

Time Ain't Got Nothin' On Me - lyrics, notes & production credits

The Middle Years ©2009

MD: voice & guitar, Ellen Shepard: voice, Chris Walz: voice & guitar, John Abbey: bass, Brian Wilke: pedal steel, Frank Rosaly: drums.

The title and melody came one summer in the mid-1990s. I was finally able to get the verses together in June 2009. Finished it up the same day as "We Become."

Seems like only yesterday
I was really on my way
young and green I used to sway
like a willow in the breeze
now every time I turn around
another sun is goin down
days are fallin to the ground
like dyin autumn leaves

After all these little dreams and fears
we're comin to the middle years
lookin in a rear view mirror
ain't no turnin 'round
and after all the time that's passed
slippin through an hour glass
God it all goes by so fast
and it ain't slowin down

All my clothes don't fit me right
I don't go out late at night
sometimes I'd rather run than fight
or not show up at all
I mighta set the world on fire
but now I walk a tight rope wire
I'm just another man for hire
waitin on a call

All my hair is turnin gray
it's gettin thinner everyday
I still got somethin left to say
I just don't say it quite as loud
so hang on honey hold on tight
everything is gonna be all right
I'll be back home tomorrow night
and I'll be walkin on a cloud

God Bless the Open Road and You ©2006

MD: voice & guitar, Michael Smith: voice & guitar, Chris Walz: mandolin, John Abbey: bass, Brian Wilke: pedal steel, Frank Rosaly: drums.

God bless the great Michael Smith for this lovely duet. The first two verses were written in literally ten minutes one morning in a hotel room in Burlington, Iowa. The third verse came with coffee in Galesburg, Illinois later that day. The bridge took three days to hammer together a week later.

God bless the morning sun
and this quiet day just begun
God bless the place I'm goin to
this morning you were on my mind

God bless those happy times
God bless the open road and you

And God bless those hills and trees
and the rustling of autumn leaves
I remember how it felt when love was new
how the years have passed since those days
since we went our separate ways
God bless the open road and you

God bless the wind that blows
and every town far down the road behind me
and God bless your memory
no matter where I go it seems to find me
find me

And God bless these guitar strings
and all the songs I learned to sing
they've paid my bills since I was twenty-two
and I think of you most every night
up on the stage beneath the lights
God bless the open road and you
God bless the open road and you

The Bluebells in Kentucky ©2008

MD: voice & guitar, Colby Maddox: voice & mandolin, John Abbey: bass.

First sung on New Year's Eve 2008 in Springfield, Illinois. The idea for "Bluebells" came some time after reading Wendell Berry's very beautiful novel, "Jayber Crow," and visiting the very small town of Port Royal, Kentucky. One day the title emerged to the tune of the old hobo song, "Little Stream of Whiskey." It took almost two years before the whole thing came together.

I had a dream the other night so real it must be true
I dreamed of southern sunshine the bluegrass state and you
we were walkin by the river and we heard a cuckoo sing
when the bluebells in Kentucky were bloomin in the spring

Headed down to Jayber's we kicked the mud off of our shoes
I got me a brand new hair cut and we caught up on all the news
I bought a Big Red soda from the down town pop machine
when the bluebells in Kentucky were bloomin in the spring

We strolled alongside Katie's branch to the Coulter old home place
talked about the hard times and the loved ones we embrace
we laughed and talked and teased the girls and sat on the front porch swing
when the bluebells in Kentucky were bloomin in the spring

Later on we wandered off to the shade of the old growth trees
mist come in off the river like a sacred veil it seemed

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you took my hand and your eyes replied to some unspoken thing
when the bluebells in Kentucky were bloomin in the spring

The Saddest Town in Illinois ©2006

MD: voice & guitar, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader: voice, John Williams: button accordion, John Abbey: bass.

"The Saddest Town in Illinois" is based on an article with the same title, cut out of the newspaper in 2003. Elizabeth Brackett of WTTW Chicago, also did a piece around that same time. Paris, Illinois is the town, and the service men and women of the 1544th Transportation Division of the Illinois National Guard based there, were among the first casualties in the Iraq War.

