

**Episode Title:** Parker Millsap's Chicken Fried Steak

**Episode Summary:** In this week's episode, Sid, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to singer/songwriter Parker Millsap about his Oklahoma roots, getting his start in the church band, and how the basics of music informed his abilities in the kitchen.

**Episode Transcript:**

*(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)*

**Voice Over from SID EVANS:** *Welcome to Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. My guest this week tells me that learning to cook was in some ways a lot like learning to play the guitar.*

**PARKER MILLSAP:** I've gotten to the point now where I'll use recipes but I know the basics enough. I realized at a certain point that it's not too dissimilar from any creative art, if you will, in that like you learn your scales, which is like learning how hot to keep the thing. Like how long do you cook this? And then eventually you can use all those scales or skills to cook kind of anything. You know, you're like, "Okay, I know how to saute. I know not to put the butter on too hot. I know to add the aromatics first." So, once I learned some of those building blocks it started to become fun. And now I cook probably four or five times a week, at least.

**Voice Over from SID EVANS:** *Parker Millsap grew up in Purcell, Oklahoma, about 30 minutes outside Oklahoma City. He got his musical start playing in the band for his Pentecostal church, but he was also influenced by the likes of Lyle Lovett and Townes Van Zandt, and all those influences contributed to his first album in 2012.*

*Now living in Nashville, Parker's new record Be Here Instead was recorded during last year's quarantine, and it's full of introspective songs that feel intensely personal, but also universal. This song from Be Here Instead, called "The Real Thing," is about missing his wife while out on tour, and how technology can only do so much to bring us together.*

**("The Real Thing" fades in)**

**Voice Over from SID EVANS:** *On today's show, Parker tells me how his high-school English teacher influenced him as a songwriter, why chicken fried steak has become synonymous with Oklahoma, and much more this week on Biscuits & Jam.*

**(Theme music ends)**

**SID:** Well, Parker Millsap, welcome to Biscuits & Jam.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Thank you. Glad to be here, thanks for having me.

**SID:** So, Parker, you grew up in a small town in Oklahoma, which is one of those states that can feel a little bit southern and a little bit Midwestern depending on where you are.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah.

**SID:** I'm wondering, did you feel any connection to the South when you were growing up?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Uh, not really. To be, to be honest. I mean, culturally there's a lot of overlap, you know, like fried food and potatoes, and stuff like that (laughs). But, Oklahoma, it's mostly plains. So geographically, I mean there are parts of eastern Oklahoma that definitely feel like Arkansas, or Missouri, or something like that. But because it's so flat, it does have a different vibe. And it's definitely not Texas either (laughs), you know. So I kinda think of it as like kinda in between all those different places.

**SID:** So, tell me a little bit about Purcell.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** I think there's about 8,000 people living there now. It's like 15 minutes south of Norman, Oklahoma, which is where the University of Oklahoma is. So, football is a driving cultural force.

**SID:** Yeah (laughing).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** And only about 30 minutes from Oklahoma City, so, you know, in the past 10 years, the Thunder have also become a big thing. So, yeah, I always tell people, Oklahoma has lots of wheat, corn, oil, beef, and sports (laughing).

**SID:** What else do you need?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Right?

**SID:** Well, tell me a little bit about the house that you grew up in.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** I haven't heard this term in a minute, but when you asked that I remembered, yeah, they called it a sub-division.

**SID:** Uh-huh (affirmative) (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** It's like, you know, there's a little town and there's like a downtown but then I guess developers will buy up chunks of land and then build like 50 to 100 houses kind of in this little loop that's like just outside of town. I thought I grew up in the suburbs. But then as I traveled more and started to experience, you know, the suburbs of Chicago or Dallas, or (laughs), or New York, I realized, "oh no, I grew up in the country but I was just in a town." So I was like in the country but I couldn't, like, walk to a fishing hole or anything like that, you know.

