

## *Borne the Battle*

### *Episode # 246*

Navy Veteran Jonathan Kingham, Nashville and Operation Song Songwriter

<https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/90094/borne-battle-246-navy-veteran-jonathan-kingham-nashville-operation-song-songwriter/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

**[00:00:00] Music**

**[00:00:02] Opening Monologue:**

**(TI):** Oh, let's get it. Monday, June 14th, 2021 Borne the Battle—oh, I was a little early there—Borne the Battle, brought to you by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the podcast that focuses on inspiring Veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our Veterans. I'm your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Wherever and however you listen to Borne the Battle, be it Apple Podcasts, Spotify, iTunes, iHeartRadio, the player inside the blog, hope you're having a good week outside of Podcast Land. Personally, I am excited. After all this time, the pandemic, everything, I'm going home to Washington State to see my family. Again, I'm excited. My grandma is excited. Most of my family is excited. Going out to the family farm where there's no internet, no cell phone service. It's going to be a good time. That will go on the 4th of July weekend and the week after that. We'll spin up some Borne the Battle rewinds for you. If you heard an episode in the archives and think some of our newer audience members should hear it, email me at [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov). Couple ratings, also got one new review. This one is from a FireFox of War. Awesome name by the way. Five stars. Says, "Great for all Vets. I've been listening for about a year now, and I love how a lot of the '90s and 2000s Vets start off with, 'I went to college, and I realized it wasn't for me.' I introduced this podcast to my dad by playing it whenever I drive him around. Great information for him to use now and great for myself as I get ready to exit active duty. Keep up the awesome content and information. FireFox of War." Appreciate your review. Again, awesome name. Love when people get creative with that stuff. Yeah, I think I first picked up on the "went to college and realized it wasn't for me" thing back when we did Stephen Kupryk's episode. He then went on to wrestle for WWE and still hasn't finished his bachelor's, as I've been telling him to do. Either that or go to a trade school and get some certifications. That

monthly basic allowance for housing check is there—it's right there. Get paid to go to school. The GI bill, everyone should be taken advantage of it. Where else can you get paid to further your career goals or to develop a side gig, and, you know, take advantage of it? You've earned it. That's also great that you listen to this with your dad. What a cool way to bond with him. Glad to hear that he finds the information useful, and I hope the information we provide here on the podcast does help you as you make that transition. Firefox, please feel free to email me anytime at [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov) if there is any Benefits Breakdown, you'd want me to chase down for you. Again, just like Firefox of War, please feel free to go on Apple Podcasts and leave a review. Doing so helps us climb higher in the algorithms giving more Veterans a better opportunity to discover and listen to the interviews, our benefits breakdowns, and the news releases provided in each episode. So, the first news release is about VA winning some sort of award. Whatever, not what I or probably you are concerned about, good for them. However, I also got a feeling that the ones that got the award weren't concerned about it either. Says, "For immediate release: The VA's Rapid Naloxone Initiative provides free opioid overdose education and Naloxone Distribution to Veteran patients at risk for opioid overdose. This also includes stocking Automated External Defibrillator cabinets in high-risk areas with Naloxone and VA Police having speedy access to it for administering when necessary." Is that what they call Narcan? I'm not sure. I think that's the Narcan stuff. Anyways, "VA established the first national Opioid Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution program in May of 2014. Based on the initial program, VA formally launched the Rapid Naloxone Initiative in September of 2018. This concerted approach has equipped over 290,000 VA patients over 3,500 VA police officers, and over 1000 AED cabinets with Naloxone. These efforts have resulted in more than 2000 opioid overdose reversals." To learn more about VA's Rapid Naloxone Initiative, go ahead and email the folks at Pharmacies of Benefits Management Services, and their email address is [AskPBMAcademicDetailing@va.gov](mailto:AskPBMAcademicDetailing@va.gov). Ask them for a direct link because the URL is a little complicated to spit out, and I couldn't find an easy way to tell you on how to get to it on [va.gov](http://va.gov). And of course, I'll put a link at the bottom of this episode's show notes and in this episode's blog on [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov) [Link: [blogs.va.gov/VAntage](http://blogs.va.gov/VAntage)]. To learn about all VA treatments for substance abuse, go to [mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/substance-abuse-index.asp](http://mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/substance-abuse-index.asp) [Link: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/substance-use/index.asp>].

And finally, to learn about safe and effective ways to manage pain, go to [va.gov/painmanagement](http://va.gov/painmanagement) [Link: [va.gov/painmanagement](http://va.gov/painmanagement)]. That one was pretty easy. All right, this next one is good news for those with spinal cord injuries. It says, “For immediate release: Recently, the Department of Veterans Affairs accepted a donation of 50 iBOT Personal Mobility Devices from Mobius Mobility LLC, to help Veterans with spinal cord injuries regain their autonomy. The iBOT PMD increases the users of mobility by allowing them to independently elevate, interact at eye-level, climb stairs and cross various terrains. Acting VA Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Carolyn Clancy, M.D. welcomed the first donation at the VA East Orange Medical Center from the inventor of the iBOT PMD and president of DEKA Research and Development. iBOTs will also be distributed to all 25 VA spinal cord injury clinics, and another 24 iBOTs will be donated directly to Veterans at the local spinal cord and injury clinic based on need, a clinical assessment, and prescription.” To learn more information about VA's life-long continuum of services for Veterans with spinal cord injuries or disabilities, go to [sci.va.gov](https://www.sci.va.gov) [Link: <https://www.sci.va.gov>]. And to learn how to partner with VA like this, like iBOT there, go to [va.gov/scsp](https://www.va.gov/scsp) [Link: <https://www.va.gov/scsp>]. All right. This week's guest is a Navy Veteran. He's a musical artist. He has shared the stage with the likes of Shawn Colvin, Joan Osborne, Michael McDonald, Doug Stone, Vanessa Carlton, and has toured with Julio Iglesias Jr. Currently he plays keyboard and guitar for the rock band Toad the Wet Sprocket, which if you're a generation older than me, half a generation older than me, you may have heard of him. But he's also a professional songwriter out on Music Row out in Nashville. How I found him here is he's one of the professional songwriters that donates his time to the nonprofit Operation Song, which does retreats for Veterans on Music Row in Nashville. Veterans that take part in Operation Song's three-day retreats get to meet a who's who of songwriters and have a song written about anything they want during the retreat. And one of the songwriters they could meet is our guest, Navy Veteran Jonathan Kingham. Enjoy.

**[00:07:44] Music**

**[00:07:50] Interview:**

**Jonathan Kingham (JK):** The music you've got coming in now—are you still using that Machine Gunner song?

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Yes, yes.

**(JK):** So, that's one of my oldest buddies in town. Jason Sever wrote that and sang it. Yeah, he's fantastic. He's like one of the best. He's been—he's one of the first guys I knew when I moved to town, Nashville. I knew him before I moved to town. We moved—he moved first and then got a place and then I'd come to town to write, and I'd sleep on his couch. And, yeah.

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** So, he's like one of my oldest friends. He's probably my favorite male country singer in town and had some gotchas, had some big old hits, but just a sweetheart of a guy and killer singer and writer. When I saw that you switched to that Machine Gunner, I was like, "Oh, that's Jason."

**(JK):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Yeah, no, you know, it was great. I'm always trying to switch something up every year. This year I was like let's do the music. Gina showed me that song, or my colleague, Gina, you know her.

**(JK):** Oh yeah.

**(TI):** You know, she showed me that song, and I showed that to a previous guest, Stephen Kupryk, who's a WWE wrestler there. He was a WWE wrestler, and he was like, "Oh man," because he used to be a machine gunner.

**(JK):** Oh, really?

**(TI):** Yeah. I want that for my—he was like, "I want that for my intro music."

**(JK):** Nice.

**(TI):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Of course. But you know, WWE is very tight on their own music and their own brand and their own identity. So, their own writers and stuff, but he didn't have the creative license to actually change it at the time, but he loved it. He absolutely loved it.

**(JK):** Yeah, he's—Jason's a talented dude for sure. He's one of the best out there. So, he's one of the good ones. That's for sure.

**(TI):** Gotcha. Well, let's talk about you real quick. First question we always ask here on Borne the Battle is, Jonathan, where and when did you know the military was going to be the next step in your life?

**(JK):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** That's a good question. I didn't realize that until—well, no one in my family had ever been in, and I grew up in a little farm town in northern California. I actually took the ASVAB test to get out of class. A buddy of mine and I were joking around and he's like, “Well, dude, we should go take this test. You know, you can get out of class and go to the theater for an hour and you could skip,” I don't remember what class it was, math or something. I said, “Well that sounds like a great idea.” So, I skipped out and signed up. We both went and took the ASVAB. And, you know, , it's a test and whatever. It tests your ability and what not. I think in the beginning I assumed that I thought like, “Oh, well, I did well on this test, and so that's why everyone's calling me.” In retrospect, I realize it's like, “Oh, well, I signed up to take the test.” So, then, that week the Army, the Navy, the Air Force—

**(TI):** Everybody's got your number.

**(JK):** Yeah, exactly. Everybody's got your number. It doesn't matter what score you get on the test really.

**(TI):** You had to have done pretty good on the test though because you ended up managing nuclear reactors?

**(JK):** I mean, yeah, I did. I think I scored the, I don't know, one percent in the nation or something. But I don't think that's why they called me. I mean, it was just they don't—

**(TI):** Yeah, but they don't give that job to like a guy that like barely passed it, you know?

**(TI):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** No, I think there's a threshold, I'm sure, but I don't remember. I don't really. I remember there being like mechanical things, and I'm pretty handy, I guess. So, I think I remember there was like, “If this gear turns this way and that one turns this way, like which direction,” you know? I'm pretty logical, I guess. But yeah, I mean, it was one of those things where that following week I remember that the Army, the Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, everybody, all the recruiters in the small town called. I remember they were all like, “Well, can we set up an appointment to come by the house?” I was like, “I guess so.” The Army guy came, and I was like, “Nah, that doesn't seem like what I want to do.” I hadn't really, I don't know, I hadn't really thought about it. My parents didn't make a lot of money, and so we definitely—I had good grades and everything. I just, I don't know why I didn't, I mean, we didn't have money for

college. I knew that. So then I started thinking, "Well, maybe I could do the military and help pay for college." Then the Air Force guy came and I was like, "Well, that sounds interesting. And then the Marine guy came, and I was like, "Nah, I'm not sure I'm that cool or tough."