A photograph a smiling face
a tender kiss a warm embrace
a memory we can't erase
goodbye to our pride and joy
from the saddest town in Illinois

Fair haired and just nineteen
his back was straight and his build was lean
and from his chest an eagle screamed
"proud to serve with the other boys
from the saddest town in Illinois"

A call come in on the telephone
to tell us he was comin home
on the saddest day we've ever known
so many hopes and dreams destroyed
in the saddest town in Illinois

Rain falls on a soldier's grave
at the courthouse still old glory waves
in another town we heard today
more kids will be deployed
in the saddest town in Illinois

Time Ain't Got Nothin' On Me ©2007

MD: voice & guitar, Ellen Shepard: voice, Chris Walz: voice & mandolin, John Abbey: bass, Frank Rosaly: drums.

This tune fell out of the sky the Friday before Christmas 2007 after listening to Linda Draper of Queens, New York sing a very lovely cover of Ricky Nelson's "How Long." The lyrics came the very next day in a twenty minute burst. I wanted to record it in my home studio, borrowing the cool slide guitar sound from Linda's performance, and stayed up all Saturday night monkeying around with an old bar slide I had lying around. I got a solid demo take of "Time Ain't Got Nothin' On Me" the next day during the second half of the Chicago Bears victory over the Green Bay Packers.

Sometimes I get lonesome for you
and the blues they won't let me be
I strain in the darkness to see
time ain't got nothin on me

Most the time I'm so worried and sad

the rest of the days ain't so bad
and when I push through all this debris
time ain't got nothin on me

Look through the window and see
all that light shinin for me
there ain't nothin to do but believe
time ain't got nothin on me

Livin With the Blues (Brownie McGhee)

MD: voice & guitar, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader: voice, Don Stiernberg: blues fiddle, John Abbey: bass.

Brownie and Sonny performed "Livin' With the Blues" at the Newport Folk Festival back in 1959. Among the many other performers that year were Pete Seeger, Jean Ritchie, Fleming Brown and the very young Frank Hamilton from Chicago. The concerts were captured on tape and released on LP sometime afterwards. In the mid 1980s I checked a scratchy copy out of the library and heard Brownie & Sonny's performance. This is one great song.

Rocks for my pillow cold cold ground my bed
blue skies my blanket moonlight my spread
I'm not ashamed ain't that news
I been livin with the blues

Have you ever been down
oh you know how that feels
feel like an engine lost that drivin wheel
I'm not ashamed ain't that news
I been livin with the blues

The rocks have been my pillow
cold cold ground my bed
the blue skies have been my blanket
the moonlight had been my spread

Don't believe I love you look what a fool I been
don't believe I'm sinkin look what a hole I'm in
I'm not ashamed ain't that news
I been livin with the blues

Song for a Dismal Day ©2009

MD: voice & guitar, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader: voice, Brian Wilke: pedal steel, John Abbey: bass, Frank Rosaly: drums.

Winter 2009. Saginaw, Michigan.

Talkin to myself another ordinary day
fading afternoon sun-streaked window cafe
sidewalk icy dream, February snow
frozen walkers stepping lightly as they go
another ordinary scene from an old unfinished play
sing another hopeful song for a dismal day

Pickin at the strings you feel so far away
we spoke last week I wrote you yesterday
no one else it seems could ever touch me like you do
since you've changed it feels like I'm changing to

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another ordinary scene from an old unfinished play
sing another hopeful song for a dismal day

The night is getting on this drama overplayed
it's comedy it's tragedy and it's something else again
I wonder where you are and if you ever think of me
I can't help think it's getting time for me to leave
another ordinary scene from an old unfinished play
sing another hopeful song for a dismal day
another ordinary scene and if you find out what it means
sing another hopeful song for a dismal day

Ruben You Can Play Your Banjo (Bartholomew Bean)
MD: voice & banjo, Ellen Shepard: voice, Chris Walz: voice
& guitar, John Abbey: bass.

I first heard Lee Ruth sing "Ruben" on Lead Belly's 100th birthday, January 20 1989, at the Chez Coffee House in Columbia, Missouri. Later, Lee sent me the words and a recording of it. "Ruben" has been with me ever since.

