

MESSSENGER



Carmelita De La O Madrid de Wright

RHYTHM IN THE WORD, Volume 16

Home Recordings - 2025

DON WRIGHT

MESSSENGER

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Lyrics and music for all songs by DON WRIGHT

Vocals, guitars, harmonica, keyboards & mandolin – DON WRIGHT

Background vocals, tambourine & shakers – Carmen Madrid Wright

Recording & sound mixing done in Studio 44 – Los Osos, California

I'm looking out the window at a line of cypress trees, the sandbar and bay beyond, and twenty pigeons balancing on the power lines. Native American flute music drifts through the house and the dogs are lying contentedly on the couch in the living room. Here in the studio, the walls are lined with pictures of family, some living, some gone. The shelves are filled with rocks and bones, books I've read and wooden boxes filled with memories. Guitars hang on the wall and dust gathers on everything with a flat surface facing upward. I would have to move everything to clean them. I have yet to do that and I'm not holding my breath. I like to keep my room cluttered and my mind clear.

I woke up with a song this morning and I don't know where it came from. Though I do know it came from the same place they always do. And even though I don't know where that is or why it happens, I know that one will come again. I've learned not to worry about days or weeks, or months or years passing without getting any messages. It's not a delivery service. It's not the post office. It's a mystery beyond our understanding. Patience and faith are required and I have yet to be disappointed by what comes of just waiting and listening. *Gracias a Dios!* Don Wright, 2025

"If you're gonna light that candle, maybe it's your turn
You better light it now while there's something left to burn"

How many times do I have to talk about time before we all understand the value of it? Maybe couple more times, at least, I expect. Y'all know by now that I don't even understand what it is but I do know that we only have a limited amount of it. And I do know that it is more important than us. And it doesn't actually even exist.

TIME WAITS FOR NO MAN

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You been waiting on that same bus out of town
All your life
You ain't had much of anything but bad luck
But that don't make it right
Now there's fire raining down
And it'll take you out right where you stand
Hell don't you know by now
Time waits for no man

Once there was dinner in the oven
And a record on the turntable
You had your dreams and you knew
That everything was gonna work out someday
Well that ain't always how it goes
Maybe you see that now
Maybe you understand
There's only so much time
And time waits for no man

There's storm clouds circling 'round your head
Turning black as the night does fall
Open your eyes and read
What's written on the wall

If you're gonna light that candle
Maybe it's your turn
You better light it now
While there's something left to burn
You lived to take and you took too much
Without offering a helping hand
One day it will be too late
Time waits for no man

What do you want that you've always
Been too afraid to risk
You got nothing left to lose but your past
Take that leap into the mist
Time waits for no man

Hey don't you know by now
Time waits for no man
Time waits for no man

"I wake up in the morning and I just drive"

Two things very dear to my heart – Hope. And the Highway. I've retired from the road but the memory of each mile is still fresh and I do not regret a single turn I might have taken. Not that they all resulted in successful outcomes or pleasant experiences, but the sum total of one upon another has brought me here. And here is where I belong.

As for hope, well that has never diminished within me. At the lowest points, suffering produces hope. Hope and yearning and dreaming is what makes us human. I remain optimistic. And grateful for my circumstance.

HOPE IS A HIGHWAY

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There's a road I've traveled on
Up and down and back so long
I know every turn and dead-end sign
Every darkened corner in my life

I wake up in the morning and I just drive
Wherever I end up's alright
There's always another day rollin' 'round
Another chance to make up some ground

Hope is a highway without end
Runs up to heaven and back again
There's no getting off once you're on
There ain't no way to get lost

When it all keeps coming at you fast
And you don't think you're gonna last
Just put that pedal down to the floor
And let that road sing to your soul

I've seen the world from behind the wheel
And lived my life by how I feel
Nobody's gonna tell me what I can't
Or shake my faith in what I am

Hope is a highway without end
Runs up to heaven and back again
There's no getting off once you're on
There ain't no way to get lost

Now you and I we both know
There's a time to stay and a time to go
Oh when that voice whispers in your ear
Or when the storm is drawing near

Hope is a highway without end
Runs up to heaven and back again
There's no getting off once you're on
There ain't no way you're gonna get lost

"Dusty and haggard
Worn down from the things he had seen"

Many years ago in a country much different from ours, I rode from El Paso, Texas, south to Guadalajara and then east to Leon. Leon had nothing for me and I rode further east to Los Brazos – a little farming community just south of Tampico and not far from the coast. I intended to ride on to the sea and stick my feet into the sands of the Gulf of Mexico.

