



## Josh Ewers: The phone calls that led here

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[By Josh Ewers Main Street Nashville](#)



One phone call can alter not only your course, but your understanding of the steps along it. I should know; it's happened to me twice now.

This time last winter, I was twiddling my thumbs on my parents' couch in suburban West Virginia against the backdrop of a raging pandemic.

I'd left my job that summer. For five years, I'd worked for a rare family-owned county newspaper in a small farming town in Ohio. The county seat was home to Dum Dums suckers and Etch a Sketch, of all things. Bryan was a romantic, middle-of-nowhere kind of place where the fields outside of town seemed to stretch on forever.

My choice was confounding to many back home, but it was time well spent. Removed from sight of loved ones, I grew up more honestly. My experiences fostered confidence in my own ability, gave me my first stumbling, wide-eyed glance at infatuation and drove home much-needed life lessons.

Most importantly, though, Bryan was a serendipitous crossroads where I found a few friends I will never, ever forget.

Chief among them was a charismatic old chef with a long white ponytail called Chef Ricardo.

I first met him while seeking a lead in a record store. A week or so later, he called up the paper keen on getting me to write on his past exploits as a high-caliber chef and hippy who'd seen the world.

Unoptimistic, but eager for an excuse to get out of the office, I took him up on it. I found him to be on hard times, living in a tiny, smoke-filled one-room apartment with only a small collection of old things. Still, he maintained a sharp sense of style, stature and wit that belied his humble surroundings.

After a few cursory visits, it became clear he was lonely. One day, he shared that just a few years earlier, he'd lost his young son. He'd had him late in life after finally settling down.

Bonding over his endless bag of stories, old rock and funk music, buzzer beaters and the best food I'll ever eat, we grew to be close, if unlikely, friends. I'd hang out there at least several times a week. He became a treasured friend, brother and confidant.

Things continued this way until 2018, when out of the clear spring sky, he was diagnosed with ALS.

Estranged from his family and out of work since his son died, he had no resources and no caretakers. Aid was only minimally available from traveling nurses who'd stop in for a half-hour or so a day.

I opted to care for him as he deteriorated. It's a decision I don't often talk about but is among the proudest I'll ever make, even burdened with the lifelong weight of falling short more times than I care to remember.



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and returned home to discover the next phase of my evolution.

I hadn't envisioned the cocoon I'd become stuck in.

After six months, I was considering giving up writing between a lack of opportunity and employer interest. Like many, I was also feeling pretty world-weary.

While I was swimming in my thoughts and at my wit's end, my phone rang.

This time, the voice belonged to my friend and colleague Amy McCarty, who'd left Bryan for Tennessee several years prior. With an unsolicited invitation, her words rekindled my sense of adventure.

My interview took place during the opening moments of the Capitol riot, and I accepted the job on my 29th birthday.

Somehow, it's Dec. 22, 2021, and, like half the city, I've been in Nashville for almost a year.

In that time, I've been afforded the incredible opportunity to speak with and write about inspiring creative people, both big and unknown, for a living. Living out a college dream, I live in a historic musical neighborhood where I frequently get to attend shows for free.

As I dwell on just how the hell it is I got here, I wonder if Chef Ricardo might have had a hand in all of it. Maybe, maybe not. I have my belief.

Ricardo was the kind of guy who could embellish. Yet, even if only a third of the stories he told were true, he lived an amazing life. He reveled a bit in his connections. In some ways I think he felt he had to elevate himself when just being Ricardo was good enough.

I wonder what he'd think of that wayward kid he'd befriended now shaking hands and shooting the breeze with Garth Brooks, touring the Grand Ole Opry with Richard Petty, inadvertently making Kevin Bacon cry or talking philosophy with Carlos Santana.

I don't have the answer to that, and I may never. There is one thing I do know, though.

Twice in my life, I'm beyond thankful to have answered the phone.

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