Ruben you can play your banjo all night long
we've been waiting all your life just to hear you play your song
Ruben you can play your banjo all night long
we'll be sitting around the fire just in case we can play along

When I was just sixteen I had a little dream
about playin on my daddy's banjo
and when I picked it up and made a sound
I found I couldn't let the darn thing go
you know it felt so good and I knew I could
play to let the music flow
I would hit those strings just to hear them ring
when I played my old banjo

You know it felt so good I knew that I could
play to let my feelings show
like my very best friend staying right till the end
to help me when things got slow
It was so hard to put it down I went to make a brand new sound
and take it to my friends to show
and I would play so clear so they would surely hear
when I played my old banjo

Promise of the Promised Land ©2008
MD: voice & guitar, Ellen Shepard: voice, Chris Walz: voice
& guitar, John Williams, piano, John Abbey: bass.

The seed for the idea of "Promise" grew after reading a front page article in the Chicago Tribune. The lyrics to the bridge were inspired by "The New Colossus," a poem by Emma Lazarus, which is engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the Statue of Liberty.

I slept last night in a warm bed
food on the table and a roof over my head over my head
I dreamed a dream so far away

across the wide Sonoran
across the Rio Grande Rio Grande
I was somewhere beyond the desert sand
lookin for the promise of the promised land

I lost my job at the factory
sixteen years with the company the company
they went south of the border Ramos Arizpe
where the wages are low and the plant runs both night and day
night and day
and all across the desert man there are guards along the border of the promised land

Who crossed the wide Atlantic to find America's shore
who huddles tonight down by the bridge so hungry and homeless and poor
my brother who'll light the lamp
who's gonna open the golden door
open the golden door

I promised my father before he died
I would always be faithful I would always try always try
I got my kids to feed I got bills to pay
I can't get ahead I keep lookin for better days better days
and it's gettin so hard to understand
lookin for the promise of the promised land

My D-18 ©2009
MD: voice & D-18, Colby Maddox: mandolin, John Abbey: bass.

My first real guitar was 1 1979 Martin D-18, purchased new that year. I spent all my money on it and for the next twelve years, spent all of my time with it.

I'm goin back to my D-18
best guitar you've ever seen
the bottom's low and the treble's clean
I'm goin back to my D-18

We fell in love so long ago
you picked me out at the Martin store
I took you home for everyone to see
and I played all night on my D-18

My friends all left or they moved away
I hit the road and dreamed of better days
coast to coast and scene to scene
just you and me my D-18

I joined a band and got a new guitar
a brand new show on a distant star
but now I'm goin back to where I wanna be
I'm goin home to my D-18

No Triple 0 no Gibson J
no Taylor Guild no Larivee
I'm goin home to the one I need
I'm goin back to my D-18

I'm goin back to my D-18
best guitar you've ever seen

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the bottom's low and the treble's clean
I'm goin back to my D-18

Take Me with You ©2008

MD: voice & guitar, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader: voice, John Abbey: bass.

Written in a blur one afternoon August 2008. The last verse was polished up just before the show that same night at Cafe Carpe in Ft. Atkinson, Wisconsin. I sang it for the encore.

You said this town could never hold you in
and livin here this year has been wearin kind of thin
this morning I dropped by so you would know
to take me with you when you're gonna go

If I had to stay here without you
the nights would be so long and the days would be so blue
I'd miss you more than you would ever know
so take me with you when you're gonna go

Take me with you when you're gonna go
don't leave me here alone you know I love you so
hold me close so I'll always know
and take me with you when you're gonna go

You know last night I hardly slept at all
and I thought I heard your footsteps comin down the hall
I swear I heard your voice so soft and low
please take me with you when you're gonna go

Take me with you when you're gonna go
don't leave me here alone you know I love you so
hold me close so I'll always know
and take me with you when you're gonna go

I Hate to See the Summer Go ©2008

MD: voice & guitar, Don Stiernberg: mandolin, John Abbey: bass.

Written on the back porch August 2008. Had an Irving Berlin tune in mind and this one happened instead.

I love the sound of summer rain
and I love the sunshine when skies are blue again
but now the autumn wind has put a chill into my bones
I hate to see the summer go

We fell in love it was early spring
you kissed me and my heart began to sing
I picked you a dandelion and you gave me a rose
I hate to see the summer go

Such a bitter change of seasons
how I hate it cause you're not here
love comes and goes without reason
and lets the summer disappear

I still love you and I can't let go
if I could hold back winter and the cold December snow

you know it might be summer for another month or so
I hate to see the summer go

Two Little Boys (traditional)

MD: voice & guitar, Chris Walz: voice & guitar.