But I met a girl. I didn't make it any further.

LOS BRAZOS

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South of Tampico, east of Leon
I ran out of country I could depend on
I stopped in Los Brazos
Five miles from the sea
En Los Brazos
En los brazos de ti

In the plaza the children
Came and went as they did
With no fear of the stranger
There in their midst
Dusty and haggard
Worn down from the things he had seen
Hunted and holed up now
En Los Brazos aqui

There appeared by the fountain
A woman alone
Light shining on her like water
And all else was suddenly gone
She looked at the stranger
With eyes unashamed and carefree
I will stay in Los Brazos
En los brazos de ti

Too many towns to remember
And too many nights
Lying alone with no fire
And no one to hold tight

They settled down by the river
Looking out on the soft rolling fields
They had a child, then another
The years passed as if in a dream
Though he always was looking
Over his shoulder uneasy
Fearing he'd be found en Los Brazos
En los brazos de ti

One day they came, crossing the river
And up to the house with guns drawn
He sent his young family to the basement
He'd built to protect them from harm
He walked out to face his pursuers
They shot him down where he stood
Now he lies in the cold *camposanto*
En los brazos de Dios

South of Tampico, east of Leon
I ran out of country I could depend on
I stopped in Los Brazos
Five miles from the coast
En Los Brazos
En los brazos de Dios

I lie cold in the ground en Los Brazos
En los brazos de Dios



I prefer the high desert to the shore of any ocean – Chihuahua, Sonora and the like. *Pero, a veces*, I think one has to go to the end of the land to look back and assess where you've been. And how you got there. We don't always make it that far though, do we?

*"Imagine reading a book where there's no way to turn back the page.
How carefully would you read it? That's life."* (Unknown)

*"You might think that if you keep on running, your past can't catch up with you.
Trouble is, you have to stop sometime."* (J. De la Paz)

"Eat or be eaten, that's what I was told"

I've learned a lot of lessons in many different places – big cities, little hole-in-the-wall towns, wilderness, classrooms, bars, and churches. But none more useful than the one above. Stay in the shadows whenever you can but if something's coming for you, always strike first. It might be your only chance.

THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE

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I lived in the jungle
And I stayed in the shadows
From the day that I was born
Eat or be eaten, that's what I was told
As I headed out the door
Cover up with whatever's growin' nearby
Don't move a muscle if you want to survive
That's the law of the jungle
Morning noon and night

I lived in the jungle down below the trees
Here where the ground is warm
I got my things together
And I keep an eye out
For whoever wants to do them harm
You got a long way to run
Before you catch up with me
And I'll be gone when you get there
That's the law of the jungle
Nobody said it was fair

I lived in the jungle
With everything that crawls
And I ain't left but a time or two
It's the same all over
That's what I have found
You got to pay for whatever you do
You take your chances
If you go where you don't belong
You're better off with the devil you know
That's the law of the jungle
The only law I know

I lived in the jungle
And I stayed in the shadows
From the day that I was born
Eat or be eaten, that's what I was told
As I headed out the door
Oh what's it gonna take to deliver me now
From the things that I have done
That's just the law of the jungle
The law of the jungle
That's the law of the jungle
There's a reckoning wherever you run

“Don't tell me that it will get better
Or that this wound will heal in time”

When you lose someone, you hang onto whatever of them might be left – a picture, a keepsake of some sort, an article of clothing maybe. Sometimes, it's a song. Whatever it might be, it keeps them with you in some capacity, however small. Healing is not part of it. It's not about getting better, moving on, pinche closure! None of that crap. It's about keeping what you had and never letting go. Yeah I know – that ain't healthy. Just close the door and leave me with my dysfunction.

