

REFUZIONX

A Life of Music, Machines, Miles and Changing Lanes

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"I never reinvented myself. I just changed lanes."

REFUZIONX

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This first-edition manuscript is based on James Westover's firsthand recollections and project history. Some names and events may be expanded, corrected or documented further in later editions as archival material is recovered.

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Prologue - I Just Changed Lanes

I have never thought of my life as a series of reinventions. Reinvention sounds like throwing the old version away and becoming somebody else. That is not what happened. I just changed lanes.

Some of those lanes were loud: recording studios, performance cars, semi trucks, construction sites and computer shops. Others were quieter: sitting at a graphics tablet late at night, working on photographs one detail at a time; staring at code until a bug finally gave itself away; writing lyrics because something that happened that day would not leave my head alone.

Music is the lane people see now because DJ Refuzionx is the name on the records. But the records carry everything else with them. The mechanic is in there. The computer technician is in there. The kid from Santa Cruz who loved West Coast rap is in there. So are the father, husband, photographer, designer, truck driver, locksmith and software builder.

This is not a story about pretending every turn was planned. A lot of it was not. I took jobs because bills had to be paid. I walked away from things that did not fit. I got into my share of trouble when I was young and did not really stop finding trouble until my late twenties. I was not a gangster. I was a misguided soul. Eventually I learned that experience - good, bad, embarrassing, painful or funny - becomes useful if you are willing to learn from it.

These days I live a simpler life in Grand Junction, Colorado. I create from home. My wife, JoNi, is beside me. My kids are grown. My brain still does not shut off. There is always another song, another photograph, another piece of software, another idea, another problem that I think I can solve.

I did not reinvent myself. I just changed lanes. This is the road that got me here.

Chapter 1 - Santa Cruz, Sound and an Artistic Brain

I was born in Santa Cruz, California. California was more than a location on a birth certificate. The sound, attitude and culture of the West Coast became part of the way I heard music. I grew up loving gangster rap - the weight of the bass, the drums, the storytelling and the sense that a record could create its own world.

Liking that music never meant I needed to manufacture a gangster biography for myself. I had enough real life to write about. I got into trouble when I was younger, but I do not romanticize it. I describe myself from those years as misguided. By my late twenties I had started leaving that chapter behind.

The creative side showed itself early. I went to art school in the early 1990s. I knew I was developing real ability when a classmate started taking my work and claiming it as her own. It was aggravating, but it was also an odd kind of confirmation: what I was making had value.

I also had a troubleshooting brain. When I was younger and could not solve something, I would sometimes go to sleep frustrated and wake up the next morning with the answer. I did not understand why that happened; I only learned to trust it. That same pattern followed me through mechanics, computers, photography, software and music production.

I started writing song lyrics around nineteen. At that age I could not have known how many times music would disappear into the background and then come roaring back. It never actually left. It waited while I worked other jobs and learned other skills.

Chapter 2 - Studios, Turntables and Learning the Machinery of Music

The name DJ Refuzionx can make people assume I am a traditional DJ. The name does come from earlier years around turntables, but the work grew beyond that. Songwriting, arranging and production became the real center.

In my twenties I spent time working in major commercial studio environments, writing, producing and creating music around other artists. I learned my way around consoles, DAT machines and racks of outboard equipment. Later, the tools changed and software such as Pro Tools became part of the workflow, but the underlying job stayed the same: listen closely, understand what a song needs and make decisions that serve it.

I have co-written with many different artists and worked across more styles than somebody hearing one Refuzionx track might expect. Ballads. Love songs. Wedding songs. Harder rap. Rock-driven records. Collaborative projects such as Kharma Factory. I never liked the idea that a songwriter had to stay inside one box.

My own writing usually starts with something real. It can be an experience from years ago, something that happened that morning, a conversation, a person whose personality is impossible not to write about, or a frustration that has been building all week. Sometimes the result is serious. Sometimes it is funny. Sometimes it is angry. Sometimes it is a love song.