**SID:** So do you have a big family in Oklahoma? Lots of relatives there?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, really both sides of my family have been in central Oklahoma for, like, four generations. I grew up like a half mile from my dad's parents, and five miles from my mom's parents. And, yeah. Lots of cousins, and uncles, and aunts and stuff all around central Oklahoma.

**SID:** That sounds like a lot of mouths to feed. And you know we love to talk about food on this podcast. So what kinda food did you grow up on?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** The thing that we ate a decent amount of—it's not like we had this everyday. But we had it enough that when I tell people from other places about it who have never had this they're like, "huh?" Um, chicken fried steak, I feel like it's a staple of central Oklahoma cuisine, there are multiple restaurants that, you know, their calling card is their chicken fried steak. And if you're not familiar with the chicken fried steak, what it is is you take a steak, usually a lower quality cut (laughs)-

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** And then you pound it out flat and then you bread it and fry it like you would a chicken breast (laughing), so it's battered and fried red meat. Really quite delicious. Usually served on like some toast with a bunch of white gravy poured on top of it with like a side of mashed potatoes. Everything on your plate is often between, you know, yellow, tan, and brown, and white.

**SID:** (laughs)

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Somewhere in there (laughs).

**SID:** But it sure does taste good.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Oh man, it's amazing.

**SID:** Is that something y'all made at home or was that more of something you'd find in a restaurant?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Uh, both. Definitely there was a restaurant called Kendall's, it might still be there. And their claim to fame is they serve these giant chicken fried steaks, which are, you know, they're like this big, it covers like your whole plate.

**SID:** (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** So every once in a while we'd drive up and get one of those.

**SID:** Well, so who was the cook in your family?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** My mom usually did dinner and my dad usually did breakfast. On weekends, my dad would always wake up early and get the bacon and eggs, like classic bacon, eggs, biscuits, and gravy, pancakes, that whole thing. But then my mom was usually cooking, cooking dinner, yeah.

**SID:** And what about grandparents?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Oh, wow. That's making me think of some other things that I've eaten. We used to have these things my grand mom made called sausage balls. I'm still not 100% sure what's in a sausage ball. But (laughing) it's delicious, they're like meatballs but they're made of like breakfast sausage. And I feel like there's some like jelly or something in it. There's like a sweet component to it.

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Um, I'm gonna have to call grandma and ask her, what is a sausage ball? (laughing).

**SID:** Well, they keep you coming back, right?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. (laughs)

**SID:** So have you gotten interested in cooking yourself over the years?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. When I moved out of my parents house I didn't know how to make much. I actually remember in high school trying to make macaroni and cheese once. I just didn't read the directions and didn't know what I was doing. So I, (laughs) I didn't drain the noodles before I put the cheese packet in there-

**SID:** Oh.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** So it was just like macaroni soup.

**SID:** Yeah (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Um, powdered cheese macaroni soup. And after that I was like, okay I gotta figure out how to do this (laughs). Touring a lot right after high school I didn't have many opportunities to learn how to cook. And when I was home I would just make, yeah, spaghetti or something easy. But then as I started touring more and my palate started to expand. Just because, like, we didn't have—there was one Indian restaurant in central Oklahoma that I knew of. There are actually many more than that, but it's just like, we lived in a small town away from that, so we never went there to eat. And I was probably like 19 or so, 20, when I had Indian food for the first time. And I was mad. I was like (laughs) coulda been eating this the whole time?

**SID:** (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Like what? So, uh, that was actually one of the things that inspired me to learn how to cook a little bit was having Indian food and being like, "What, what is that? Ginger? I've never had ginger before." You know?