And drop that needle into groove number four on your way out.

BROKEN LULLABY

Copyright 2025 by Don Wright

There's a red sun settin' on the ocean
Birds are roostin' in the trees
I'm just looking out my window
No one's looking back at me
But how the memory of you lingers
In every corner of this room
So many things I should have told you
But you slipped away too soon

I got to taking you for granted
But I hope now you understand
I never claimed you were my woman
I was just happy to be your man

All along maybe I knew it
That I would lose you if I tried
And end up here alone and listenin'
To some broken lullaby

Put that record on the turntable
You know the one I want to hear
Let it play over and over
Until the day is drawing near
I been all across this country
Back and forth and up and down
I've seen your face in every barroom
On every street of every town

Don't tell me that it will get better
Or that this wound will heal in time
Just drop the needle into groove number four
And play that broken lullaby

There ain't one line I can't remember
To this broken lullaby



"Circle up the wagons and hold your fire"

Somewhere in a town just north of here, I met a girl – yes, name of Ramona – she let me go and took me back so many times I can't remember. Every time she took me in for a while, I got better. And every time I left for a while, things got worse. Last time I came back, well, she wasn't there.

RAMONA (Take Me Away)

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There's too much 'a nothin' in this town
Too many irons in the fire
Too many cooks in the kitchen
Not enough food to go 'round

I got myself in a fix this time
Painted in a corner down here
In between a rock and a hard place
Waitin' for the bus to nowhere

Take me away Ramona
Save me like you did last time
I'll be gone I promise
I'm just waiting for the sun to rise

There was a time we could hold our own
Weren't no need to run
Now I just gotta get outta here
Find a place to lick my wounds

Maybe out on the edge of town
Or under the shadow of the moon
Let's roll the dice and whatever they say
That is what we'll do

Take me away Ramona
Save me like you did last time
I'll be gone I promise
I'm just waiting for the sun to rise

I tried to grin and bear whatever was comin'
Got all my ducks in a row
Nobody told me how to keep 'em in line though
They flew south and I just watched them go

Trouble comes in bunches they say
Looks like there's some comin' now
Circle up the wagons and hold your fire
Maybe we can wait it out

Take me away Ramona
Save me like you did last time
I'll be gone I promise
I'm just waiting for the sun to rise

"Why the hell did I worry who was wrong, who was right"

Sometimes the wind howled. Or at times he could hear the rain if it came down hard enough. A dog bark. A police siren. Occasionally. But most of that dark vault was filled with an immense, gaping silence. A silence he came to despise. Then fear. He relied on the radio for salvation. And a song by The Five Satins -

"I held you, held you tight... Promise I'll never let you go... Well before the light, hold me again with all of your might... In the still of the night"

Not that the words or the music helped any. It just beat the silence.

THE STILL OF THE NIGHT

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Last night when you left me
I got to thinking about
All the time that we wasted
Apart and standing our ground
When we could have been happy
Just holding each other tight
Breathing softly together
In the still of the night

I think over and over
Of how the days they did fall
And the words that were spoken
I regret most of all
Why the hell did I worry
Who was wrong who was right
Now all I have is your memory
In the still of the night

Morning breaks, the world keeps turning around
But here I lay in this silence
Listening for the sound, the sound of your voice
And your heart beating with mine
Nothing comes with the end of the day
But the still of the night

Some say that it's peaceful
When the darkness descends
But I dread what is coming
What comes with each day's end
I long for the light of day
When the heartache subsides
For just awhile and then
It starts all over again
In the still of the night

"You had your chance to be truthful
But you blithely let it pass"

I've been taken in by people. For years at a time in some cases. But when it's time, it's time. And once it's done, when you've sent them on their way, it's best not to question your decision. Move on. They've had their chance, whether it be friend, hero, preacher or wife, don't look back.