**(TI):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** Then the Navy guy came and I thought, "Oh, that sounds cool. I like to travel. I'd like to at some point go around the world." I remember thinking about it, and then the Navy recruiter kept calling me. Ken was his name. He was like, "Well, you know, you did pretty good on the math and physics." He's like, "You should come down to MEPS in Oakland and take this math and physics aptitude tests for the nuclear program." And I was like—so I remember I went down there and I took the math and physics test just cause I kind of like a challenge.

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** And I guess passed it or did well. I don't remember how I did, but I must've passed it. I remember he was so good, like he was so slick. He was just kind of like, "Well, you passed this, you might as well take the physical. See if you pass the physical thing and like—"

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** And in retrospect, it's like—

**(TI):** Let me just give you the next step. Let me just get you the next step.

**(JK):** Totally. It's just like, it was pretty slick. And so it was—and you know, the physical. I don't even remember what the physical was. I think it was like heartbeat and something else. I came home, and I was 17 at the time so my parents had to co-sign for me because I was not legally allowed to sign up. I remember when the recruiter came back to the house and I was talking to my dad about it. My dad was like, "Sounds great. Sounds great. Yup. Sounds great." And my mom was just kind of like, "I don't know, son. I just, I'm not sure." And my dad was just like, "Yep, that's great. Let's do it."

**(TI):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** So, I signed up. I graduated when I graduated I was 17, graduated high school. And then I remember I went and worked at a summer camp at a horse ranch with kids. And then I went into basic on Christmas Eve. I remember, I don't know why that was—

**(TI):** Oh, wow.

**(JK):** And, so I—

**(TI):** So you spent Christmas in boot camp?

**(JK):** My first morning in bootcamp was Christmas morning. And I remember that. I distinctly remember the 3:00 AM trashcan lid. Just bang, bang, and then a whole list of curse words and to get up. And I was kind of like, whoa, all right, this is different.

**(TI):** Merry Christmas.

**(JK):** Yeah. Merry Christmas was sprinkled in there somewhere, but—

**(TI):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** There was a lot of other colorful language that happened before that.

**(TI):** That's awesome.

**(JK):** So yeah, that was Christmas Day. I remember I went in on Christmas Eve, and then I got, I can't remember if they shaved our heads first. I can't remember what it was, but I remember it was Christmas Day and I remember thinking like, "Oh man, what have I signed up for?" I've been practicing my pushups before I went in, but that didn't help cause there was a lot of them.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** So obviously you graduated bootcamp, got through it.

**(JK):** I managed.

**(TI):** Was there ever any apprehension when it was like handling nuclear stuff? Like—

**(JK):** I mean, I was—

**(TI):** Like as far as like, "Am I going to be bald or have some weird gross or?"

**(JK):** Yeah. You know, they're very—I mean, I was in the Nuclear Propulsion, the NNPS Naval Nuclear Power, like NNPS School. And so, you're basically Homer Simpson. I mean, depending on what part of the reactor department you're in, there's primary, secondary sides. But they're very—what's the word. I mean there's obviously a lot of regulations surrounding it, and you constantly, constantly wear a little TLD, thermoluminescence detector on your

belt. And then you get checked every week, I think it was. You turn it in, and they check how much radiation you've got. And then if you, I mean, you rarely would exceed what you would, you would get more in a cross-country flight being closer to the sun than you would in a week. I mean, there's so much shielding and around because each, like a carrier has two reactors on it. At least the one I was in, the *Abraham Lincoln*. So, not a huge concern. I have one kid. Yeah.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** He's not weird or anything.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** He has red hair, and I don't know where that came from. So, perhaps I should file something with the VA and say, "Hey look. This happened." He has, yeah, he's pretty cute. He's redhead and freckles. So, maybe that was a result of my direct line of work in the reactor department. No, I mean, they definitely take a lot of precautions and they limit your exposure. And so far, I haven't seen anything. I did have a tumor cut out of my stomach a couple of years ago, but I don't think that had anything to do with it, but—

**(TI):** No?

**(JK):** Nah, I don't think so.

**(TI):** Alright.

**(JK):** I think, no, I'm not. I haven't—

**(TI):** Interesting.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** Your bio said that's where you started writing songs. Is that like, when you were in like in that Homer Simpson like little seat, you were just like—

**(JK):** You know what—

**(TI):** —Like where did you, where did the thought of like, "Hey, songwriting," like where did that start?

**(JK):** Man, I actually didn't. I started my—I got—there's five kids in my family. My older brother, Nathan, he's a great—all my brothers and sisters are musicians, but Nate was, he started writing songs when he was in high school. And he's very, very well read and very literate and poetic and wrote great songs. And he kind of introduced

me to songwriters, like singer songwriters. And for me, that was, you know, he turned me on to James Taylor and Shawn Colvin and Joni Mitchell. In the nineties there was a lot of singer songwriters kind of coming up. And there was kind of a boom on that. And I mean, he introduced me to all those cats and Jackson Brown.

**(TI):** So, this was all like right when you're in the Navy, he was introducing this stuff to you?

**(JK):** Yeah, and in high school he was playing it. But then he worked at-- in Woodland. There was, I don't—I doubt it's still there because I don't think people buy CDs anymore, but there was a place called Valley Records Distribution or Valley Distribution. And it was like, it was called a one-stop and it was a huge warehouse on the edge of town. And it was basically where all the record labels would send their CDs and they'd warehouse. And then when Tower Records would place an order for 50 records, they would ship them out. So it was once, it was the biggest one-stop on the West Coast.

**(TI):** Gotcha.

**(JK):** And kind of the only thing going on the north end of town. And so, my brother worked there and so he would get access to tons of records and so he would always be bringing stuff home. And so, yeah, he introduced me to a bunch of singer songwriters and kind of help me fall in love with that kind of that style. And then I started playing guitar about that—actually, I started playing guitar when I graduated high school. So, I played keyboard, but the job I wanted at the summer camp after high school, they didn't want to hire me cause I was 17. And they said, "Well, can you play music?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I play piano." And they said, "Well, that doesn't really work around the campfire."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** You can't bring a big grand around the campfire.

**(JK):** That's a good point. To lead music at a camp you need to know like three chords, maybe four, and you pretty much got the song covered. And so, I've faked and fumbled my way through that summer. And then after the summer was over, I went to bootcamp. I didn't have a guitar, obviously. And then, so yeah, I guess for graduation, my parents agreed to pay for one half of a guitar. I mean, I got a whole guitar, but it was—

**(TI):** [Laughter]

(JK): They paid for half of one. And so, yeah, by the time I guess I finished bootcamp and then I came home I remember I took my guitar back with me to the barracks and cause I ended up staying in Orlando at the base there. Well, I went to basic and then went to machinist school. And then after that, I ended up staying on actually for six months at machinist school and being a lab assistant. And then from there went to the power, NNPS, the power school was on the same campus. And then I—

(TI): Gotcha.

(JK): After that, the training facility was it. I know out in Idaho Falls, they have an actual reactor out in the middle of the desert and you get certified to do your Homer Simpson out there. And—

(TI): [Laughter]

(JK): So that was another six months. But the first year, I guess, a year, almost a year and a half—I mean, it probably was a year and a half, was in Orlando at school. So, but yeah. I played then. But then on the—I got assigned to the *Abraham Lincoln*. And so, there was no, obviously no piano on the boat either. So, I took—I saved up money and bought a nicer guitar at that point cause then I had a j-o-b for the last two years and—

(TI): Yeah.

(JK): —went down to Guitar Center and bought myself like a legit guitar. And, you know, WESTPAC is six months, and so there's not a lot to do when you're not on duty. And so, when you drive in circles in the Persian Gulf, it's, yeah, play guitar. So, we were stationed, the boat was out of Alameda, California. And then when I remember I had—I'd never really played out or anything. And then we, my buddies, we'd pull back into port and my buddies would go over to San Francisco across the bridge and, you know, go to the bars. And I remember they'd come back drunk and be like, "Hey, Kingham, you should go play at this bar. Anybody can get up and sing." And I was like, "Really? I don't really do that." And they're like, "No." And it was an open mic and so anybody could just sign up.

(TI): Yeah.

(JK): And so, I would go and I went once and I didn't have any original songs really that I could play. So, I played some of my brother's songs. I played some James Taylor and whatever. And I was terrible. I mean, I never was the best. And so—

(TI): Open mic night, it's open mic night.

(JK): Totally.

(TI): It's your first time.

(JK): Yeah, the bar is not super high. And so—

(TI): Yeah.