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** And then realizing that it can be kind of time consuming to make if you wanna do it really good. You gotta like go buy good ingredients, you gotta learn how hot to keep the stove. So, yeah. I've been just gradually learning since then. And I've gotten to the point now where I'll use recipes, but I know the basics enough. I realized at a certain point that's it's not too dissimilar from any creative art, if you will, in that like you learn your scales, which is like learning how hot to keep the thing. Like how long do you cook this? And then eventually you can use all those scales or skills to cook kind of anything. You know, you're like, "Okay, I know how to saute. I know not to put the butter on too hot. I know to add the aromatics first." So once I learned some of those building blocks it started to become fun. And now I cook probably four or five times a week at least, you know.

**SID:** Wow, that's great. I've never heard anybody kind of make that comparison between learning the basics of music and learning the basics of cooking.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, yeah.

**SID:** But I love that. (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** You know, there are building blocks and then you can use those in a bunch of different ways.

*(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)*

*Voice Over from SID EVANS: I'll be back with more from Parker Millsap, after the break.*

BREAK

*(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)*

*Voice Over from SID EVANS: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid, and I'm talking with singer/songwriter Parker Millsap.*

**SID:** So much of your story and your music seems to go back to your roots in the church.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**SID:** And specifically the Pentecostal church.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah.

**SID:** And I'm wondering if you can kind of paint a picture of a typical service. What did that look like? Was this a big crowd? Was there a lot of music or a lot of preaching, or maybe a lot of both?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, a lot of both (laughing). So the church that I went to for most of my young life, was an Assemblies of God church. So it's a particular brand of charismatic Christianity or Pentecostalism. We went Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesday nights. So I was in church a lot. But as soon as I could play six chords on a guitar and could operate a capo, I was about nine or 10 years old, they started letting me play down in front. So for me church became, like, I was there for the music (laughs), you know what I mean? Like I got to go down and play with the church band. And eventually they let me plug in when they realized I wasn't gonna mess up everybody else, you know. But it was a big band, it was like organ, piano, drums, bass, guitar, like five singers. Eventually there was a trumpet and a clarinet player. It was a lot of fun.

**SID:** Wow.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** But it seemed like in my church, the way that it went is, like, the ultimate service would be one where there was no preaching because the music service and the praise and worship service took over. And the music and the praise and worship became the service. Many, many, many church services I went to there was no preaching, there was just songs the whole time because people would get wrapped up in it and-

**SID:** Wow.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Just like, "Here's what we're doing. We're praising God with our music and our voices." So that was really beautiful. There was darkness as well. A lot of the times the preaching, especially once I got into high school, I started to recognize some of the more negative aspects of what can go on in a, you know, small town church without anybody (laughs) holding other people accountable for their negativity.

**SID:** Sure.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Or without anybody thinking about how their words can actually go out and affect other people in the real world. But the thing that I really held onto is that communion in the spirit, you know. Whether the holy spirit is the Abrahamic God or whether it's just the connection between all of us when we're in the same room together playing music, I really hung onto that. And that makes me believe in something bigger than myself more than a sermon ever did.

**SID:** Well, Parker, was there a particular song or a hymn that you remember that really had a big impact on you or one that you really loved to sing or perform?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. There's a whole bunch of them. One that always made me cry, even when I was like six years old, and I think it's just the melody, you know, the lyrics are heavy. This song, the lyrics are heavy. But I, I think it was, it's just the music that still gets me. Uh, the "The Old Rugged Cross."

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Um, (singing). It's just like this classic melody that always got me. Another one is—again the lyrics are like heavy and not necessarily what I (laughs) connect with. But there's a song called "Jesus Paid It All." It's like (singing). That one always got me too. Something about those just like classic pentatonic American melodies. Yeah, it sticks in my brain.

**SID:** You wrote a song called "Truck Stop Gospel"

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**SID:** That was a bit of a hit, and it seems to turn some of that background on its head, you know. It's kind of an outlaw song.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** (laughs).