You give some people enough rope, they'll hang themselves.

FALSE PROPHET

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Put your cards on the table
You said you're all in
Take your money and your conversation
Don't come back here again
Hightail it down that road
On the next train goin' south
Don't look back and don't be mistaken
There ain't nothin' but trouble comin' now

Stranger in a borrowed suit
Harbinger of doom
You're a spook and a false prophet
Can't get shed of you too soon

Tell us the story of your ordination
Yeah that's what you do best
Lay your hand on this bible
If you got something to confess
You had your chance to be truthful
But you blithely let it pass
Now you've shown us what you're made of
You showed us way too much I guess

Yeah you're an empty vessel and a thief of hearts
That's all you've ever been
Just keep your hands where we can see 'em
And don't come back this way again

A stranger in a borrowed suit
Harbinger of doom
You're a spook and a false prophet
Can't get shed of you too soon



"With a red sun rising in the middle of a shiny sea"

We are many things. One thing we are not is immortal. They say if you have at least a high degree of certainty, you can plan. Well of course, there's nothing more certain than death. So, when we're faced with the fact that we're all going to die, we have a choice. We can be very depressed and figure, "What's the point?" Or we can be encouraged to really live! Because that IS the point. And every minute that passes can be either wasted or cultivated.

The certainty of death is a blessing; in that it should motivate us to live.

WAKE UP DEAD

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One of these mornings
I'm gonna wake up dead
Yeah one of these mornings
I'm gonna wake up dead
With a red sun rising
In the middle of a shiny sea
One of these mornings I'll be free

Sometimes I gotta shake myself just to realize
Where I am or what I'm doing with my life
Not 'cause of the bible or any visions of the Lord
Or what someone said
Just know one of these mornings
I'm gonna wake up dead

One of these mornings, oh it won't be long
Yeah one of these mornings
I'm gonna hear that song
The one about the prophet turned his lamp down low
And just curled up in his bed
Oh there's comin' a morning
I'm gonna wake up dead

One of these mornings
I'm gonna wake up dead
Yeah one of these mornings
I'm gonna wake up dead
I swear by every night and day I've been given
And what all I don't know
One of these goddamn mornings
I'll be comin' home

Just as sure as birds keep singin' and rain does fall
I'm gonna wake up one morning lyin' in lovin' arms
Come one morning some day, lying in the arms of love

“Walk around any corner or open any door”

Mystery upon mystery. Such is life. We never know what's around the next corner or what we'll conjure up in our dreams. It keeps us on our toes, I guess. But it really gets to the heart of how little we really know about pretty much anything, doesn't it? At least, that's how I feel.

But then, if you're not still looking for something good to happen, that thing or that person to come into your life, then you're just counting days and watching them dissolve into a mist and blow away. And that's about as dead-end as it gets.

WHERE DO YOUR DREAMS COME FROM

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Where do your dreams come from
You never know for sure
Walk around any corner
Or open any door
She could be standing there
One you never thought you'd find
There's something in the way she looks
There's something in her eyes

Where do your dreams come from
Falling down night and day
How can you tell which one is real
What would you even say
Time will come, your heart will sing
If you only just believe
With every step you're closer now
With every breath you breathe

Why does the sun come up each morning
Why do we look for love
Why not ask why the world keeps turning
Or why there are stars above

Where do your dreams come from
We'll never know that's sure
But one thing is certain in this life
There's always one more turn
Don't look back and don't you ever
Turn away from the light
Another dawn is breaking
There'll be another night



“What I didn't know is you can't outrun yourself”

There's likely no older or less-told story than that of the man who became a victim of his own misdeeds. This is one of those stories. But what I really want to talk about is the Lucky Spot café that my father and I frequented when I was a child. Eight stools at the counter, four booths on the floor, a jukebox, and a floor fan for cooling the customers.