Oakland After Midnight is connected to that lived-history approach. So is Didn't Drop the Ball, a song born from frustration with people who cannot do their jobs and always seem to have somebody else ready to blame. I can write comedic songs because I pay attention to personalities. The intention is not to hurt people. Sometimes humor is simply the sharpest way to tell the truth as I experienced it.

I do not like creating bullshit songs. If I have not lived it, observed it or understood it well enough to say something meaningful, I would rather find another subject.

Chapter 3 - Wrenches, Construction and Learning to Fix Things

Before computers became the long professional chapter, I worked with my hands. Construction and automotive work were among my early jobs. Mechanical work made sense to me because a machine is a system. Something happens, something fails, and the job is to understand why.

For years I bought and drove what interested me because I could fix much of what I drove. I have owned some exotic and high-performance cars. I have also learned that exotic does not automatically mean good. The Maserati Biturbo never earned much affection from me. My memories of that car are tied to reliability and fire concerns more than romance.

I also had my days with Super Sport Chevilles and cars that made it very easy to attract attention. Those days are mostly behind me. Today I roll around in a Honda CR-V. It is zippy, gets me where I want to go and does not spend every mile daring me to collect another ticket. There is something to be said for simple.

That shift says something about age. When you are young, horsepower can feel like freedom. Later, freedom can mean a vehicle that starts every morning, carries what you need and leaves enough mental space for everything else you are trying to build.

Chapter 4 - Locks, Trucks and Jobs That Paid the Bills

One of the people who influenced me when I was young was a mentor connected with the Boy Scouts. He was a locksmith and taught me the trade. Years later I went to locksmithing school myself and worked as a locksmith for a few years.

It was a fun job in many ways. Locks are puzzles with consequences. But some parts of the work wore on me. Unlocking a car for somebody you believed had been drinking and should not be driving could turn a technical service call into an ethical problem very quickly.

I also drove commercially for about five years. I worked through a CDL staffing service, and I liked that arrangement because it gave me experience with many kinds of equipment instead of trapping me in one configuration. I drove flatbeds, tankers, doubles, pump trucks, garbage trucks and other commercial setups.

Eventually people kept telling me I was wasting my technical talent driving a truck. There is an irony in that. I had also been told I was overqualified for jobs. When people tell you that you are too qualified for one thing and wasting your talent in another, you still have to pay the bills. You take the work that is available.

For a very short time I sold Kirby vacuums. That lane ended almost as quickly as it started. I was uncomfortable with sales practices I encountered during training, including the way customers' existing machines could be represented during trade-in discussions. I did not want to make money by treating people in a way that did not sit right with me.

Those jobs may look random on paper. They were not wasted years. Every one of them taught me something about people, systems, pressure, responsibility or problem-solving.

Chapter 5 - Redline Computers and Fifteen Years of Troubleshooting

Technology eventually became one of the longest lanes of my working life. In Southern Utah I owned Redline Computers for roughly fifteen years.

We did the work that people needed when their machines stopped cooperating: hardware troubleshooting, software troubleshooting, data recovery, repairs and new computer builds. A computer problem can make somebody feel like their whole life disappeared, especially when the missing data is photographs, business records or years of work. Recovering that material was never just a technical exercise.

The work fit my brain. A computer is another system to diagnose. Symptoms can lie. The obvious answer is not always the right one. You test, eliminate possibilities, follow evidence and eventually find the failure.

I also operated a web-design business called Web Monster and worked closely with eGuyd.com. As the years went on, more of my work moved toward technology and the web. What began as fixing machines became building things that lived on them.

Those years created the foundation for what would eventually become Streetwise Software Online. The name changed. The tools changed. The troubleshooting mindset did not.

Chapter 6 - The Night Shift: Retouching, Design and Photography

During those fifteen years in computers, I had another life at night. I would sit at a digital tablet and work on photographs. Retouching was manual. This was long before the current wave of generative AI could invent pixels on command.

You learned patience because there was no magic button. Skin, edges, highlights, shadows, color, texture and separation all had to be judged. If you pushed too hard, an image stopped looking like a photograph. If you did too little, the problem stayed.

