

## **The Life and Music of St. Louis, Michigan Native, Kevin McCreery**

Written by Dr. Chris Petras

Kevin Paul McCreery was born February 8, 1964 in Alma, Michigan to Melvin Paul McCreery and Sharon Lucille McCreery. The McCreery family resided in St Louis, Michigan where Kevin attended Michigan Ave Grade School, T.S. Nurnberger Middle School, and St. Louis High School.

Influenced by the musical talents of his father, Kevin taught himself how to play the drums at the young age of five-years-old then later switched from drums -- to the guitar (self-taught) -- when he was just eight-years-old.

Family and friends tell the story of a young Kevin McCreery occasionally performing with his father's band and how quickly his mother, Sharon, discovered Kevin's passion and commitment to learning guitar. For example, Kevin's mother would return home from work each day and place her hand on Kevin's guitar amplifier. If the amplifier was warm, Kevin had practiced. If cold, no practice. However, if the amplifier was hot, she knew immediately Kevin cut school to practice his guitar technique. Legend has it Kevin's mother often discovered his guitar amplifier, hot.

Kevin McCreery's professional music career began in 1979 when he joined Gratiot County, Michigan-based rock band, Milestone. Milestone performed regularly throughout Michigan including the famous "Rock Farm" in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Kevin's songwriting evolved during his tenure with Milestone -- reflecting a multitude of artistic ideas -- while his stage presence and guitar solos left audiences in awe.

After leaving Milestone in 1982, Kevin performed throughout the year with local Gratiot County, Michigan rock band, Ezra. However, the window of opportunity opened wider for Kevin in January of 1983 when he joined forces with Bay City, Michigan drummer, Fran MacMillan and bassist, Eric Link in the power-rock trio, MACH.

Critically acclaimed as one of Central Michigan's most promising up-and-coming bands, MACH highlighted Kevin's prowess for songwriting and performing. In August of 1983, Kevin took a temporary leave from MACH and joined the rock band, Prankster. After a short tenure with Prankster, Kevin re-united with Fran and Eric in MACH. However, in 1987, Kevin placed his performances on hold to begin a new phase of his life—raising a family.

As a husband and father raising two beautiful daughters -- Kinley Sue and Lacey McCreery -- Kevin's faith and passion for life and music were interwoven. On a spiritual path, Kevin shared his faith and love of GOD through songwriting and performances. From the late 1980s through the early 90s, Kevin formed a Christian rock band, Under Grace and served as Youth Pastor at Amazing Grace Church in Wheeler, Michigan---all while working full-time at GARR Tool in Alma, Michigan. Integrating his faith, life experiences, and literary knowledge (Kevin was an avid reader of the classics), Kevin followed a path to self-fulfillment and enrichment. Little did Kevin

know at this time in his life, the next phase in his music career was waiting for him right around the corner. In 1992, Kevin and best-friend, Fran MacMillan connected with Bay City, Michigan bassist extraordinaire and national recording artist, Bruce LaFrance forming the supergroup trio---Love Jones.

Love Jones' debut album had regional success with play on FM radio stations. The band performed at festivals and with several national acts, including Nazareth, April Wine, Warrant, Blue Oyster Cult, Pat Travers, and more. Love Jones however would eventually become "Feeding the Machine" -- delivering a new and bolder rock sound. While Love Jones and Feeding the Machine found regional success, Kevin, Fran, and Bruce would eventually follow their separate paths, including individual solo projects.

For Kevin, life was a classroom with each moment and experience representing a lesson. In 2000, he sold his belongings and moved to Nashville, Tennessee.

While in Nashville, Kevin performed in several local bands and did session work. What many do not know is Kevin could not read music. His studio/session work was improvised. According to friends close to Kevin, he would pretend to read a music chart while improvising the guitar parts. One day, a studio manager discovered Kevin could not read music and his work as a session musician ended. Undeterred, Kevin continued his pursuit of a professional music career while in Nashville and teamed-up with singer, David Frazier. David convinced Kevin that Louisville, Kentucky was the right place to start a new band. David knew three musicians in Louisville perfect for the project--guitarist, Shaun Kennedy, bassist, Frank Green, and drummer, Donnie Highland. The five formed the band, Outspoken.

In 2003, Outspoken signed a major record deal with LAVA-Atlantic record company—fulfilling one of Kevin's music career dreams. The band had nationwide success with their hit-single, "Farther" and toured the U.S. However, in 2005 Outspoken disbanded with Kevin -- once again -- finding himself guided by faith and determination.

While in Louisville, Kevin met former Days of the New -- now Tantric -- songwriter/guitarist, Todd Whitener. Believing life experiences are opportunities, Kevin accepted a job with Tantric as guitar tech. This eventually led to an offer to Kevin by Tantric to assume the role of touring guitarist/vocalist. During his tenure with Tantric, Kevin performed on stages nationally and internationally including a performance on the Tonight Show Starring Jay Leno and for the U.S. Troops overseas. His journey with Tantric included long-time friend and bassist, Bruce LaFrance joining the band as touring bassist/vocalist and recording an album with Tantric as well.

During his off-time with Tantric, Kevin continued to expand the boundaries of his songwriting prowess. In mid-2000, Kevin contacted Detroit-based singer/songwriter, Geo Teubl (formerly of the band, Bridge) along with former Outspoken bandmates, Donnie Highland and Frank Green, to start a new project. The result was the formation of the high-energy rock band, UGLY.

UGLY signed an independent record deal and performed throughout the mid-west building large fan-bases in the Detroit and Louisville-areas. However, in 2012 Kevin's journey would once again take a new

and exciting direction when country superstar, Uncle Kracker, called Kevin inviting him to join the band as touring lead guitarist/vocalist. Kevin readily accepted the invitation and calling.

As touring guitarist/vocalist for Uncle Kracker, Kevin performed in stadiums nationwide with country and rock superstars including Kenny Chesney, ZZ Top, and Kid Rock. Kevin also performed with Uncle Kracker on the nationally televised weekday morning show, FOX & FRIENDS.

When off-tour with Uncle Kracker, Kevin stayed close to his roots performing -- on occasion -- with Fran MacMillan and Bruce LaFrance as Feeding the Machine at Rubbles in downtown Mount Pleasant, Michigan---where it all started for the band in 1992. In addition, Kevin was selected and featured as the guitar instructor in a House of Blues "Beginning Guitar" instructional video. One of Kevin's greatest joys was recording a solo album as AvantgardeDog with close friend, Chip Adams. The album was produced by 3 Doors Down guitarist, Chris Henderson.

In July of 2016, Kevin's life changed forever when he was diagnosed with Small Cell Carcinoma. Before his passing on September 14, 2017, Kevin fought a courageous battle with cancer while continuing to tour with the love and support of his Uncle Kracker bandmates, family, and friends. Placing others before himself, Kevin would help those in need including those battling cancer.

Kevin McCreery never forgot his St Louis, Michigan roots and the life experiences he shared with friends and family. Those close to Kevin will always remember him as a kind soul with a love for life, GOD, family, and others. Placing his faith above all else, Kevin McCreery graced the Earth with hope and peace. He rests next to his mother in St. Louis, Michigan at Oak Grove Cemetery.

Contributors:

Kinley Sue McCreery

Lacey McCreery

Vickie McCreery

Francis B. MacMillan

Bruce LaFrance

Nancy Vliet

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