Tony Machado was the owner, server and bartender. Tony Costa was the cook. Everything was fried. The kitchen so close, you could not only smell it, you could hear the food sizzling in the pans. The rib steak dinner was \$1.65, including a side of fries. Sodas and beers were 35 cents. The jukebox took nickels. My father knew both Tonys well, of course, and even though it wasn't on the menu, was always able to get them to cook him a plate of liver and onions. Along with a shot or two of whiskey he would discretely manage, back in the kitchen. I always ordered the rib steak.

So, this song isn't about that – I was just remembering the name of the place fondly and took the liberty of using it as the setting. I can still smell that steak and that liver and those onions frying though. I can still feel that one fan blowing and keeping us almost comfortable on a hot August night at the Lucky Spot café.

LUCKY SPOT CAFÉ

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I went down to the Lucky Spot café
And I walked right in
He sat at his table
With his hand on his gun and a curious grin
He said sit down, have a drink
Tell me what's been on your mind
I said the truth is I can't stay here another night

You made your bed
Now just lie down and give it some thought
Did you believe you could get back
Everything that you lost

It was back about four years ago
When I first got to town
I met him on the street
Where we both made a living scrounging 'round
He was smarter than me
He was meaner too and I fell in line
He made the deals and I did the dirty work
Most the time

Yeah the streets were rough back then
But we always found a way to get by
Some ways were legal, some not so much
But we didn't mind
We told ourselves there was only one way to survive
In a world on fire
You don't ask questions 'bout right and wrong
And then one moonless night

We found ourselves with our backs to a wall
Without a good choice either way
I shot an innocent man that night
And I left him where he lay
I looked at him and he looked at me
He didn't even bat an eye
He said it's best you lay low for now
I'll send for you in a while

You made your bed
Now just lie down and give it some thought
Did you believe you could get back
Everything that you lost

I found my way to a border town, Nogales it was
I drove across in the middle of the night
And just kept on runnin'
What I didn't know is you can't outrun yourself
No matter how far you go
You are whatever you've done
Now and forever more

So I walked back into the Lucky Spot
And it was smoky and dark
He looked the same like he always did
Cold gray eyes and a empty heart
He said you know I can't let you leave again
You sealed your fate that night
You wanted in this crapshoot
And when you're in you're in it for life

These days you can find me in my room
In back of the Lucky Spot café
I work the bar and I close up at night
I sleep in most of the day
And every so often when it's asked of me
I do some dirty work too
I got no more questions 'bout right and wrong
Or the truth

You made your bed
Now just lie down and give it some thought
Did you believe you could get back
Everything that you lost



HAWK AND BUZZARD (A Conversation)

Hawk said to Buzzard, "You look a little hungry, when's last time you ate?"

Well, it's been kinda lean 'round here of late, that's true," said Buzzard. "Haven't seen or smelled anything in a few days."

"Why don't you kill something then? A bird needs to eat," says Hawk.

"We don't do that. I wasn't trained for that. I wouldn't even know how," said Buzzard.

"All you do is wait to find dead shit up in the hills or on the road?" asks Hawk.

"Wherever it's layin, yep," says Buzzard.

"Well, when I get hungry, I get to killin' and I never go hungry," says Hawk.

"Yeah, well I do alright. And my conscience is clear," Buzzard says.

"Whoa, whoa, my conscience is clear!" exclaimed Hawk. "This is what God made me to do."

"God made you to kill other animals?"

"I guess so, yeah. That's the only way I know to feed my belly, and my family," said Hawk.

"You ever think about those you kill? How they fear for their lives? How they must feel when they know they're just about to die?" Buzzard asked.

"Nope, never have. Never looked at it like that," said Hawk.

"Well maybe you oughta," said Buzzard.

"Hmm, but then what would I do, just wait for others to do the killin', then eat the leftovers? What's the difference who does the killin'?"

"Hmm, never looked at it like that," said Buzzard.

Hawk went his way. Buzzard went his. Neither one thought about it after that.