(JK): I can jump a low bar. And so—

(Both): [Laughter]

(JK): They would be slightly inebriated, so they'd lie and tell me it was good. So, I did it. I started doing it. Then we go back out to sea. And, yeah. So, I started writing, you know. I kind of started writing when I was out at sea just cause I was missing a lot of stuff back home and just kind of help pass the time. And, yeah, that's where I started writing and then kept on writing and kept on writing. And then when I was—I was still in the Navy, and I started doing shows out—the boat moved to Bremerton to go into dry dock. And while it was in dry dock, we were pretty close to Seattle. So, I started going over to Seattle and, man, there were some people that could sing and play. And so—

(TI): What year was this?

(JK): That would have been like 90—oh geez, '94, '95. Probably '95.

(TI): Oh my gosh, so you're in Seattle, and I'm from Washington state myself. I'm two hours west of Seattle.

(JK): Well, where at?

(TI): Like Aberdeen Hoquiam, so—

(JK): Oh yeah.

(TI): —the birthplace of Kurt Cobain.

(JK): Yeah.

(TI): Muddy Bank of the Wishkah. That's I mean I grew up in the Olympic National Rainforest area.

(JK): Oh, so beautiful out there.

(TI): Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, you're talking about Seattle at a time when, I mean, music was just—

(JK): —jammin'.

(TI): —jamming in Seattle.

(JK): Yeah.

(TI): I miss that Seattle.

(Both): [Laughter]

(TI): I completely miss that Seattle.

(JK): Yeah.

(TI): Late eighties you had some great rock acts that came out of there.

(JK): Mudhoney and all those guys. Yeah.

(TI): Yeah. And then the nineties, of course you had the grunge era—

(JK): —Brad—

(TI): So, you were right in the middle of all that.

(JK): Yeah. I was never that cool. I mean, I was—

(Both): [Laughter]

(JK): I was pretty dope.

(TI): But you were in it.

(JK): I mean, on the periphery, I guess, as a dorky Navy guy could be. And it's also, there's a limited scope of what you can get into when you're, you know, you gotta be back on base and you gotta, sure, show up.

(TI): What was it like to be in that town at that era during and just in that vibe at that time?

(JK): I mean, I agree. Seattle was a—it was a different. I ended up staying after I got out. It was a different place. I mean, I ended up—I never planned on it, but like I got out. I got out of the Navy in 90—end of 97. I just ended up staying because there was so much music happening, and I just loved being there. And I didn't realize the toll it was taking psychologically on me to like have—I hate the rain and so—

(TI): Oh yeah.

(JK): Growing up in northern California—and, but I ended up living there for, I think, 16, 17 years. And, but there was just so much. Yeah, so much music. I mean, there's—I mean, yeah, all of those bands you mentioned plus all the whole world of singer songwriters. And then I

started listening to a ton of jazz. Cause KPLU, the jazz station up there, used to be I guess. There was just so much music, and there's still a ton of, I mean, a ton of amazing musicians.

**(TI):** Yeah. It seems like every decade Seattle has a musician that just pops.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** It just comes out, you know? You know, I mean, I think most recent for me is like Macklemore.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** Is like the most recent liked musician, and it's always different genres too.

**(JK):** Yep.

**(TI):** It's always different. So, it's—I just love the amalgamation that Seattle has when it comes to music. Was music the reason that you left the Navy? Was it like, “Hmm, I want to pursue this?”

**(JK):** Not, I mean, not intentionally, no. I mean, I didn't plan. It's interesting. I didn't really plan on—not as a kid, like, “Hey, I want to grow up and go into the military.” And I also didn't think like, “Oh, I want to grow up and be a musician.” It was like, you know, “I'll take the ASVAB and, “Oh, well you passed the physical and the physics. Okay, well, you might as well go in and it's probably a good choice.” And then music, I kind of had the same thing while I was in Seattle. I started, you know, I started doing the open mic and the guy who—there was a really cool little cafe over in West Seattle called Madison's Cafe. And the owner Bill, he was like, “Oh man, you know.” You'd sing two songs on a Sunday night or whatever open mic night was. And then he said, “Well, you know, you should come back on a Wednesday and do your own show.” He's like, “I can't pay you, but you can get tips.” And so, I started doing that because you know, the boat wasn't going out. And so, then I pretty much, by the time I got out, I had gone from like Wednesday night for tips to Thursday night for five bucks to play Friday nights for \$10 cover. And like, it kind of just, I don't know, organically had built. And so, when I got out, I had actually—before I got out, I had—I started saving some money and I started recording some songs. And so, I had put out like a little—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Like a little EP?

**(JK):** I put out an EP, and I was just laughing. I was thinking about it because it was on a cassette and the—I'd never done a record before. And then in standard Jonathan dorkdom, when I went to get them duplicated, the duplication company, Disc Makers, I think it was, or Martin.

**(TI):** Oh, yeah.

**(JK):** They said—well, the lady who was duplicating them, she was like, she was super sweet. She was like, "Well, you know, you need to have, you should have." Like, I didn't have any graphic design or anything. And she was like, "Well, you should have a picture of yourself on the front." And I had never had my picture. I hate having my picture taken.

**(TI):** Sure.

**(JK):** And she was like, "Well, you should go. You need to get a photo so we can put a photo on the front so people will know who you are." And I was like, "Oh man." So, I remember I went down to the University Ave, down there, and there was this old lady who did like band photos or photos. And I can't remember what her name, I wish I could remember her name. But it was—I remember was on the Ave, University Ave. And it was like, you walk up this carpeted narrow staircase and I go up there and she's got like a little photography studio and had like the backdrops that you cranked down around, you know, like different—and so she cranks down like the gray, I don't remember what it was and then—

**(TI):** Seattle grunge.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** I feel like there was like a log or like a fake log on the ground. It was the most weird. And so, I'm just like standing there with my guitar and it's the dorkiest, most amazingly dorky thing like then. So, then I made these cassettes. And I didn't, you know, who knows, six songs or something and they were pretty mediocre. It's probably the first six songs I ever wrote. And I remember there was a singer songwriter. I was really digging on this guy named David Wilcox out of North Carolina, and he was coming to town at the Backstage down in Ballard. And, I had bought tickets to go see him. And I don't know why, but I'm just like, "Well, I'm going to call the club promoter and see who's opening the show." And so, I called and he was like, "Well, I don't think anybody is. I don't think he's bringing support." So, it was like, let me find out. So, he called me back like a week

later and was like, "Well, he's not bringing supports. If you want to do 30 minutes, we'll pay you 50 bucks and give you two tickets." And I was like, "Well, I already bought tickets so—"

**(Both):** [Laughter] 30:56

**(JK):** So, he was just like, he let me open the show. And I was so nervous. This guy was like one of my heroes and—

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** You know, it was a sold out show, 500 people. It was like one of my first big shows. And I totally forgot to plug my guitar in for my first song. And I'm thinking like, "Wow, it sounds terrible." Like I, what is—going to look halfway through the first song and my cable, and my guitar cable is hanging off the mic stand thinking like, "Oh, I'm a joker."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Oh, no.

**(JK):** And so, I stopped, plugged the guitar back in and make a joke about it. And it—I mentioned offhand, I was like, "You know, I got some cassettes in the back in my trunk, if anybody was interested, they're five bucks." And I had like a hundred of them and I sold them out. Like I sold all hundred. And I remember thinking like, "Wow, that was pretty cool."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** All right. And so, the club owner was like, "Well, you know, people really dug that. You know, you want to open for this woman, Jonatha Brooke. She's coming through town in a couple of weeks." I was like, "Yeah, I love her too." And so—but I was just thinking cause it was that cassette, and like that there was some lady that sent me a message and said, "Hey, I purchased your cassette at the show. I really enjoyed the show, but I think there's something wrong with your cassette because you kind of sound like Satan underwater." And I was like—

**Tanner:** What?

**(JK):** Well, you know, cassettes would get warbled sometimes. So it was like [warbled noise].

**(Both):** [Laughter]

- (TI):** That's funny. That's funny. Well, you've played with a very diverse set of performers. You mentioned Shawn Colvin.
- (JK):** I love Shawn, yeah, she's great.
- (TI):** Yeah, Vanessa Carlton, you know, some other ones. Was this all in Seattle or was it like, hey, as you started going on the road, you started playing with these folks. What was it like?
- (JK):** Some in Seattle. Some, I mean, a lot of it's, you know, there's a promoter in the Northwest. Then he'll, you know, say, "Oh, you know, people enjoyed that, and I'll put you on this opening slot. Open for this person. Open for that person." And yeah, Seattle and Idaho and around the Northwest. And then, yeah, as long as you don't screw it up too bad, they're pretty amendable to having you back usually. And if it's a good fit, you know, they, a good promoter will try to find somebody that's not completely the same as the headliner. And then, but I love opening. I feel like it's like my favorite thing cause it's 30, 40 minutes. You play your only six good songs out of, you know, a hundred. And then—
- (Both):** [Laughter]
- (JK):** It's, yeah, it's great. You get exposed to a whole new group of, a whole new audience that you wouldn't normally have. And I mean, it's crazy. I look back on some of those openers and like, I got to open for Shawn Colvin at the Benaroya Symphony Hall. And, you know, it was, it's a beautiful symphony hall. And there was probably 2500, 3000 people there. And from that one show, like I can trace back a number of different like tours that people asked me to be on. All sorts of crazy stuff from that one show. Like I had a guy email me like seven years after that show like, "Hey, I saw you open for Shawn seven years ago." And like, just crazy stuff that. So, I love doing the opening act and there's a lot less pressure because it's like they kind of expect you to suck and yeah.
- (Both):** [Laughter]
- (TI):** I'm sure you didn't or else you wouldn't be getting called back, going back for different shows, you know?
- (JK):** But you know how it is when you go to a show.
- (TI):** Yeah.
- (JK):** You're like "Oh who?" We're like "Show's at 8:00, the opener will be on till 8:45, so I'll get to the show about 9:00." Like, you know how it is.

