

THIRTY YEARS GONE

Collected Original Songs by Jake Weld

All original lyrics by Jake Weld

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Track List:

1. Going Down (A Miner's Lament)
2. Hold Them Tracks
3. The Ballad of Joseph Warren Todd
4. Heat in the Holler
5. The Rivers Between Us
6. Two Crows
7. Boulders in the Breakers
8. Thirty Years Gone
9. Going Down (A Miner's Son's Lament)

TRACKS & LYRICS

Going Down (A Miner's Lament)

Down the shaft and into the pit
Six bucks a day is all I get
Money's all spent at the company store
So down I go to earn some more

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine
Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
Lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

Some go quick in a fiery blast
At least their story's over fast
For the rest it's years of coughin' black
Our lungs filled up like a miner's sack

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine

Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
Lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

The union came but they didn't stay
Company guns drove 'em away
So down we go, back into the earth
Where we pull more coal than our life is worth

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine
Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
Lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

My boy turned twelve, took my lamp
Said, Pa, I'm ready for the camp
I tried to keep him from that mine
But he's been itchin' to work since he was nine

Pa, I can handle the shovel and the pick
Besides, you know you've gotten sick
Your lungs are filled with that black coal dust
So I'm goin' to work before this family's bust

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
They send him in at eight, pull him out at nine
A light on his head and a pick in his hands
But lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

Hold Them Tracks

Harlan County miners
Hold your heads up high
You did your work and dug that coal
Piled black gold to the sky

But the company filed some papers
To shut the tipples down
Tried to walk away with all your pay
And slip clean out of town

So hold them tracks
And hold them trains

And hold them back
Till they pay you for their gains

Shut down that old railroad
Make sure no coal cars run
'Cause not one ton is leavin' here
Till you're paid for what you've done

It's a devil's deal to work
And a devil's deal to mine
But the devil's in the details
When they steal your coal and time

They say Black Jewel's bankrupt
But the bosses don't seem broke
Their table's full of steak and wine
While our town goes up in smoke

So hold them tracks
And hold them trains
And hold them back
Till they pay you for their gains

From Matewan down to Harlan
The same story's always told
When we stand together for honest pay
We get what we are owed

It's a devil's deal to work
And a devil's deal to mine
But the devil's in the details
When they steal your coal and time

So hold them tracks
And hold them trains
And hold them back
Till they pay us for our gains

The Ballad of Joseph Warren Todd

Where the New River rolls through mountains
Past fields and rocky bends
It's carried tales a thousand years
And tells them all again

Gather 'round for the story
And learn how old Elk's Crossroads came
To remember Joseph Warren Todd
And why they changed their name

His Irish blood was mountain-born
Back in eighteen thirty-four
A Carolina country boy
Before the guns of war

He enlisted in '61
A man of twenty-seven
Swore his oath to Richmond town
To the South and God in heaven

J. W. marched through mud and fire
Saw hunger, death, and tears
Saw courage, pain, and sorrow too
Lived a lifetime in four years

Three horses shot from under him
The first at Middleburg
The second fell at Five Forks
The third at Gettysburg

He was wounded down at Reams Station
And again at Namozine
But he made it home from bitter war
To the bend where the hills turn green

And the New River kept on rollin'
Gathering the stories that were told
Every voice that ever lived there
Still carried in its fold

But the violence wasn't over
It found him once again
Bushwhackers roamed the lawless hills
And killed his brother Jim

J. W., he had lost his war
But he wouldn't lose the peace

He took command of the Home Guard
To clear the hills of thieves

He studied law in Raleigh town
Miss Sallie he did wed
Seven children came to fill their home
Nine mouths that he kept fed

The Todds moved across the mountain
To Jefferson they made their way
But the New River keeps its stories
And we still call the town Todd today

The river rolls on through the seasons
Slow in summer, quick in fall
Through mist and bloom and laurel green
The river's memory knows it all

It's seen the world come apart
Then mended once again
While men like Todd have played both parts
The New River never ends

Heat in the Holler

Come on out, get on the floor
Tap your feet, let's dance some more
Come Monday you'll be back in that mine
But tonight, friends, it's dancin' time