KANSAS CITY 1975

Rain. Perfect. That's all I need. I'm sitting across from Bunny Leguina in a diner in Kansas City, Missouri. She asked me to meet her for dinner at this joint. She's looks to be in somewhat of a foul mood. I got about thirty dollars left for the week and it's only Tuesday. I gotta get back to the hotel to watch game six of the series between Cincinnati and Boston. The wipers don't work in the '67 Plymouth station wagon I'm driving. And now it's starting to rain. Perfect.

I came to Kansas City looking for the corner of 12th Street and Vine and one of those 'crazy little women' that Wilbert Harrison talked about in the song, 'Kansas City' – first record I ever bought (a 45 rpm) back in 1959. I never did find 12th Street & Vine – must have changed the streets around sometime in the last sixteen years. But I did find one of them crazy little women – Bunny here, sitting across from me. Met her a month and a half ago at the coffee shop where she works the counter. She was pretty and she seemed to be at least a little interested in me – 'course waitresses will do that. But, turns out, she actually was.

We hit it off pretty good, right away. She had a great apartment overlooking the river, she pronounced Missouri "Missoura", looked great in anything she threw on, liked to drink Johnnie Walker straight or with soda – anyway I poured it. And, as Raymond Chandler put it, "smelled like the Taj Majal looks in moonlight." Up to this point, I hadn't seen anything I didn't like about her and was starting to feel pretty comfortable in KC, Mo. About a month before I met Bunny, when I first got to town, I got a job parking cars at the Alameda Plaza hotel in exchange for a small room in the housekeeping quarters and just enough money for food and gas – augmented by some mooching in the hotel kitchen.

So, as you might imagine, I now spent most of my time at Bunny's apartment. She had a cat, name of 'Spook', who lived mostly inside and got a little fresh air out on the balcony. From my seat in the diner, I could see her

car – a little Fiat coupe of some sort – and noticed that Spook was laying up on the back of the front seat. So I asked her why he was in the car. She said she was getting out of town for a few days but that didn't explain it. She said I was welcome to use the apartment if I needed but said it in a way that gave me the feeling she'd be disappointed if I was still there when she got back. Whenever that was going to be. We didn't talk a whole lot after that and when we finished the meal, she went out front and waited, I paid the tab and then joined her in the parking lot. She laid her hand on the side of my face and gave me as good a kiss as she ever had and said, "It's been fun. Take care of yourself." I watched her drive off and knew it was the last time I would do that.

I went back to the hotel and watched the greatest World Series game of all time. Then the next day, I quit my job and hit the road. I don't know exactly what the explanation was for what happened, other than she did seem the kind of girl that, when it's time, it's time and that doesn't include time for explanations. I still think of Bunny and that last kiss and truly hope she's well. And thanks Wilbert, but it just didn't pan out for me.

On my way back to California, I was stopped and arrested in Grand Junction, Colorado for ignoring my 'Greetings from the President of the United States' letter many years earlier, in the days of the draft and Vietnam. Spent three months in the Denver County jail. They sent me back to L.A. for my physical to get in the Army. I failed it and was released with two dollars and a good reason to stay out of trouble. That didn't really pan out either though (staying out of trouble). But that's a whole 'nother story.

MESSAGES FIND ME in a lot of different ways – Half asleep and coming out of a dream. An overheard couple of words in a conversation. Noodling around on a guitar. A child's pure innocent joy. Or a face looking out the window of a bus headed out of town. If I can take any of those things and expand on whatever meaning I can find in them, it's my obligation. And I am happy and grateful to do so.