- (TI):** Yeah, but it's, but you're also the hype man. You're also the hype man, being the opener.
- (JK):** Yeah, totally. WWE, you carry the round card around and—
- (TI):** There you go. There you go. Or the opening, you're the opening match and it's usually like a high flyer, you know. It's usually like a, a cruiserweight title fight or something. I see you're—
- (JK):** Are you a fan of the WWE? Is that what—
- (TI):** I was at one point, but I still follow the dirt sheets. I don't know why. Maybe cause I feel like wrestlers in that, with like when we grew up—
- (JK):** Yeah.
- (TI):** —were just like the big hair metal bands, like the backstage, like, you know, just clearing it up, crazy lifestyle. And so, I've always been enamored with that whole lifestyle. I don't know what it is. I mean, I don't watch it anymore, you know, but I'm still enamored with like the wrestling industry and like how that's a thing and how it works and stuff.
- (JK):** Yes, I tried to explain it to myself. I mean, I'm not a huge fan. Like I didn't really follow it. I have one friend who's crazy about it. But my son saw something, I can't remember what it was. It was a couple of weeks ago. My son's eight, and he was like, his eyes were just kind of like huge. He was like, "What are they doing, dad?" And I was like, "Buddy, that's fake." Like, they're actually falling on the ground, but like it's choreographed and—
- (TI):** It's brilliant.
- (JK):** It's a show. And he was kind of like, "Whoa, I want to do that," cause he loves to rough house and wrestle.
- (TI):** Oh wow.
- (JK):** Yeah. But wrestle me, but not anyone else.
- (Both):** [Laughter]
- (TI):** Gotcha. You got a favorite story from opening for someone? Like, cause there's so many that you opened for that you never thought in a million years that I would be opening for this person?
- (JK):** Man. I mean, Yeah. I mean, there's a lot of them. But there's a—I think one of my favorite ones—and there was a promoter. He had me do a few and then he called and he used to book the summer

concert series at the zoo in Seattle. They used to, I think they still, well, before COVID they'd have a big outdoor stage. It's awesome. Take a picnic, take the kids, listen to the elephants in the background, and—but anyways, he called and said, "Hey, you know, Michael McDonald's coming, do you want to open?" And I was like, "Yeah, for sure." And he was so cool. And just, like, I mean, awesome show, like. And that's, to me, that's probably one of the coolest things is like you get to play and then you get to get in the show for free. Sometimes you can snack on some of the catering and, you know, get your—but, I think probably the coolest thing that came out of that show was I had a guy come up to me at the merch booth and he bought like 15 copies of my record or something. And he was like, "Man, that was great." He was super hype. And like, he was my age and really cool guy. And he was like, "Man, this is great." He's like, "I play keys. And, you know, I'd love to play some time." And I was like, "Okay." You know, it's just kind of, everything's a little crazy after a show and—

**(TI):** Sure.

**(JK):** Anyways, fast forward a couple of months and same guy comes back to a show, a solo show, later and he starts talking to me. He's like, "Hey man, we should jam sometime." He's like, "I play keys," and this and that. And I was like, "Okay. Okay, cool." And we became friends, but we didn't really, we never really played together. And then probably another four or five months later, it was New Year's Eve, and he invited me over to his house for New Year's Eve. And so, I went over, and he had an old fender Rhodes set up in his living room. And I, he sat down, and he was playing with this blues artists at the time, and he started playing. I was like, "Oh my goodness, this guy is on fire." Like this guy could, this—

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** This dude can play.

**(TI):** Just totally blew your socks off.

**(JK):** Oh yeah. And so, I was like, "Man, we should definitely play some. We've been talking about it. We should do some shows." So, he started playing with me and he's been playing with me for 20 years now. And I'm—

**(TI):** That's awesome.

**(JK):** And he's like, you know, one of my best friends and it's just. So out of that, Michael McDonald, we always joke like in the old

millennium we met and—but yeah, he was just, his name's Ryan, Ryan Shea Smith. And he's incredible keyboard player, singer songwriter. He loves Michael McDonald, hence he was at the show. And so, we have many Michael McDonald jokes at this point. But—so yeah, that was probably, probably one of the highlights because—

**(TI):** You got a lifelong friend out of it. That's pretty awesome.

**(JK):** Yeah, yeah.

**(TI):** Now I've seen a couple of reviews that were sent to me. One of my favorites and I just had to share it was—my favorite was, "more chops than a meat department at Safeway."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Was it the— is it the Dallas Chronicle or the Dallas?

**(JK):** Dals, you know, the Dallas down in Oregon.

**(TI):** Yeah, okay.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** That was pretty good. That was pretty good. And then another one, when you, you know, you got reviewed by VH1, MTV, it says "Kingham yields music that is divisively simple, organic and genuine in a way that a mainstream is not." Now, touring, playing music for a while, I would say a niche crowd. What's that life like? Is it lucrative? Are there ups and downs? You know, I've always seen niche, niche crowds, niche music, you know, it may not be mainstream, may not blow up, but this fan base is always so dedicated to whatever that artist is doing.

**(JK):** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's a strange time. I mean, growing up through, through the eighties and nineties, and the music business was completely different back then. I mean, you had, if you didn't have the backing of a major label, like it just wasn't going to happen. And I kind of ended up in that weird spot when that was starting to crack and actually had like a development record deal with Universal South, was like a label down here, and I'm in Nashville. And so, I started flying down and they paid for some recordings and stuff, and then that disintegrated. But I was already making records on my own. And so, it's kind of a weird. Now it's, you know, if you have a label, that's great. They'll put a bunch of money behind you, but it's not at all a requirement these days.

**(TI):** No, and we talked about Macklemore. Macklemore's one that kind of showed that you can kind of just do it on your own.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** You know.

**(JK):** Yeah. I mean to take it absolutely enormous you have to have a team. But yeah, I mean, Macklemore, he used to freestyle on the corner in downtown Seattle, like he's, he did it completely street—excuse me. So—

**(TI):** He just found a really good team to work with him to get, you know.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** He was doing the stuff.

**(JK):** And he's super talented. I mean, he's—

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** He's—so, it's been an interesting path. It's definitely a—what's the word I'm looking for? It is—somebody joked recently, and they said, they're like, "Man, this business is just feast or famine." My other friend goes, "Oh, it's more like snack or famine." He's like, "It's not really."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Interesting.

**(JK):** He's like "You know, you rarely get the feast. But—and I think that's kind of what the internet has done in terms of, like, I think it's made the middle-class a little bigger in the music world. I don't think there's many people that have huge, massive hits. It's made it possible to make a lower-level living without having a, you know, nobody knows any of my songs. But it's a—you're able to make a living. And I mean, there's a guy who put out a book and it was like, I think it's, I can't remember his name. It was basically the idea of like having a thousand true fans. And he's like, you know, if you can find a thousand true fans that each are willing to spend a hundred bucks a year on you, like whether that's two tickets to your show and a t-shirt. And he's like, you know, that's a hundred grand a year that's, you know, before touring expenses. But sure, it is about 60% of your gross income. But he said, you know, you find a thousand true fans and cultivate that relationship, then, you know, that's a living. You're solidly lower middle-class, but so there's room to do it and there's ways. And the tricky part is there's so much of it now. I

mean, there are so many because the barrier has gotten so much lower. You don't have to save up 50 grand to make a record anymore. Excuse me. You just, you know, buy Logic and put on your MacBook Pro and get yourself a Rode podcaster, and you can make a good sounding record on your laptop at home with Garage Band. So yeah.

**(TI):** And that's the same with podcasting. That's the same with the film industry, writing. Like the barrier has dropped so low as far as the barrier to entry. But I think you're right in the fact that the peaks aren't there like they used to, like the big, big peaks.

**(JK):** No, no. And I mean, and that's—I mean, you, you went to Cronkite School of Broadcasting, right? I mean that's—

**(TI):** Yes, sir. And online, but you know, I did it.

**(JK):** Excuse me. That counts. So was that before you were in or after you were?

**(TI):** That was, well, that was after I was in taking night school while I was still a senior post production editor at NASCAR.

**(JK):** Oh, wow.

**(TI):** So, I'd go to work and then I'd go to school after work.

**(JK):** Yeah. Yeah, I mean. It's—the barriers are, yeah, much lower, but the trick becomes who's the gatekeeper to quality. And I think that's why the Spotify playlist curators and all those people have come into these positions of power because they hypothetically make it easier for you and I to find quality stuff.

**(TI):** Gotcha. So, it's the curators now? Interesting.

**(JK):** I think so. I mean, that's what will make or break you. If, you know, if you can get on the newest Spotify playlist or the new Amazon music playlist, whatever the playlists are, the people that are curating those playlists are the new gatekeepers to—

**(TI):** —to the fans.

**(JK):** Yeah, to the fans.

**(TI):** To new fans, to new fans too.

**(JK):** Yeah, exactly.

**(TI):** Interesting. So, our mutual friend and my colleague, Gina, she told me that you're also now playing keyboard and guitar for Toad the Wet Sprocket, and my immediate, immediate reaction was "Who?"

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** She said, "Oh, you know." And I had to look it up, and it seems like I was about a half a generation behind because if I mentioned that band to anybody that's like 10 or 15 years older than me, instant recognition. But for me, it was blank. I went blank. But, so again, I looked them up and, and yep, it's, it's that Oasis, Gin Blossoms feel that I totally missed about the time that folks have an older brother or sister.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** How did you—it's really cool. How did you link up with them? How did that gig come about where you're now part of the band?

