



Excerpted from Chapter 7 of BACKSTAGE Nashville

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I always tried to make myself as comfortable as possible out there in my new universe. I was very blessed to have the family I had, and they were able to be not only a part of my team, but to me: THE team. Incorporated with my Nashville band was Unc, right there at my side and a reminder of all those Saturday nights at Buzzy's barn dance. Not only was he a part of the band, but he and his wife, Lisa, along with my dad were primary bus drivers and were able to get us wherever we were supposed to be on time.

We became one out there, as an artist, as a label, as a band, as "easy-breezers" caught by a hurricane, always managing to find our way and land on our feet somewhere behind a microphone in our new land of chaos. It was a major and rapid lifestyle change for us, and together we kept each other grounded and in check. While stress was high and miles were many, disagreements were few and laughs were plenty.

We also had Charlie, who had driven us for many miles, but we sometimes had to share him with other artists who had come to love him as we did. It was one stage or radio station after another, and yet another a little farther on down the road. I would always try to forget where I was the night before so I wouldn't say how great it was to be in Fort Wayne, Indiana, when I was now in fact in Leesville, Louisiana.

We were on an especially long radio tour that would take us through Colorado, the Dakotas, and the south-western states. Due to the length of the run, our regular radio tour team made up of our dad, Unc, Charlie and Lisa couldn't go, and, our other standby driver was called out for a road run with one of his other regular clients, Whoopi Goldberg.

Sis and I were sent a driver named Dave, who I swear should have come with a seeing-eye dog. If you wanna get on the right side of Jesus, let this guy haul your ass around the western mountainside ledges for a few weeks, and if you ain't praying to God then, you need some kind of exorcism, I'm here to tell you that right now. One night, as the bus was rolling down the interstate and Sis was back in her bunk focused on the next day's agenda,

I slapped a coffee in the microwave. At the days' end, and when the chaos quieted, the old Wayne would get restless and want to retreat to the sanctuary of home. But good ole driver

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Dave was chasing down those white lines and had the windshield pointing even farther away, and I was in it for the ride. So, like many times before, I grabbed my old cassette recorder from my guitar case to see what I had thrown down for song ideas. Sometimes, I would hear something that would inspire me, and the ink would flow from the pen to get me through another “somewhere” night.

On the tapes, I would whisper lines that I thought might be good, song titles that I had come up with, or melodies I thought might be a hook. I pushed the play button and listened to a few ideas, made some notes, fast-forwarded, rewound, and then, there, what was that? Who was that? At first, I was confused by the sound of a female voice vibrating the little speaker of the machine.

And then, I thought, Wow. It was the song that the teenage girl and I were working on back at her house and came up within two seconds! What was her name again? Oh yeah, Taylor. Taylor Swift. A few more listens to the spontaneous and off-the cuff little co-write once again amplified her skill and reminded me of our commitment and desire to support her in any way we could. The writer’s cap was on and no matter how many guardrails Dave might have taken out over the next few hours, I was in my zone. I wanted this song to be perfect for Taylor. She had introduced the title, a hook, and some great lines.

Knowing she was a fan of Turbo Twang, I rocked it up a bit from her original slower feel and tried to rope it in. We all knew that she would be needing strong material to secure the right deal and I wrote, crossed out, rewrote, and made sure to keep it in the original direction that we had crafted so briefly that day at her house. Truckers passed, miles passed, and the candle burned out as driver Dave rolled on, talking on his phone to other drivers, both to stay awake and to pass the time. A few more edits to tie in with her melody on top of the chorus and the song The Middle of The Light was finished, and I couldn’t wait for her to hear it.

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