Step to your left, then turn back 'round
Heel and toe to the stompin' sound
Keep that time and don't you slow
Heat in the holler, let the cool winds blow

Knock that mud off your Sunday shoes
Girls in ribbons, boys in blues
Line up straight now, two by two
Bow to your partner, that'll do

Step to your left, then turn back 'round
Heel and toe to the stompin' sound
Meet your partner, circle slow

Do-si-do and back you go
Face the one across from you
Step in close, don't pass too soon
Right and left and back again
Round the set to meet your friend

Step to your left, then turn back 'round
Heel and toe to the stompin' sound
Circle wide and keep that line
Bring it home and make it shine

Promenade that line once more
Hand in hand like times before
Round the ring till the fiddle's cry
Back to your place, stay right in line

Step to your left, then turn back 'round
Heel and toe to the stompin' sound
Couples turn once more in time
Stamp twice hard, and end on time

The Rivers Between Us

(Female voice)

The New River runs through Todd and Boone
Past fields we turned and plowed
It hums that tune you used to sing
Before that recruiter came to town
He promised cash for honest work
Buildin' ships of war in Maine
Said our country needed men like you
Until the fightin's through

(Refrain - both voices)

The rivers run between us
Carrying what we can't let go
From ridge to tide, from pine to sea
In the currents and the undertow
An ocean's not a river's end
It's just where the water goes
Before coming home in mists and rain
To rejoin that ancient flow

(Male voice)

The Fore River freezes cold and black
The ships stand dark and gray
We work through snow by lantern light
So I can send home my pay
And your cousin John from Harlan's here
He swings that hammer hard
Says this yard's as rough as any mine
'Least up here, we see the stars

(Refrain - both voices)

The rivers run between us
Carrying what we can't let go
From ridge to tide, from pine to sea
In the currents and the undertow
An ocean's not a river's end
It's just where the water goes
Before coming home in mists and rain
To rejoin that ancient flow

(Male voice)

We launched a ship this mornin', love
Watched her slide into gray
The tide pulled hard, the ropes went slack
And the sea just took her away
John says when this one clears the bay
He'll head back down your way
But I might stay for one more boat
Then try for the first-cut hay

(Female voice)

Your letters come, though slower now
Smell of salt and burnin' steel
I read 'em by the lantern light
Till the lamp gives up its glow
Our boy's near grown; he walks that river bend
And listens for your train
He swears he hears his daddy's song
Come ridin' in on the rain

(Refrain - both voices)

The rivers run between us
Carrying what we can't let go
From ridge to tide, from pine to sea

In the currents and the undertow
An ocean's not a river's end
It's just where the water goes
Before coming home in mists and rain
To rejoin that ancient flow

(Female voice)

The river only runs one way
You can't cross the same one twice
Each spring I watch it rise again
Then drop on into fall
However you come home to me
By road or rail or rain
The river will welcome you
Ain't nothin' you need explain

(Final refrain - female voice)

The rivers run between us
Carrying what we can't let go
From ridge to tide, from pine to sea
In the currents and the undertow
An ocean's not a river's end
It's just where the water goes
Before coming home in mists and rain
To rejoin that ancient flow

Two Crows

Two crows were sittin' on a fence at dawn
Two crows were sittin', now one's gone
Two makes a murder, but what's one crow
A killer or forsaken, how do you know

Two owls rest in the crook of a tree
I can barely see them, but they see me
Wise as the word and quiet as the grave
I whisper for mercy, I try to be brave

There's a shadow on the wing, death in the air
Fall to your knees, whisper your prayer
It circles the fields and it calls your name
No one knows when or from where it came

So stoke your fire and mark your door
And pray Azrael passes you by once more
Like forty nights driftin' on the black sea
Waitin' for a dove and the olive tree

There's a shadow on the wing, somethin' in the air
Get down on your knees, whisper your prayer
It's circlin' the fields, could be searchin' for you
It's comin' for someone, but we don't know who

So stoke your fire and mark your door
And pray Azrael passes you by once more
Like forty nights driftin' on the black sea
Waitin' for a dove and the olive tree

