

BUCKLEY KNEW HE WAS GOING TO DIE YOUNG. IT WAS
just a matter of how and when.

His autopsy report shows no signs of drugs in his system and he had had the equivalent of one beer the night before his drowning in Memphis. Wolf River Harbor on May 29, 1997. His death was ruled an accident.

The day he died, was, in fact, one of the happiest days of his life. Before moving to Memphis, Buckley and his band had been touring for two years, promoting his debut album *Grace*. At the beginning of the tour, most casual observers knew of him only in connection with his famous father — an upstart folk-rock singer Tim Buckley — who had died of a heroin overdose at the age of 28 in 1975. The younger Buckley had only met his father once, spending a week with him when he was eight.

By the time his tour was finished, Buckley was a full-on star and his label, Columbia, wanted another album that sounded like *Grace*. But Buckley was already on a different path. "I'd definitely wanted to make a much grittier album than *Grace*," says guitarist Michael Tipton, who joined Buckley's band after the bulk of *Grace* had been recorded. "I'd often would say that he wanted to make music that would scare people. And he was into the idea of disturbing his audience. He knew that a lot of his audience wouldn't like this album and he was energized and excited by that."

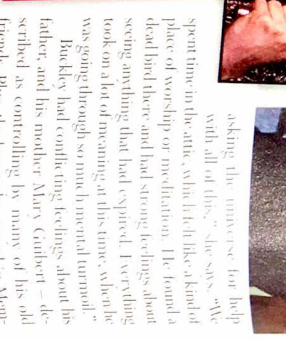
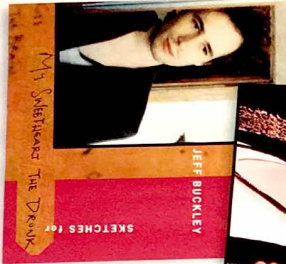
Buckley and his band — with Parker Kindred replacing *Grace* drummer Matt Johnson — had been writing and recording new material in New York City with Tom Verlaine. But Buckley felt under the microscope in New York. Meanwhile, aspects of the group's lifestyle, which had come to the fore on the *Grace* tour, were dissipating their focus. Buckley needed to escape, and the destination he chose was Memphis, home of his friend Dave Spouse, lead singer of all-rock band The Grifters. "I've everything came from his relationship with The Grifters," says Gene Brown, Buckley's former tour manager, "and The Grifters were attached to Easley McCain Studios, and Doug Easley. So that was the attraction... There's a real deep musical friendship with them."

BUCKLEY HAD FIRST MET SHOUSE WHILE performing a show at Gabe's Oasis in Iowa City in 1994. The Grifters were on tour with another band, The Dambuilders, which featured violinist Joan Wasser, who would eventually become Buckley's girlfriend. Spouse remembers being told that neither band would be headlining that show, and that they would both be supporting Buckley.

"We were like, 'Who?' " laughs Spouse. "And, of course that night, we saw him play and we were just like, 'Oh my God, this guy is different.'"

Once Buckley got to Memphis, he and his band resumed recording with Verlaine at Easley McCain. Memphis, for Buckley, was meant to be a temporary refuge — two weeks while he found the direction for the new album. But the singer felt so at home he called Bowen and told him he was staying longer. He rented a small house on 91 N. Rembert St. Unknowingly, he would ride his bicycle to record stores, like nearby Slanger-Ha Recorder/Andromania, chatting with employees about Bob Dylan and other favorite musicians. He ordered takeout from Saigon Le — a nearby Vietnamese restaurant — so often that he was mistaken for a delivery boy. "Things were somewhat deconstructed," recalls Spouse. "There wasn't a label. There weren't people running his life. He could be in his house. He could move into the attic if he wanted."

Wasser, who had been dating Buckley for three years by then, would make bi-weekly trips to Memphis to see him. "I know he had been



asking the universe for help with all of this," she says. "We spent time in the attic, with like a kind of piece of worship or meditation. He found a dead bird there and had strong feelings about seeing something that had expired. I everything look on a lot of meaning at this time, when he was going through so much emotional turmoil."

Buckley had conflicting feelings about his father, and his mother Mary Guitert — he described as controlling by many of his old friends. Plus, the longer he stayed in Memphis, the more word spread that he was the guy who made *Grace*. "It was a point where he was a little bit unsteady and a little more vulnerable," says Spouse. "So we tried to help him. We took him breakfast, or, were like, 'Stay over... sleep on the couch. I think that's what he wanted...' He felt like he could disappear."

"I felt very maternal," says Spouse's ex-wife, Tammy. "Jeff definitely looked up to David. He would say, 'I don't know why, that guy even



Warming up at Sony studios for a radio show, 1995: Jeff Buckley and Joan Wasser; Tim Spouse with Buckley in the house's kitchen; JB's albums *Grace* and *Scheherazade*; *For My Sweetheart The Drunk*.

"NOT TOO LONG AFTER WE MET, HE SAID, 'YOU KNOW, I'M GOING TO DIE YOUNG.'"
JOAN WASSER

talks to me. "Of course, David would say the same thing," she adds with a laugh. "I think that was part of what he struggled with, he still felt like a boy. In some ways, he was very mature and developed, and in other ways, he was nothing more."

Early on, Spouse's relationship didn't help. "I saw him deal with fans at shows; girls were beside themselves, the kind of thing I would have dreamed of," says The Grifters' tripp, Ian Jenks. "I saw him talk a girl down before. He was like, 'You're going to have to realize I'm just a guy...' and the girl said, 'Oh, you're just Buckley. And he said, 'But what you think I am. I'm just a person.'"

Meanwhile, his father's legacy loomed large. "Jeff was either famous or he really loved what he did, and who he was," says Wasser. "He would often buy Tim's whole catalogue of CDs and listen to them for a while... and then throw them in the garbage."

BUT KILLY SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN THE ATTIC, working on songs, and he began to sense the album finally coming together. He had already fired Verlaine. Now

he began talking to Bowen about staying in Memphis permanently, about having the N. Rembert St. house, getting his license and buying a car. He wanted to become a Memphian.

Tammy remembers taking Buckley to the Memphis Zoo, one of his favorite places — this time to get a job. "He felt that the guy working the butterfly house was mistreating the butterflies... not doing a good job," she says. "So he wanted to apply for a job working at the butterfly house; Jeff took a shower and got all spruced up. He put on his clothes with those little patches on the shoulders and the vintage suit thing and he was all shiny and went in to put in his application."

"He wanted a normal guy life," she continues. "I know we had a couple conversations about him feeling difficult in how to be a man, feeling he's got somebody controlling his funds, he's got somebody controlling what he does, and where he goes, and what he does... and he did not know how to take control." Buckley had a regular gig Monday nights at a local bar, Bartister's, where he tried out new material, giving him a new perspective on the songs. At home, at Wasser's urging, he put headphones aside and >