**(JK):** Well, I actually—I met Glen Phillips, the lead singer, at a songwriters weekend up in Durango, Colorado about geez—18 years or 17 years ago. I don't remember it's been awhile. But I was a fan. I mean, I was a fan of the band, and he—it was a songwriters weekend and you get together and write songs and perform and whatever. And I met him and—excuse me, I got a frog.

**(TI):** No worries.

**(JK):** We just kind of hit it off instantly and fast friends and, you know, we were going to go—we started, we wrote something and then they kind of blew off the whole rest of the weekend. Just went hiking with a friend of ours, Kim Richie. And we just kind of became friends in the mountains. And then, he called me a couple of weeks later. He was like, "Hey, man." He's like, "I'm putting out a solo record cause the band Toad had broken up." And he just finished a solo record. And he said, "Hey, I'm putting out a solo record." And he said, "I need a utility guy who can play keys and guitar and whatever." And he's like, "Do you want to go out on the road?" And I was like, "Well, sure." So, I helped him...

**(TI):** It was a cool opportunity. Yeah.

**(JK):** Yeah. And the funny, the irony we were talking about this last time I had talked with him and like he had never actually even seen me play. And like, we met in the bar and like, I just got done playing and some people came by and were like, "Hey man, that was really great. I enjoyed that." "Oh, thanks." And so, Glen was like, "Well,

you must be pretty good that people seem to enjoy it." I was like, "Wow, I don't know." So, he had actually never seen me play and he asked me to come out on tour. And so—

**(Both):**

[Laughter]

**(TI):**

That's a leap of faith.

**(JK):**

He's very trusting.

**(TI):**

Yeah

**(JK):**

So, I said, "Yeah, of course. I'd love to." I mean, I'm a fan of—he's one of the best songwriters out there, and singers. And I mean, he's fantastic. You should dig into his solo stuff too in addition to the Toad stuff. But anyways, I helped him put together a band and we did a full US tour. I don't know, 40 dates or something. And then the label dropped him. And so, he started doing independent records. And so, I started touring with him, just acoustically, the two of us quite a bit for, I don't know, eight years, nine years. And then he asked the band—Toad got back together, and they started working on new record. And he called me and said, "Hey man, we're, Toad's getting back together and we're putting out a new record." I think it was probably 11 years ago or something. He said, "I'd love for you to come out and play keys and steel on the road with us." And so, "Yeah, sure." It's supposed to be like 20 days. He was like, "We're going to try it out, see how it goes." And he was like, "Everybody's getting along, got new songs, and seems good." So, I said, "Sure." So, it was supposed to be 20 dates and I think it was 2010.

**(TI):**

It's turned into an 11 year relationship.

**(JK):**

Well, yeah. I mean, we ended up doing I think 80 shows that first year.

**(TI):**

Wow.

**(JK):**

And I was like, whoa. I got a bunch of solo dates and trying to work that around. And I teach songwriting residencies and stuff. And I do a lot of like with kids in high school and junior high kids. And so, I ended up doing 80 shows. And then the next year, I think we did 75. And now they've done, since then, they've, I think they've done two full records and an EP and there's a new one coming out at some point. It's done. So, it just kind of organically ended up, you know. I've been playing with them for, yeah, 10 or 11 years, I think now. Although we only did three shows last year in 2020.

**(TI):** Yeah. But it still counts as a year. But, so how many shows total in those 11 years though you figure?

**(JK):** With them? Oh man. I probably average 70 shows a year, so probably 600, 700 shows, I would guess.

**(TI):** Wow. So, what a hey do you want to turn into 700 shows?

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** That's pretty cool. That's pretty cool.

**(JK):** Yeah. And I mean, with Glen, I mean, the last show in person I played was with Glen, acoustic. We went to Switzerland in February of last year and did a couple festivals over there. And I remember while we were there, the Corona was just starting to break and in- Italy and Spain and across the border and clubs, like this could be bad. And I was like, "It's fine. It's going to be okay." I don't, you know, he's definitely the canary in the coal mine. Like he worries for the rest of the village, and that's his superpower. And I'm usually like the optimist. I'm like, "No, it's fine." And sure enough, he was right. I mean, he called it.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** So, it's—yeah. I mean, so we do about, I mean, normally I do probably 20, 30, depending, sometimes 40 shows a year with him. And then Toad usually does like a block of dates. Like some were, like this summer we're supposed to do—well, last summer we were supposed to do a two and a half month run with the Gin Blossoms and the Bare Naked Ladies.

**(TI):** There you go. I called it.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** You were there in zone. You had them all. You were hitting them. So, we've been doing a lot of those packaged tours. But yeah, so that was supposed to happen last summer. And then, it got postponed to this summer. Same date, same venues, just different year. But I don't—we'll see. I mean, I'm not sure the world's going to be ready for 10,000 people getting together, singing at the top of their lungs.

**(TI):** We'll see. We'll see how it goes.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** Give me, give me one second here. [Typing]

**(TI):** I got to pull up a name from a previous episode. So, when all this started, I interviewed Josh Strickland. He has a band called the Bayou Bandits out of Arizona. And he's also a traveling nurse, and was a traveling nurse during COVID. He talked about how COVID was really starting to really stop a lot of the traveling as far as the band was going. They did a lot of virtual shows. How, from your perspective, from what you've seen in Nashville and through your connection to, what have you seen—how is, what did COVID do to the entire music industry when it happened?

**(JK):** I mean, it's been decimated like absolute. I mean, for Nashville, I would, I mean, I was telling my wife yesterday. I went and dropped off a piece of studio equipment that I was getting repaired at the repair shop, and it's over Berry Hill area and surrounded by studios. And they're all, I mean on a Thursday. Normally it would just be packed and every parking lot's vacant. I mean, it's one of those things where I don't think—I mean, being Nashville, obviously the music business is, I mean, healthcare is the biggest economic driver for Nashville, but music is a close second. And it's one of those things where it's like, “Okay, well yeah. We, you know, we couldn't tour.” Well, it's not just we couldn't tour and play music, it was our bus driver's out of work and the guy that runs our front of house audio is out of work and the company that installs that and the company that rents that and like the tendrils. We have a couple of rental houses and like one of our tenants worked for Word Music. Well, Word Music—one of their biggest publishing arms is for like worshiping and church music. Well, she got laid off cause they closed that whole thing because they make their royalties off of churches. Well, churches are shuttered, so they're not performing that music, so she got laid off. Like the tendrils of the layoff is just like staggering. And so, it's you know, some people have shifted to online. Glen's been able to do mix, survive, and make a living off of doing online concerts and stuff. And some people have shifted that way. And I think fans have gotten more used to it. And he was doing it before COVID hit. He was already doing one live stream show concert, like a ticketed concert, online a week or a month depending. But I mean, looking at the fallout, like how wide, like this last economic package with the, the SVOG—what was the small venue operators grant, operational grants. It's like, I mean, the venues here shuttered. Like everything, it's—I mean, all those people are laid off. It's just like—yeah, it's crazy. And I think it'll be the last ones to come back just because of the nature of it. So yeah, it's this, it's like the CDC though. The two worst things are large groups and people singing, like—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** —expelling, expelling things into the air together. And like—

**(TI):** I don't mean to laugh. It's just—

**(JK):** No, it's, it's—

**(TI):** What it is.

**(JK):** Yeah, it's comical. When you look at it that way, it's like, okay. What are the two worst things the CDC says? Okay, well, that's the job. And so—but not only that. I mean, you take it a step farther. Like my buddy, Jason, who wrote your Machine Gunner song. You know, he's been a—he doesn't tour much. I wish he did. We've done some shows together and he's incredible, but he's been a staff song writer for a bunch of different publishing companies for the last 20 years. But even the publishing companies, you know, they pay a writer a salary every year to write X amount of songs that then they go and try to get Kenny Chesney or Garth Brooks or Dustin—

**(TI):** Some artist to sing it.

**(JK):** Yeah. And then they, you know, they make their money—you make your money off royalties and if you get a hit, then you make some money off the radio, etc. You don't make—anyways, there's different piles.

**(TI):** That chain has changed too. How that—

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** —used to work. And, you know, I've met people through the non-profit Operation Song, and you talk about people that were paying colleges, you know, their kids' college funds through songwriting.

**(JK):** Yep.

**(TI):** That just—it's not what it used to be anymore because of digital publishing.

**(JK):** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you use the mechanical royalty rate, is, you know, nine point, I don't know what it is this year. It was 9.1, 9.2 cents per song per record blast two years ago. So, you know, even if you've got a song on a Garth Brooks record that wasn't a radio signal, single is the word I'm looking for. You know, you'd make, it sells a million copies, make 91,000 bucks. You make a living like that. But now it's like the streaming royalty rates is nowhere near—I

mean, like I would make, I would typically make on like a show day selling records at a show more in one show than I would make streaming the entire year. And so, the shift in that—and so, for a staff songwriter who doesn't go out and tour, you would be dependent upon getting a song on a record and you can make a living, recoup your salary. With that going away, then you're dependent on getting some, a hit that's on the radio, cause that's a different set of income. And so, if you don't get a hit, if you don't get radio play, like your chances of making money, they dwindled down pretty quickly. And so, I mean, they're trying to figure it out, the streaming rates

**(TI):** Sure, because eventually you're going to squeeze artists out of being an artist.

**(JK):** Well.

**(TI):** And that's what you don't want

**(JK):** The trick has been that historically, at least, especially in Nashville, it's been songwriters write the songs for the artists. Not all, there are some artists that write their own songs, but traditionally, it was the song writers who wrote the songs and that's what they're really good at doing. They could be terrible singers, but they write amazing songs, which is one of the things that drew me to this town was like, man, these songs are amazing and you go see a guy who is never going to be on the cover of GQ magazine, but man that guy will slay you with his song. And it used to be, they would write the songs and then, you know, they and whoever would sing them, you know, George Strait would sing it and everybody made a living. Well, there was that sort of division of labor. And because of the way that the finances have gotten squeezed, now they're making singers writers when they aren't necessarily a great writer. They could be an incredible singer, really beautiful. However, that all shakes out. But it's like, well, the label needs to make that money from the publishing, and so they're going to say, "Okay, you're a writer. I commissioned you as a writer."