Boulders in the Breakers

Going southbound from the city
Hang a left at The Promised Land
There's a little hidden beach down there
Made of rocks instead of sand
Where you can smell the ocean
Taste the salt and feel the rain
And there's a lighthouse in the passage
To lead you home again

There are boulders in the breakers
And they're tumbling to the shore
Their thud-and-crack collisions
Like the slamming of a door
Their edges ground off slowly
Lost the battles, won the war
But smooth stones aren't any softer
Than they were before

Autumn apples from the orchard
Squeezed to cider in the mill
It's woodsmoke in the winter
To push back against the chill
Springtime brings the thaw out
So you just wait until
Blueberry hills in summer
Until you've had your fill

There are boulders in the breakers
And they're tumbling to the shore
Their thud-and-crack collisions
Like the slamming of a door
Their edges ground off slowly
Lost the battles, won the war
But smooth stones aren't any softer
Than they were before

Red sky nights can still delight
But beware of red sky morns
And when there's a fog out in the passage
Just listen for the horns
They call out low and rumbling
Short-short-long and so forlorn
Remember: red on right returning
To safe harbor from the storm

Going southbound from the city
Hang a left at The Promised Land
There's a little hidden beach down there
Made of rocks instead of sand
I've seen nor'easters hit that shore
Heard the grind as the boulders roll
Felt it reverberate in my core
But the coastline always holds

There are boulders in the breakers
And they're tumbling to the shore
Their thud-and-crack collisions
Like the slamming of a door
Their edges ground off slowly
Lost the battles, won the war
But smooth stones aren't any softer
Than they were before

Thirty Years Gone

It's been thirty-five years since I fell for you
Thirty years gone don't make it untrue
That song came on, the years crashed right through
For a moment there, I was split in two

The air turns warm, as time peels back
The highway hums beneath our wheels
Dash lights glow against the black
I laugh out loud at what time reveals

Two kids runnin' ninety with the high beams bright
Her hair flyin' wild in the evening light
Bare feet hangin' out the window's frame
So certain that forever we'd feel the same

Hearts on fire while the radio blares
The whole world in our pocket without a care
But the world comes apart when you hold too tight
We were chasin' a forever we'd never write

I think back now and I just shake my head
At the shit that I did and the things that I said
Like trains uncoupled, now on separate tracks
That's long time gone and it ain't never coming back

I blink twice and the image clears
The road hums steady, soft, and low
Transmission drops to a lower gear
As memory's echoes let me go

Those summer nights on old country roads
Taught me a lot about what love can mean
Anything that burns that hot's bound to explode
But you can still keep hold of what sixteen's seen

These thirty years have been quite the ride
I'm happy now, and have made a life
Been around the world, seen the other side
Got a sagging fence but a beautiful wife

She knows that songs can hijack my mind
She'll even hum along, keeps me right in time
And every note she knows reminds
That today I'm hers, and sixteen is mine

I think back now and I just shake my head
At the shit that I did and the things that I said
Like trains uncoupled, now on separate tracks
That's long time gone and it ain't never coming back

I think back now and just shake my head
At the things that I did and the words that I said
Like trains unhitched on separate tracks
Long time gone, and it ain't comin' back

Going Down (A Miner's Son's Lament)
Alternate Version

Down the shaft and into the pit
Six bucks a day is all I get
Money's all spent at the company store
So down I go to earn some more

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine
Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
Lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

Some go quick in a fiery blast
At least their story's over fast
For the rest it's years of coughin' black
Our lungs filled up like a miner's sack

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine
Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
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The union came but they didn't stay
Company guns drove 'em away
So down we go, back into the earth
Where we pull more coal than our life is worth

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
Send us in at eight, pull us out at nine
Lights on our heads and picks in our hands
Lungs filled up with dust will kill a man

My boy turned twelve, took my lamp
Said, Pa, I'm ready for the camp
I tried to keep him from that mine
But he's been itchin' to work since he was nine

Pa, I can handle the shovel and the pick
Besides, you know you've gotten sick
Your lungs are filled with that black coal dust
So I'm goin' to work before this family's bust

Thirteen hours a day in a dark coal mine
They send him in at eight, pull him out at nine
A light on his head and a pick in his hands
But lungs filled up with dust will kill a man