

Singer/ songwriter  
**Brendan McKinney** has traveled  
 the world because of his music.  
 He learned a huge lesson  
 along the way.

# You Can't Do It Alone

**M**y first ever professional solo gig was in the early 90s at the Grape Street Pub in Manayunk. It was one of the roughest nights of my career.

At the time, Guy Campo, of a band called the Rockadile's, helped with bookings at the Grape Street. Guy knew me from playing his open mics at the Rusty Nail in Ardmore on Wednesdays. He believed in me enough to give me my first break.

I was eager ... but very green.

The system I brought was barely running and I really didn't know how to use it. The sound was tinny and pretty horrible.

While Tom, the owner, looked on, a customer yelled across the bar, "Tune your guitar man!"

I was perplexed. I thought it sounded in tune. My confidence crumbled.

On my first break, the same loudmouth told me he had his horn "just down the street." I could tell he'd probably been drinking too much but I foolishly invited him to get his trumpet and jam with me anyway. I thought it would help but it made things sound much worse. And it dashed any hope I had as coming off as a pro.

I never expected to play there again. But Tom saw me months later performing at the Rusty Nail (another gig that Guy Campo got me) and decided to give me another shot. This second chance turned out to be crucial for my career: Vince Schneider, a musician, agent and Philadelphia staple watched me perform. He liked what he saw and began booking me in other rooms in and around Philly.

**V**ince, who is still a great friend, also had some connections in Europe. He booked me to play for a month at a pub in Copenhagen,

Denmark.

From there, I picked up gigs in Norway, Sweden, Austria, Germany and Greece, as well as places throughout Denmark.

That connection with Vince changed my life profoundly, both professionally and personally. In Denmark, I met the love of my life, a girl who became my wife and the mother of my two children.

I should back track a little here. Before I first went to Denmark for the first time, I recorded in Eric Horvitz's studio. Eric had a popular Philadelphia band called Dynagroove. He was managed by Steve Mountain who, in those days, also represented Tommy Conwell and the Hooters. Eric produced my first original recording project, which ended up catching the attention of a few key people in Denmark and led me to many recording opportunities in Copenhagen and Bergen, Norway.

It was in Bergen where my band, The 99 Brown Dogs, was born. We began recording and producing my original songs, which led to two CD's, *Right Where I came in* in 2003, and *My Dad's Car* in 2006.

Around that time, I made another great connection with a New Zealander named Robin Tripp. Trippy played as a solo guitarist around Denmark and he was a fan of my songs. He hooked me up with a booking agent in Vail, Colorado.

**A**fter living and performing in Copenhagen for about seven years, and with the promise of a fresh, lively music scene back in the U.S. beckoning, my wife and I decided to make the move.

In Vail, I met and began playing with a great guitarist named Joel Racheff. Joel introduced me to Jim Attebury, the owner of The Durango Songwriters Expo, a songwriters convention in



Photo courtesy of Brendan McKinney.

Colorado. Participating in the expo would prove pivotal in my writing and recording career. Jim opened many doors for me. I ended up signing a deal with a Los Angeles licensing company called Riptide, which has since placed many of my songs on TV and in films.

I began travelling to Nashville, also thanks in part to some connections I made at the expo. There, my music caught the attention of Jim Tract, the president of a Nashville-based label called Adroit Records.

As it turns out, Jim and his business partner Tim Boylan, both grew up not more than 5 miles from where I grew up. Life had come full circle.

I signed a record deal with Adroit and in October 2010, we released an album, *Best They Can*, with the revamped 99 Brown Dogs.

**I** returned to Manayunk at the end of April. This time, I performed at the Dawson Street Pub. I was joined by friends and colleagues of Eric Horvitz's - Jim Steager and

Kevin Hanson from Philly's own Huffamoose. We performed with guest harmonica players, Joe "Fat Benny" Innes and my brother, Kevin McKinney, who was in a band called Driving Wheel with me before I first went overseas.

I was charged up to be back home, so close to where it all began for me.

I played my guitar with a very special pick that night. It was a medium black pick with the name "Guy Campo" monogrammed on it. I see Guy every so often and I always ask for a few. I try to make sure I have at least one on hand when I'm doing an important gig. For me, it's a good mojo.

Numerous people helped me get to where I am today. Every connection matters and each has led to something life changing that I could have never expected.

I still look ahead with great anticipation for what's next but I'm always looking back with thanks for all the good people who have helped me along.

You can't do it alone.

Never underestimate, nor forget, your connections.