**(TI):** They're cutting out one of the things and trying to—it's like when combat camera kind of consolidated and they said, "Okay, yeah, you can write stories and take a photograph, and do a video." And it's like, "Okay, I'm only good at one of those things, but alright, cool."

**(JK):** Yeah. Yeah. The assumption, and it kind of goes to the independent artists. You're expected, now you got to wear all those

hats. And so, it sounds like the same with combat camera. I mean you're—

**(TI):** Yeah, yeah. You just, it just, it's, you know, it's changed the game.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** For a Veteran that's looking to get into songwriting or touring as a career, what advice do you have? Is there anything that you can do to help with some of these, this change that we're talking about? You know, I've seen your, your bio, and, you know, we read it off at the intro that you didn't hear. Is there anything that's like, you know—I've seen others cultivate an audience online. You've been successful in competitions. What have you found to be successful in helping maintain the career that you obviously love?

**(JK):** Buy rental properties?

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Have another source of income.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Okay.

**(JK):** No, I mean, I joke, but it's, I mean, it's gotten us through this last year when—

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** It's really one of those things that's been fascinating. I mean, having something like COVID where—I mean, I, I've been doing music pretty much since I got out of the Navy. And it, like to have that all of a sudden, like, nope, that's not happening this year. It's a good thing to have other options.

**(TI):** Or streams of income. Diversify that portfolio.

**(JK):** Yeah. My wife always jokes, "It's the trickle trickle." Because it's like, "Oh, here's a check for a hundred bucks. Here's a check for 500." Like it just, and that's both with royalties and other things, but like, I guess my thing would be figure out what you like doing musically, and figure out what your superpower is in that world that may set you aside. What makes it different? Unfortunately, people's attention spans have gotten so short.

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** But figuring out what it is that you like to do, what you're drawn to, what you're passionate about. But I guess I would, my main advice would be, be aware that there are so many different ways. Like I've got a buddy that I write with, he lives in Florida actually, and he's been doing music library stuff where he, you know, he used to tour and he used to do that kind of stuff. But he, you know, he produces tracks at home or in the studio. He's got a little studio, but he basically does TV and film licensing, and he puts songs into a music library and he makes a, you know, he makes a good living.

**(TI):** So for like APM or for like FirstCom or stuff like that or his own personal library.

**(JK):** He writes for a library out of the UK actually, and they're called Audio Network, but they do a lot of TV. I mean, TV film, mostly Europe and Japan and Australia. And I mean, I've done two projects with them now, and it's really interesting to see where the royalties, and it's such a different economy of scale where it's like, you know, you'll get royalty statements like, well, this got used in something, the coronation, crown, some I don't know, some British soap opera or something, you know. And you'll see you got like seven cents here, nine cents there. But like, I mean, he's been doing it for 10 years now. I mean, he probably makes 80 or 90 grand a year just in passive income. So, it's—there are so many different, in the words of George Bush, "ways to skin a cat." There are so many different—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** If it is the music business that you want to be in, I mean, there's everything from the writing to the publishing, the studio work, all of that stuff. But even in the songwriting world, there's writing for yourself, there's writing for your own records, and then the whole music library, TV and film aspect is only growing. I feel like because there's so many more avenues, so many. I mean, how many channels are on television? They all have background music.

**(TI):** Yeah, yeah. So no, I mean, we used APM, you know, in NASCAR, and we have a musical library for, for our own digital media here at the VA. So, I mean, I can honest—and I see a lot of the same writers, you know.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** I noticed, you know, and I will go, I will gravitate to a certain writer because I know that their library is quality for—

**(JK):** Absolutely.

**(TI):** So, I totally get with what you're talking about.

**(JK):** And it makes your job easier. Cause you know, like, "Oh, I trust this writer. They put out good stuff." And it's funny, that's what my buddy Pete, who does a lot of the music library stuff, and he said, "Yeah, it's just like producers for different TV shows will say, 'Oh yeah.'" They'll look for your name when you've got a new project with a new, you know, it's all separated by genre, etc.

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** But—

**(TI):** One of the very first interviews I did for this podcast was—he's a CEO for a music library and he's—

**(JK):** Oh, cool.

**(TI):** And he's an Air Force Veteran.

**(JK):** Nice.

**(TI):** Yeah, so that was like, man, it was a year and a half ago. Okay, at this very moment, the name escapes my mind, but I'll probably link it in the blog for this episode on blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/62791/borne-battle-153-perry-fiorz-ceo-epic-music-la-analytical-scientist/>].

**(JK):** Nice.

**(TI):** So, you also, help—you talked about it earlier, you also helped develop future songwriters through your workshops for middle school and high school students. How much talent are you seeing in the younger generations? Are we ever going to get out of the mumble rap? And the rock country genres? What are you seeing out there?

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** Mumble rap, rock country. That's the new genre and combine those two.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** Oh man. I'm gonna take my horse to the old town road. You know what, I'll be honest, like the level of talent is off the charts. Like some of the kids—I remember, Ryan and I were out in Montana probably three years ago. And we did a two-week run out there and

did a bunch of shows and then a bunch of songwriting residencies and schools. And I remember this kid came up after our workshop and he said, "Hey, man, would it be cool if I played you some stuff?" I said, "Absolutely, I'd love to hear it." And he played me something, and he was so good. And this was a town, literally, it was a K through 12 combined school. Like probably had a hundred kids total.

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** I'm talking super rural, remote Montana. And I looked at this kid, I was like, "Where did you, like, where did you come from? Like, what did you, where did you learn this?" And he just, and he's like, "Oh, YouTube."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** I was like, like that, the level of access that kids have to—I mean, when you and I grew up, I don't know. Do you play anything?

**(TI):** No. I fumbled through drums, I think in fifth grade. And it was never, I lived 30 miles out in town, could never get to town. So I was never able to develop that.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** Any kind of musical skill—I was in choir in high school. You know, but that was, that was pretty much the extent of my music career.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** But yeah, I just didn't have access.

**(JK):** That's the point. Every single kid. Well, I mean, especially with broadband, rural broadband getting expanded, like these kids, they—anything you want to learn, if you have the time and the gumption. I mean, these kids are, that they have access to everything. And so, I mean, I remember we did a show at a—Ryan and I played a show at a university in central California, and we were supposed to—the college booked us to play some evening concert thing. And the local students, there was like a jazz program, and they were kind of bent out of shape that they were opening for us. And I said, "Dude, we'll open for you." I had no ego at all in this, like, "You guys can play, we'll play first. I don't care." So, we played and that kind of assuaged their upsetness. And we played, and then they got up and these kids were maybe, I guess like freshmen, so maybe 18, 19. These kids were unbelievably good.

**(TI):** Really?

**(JK):** And you know, they have access to instruction that is—I mean, I subscribe to an online thing called Artists Works Online and it's, you can get like the best players in the world. And it's like 200 bucks a year and you get unlimited videos and video response, like you can play and say, "Hey, what do you think about this?" I'm doing a mandolin one right now with this guy, Mike Marshall, who's, you know, probably one of the top 10 mandolin players in the world. And it's like, anybody can sign up for, this is 200 bucks a year. You get all these videos, you can slow them down, but the pitch stays the same.

**(TI):** Whoa

**(JK):** And then at any point you have a question you can make a video of yourself playing and say, "Hey, Mike, what do you think about this?" And he'll say, "Oh, well move your hand." Like, he'll send a video response within a week.

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** It's unbelievable. So, I don't—I think the future is bright. I mean, there's a lot of great music. It's just finding the quality stuff, which isn't always the stuff that makes it to radio. But yeah, the future is right with the kids. There's so much talent out there. I mean, you watch those singing shows and it's like, crazy.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** I'm glad you're seeing it. I'm glad you're seeing.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** You don't sound optimistic.

**(TI):** I'm at that age where I'm now—I now have my musical, my music palette, you know, on Spotify and I'm like, "I'm good, I'm good." You know, and I'm just self-realizing that I'm like, "Okay, I'm at that age where I'm not liking any of the newer stuff." I am getting to that age where I'm getting older. But, no, it's good that you're seeing that.

**(JK):** There's a great article. You can probably find it. It was just talking about why, well, you're not alone, like the majority of people is stop listening to any music after, I can't remember what the age cut off, like after 32 or something. Like they say, like, you don't start listening to new stuff and how you should.

**(TI):** Yeah.

(JK): And so, I've been trying, trying to get exposed—

(TI): To what? To recognize that and still expand, still expand.

(JK): Yeah. Because there, I mean, there is a lot of stuff where I hear now where I long for. I wish that I was a songwriter in the seventies and eighties, like I love power ballads and stuff like that.

(TI): Yeah.