Carmelita's in the kitchen

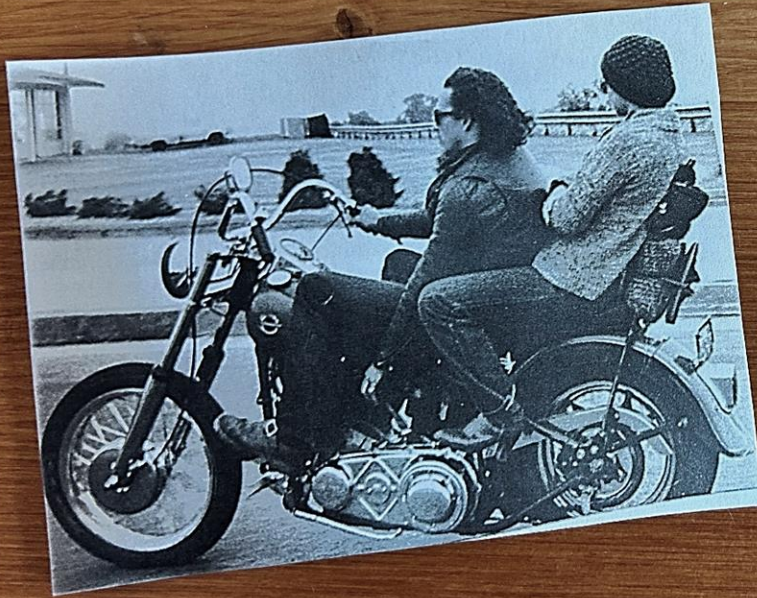
Making flautas and Spanish rice
She's playing Pepe Aguilar songs
His voice *es como miel de la piedra*
Like honey in the rock
He is Mexico incarnate
And I envy every note he sings
A light wind blows in from the orchard
The adobe walls are still warm
From the heat of this September day
And there is nothing I could add
To make it better

Later in the evening, walking out into the yard
The songbirds sing their chorus
Always perfect, without any retakes needed
They know what they're doing
The wind knows what it's doing
The trees know what to do
They're all smarter than us
The desert comes alive
With God's presentation
Of all there is we need to know

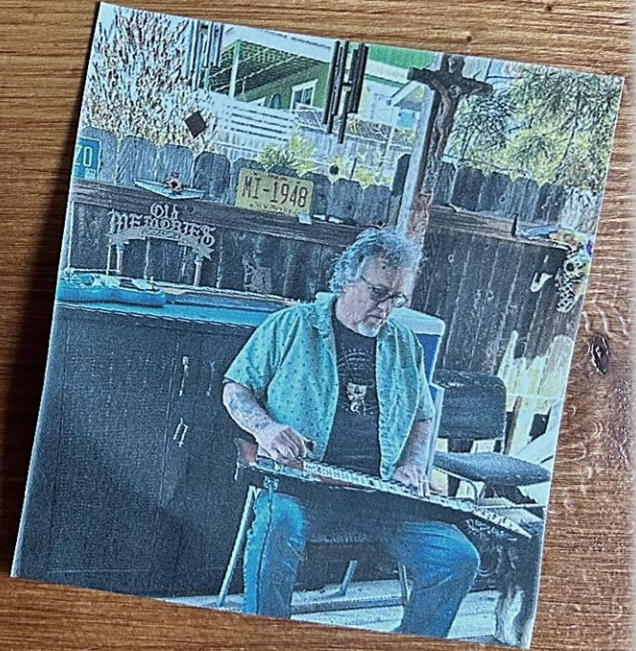
I laid face down in the road

Couldn't feel anything below my waist
The Knucklehead lay behind me
Crumpled but still intact
I could hear people talking, concerned
And I waited for help to arrive
They scooped me up off the road
They threw me in the back of a ambulance
They took me to a hospital
I recall being rolled over and x-rayed
I recall being saved from a life in a wheelchair
And I recall being thankful to God

Thankful for a brush with death?
Yeah that's something to be thankful for
You don't always get the chance
To see what your life could have been
Without someone watching over you
Even if you don't believe
You can't explain what saved you
You can't explain it all with logic
Or with what's easily understood
The only explanation is the truth



Knucklehead, San Fernando Valley, 1978



Knucklehead, Los Osos, Cali, 2025

MESSINGER SONG LIST

1. Time Waits for No Man.....3:52
2. Hope is a Highway.....3:56
3. Los Brazos.....5:15
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5. Broken Lullaby.....3:51
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