**SID:** I mean, it sort of reminds me of Johnny Cash or something. Um, would you say that there's a little bit of an outlaw streak in your music?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Uh, I have no idea. (laughing) I don't, I don't know. That song in particular, I wrote that one after I toured just a little bit. Everybody went to church pretty much in the town that I grew up in. It was like this cultural center point. No matter if you're Baptist or Catholic or whatever, it's like you went to church. That's the environment that I grew up in. And then as I started to tour and see more of the world I started to realize, like, that's not everybody's experience. And some of the more radical contingent of Christians, I started to see how chaotic that looks from the outside world. So that ones definitely some like looking in the mirror a little bit. Not necessarily at myself, but at the place that I was raised. And I gotta say, I'm not ashamed by any of it by any means. You know, it's like-

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** It's where I'm from. And I wouldn't be who I am without those experiences. I just got out into the outside world and kinda saw, I don't know, getting in a helicopter and looking down on your house. Like, "Oh, that's what it looks like from up here."

**(Instrumental music)**

**SID:** How long have you been in Nashville now?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** About six years now.

**SID:** So I'm wondering what those first few weeks and months in Nashville were like for you, coming from small town Oklahoma to the big city.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Well, I was on tour a lot, first of all, for like the first three or four years. I mean, really until the pandemic. I was touring quite a lot. So I wasn't home (laughs) that often, you know. It's like I moved here and then was like gone a lot. We moved into a neighborhood that actually felt not too far from like the neighborhood that I grew up in. You know, just like ranch homes, like, on half acre lots, you know. So like it felt, it felt kinda normal to me. And I also feel like Nashville's a great. I don't wanna say a beginner city 'cause it's a real city, but compared to like New York or LA, it's not gonna swallow you whole in the way that those places (laughs) I think can. And I moved out here with some support. Like I had management and my distribution company, Thirty Tigers. And so I had some friends out here. I wasn't just coming out here on a wing and prayer, I had a new manager who was working from here. And he said, "Hey man, it's a lot easier to tour in the South. There's way more cities close together than there are in Oklahoma. You can go out for four or five days and not have to spend half of it driving."

**SID:** So, you had a pretty good head start by the time you got to Nashville.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. I was already making music for three or four years, and gigging, and doing house concerts, and putting out records on my own before I moved to Nashville. So I was already doing it and I had already decided that this is what I wanted to do with my life before I moved here.

**SID:** Yeah. Well, you're such a songwriter, Parker, and it's very clear that words and storytelling mean a lot to you.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**SID:** Is there a songwriter that you really look to for inspiration or a couple of them?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** There are like hundreds (laughs). And I love all kinds of songs. I grew up rooted in like the Americana scene, if you will. It wasn't necessarily called that. But I listened to a lot of like Texas and Oklahoma singer-songwriters and stuff growing up. So early influences were like Lyle Lovett, and Robert Earl Keen, and stuff like that. But more recently I've been really into David Byrne.

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** All of his solo stuff and his stuff with The Talking Heads, I think just, lyrically, he's doing something that is really brave and funny, and profound all at the same time. I'm also a big Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan fan. And John Prine too, I feel like they're all kind of in the same vein, that very different incarnations of this but they all write in a very metered and structured way, like very much rooted in, like, the blues or sonnets. (laughs) Where it's like couplet, couplet, couplet.

**SID:** Right.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Maybe a line for a chorus. And Townse Van Zandt another great example of that, of just this very structured, measured songwriting. And I think I really like that because it does feel like hymns. You know, hymns are often like, here's the melody and the words match this melody exactly. Or they have this very, I don't wanna say rigid structure, but basically a rigid structure. It's, you know, you got your four lines and then you got your chorus, and then you sing the same melody with different words for the second verse. There's something about that simplicity that I'm drawn to. And I'm always trying to push myself out of that box. But, yeah. Those are some off the hip ones.