(JK): And like all those old melodies—like I feel like a lot of melody is lacking these days as a [humming]. Like there's not a lot in the pop music. But there are still some people writing cool stuff.

(TI): I'm getting into acoustic, really acoustic stuff. Kind of like, you know what, like some of the stuff that you do. Some of the stuff that Sean—you know, I walked in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. I forget his name. A lot of acoustic stuff like that. And then I've been getting into, honestly, lately within the past three or four years, video game music. There's so much richness in the scores of video game music now and in, like League of Legends, every time they come out with a song for their tournament or whatever, they come up with some incredible stuff.

(JK): Yeah.

(TI): But yeah, that's, you know, again, trying to expand that palette, trying to try and go. Okay. I'm realizing that. Okay, what else is there that's coming out this year, next year that I actually do like, and sharing that.

(JK): That's a great point though. That's another whole genre of, you know, that's big business, is video games, but the music for video games is huge. And it's all, I mean, when Glen and I were in Seattle, we went to—what's it, Bungee?

(TI): Oh, yeah.

(JK): The company would make—

(TI): Halo.

(JK): Yeah, so Glen's friend was one of the developers there. And so, we got a tour and they took us to their whole, like, they have a whole composing, soundstage, everything, and it's huge. But like a big part of it is, it's all—I didn't realize, it's like, well, if you go through this part it triggers this song, and if you go through this part, there's all these different music cues that are triggered depending on where you go in that world or—

**(TI):** In the game or in the story, or yeah. I remember there was one that really resonated, it just picked my brain. I was like, “Wow, I can't believe they chose this for this scene.” And it was Red Dead Redemption when you're finally coming home. And it was an acoustic song.

**(JK):** Wow.

**(TI):** And it was like an old-timey Western feel as you're coming home to see your family after completing all these missions.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** And it was just like, I remember going, “Wow, that was a really unique and good choice.”

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** You know, and it was just like you're riding home on your horse and I don't know.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** It was really piqued me, you know, because you hear all the big scores and all that stuff, although. But that right there, it was simple and it was impactful.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** And it was right on the money.

**(JK):** And they did Old Town Road, they could have taken—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Exactly. Now you also donate time and helping fellow Veterans write songs about their experiences through Operation Song.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** How-- you know, I've always, I've, I've seen it and I've interviewed people that I've interviewed Veterans that have, that have gone through the program on that side.

**(JK):** Oh, cool.

**(TI):** How have those experiences been for you?

**(JK):** You know, it's amazing. The guy who started it, Bob Regan—he's just one of those people that, like he's one of those people when you meet him, he's incredible song writer. Our main guy wrote hits

for like everybody, Keith Urban to George Strait. Like Garth, like he's one of the old school Nashville songwriters. I remember the first time he called me, and we had coffee and stuff and he's like he's so passionate about it for all the right reasons. And he's one of those people that I think who is not a Vet, but like is so, he's just like, yeah. I don't even know how to say it, but he's awesome and his heart's in the right place and he puts together amazing. He's got a great board of directors put together, and the impact on that he's been able to have with the Veterans. It's just, I mean, it's amazing. So yeah, he's there, they've been doing some, well right before COVID. The last one I did was right before COVID. They were bringing groups of 10 Vets down from the DC area, and then we would write. They pair you up with a Vet and then you write. And then the lab is like a three-day thing. You write a work up, do a, like a work tape on it, and then track it. And so, we go into the studio.

**(TI):** Isn't that like the first day you get to know the Veteran, kind of get to know them, kind of—they kind of get to hear your styles. And then the second time, it's second day, it's like a conversation with the Veteran about whatever they want to write about. And then, and then you come up with a song that night. It's pretty incredible.

**(JK):** Yeah. We, I mean, it's really cool because I think a lot of times that in the mystery of songwriting parlayed over the beautiful stories of people's lives or tragic stories. I mean, it's therapy. It's their story, like trying to tell their story. Yeah, it's, it's, it's a beautiful thing. One of my dearest friends here in town, Cindy Morgan, she's an unbelievable writer and she's done so many of them, and, like her ability to draw out stories. She's done—they've had some that are just for women that she's worked with that are. Anyways, it's an amazing organization. And I know Gina's board of directors on that too. Yeah.

**(TI):** Yep. Yep. And then third day, it's tracked and then played in like a concert hall too.

**(JK):** Yeah, yeah. We perform it usually the last day in front of whoever can come. Yeah, it's actually, the last one I did was with a guy, with a Navy Vet. And he did a little cameo on the track. He got up, and, because I said, "Man, you want to sing it?" And he's like, "No, I don't want to sing it." And he's like, but so he did like a little spoken word piece. He spoke the chorus on it, you know?

**(TI):** Oh, wow.

**(JK):** It was something he had come up with. He said, you know, "I'm not as good as I once was." What was it? I'm better today, but not as good as tomorrow. And so, it was like this mantra that he had for himself. "I'm better today, but not as good as I'll be tomorrow." And so, this whole—but yeah, it's the list of songwriters that he's got in there is—it's a fantastic group of songwriters.

**(TI):** Yeah, now, and including yourself, which is great. I've seen this in action. I've seen Operation Song in action, and I've seen that it's very cathartic for Veterans to write a song about whatever they want to write about. Is it cathartic for you?

**(JK):** Yeah. I mean, I think the thing about co-writing with somebody is being able to relate and empathize. And, but also to see someone realize how their story is being put into words and put into song. And a lot of times, it's just taking what they actually say and, you know, making it fit into the framework of a song. Sometimes it's trying to fish it out of them a little bit more. But a big, a huge part of it is establishing that rapport and that trust because it's super vulnerable. I mean, it's co-writing. If you're being real about it, it can be terrifying, and it's one of the reasons I haven't done a lot of co-writing online this last year. Just because trying to get intimate and with someone that you've never met before and try to establish that trust over a screen. Not that I don't trust you, Tanner, but—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** It's different. It's more difficult sometimes.

**(JK):** It's a tall order and being able to relate, but you're right. I mean, they run the gamut sometimes. They're, I mean—I wrote, I remember one of the first ones I did was with a Vet from Clarksville and it was, you know, he was going on vacation and he was excited to take a vacation. Like he—and so, we wrote a song about going to the beach, like it was a feel good, happy song. And you know, but it runs the gamut. I mean, but the crazy thing was the last one that I did with one of the Vets from DC, turns out we had like five, he was a Navy Vet, we had like five friends in common that we had both served with.

**(TI):** Oh, wow.

**(JK):** We had missed each other on duty stations. But like, because he was in—I didn't tell him in the beginning that I was a Vet. But, and then we were talking, and I was asking like what he did in the service and he was kind of coy about it. And then he said

something and I was like, "Oh, were you a nuke?" He was kind of like, "How do you know that?" And I was like, "Well, all the things you're saying sounds like you were a nuke." And he was like, "Yeah." I was like, "Oh, so was I." So, then it's like, you know—

**(TI):** He's like but you didn't answer my question. How do you know?

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** That's awesome.

**(JK):** Yeah. It was. It was pretty crazy. And I was like, "You know that guy by chance?" He was like, "Oh yeah, I served with." And it's like one of those crazy. So then, you know, you have an established bond of common shared experiences that you can draw on. And, yeah, so it's—

**(TI):** And so, it probably makes the process of writing a song so much better once you have that.

**(JK):** Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, they—I mean, Bob has done a bunch with like some World War II Vets, a lot of Vietnam Vets, I mean, it's just, it's, it's incredible. So, it's the...

**(TI):** What's the process of writing a song in a day? Like, is that—that's not normal, is it? Or is it?

**(JK):** It can be, yeah, for sure. I mean, that's the weird thing sometimes. It's—I got some that I've been working on for years and then those usually aren't the best ones. I mean, the best ones usually end up being the ones that tumble out and, you know. But yeah, I mean, when you have a tracking session scheduled the next day with a bunch of union session players, like you got to finish it.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** You'll get it done. But no, I mean, that's pretty typical. I mean, and in normal, non-COVID times, the typical, like staff songwriters here in town, will do a 10:00 AM and a 2:00, and a one or two 10:00, 2:00, like, they'll write 10:00 to, 10:00 to 1:00, take lunch and then come back at 2:00, write 2:00 to 5:00, 2:00 to 6:00. Some will even do an evening session. You know, sometimes they'll write a song in each of those three-hour blocks.

**(TI):** Wow.

**(JK):** It's definitely not unusual to write a song in a couple of hours. If it's, I would say a lot of times, if it's somebody you haven't written before, you spend an hour or two getting to know that person.

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(JK):** Figure out where you're both at in life, and what you want to write about and figure out, I mean, as in, in Nashville, most country song writers write from a title, at least old school ones. The new ones write from a track.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** But the old school guys, like they wouldn't even start writing the song until you have the title. Once you have the title. I mean, write the song in 45 minutes, a lot of times.

**(TI):** So, it's, it's the right inspiration can spur the—

**(JK):** Absolutely, absolutely.

**(TI):** —the time. Gotcha. Jonathan, what's, what's one thing that you learned during your time in service that you apply to what you do today?

**(JK):** I daily run a nuclear power plant and that's really what I've applied.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Oh man. Anything, you know, any intangibles, any?

**(JK):** You know, it's interesting. I think about it a lot. Like, I'm so glad that I did it, especially having nobody in my family having done it and no reference. It definitely, I mean, I've always been a hard worker, but it instilled in that, you know, get up, and make stuff happen.

