



By Jake McVey - GJD Contributor

I recently got introduced to GJD, and, after talking with Ken Volpe, I was asked to talk a little about Life on the Road from an up-and-coming artist's perspective -- day-to-day trials and struggles, and all that entails, as a new, 'breaking-edge artist.'

So, first, let's get introduced.

My name is Jake McVey, born and raised in Southeast Iowa. After graduating school and performing locally and regionally for 5 years, I decided to take that giant leap and dive-in headfirst. I have been touring full-time for the past 2 ½ years.

And what a dive into the deep end it was! Sell your possessions, sell your truck, and sell your home. Buy a bus and throw in the fishing pole!

My whole approach to this music business was a little different from the normal one. Simply put, it was because of that word business. Like most everyone else: you get into this for the love of what you do, taking those given talents and striving to perfect them. But that darn word business sometimes can get in the way. You can only do what you love to do if the funds are there to support it. Otherwise, it's just an expensive hobby.

Well, one crazy day my tour bus broke down, and I got introduced to my current investor and enthusiastic supporter: my mechanic. (Sound's like an opening to a song. But I'll get to song writing shortly.) As they were working on my bus, we started talking, and one thing led to another. And the important words came: "What's the next step?"

Every artist in this industry should be asking that question daily. You can't be like those guys who wager everything on a day-to-day deal. This ain't no stock market. CD sales have dropped, but downloads are up. And it's hard to catch people's attention these days. The bottom line is this is a business. And you want a business to grow. Dave and his people got me to focus on that.

We need to look realistically at the challenges and the opportunities. How many time have you got an album that has only one or two good songs on it, and the rest are, well.... But the CD music buyer has had to take the whole package. Now we have a wonderful resource like iTunes that lets the consumer download just those one or two songs. The bottom line is we have to write better songs and cut better material.

I believe Willie Nelson said it best. "When you're broke you write better songs"

I was trained by a writer named Johnny "Pap" McCollum. You may not have heard of Pap, but he has had over 100 cuts published -- from Farron Young to Toby Keith. He also trained Dean Dillon, who wrote maybe 30 of George Strait's number-one songs.

When I start writing a song I feel I have the best job there is. I find my crazy hook, whatever it might be, and hammer it out on a guitar.

I make a demo with my ProTools rig on the bus. And then I ship it off to everyone that I can. One major thing I learned from other writers is, a song becomes a song in the re-write. Collaboration is a wonderful thing. When friends get involved, it's not just what you might feel, it's what several have felt. Most every good song has collaborators -- co-writers.

Part of that collaboration is the audience. I've been performing 300+ shows each year since I've been on tour, and I have added a "Pay It Forward" tour in every town I go to.

I select a convalescent home or a veteran's hospital, to perform a 45-minute acoustic show in the middle of the day. And just watch their faces light up. It is amazing. I was told once of the meaning of true happiness in life. "Increase your standard of living to increase your giving."

There will be more coming from Jake's corner. Feel free to shoot me any questions. If I don't know the answer, I'll find it. But for now I leave you with this How to make it in this industry:

Get the right people on the bus
Get the wrong people off the bus
Put the right people in the right seats
Figure out where you're going

Have a mighty life!

Until next time,
Jake McVey