**SID:** Did you have an English teacher or was there a class that made a big impact on you, 'cause there seem to be so many kind of literary references in a lot of your songs.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, my junior English teacher named Mrs. Dyson, she just made us write a lot. And I was already like getting into songwriting and stuff like that when I was like 13 or 14. Before I took her class. But in her class is, like, two or three times a week we would have a writing assignment and I wanted to make good grades so I (laughing), so I did my writing assignments. But I just realized that I liked it before too long. And I wasn't like always writing or anything, I'm still not. But I do like writing when I get a good idea and I feel like something's worth pursuing. I like chasing it down. And I don't know if I would've recognized that in myself as much if I hadn't taken her class, you know. So thanks Mrs. Dyson.

**SID:** Well, cheers to Mrs. Dyson, yeah (laughing). I know you did some touring with Jason Isbell and he seems like a bit of a kindred spirit, both as a songwriter and a guitar player. Is that fair to say?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, he's definitely a kindred spirit. I mean, he's a real one, you know.

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** He's an artist. And when you hear him talk about his art, you know, like, "Oh, this guys an artist." We're both, like, very independent when it comes to the way our business operates. And I only know this because, like, we have lots of mutual friends and we're both on the same distribution company. But we're both very much for artists owning their material. It's just really important for artists-

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** ... to understand how publishing and how royalties work and all that stuff. Songwriting-wise, I think we do different things. But, yeah, definitely a hero, somebody to look up to and really he let a bunch of us know, a bunch of us younger people who realized pretty early on, like, "Oh, I'm not gonna be, nor do I necessarily wanna be a Taylor Swift or a Katy Perry." That career path is something, but there are so many of us who love music and wanna make music and believe in music, and who are great musicians who we realize, like, "Oh, well that's not necessarily my path. /s there another path?" Because sometimes it can seem like the only way to make music and make a living at it is to be a huge superstar, and not all of us are cut out for that (laughing). You know?

**SID:** Right.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** And, and now Jason is a huge superstar and he let all of us know, like, you can do it on your own terms.

**SID:** Right.



**PARKER MILLSAP:** You know, he's making a great living for himself and he does what he loves. And he spreads joy to the people around him. And he doesn't, you know, have to live in, like, a closet. I think I'm speaking for a lot of people around my age who are in music. Like, he's a big inspiration for that reason, he just showed us, like, "Hey, you can do this. Believe in yourself."

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** "You can do it."

**SID:** Well, speaking of doing it. Parker, you had a new record come out this spring called *Be Here Instead*.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah.

**SID:** Congratulations on that.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Thank you.

**SID:** It's a terrific record and it seems a little more introspective in some ways than your other records. Was any of this written during the pandemic or was it in anyway a reaction to that?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** There was only one song that was written during the pandemic and that's, uh, "In Between." I wrote "In Between" probably like three weeks to a month into quarantine, and I don't even necessarily directly address the pandemic in the song. But that ones about the pandemic, you know.

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** And I feel like at first most of us are, like, "Oh, two or three weeks. We gotta stay home." Cool. And then at about three weeks to a month all of us started realizing like, oh, this is a 9/11 type event. Like things are going to be different after this and especially like a month in we didn't know what that meant, but we knew, like, "Oh, things are changing now. We're in between whatever that old world was and we're heading into this new world, and we all realize it but we don't know what the new world is yet." So that's kinda what that songs about, but everything else was written prior to the pandemic. We all got negative tests the day before we went into the studio to record. So it's definitely a product of the pandemic, but most of the writing happened prior to. But it's also weird how some of the songs seem like they could totally be about the pandemic even though that's not how I intended them.

**SID:** Yeah. Well I wanted to ask you about that song "In Between," it's such a beautiful song. It's got this kind of plaintive sound that, to me kind of captures the feeling that so many of us had.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah.

**SID:** And maybe still have (laughing).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. I never really thought about it until just now, but it is, that is the only song that's that's just me and a guitar on the record. That one definitely feels like a guy alone. Which, yeah, kinda seems to fit the pandemic vibe (laughing), isolation, you know.

**SID:** Yeah. Well, Parker, would you mind playing a little bit of it?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Oh, of “In Between”?