That work became training for my photography career and for the retouching and design work that followed. I learned techniques from people who had worked with Peter Lik, and over the years people have told me that some of my landscape work reminds them of his. I do not shoot with his large-format approach, and I am not trying to be Peter Lik. I take the comparison as recognition of the dramatic, polished landscape language I learned to appreciate.

Today James Westover Photography and my art-and-print work give that side of my brain a home. Colorado has been especially good to me visually. Grand Junction, Palisade and the surrounding landscapes can change character in minutes depending on light and weather.

Photography and music are not as different as they seem. Both are about deciding what matters, what to leave out and how to make somebody feel something before they can explain why.

Chapter 7 - JoNi

Much of my current music is inspired by my wife, JoNi. Calling her my muse is accurate, but I am careful about credits. Inspiration is not the same thing as authorship. When JoNi is involved in creating a song, I give her credit. When I write the song myself and she is the reason it exists, I can say that too.

Our history goes back to when I was nineteen. Then life happened. We lost contact through years when there was no social media quietly keeping everybody connected in the background.

Years later she found me on Twitter, before Twitter became X. The funny part is that I hardly used the account. One day I checked it just to see what was there, and there she was. Surprise.

That reconnection opened a part of my life that had been absent for decades. We have a daughter together, and I had thirty-four years of catching up to do around that whole situation. I also have four sons in Utah. I stay actively connected with them, and they have grown up and built families of their own. In total, I am the father of five children.

JoNi had survived a head-on collision years earlier that nearly took her life and left lasting medical problems. Our life now includes me looking after her as well as building the things I can build from home. We eventually married and began this Colorado chapter together.

There are parts of life that make better songs after you have lived long enough to understand them. Love at nineteen is one thing. Finding someone again after decades, seeing what time did to both of you, and choosing each other with all of that history attached is something else entirely.

Chapter 8 - Colorado and the Simple Life

I love Colorado. I have written a lot of songs about it. Grand Junction has become home, and one day I would like to move to Glade Park. That is on the bucket list.

The life I want now is simpler than the one I wanted when I was younger. I am not a regular at clubs or bars. You probably are not going to run into me everywhere around town. I am mostly a homebody.

That does not mean nothing is happening. The opposite is true. My brain rarely shuts off. I can move from a song to a software problem to a photograph to a website idea and back again before the day is over.

Being home also matters because family matters. I am disabled now, so the traditional workforce chapter is behind me. I am building a way to work from home, take care of JoNi, keep creating and, if things go the way I hope, build enough income through my own work to change what disability has meant for my life.

The old performance cars are mostly memories. The pace is different. The creative engine is not.

Chapter 9 - Streetwise Software Online

Streetwise Software Online is the current technology chapter. It is a new business, but it sits on top of decades of computer repair, web design, graphics, troubleshooting and software thinking.

I build a lot of websites now, but I do not think of the interesting ones as just websites. A site becomes more useful when it actually runs part of the organization behind it.

Holsteins & Horses Farm Animal Sanctuary is a good example. The project grew beyond pages and pictures into operational tools: donations, volunteer workflows, Farm Access, reservations for Carol's Cabin, administrative controls, receipts, supporter communication and other pieces needed by a working nonprofit.

I have also built tattoo-oriented web projects, music tools and online radio systems. The radio work became its own ecosystem, with custom catalogs, players, mobile controls, administration and ways to organize and present music.

One of the most ambitious projects was the Streetwise Wildfire Tracker. It was designed to bring together current wildfire information across the United States and Canada, including maps, evacuation information, cameras, reporting features and multiple data sources. The public project was later compromised and damaged. I still have untouched backup copies, but I chose not to make rebuilding it my priority right now.

That decision matters. When your brain always wants to repair the broken thing, sometimes the harder skill is deciding which broken thing deserves your time.

Chapter 10 - Radio, Software and Building My Own Infrastructure

I have built four online radio stations. At the moment, two have been down for reprogramming. Refuzionx Radio and my Junction Underground radio projects are more than side hobbies. They are part of the infrastructure around my music.