**(TI):** Discipline. Yeah.

**(JK):** Yeah, for sure. I think it was also great. Like for me, I grew up in a little farm town and didn't have, like, we didn't travel a whole lot. We had one summer trip. So, to be able to like, that forced like, okay, here. You're going to figure out how to relate and get along with people from all over the country, from all different walks of life. Like that awareness of being able to navigate people. I think that's been an invaluable skill, and the 10% off at Lowes isn't bad either.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Well, Jonathan, we've covered a lot of ground in about an hour. See, we did an hour over what you thought it was going to be.

**(JK):** How amazing.

- (TI):** Outstanding. Is there anything that I've missed or haven't asked that you think is important to share?
- (JK):** Man, no, I mean, I would say that I remember when I was getting out, I didn't know what that was going to look like, but I feel like there are so many resources now. And in the beginning, I was a little reticent to like utilize them, but there are so many Veteran things that are available to us that you have obviously been illuminating on a lot of your podcasts, a lot of the benefits and a lot of the programs.
- (TI):** Trying to, trying to, absolutely. And really, it's just an exploration in myself and trying to find it too because I had no idea.
- (JK):** Yeah.
- (TI):** I was like you. I ran from the government, as far as I could, you know.
- (JK):** I didn't even know that, like I was entitled to VA healthcare when I got out. And I got medically discharged and like, I didn't even know. And I got out and like, I ended up breaking my arm one time and the, you know, I went to the VA cause it was down the street from my house. And then they were like, "Okay, you're good to go." And I was kind of like, "What?" And they explained to me like, "Okay, you got medically discharged," and all this stuff. And like, I didn't even know. And so, I guess that would be the thing I would say is, you know, find out about your benefits and all that stuff and it's, yeah. It's—I know that I feel like the VA gets a lot of flack and I feel like they've been really great for, I mean, in my experience, we have a great VA facility here in Nashville, yeah, it's good. I have good things to say about the VA.
- (TI):** Learn, learn, learn what your benefits are. That's what you're leaving.
- (JK):** That's the takeaway.
- (Both):** [Laughter]
- (TI):** Yeah. Gotcha. Very good. All right. Well, Jonathan, thank you so much for coming on. You know, colleague Gina, she always talks about your talent and even sent me a video of you freestyling when—I can't remember what the crew that came in to document Operation Song, but it was, it was hilarious and incredible. Do you mind?
- (Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** CBS came and did a thing.

**(TI):** Got it. CBS did. Gotcha. Gotcha.

**(JK):** Yeah.

**(TI):** You mind taking us off with a Jonathan Kingham either song or original freestyle session or?

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(JK):** I don't have my thing plugged in. I could, you may have to edit it. Do you edit this afterwards?

**(TI):** Yeah, totally. I edit. Yeah, I try to edit them down to an hour as far as the interviews go. So, you'll probably get cut down about an hour, you know. I edit what I can. Sometimes the content's so good I just leave it in and and everything's here so you just, you'll never know, but I do edit it. Absolutely. All the awkward pauses and the "ums" and "uhs" and all that stuff. And like what we're doing right now, like, I'll cut that out.

**(JK):** Okay.

**(TI):** All right. Well, Johnathan, let's take us out.

**(JK):** All right. I guess I'll sing a song about biscuits.

**(TI):** Okay. Very good.

**(JK):** That's probably what needs to happen cause I'm in the South and this is, yeah. To everybody getting back to traveling and working again, what you were talking about in the video game, coming home. It's called When Daddy Gets Home.

**(TI):** All right.

**[Music]**

**(JK):** Cause I'm thinking 'bout this all day, and how good it will be.  
Sneaking in the kitchen for a small taste of what you left for me.  
You have the power to hit the spot. There's always room for on top.  
Serve it up nice and hot. When daddy gets home, oh yeah. Yeah,  
we're getting to eating, when daddy gets home.

**[Applause]**

**(TI):** You are so humble. You're too humble, too humble. Jonathan, thank you so much for spending time with us. I really appreciate it.

**(JK):** For sure. Thanks for having me on. Great to meet you and I appreciate what you're doing for all the Vets and raising the awareness and raising the roof.

**[01:30:22] Music**

**[01:30:23] PSA:**

**Man:** Getting out of the military, I was missing this camaraderie

**Man:** It's frustrating when you try to talk to people that don't understand.

**Man:** I still had the anger. I still had the addictions, but we didn't talk about that.

**Woman:** It came to a point where it's like, okay, I really needed to talk to somebody about this.

**Man:** Family more or less encouraged me to go to the VA.

**Man:** It's okay to go get help. It's okay to talk to people. It takes strength to ask for help.

**Narrator:** Hear Veterans real stories of strength and recovery at maketheconnection.net [Link: <https://www.maketheconnection.net/>].

**[01:30:52] Music**

**[01:30:58] Closing Monologue:**

**(TI):** I want to thank Jonathan for spending time with us here on Borne the Battle. For more information on Jonathan, you can go to [jonathankingham.com/bio](http://jonathankingham.com/bio) [Link: [jonathankingham.com/bio](http://jonathankingham.com/bio)]. That's Jonathan without the H in John and Kingham. And it's all one word as [jonathankingham.com/bio](http://jonathankingham.com/bio). This week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week was nominated by one of our Borne the Battle interns. And it is from VAntage Point's American Veteran series. I'm going to read an abridged version of the story, but this is a series that our Digital Media Interns here at VAntage Point, otherwise known as [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov), do. They do research on a Veteran and write an in-depth blog about them. Hearing some feedback from the interns, some of these young interns have never known a Veteran. There are no Veterans in their family. And in writing these in-depth stories, and, you know, sometimes that actually means talking to the Veteran they're writing about or their family members. It gives these young interns a chance to learn about a Veteran and what they mean to our society as a whole. It's a pretty cool series, and you can check out the entire American Veterans series on [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov). From the Navy's founding to modern day, its members—active,

reserve, and civilian—are bound to the honors of honor, courage and commitment. As the entire Department of the Navy ,Marines included, Navy Veteran Harvey Milk held onto each of these values throughout his civilian life with great care. When he made history by becoming California's first, openly gay elected official in 1978, it was clear that Milk had integrated the Navy's core values into his advocacy and activism. He effused the values of honor, courage, and commitment. As he fought to expand gay rights, Milk knew that he was gay at an early age but kept his sexuality private for much of his life. Fearing his mother's disapproval, Milk kept his sexuality to himself. But by age 14, Milk felt he could not keep suppressing his identity and decided to come out to himself and a few friends. Still keeping his sexuality mostly hidden, Milk enlisted in the Navy during the early 1950s. He served for three years and 11 months before being discharged at the rank of lieutenant, junior grade. The type of discharge he received and the reason for his discharge is debated, but archives in the San Francisco Public Library suggest that Milk was given an “other than honorable” discharge. In released naval records, it was discovered that Milk was threatened with being court-martialed for allegedly participating, and this is quoting the naval records, a “homosexual act.” After being discharged, Milk drifted across multiple states for the next decade of his life. In 1972, he settled down in San Francisco's Castro district and opened up a camera shop. Swept up by the Castro's gay liberation momentum in the 1970s, Milk found his way to fight for the gay community: politics. Mustering up the courage to run as an openly gay man was hard enough. Kickstarting his political career was, however, an even harder task. Milk ran for office three times in '73, '76 and '77, losing each one of them. Despite having suffered many defeats, Milk refused to give up and remained committed to the expansion of gay rights. In each failed election, he gained more votes. In 1977, after reforms to how San Francisco conducted its elections, Milk ran for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and won. Sworn into office in 1978, Milk became one of the city's most vocal gay rights defenders. That same year, California Proposition 6, which was an initiative to ban gay and lesbian people from working in public schools, was scheduled for a vote in November. Milk launched a tireless campaign to defeat that initiative. And on November 7, 1978, the night that Proposition 6 was defeated in a landslide, Milk gave his “Every gay person must come out” speech. Throughout his political career, Milk always knew his chances of being assassinated were high. On November 27, 1978, a disgruntled fellow city supervisor, Dan White, shot and

killed Milk. Even death cannot stop Milk from making his voice heard. Fully knowing his high likelihood of being killed, he made a tape-recording only to be released if he was assassinated. In that recording, just as he said throughout his short political career, he calls for gay people to, I'm quoting now, "to come out. Only that way will we start to achieve our rights." In 2019, recognizing Milk's legacy and dedication to gay rights, the Navy began constructing a fleet oiler that they intended to name and honor the USNS Harvey Milk. Embodying the values of honor, courage and commitment throughout his gay advocacy and activism, Milk upheld his duty as a member of the Navy. Navy Veteran Harvey Milk. We honor his service. [21-Gun Salute] That's it for this week's episode. If you yourself would like to nominate a Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week, you can just send an email to [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov). Include a short writeup, and let us know why you'd like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week. And if you liked this podcast episode, hit the subscribe button on iTunes, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcast, iHeartRadio, pretty much any podcasting app known to phone, computer, tablet, or man. For more stories on Veterans and Veteran benefits, check out our website [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov) [Link: [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov)]. And follow the VA on social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube—which Borne the Battle is also on—RallyPoint, LinkedIn, Pinterest. DPTVetAffairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs, no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue check mark. And, as always, I'm reminded by people smarter than me to remind you that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not endorse or officially sanction any entities that may be discussed in this podcast nor any media products or services they may provide. I say that because the song you're hearing now is called "Machine gunner," which is courtesy of the non-profit Operations Song. And it was written by Marine Veteran Mick McElhenny, Nashville songwriter Jason Sever, and Mykal Duncan. Thank you for listening. Have a great day, and we'll see you right here next week. Take care.

**[01:37:30] Music**

(Text Transcript Ends)