in bed.

Ross is a baseball man through and through, he loves the game and though a bad knee keeps him from doing much more than batting and occasionally pitching, he manages with more heart then most guys on the field. His team is the Angels and he was in need of an outfielder, I was in need of a team so lied through my teeth and said I was a good outfielder but backed it up with the all important truth that would hold stock to any man in Ross's position; my legs are good and fast enough that if the ball gets by me I can shag it down. That was good enough for him and I was was in.

I picked up the sweatpants for my pop, grabbed a wood bat for myself and headed back to the hospital to deliver the news to my pop that a new team picked me up and I'd be playing again.

When I quit playing ball in high school and my interest turned to music it was foreign to my pop and the one bonding thing we had in common seemed whittled to a thread, but over the last few years that thread was weaving it's way back into a lifeline of sorts between us. There were plenty of signs in the hospital that my father was entering into his last days but you only had to look into his eyes to see it clear as day. The news of my return to the ball field for another season didn't ignite the same spark in his eyes as it had a year ago, there were no follow up questions as to team or schedule; the excitement of playing wood bat instead of little league style aluminum bat ball went as far as an earnest "no kidding?". I wrote it off to a bad day but the simple fact was that I was losing my father, we all struggle through our final out and this was his.

During my pops time in the hospital he tried hard to work through his rehab, mainly for my brother and I. We'd tell him "If we can get you walking as far as the nurses station then you're as good as home" but the truth was he wasn't going home. My pop had been pretty much living a life under house arrest before he landed in the hospital as naturally his mobility slowed allowing him to do fewer and fewer things. When he first got put on oxygen he was still working construction, he'd actually show up to the job site with his mobile tank slung over his shoulder, cannula up his nose and cement boots on his feet. He finally retired but still stayed as active as he could, in some ways more active than before he was sick. He got himself a girlfriend and they'd take day trips or go see a Diamondbacks game but eventually the girlfriend stopped coming around and my pops highlight was my brother taking him to the grocery store or getting the mail for himself. From there he slipped to living vicariously through my brother and I as we would report the mundane day to day of our lives or the subtle changes in the neighborhood that lay out past his view from the front bedroom window. He had long quit sleeping in his bed and spent all his days and nights in a recliner in the living room, he slowly started eating and drinking less and less mostly to avoid having to get up and go to the bathroom. His breathing had become so labor some he would pee in a hand held urinal from his chair to avoid having to walk to the bathroom.

Being in a hospital getting three meals a day, peeing and shitting whenever he wanted without having to get up shattered the denial my pop was in about his illness and made him realize how compromised his quality of life had become. My pop wanted to go home but he now knew he couldn't. I took a picture of him the day I came to the hospital to find him out of bed sitting in a wheel chair. The nurses assisted him in a real shower put clothes on him and propped him up in front of a window. It was the first time I saw him out of bed and in a "normal" state in a month and a half, I was ecstatic! I thought he might be actually going home and thought it was strange he was not as excited as me; later that afternoon I looked at the photo again, past the clothes and upright position and into his eyes, I realized he wasn't the only one who had been in denial about his condition and shortly after reality was in, he was gone.

Early the following week I told Ross over the phone my pop had died and I might not make the first game but that Friday found me wearing Angel red instead of Yankee blue. I went up to Ross and introduced myself, he said;

"Wow, you made it? You wanna play?"

"Yeah I want to, I kinda got to.."

"Great, right field"

I laced up my cleats and as I snapped a knot in them dust from last season waif out like a trail of smoke off a match that dances through the air and slowly dissipates into the air that suspends it. I went out to right field and stared out at the sky burning red just over the Tucson mountains where it met the dark blue dusk night chasing another day away. I thought about "Free Agency" and how that term now held new meaning to me; mans will to choose for himself and the things in life that slowly drive us out of the game.

I didn't even notice the first batter step to the plate..nor the second one, what I did notice was a screaming fly ball in route to me. I grossly miss read the ball off the bat and as it sailed over my head I turned and ran towards it's inevitable drop into what was sure to be a double or a triple..."legs don't fail me now....."