Instead of depending entirely on somebody else's platform to decide how a catalog should be presented, I can build the player, the catalog, the administration and the experience around it. We have worked on systems for playlists, mobile controls, analytics, media, protected audio workflows and other features that most artists would never consider building themselves.

The same thinking led to music-oriented software such as the Streetwise AI Music Toolkit: tools for metadata, cleanup, sequencing, release preparation, high-quality output, copyright documentation and catalog organization.

I am also the author of The Suno Master Guide. JoNi helped me with the book. It focuses heavily on getting better lyrics, writing better prompts and getting stronger production results from AI-assisted music tools.

I do not see technology as a replacement for creativity. I see it as another instrument. A tool is only as useful as the decisions made by the person holding it.

Chapter 11 - Baker Records, Redline Studios Utah and Refuzionx Records

Baker Records was where I started on the label side, and Redline Studios Utah became another important name in the recording history. Today everything is being cataloged under Refuzionx Records.

That does not mean erasing the past. An older recording should keep the studio, collaborators and historical information that belong to it. Refuzionx Records is the umbrella that gives the catalog a coherent home going forward.

For years, a huge amount of my music simply sat on hard drives. I released some material and made a little money, but not enough to tell some glamorous story about a commercial career. A lot of the catalog never really got a proper commercial life in the first place.

Now I am digging through the archives from the beginning. That means finding songs, identifying versions, dealing with duplicates, restoring covers and metadata, figuring out who contributed to what and deciding what deserves to come back into the light.

There is something satisfying about that process. A hard drive full of files can look like clutter until you realize you are looking at years of your own history.

Chapter 12 - What I Write About

My songs are not one mood because my life is not one mood. I can write a love song about JoNi, a hard West Coast record about being underestimated, a ridiculous comedy song, a guitar-heavy rock track or something about frustration with the world.

Current events sometimes become material too. I can get frustrated with the economy, broken promises, incompetence and the feeling that important things are not getting done. I have written politically themed material, including a song called Why You Wanna F*k Up the World. A song does not have to be designed for universal airplay to be worth writing. My own stations give me room to play material that commercial radio might never touch.

What matters is that the song has a reason to exist. I would rather have somebody disagree with a real song than agree with something I wrote because I thought it was marketable.

I also write about getting older and discovering that time does not negotiate. Life moves fast. Relationships change. People disappear. Opportunities pass. That makes the time you get with somebody more valuable, not less.

The older I get, the less interested I am in pretending. The catalog is becoming a record of that.

Chapter 13 - Five Kids, a Wife, a Catalog and a Future

I have five children. I have a wife I first knew when I was nineteen and somehow found again after decades. My kids are grown and building lives of their own. I have spent enough years looking backward to understand the value of what is in front of me.

That does not mean I am finished with the past. Right now I am literally recovering it - song by song, drive by drive. The difference is that I am not trying to move back there. I am bringing forward the pieces that still matter.

Refuzionx Records is part of that. Streetwise Software Online is part of it. Photography is part of it. The radio stations are part of it. So is the book you are reading.

I do not need every lane to become a giant business or every song to become a hit for the work to have meaning. I want the catalog preserved. I want the credits right. I want the things I build to work. I want my family to know the story behind all these strange turns.

And I still want to see what happens next.

Epilogue - Same Creative Engine

If you try to summarize my working life in one line, it sounds ridiculous: construction, auto mechanics, locksmithing, truck driving, computer repair, data recovery, web design, graphic design, retouching, photography, studio production, songwriting, radio, software and writing.

But from inside my head, it makes sense.

Mechanics taught me diagnosis. Locksmithing taught precision. Trucking taught adaptability. Computer repair turned troubleshooting into a profession. Web design taught me to build for other people. Retouching trained my eye. Photography taught me to wait for the moment. Studios taught me to listen. Songwriting taught me to turn experience into language. Software gave me a way to build entire systems instead of fixing one piece at a time.

Family taught me that time is the thing you do not get back.

Colorado gave me room to hear myself think.

Music gave all of it somewhere to go.

I never reinvented myself.

I just changed lanes.