"Two Little Boys" was written in 1863 as a public service announcement intended to make enlistment in the Union Army attractive during the Civil War. I first heard the late Gamble Rogers pick out "Two Little Boys" at the Earl of Old Town around 1982. Originally the song was set in a minor key, but Gamble picked it straight up in major. I have always loved Gamble's picking and have always aspired to play with his same clarity and taste. Maybe one of these days...

Two little boys had two little toys each had a wooden horse
gaily they played each summer day warriors bold of course
one little chap had a mishap he broke off his horse's head
he cried for his toy then cried for joy when he heard his
brother say

Do you think I could leave you crying when there's room on
my horse for you
climb up here Jack and stop your crying we'll mend your
horse with glue
someday we'll both be soldiers and our horses will not be
toys
and then perhaps we'll remember when we were two little
boys

The long years did pass and the war came at last bravely
they marched away
where the cannon roared loud and in that wild crowd where
wounded and dying Joe lay
then came a cry and a rider dashed by out of the ranks of
the blue
he galloped away back to where Joe lay and he heard his
brother say

Do you think I could leave you dying when there's room on
my horse for you
so climb up here Joe we'll soon be flyin back to the boys in
the blue
can't you see I'm all a tremble it may be the flash and the
noise
and it may be because I remember when we were two little
boys

It'll Be Better When It's Better ©2007

MD: voice & guitar, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader: voice, Brian Wilke: pedal steel, John Williams: button accordion, piano, John Abbey: electric bass, Frank Roasaly: drums,

Written in one long sitting August 2007. After three days of driving rain, the Des Plaines River threatened to flood our neighborhood in Riverside, Illinois. I had broken one of my fingers the week before and needed something to do.

The sky is fallin down and the crick is comin up
that old rickety bridge Lord is runnin out of luck
there ain't nothin left to do but let the river overflow

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It'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

The times are gettin harder and the money's gettin tight
the cost of livin's killin me and nothin's goin right
now the polar cap is meltin and the desert's gonna blow
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

When I was a little kid I did what I was told
now I go to work each morning in a corporate blindfold
and I'm feelin like it's gettin late the gate is gonna close
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

I dug myself a hole and I fell right in
a man comes along askin me where I been
he said he never really cared he just lets the four winds flow
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

I sat down and wrote a letter to the President
and I asked him where the hell he thought the Constitution went
he called me back this afternoon and said he didn't know
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

Pickin at the scab is never gonna make it heal
and every broken bone will teach you how it's really gonna feel
but the sun is gonna rise again the rooster's gonna crow
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

The sky is fallin down and the crick is comin up
that old rickety bridge Lord is runnin out of luck
there ain't nothin left to do but let the river overflow
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose
it'll be better it'll be better it'll be better when it's better I suppose

We Become ©2009

MD: voice & guitar, Ellen Shepard: voice, Chris Walz: guitar.

"We Become" was finished the same day as "The Middle Years," June 2009. Bob Dylan once said in an interview, "We are always in a state of becoming." I think I like that.

We become the things we love we become
we believe in the things we feel a broken heart a will to heal
love is all there ever is so let it out and let it in
in choosing to begin again we become

I watched you for a long long time through the cloudy days
you smiled at me and your warm sunshine chased my
lonesome blues away
now I never want to let you go it's so hard to explain
but something yearns within to grow to become again

A crooked smile upon my face you're always on my mind
I never knew such a lovely place in all those years of wastin
time
a hand to touch a heart to hold at long last we are one
like a miracle our love unfolds and we become

credits

MD: voice, guitar, 5-string banjo, Ellen Shepard: voice,
Christopher Walz: voice, guitar, mandolin, John Abbey:
stand up & electric bass, Sue Demel: voice, Deb Lader:
voice, Colby Maddox: voice, mandolin, Frank Rosaly:
drums, Michael Smith: voice and guitar on *God Bless the
Open Road and You*, Don Stiernberg: mandolin, blues
fiddle, Brian Wilke: pedal steel, John Williams: button
accordion and piano.

All songs written by Mark Dvorak © ten fingers unless
otherwise noted. Mark's songs are registered with BMI.

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through September, 2010.

John Abbey was the engineer.

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