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, yeah. I need to retune this one really quick.

**SID:** Sure.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** This is one that I, uh, I wrote it, um, in this really strange tuning so every time I play it I have to do some adjusting. “In Between.” (singing). .....

*After you're through laughing but before you start to cry  
Felt like it weren't lasting so you gave it one last try  
And now the worst has happened, but you haven't said goodbye  
Ain't it mean, the in between?*

*Once the day is done for but before the sun goes out  
After you were unsure but before you have your doubts  
Venom fills your tongue but just before your lungs can shout  
You come clean in the in between*

**SID:** Oh, man. That's just a gorgeous song.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Thank you.

**SID:** Just gorgeous. It's so unique and it makes you feel a certain way, you know what I mean, like all great songs do.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** (laughs).

**SID:** And it just really feels very appropriate for what we're all kind of living through these days.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah, there's actually a specific experience that, um, I don't know if I've ever actually talked about this in an interview. Great job. Um (laughing), for reminding me of this, um. So when I was like 17, I had a gig and my, like, high school girlfriend at the time was riding with me and we were driving to this gig, it was like 20 minutes away from my house. We were driving on the highway and it started raining and then her and I started like arguing about something. Which looking back I'm like, what did we have to argue about in high school?

**SID:** (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** What, what were we doing? But we started arguing and it's raining, and then we went under this bridge. And then on the other side of the bridge, the rain s pooling up, you know what I mean? We're in the left lane and we're in my mom's minivan. And we hit the other side of the bridge and the water just lifted us up. You know, it's just like all of the sudden we're floating. And the next like, uh, five seconds felt like a year and a half, you know what I mean? The car lifted and then we were in the left lane and we spun 180 degrees as we crossed the right lane. And then (laughs) when, when we get into the right lane we're facing traffic now. And there's a semi like 20 yards in

front of us. We're all going 70 miles an hour. But then we keep careening and hit the embankment and because we're in a minivan that was pretty low to the ground and because we had it loaded down with gear, we just like slid down this hill. Didn't roll, nothing happened, we just like slid (laughs) down this hill, and it was all muddy, you know.

**SID:** Wow.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Had to get towed out of there. But, um, that verse about, like, "just below the rubber, just above the ground, aint it just like water to take you where you're bound?" That one is definitely like, had this feeling a few weeks into the pandemic and I was like, "where do I know this feeling from? I'm looking at my own impending doom," you know what I mean? So yeah. That's the most similar feeling I could think of.

**SID:** Wow. And then you kinda got a second chance.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. It was definitely a wake up moment for my life. Nobody was injured, there was nothing wrong, but it was like we were this close, you know. Um, wild.

**SID:** Well there's a lot going on in that song. And it's a beauty, so congrats on that.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Thank you.

**SID:** And so many other good ones on that album. So I know you're excited to get them out into the world. Have you been able to perform in front of an audience recently? Is there a particular show that stands out for you?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** So I took basically a two year break almost. But then just like two or three weeks ago I started going out and doing some solo shows. So I've done four gigs in the past (laughs) nearly two years. And it's been amazing. You know, I went out for like two days and then took like a week and a half off, and then went out for another two days. It's the best. For the first good chunk of the pandemic I wasn't really talking to a lot of people besides my wife and my parents, you know. Um, and it just got weird. Like most of us performers, this is what we do. This is how we derive meaning for our lives is by going out and playing our songs for people and, like, feeling a connection to other people. And you write a song and then somebody's like, "Wow. That songs just like my life." And you're like, "No. It's just like my life."

**SID:** (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** You know, and you feel like you're the same. For musicians, it makes us feel useful. And so a good chunk of the pandemic I started to realize, I wasn't feeling good. You know, it's like, of course, 'cause everything's going awry. But I started to talk to other musicians about it and I realized that we're all just kind of in the same boat. All of us need strangers to clap for us and (laughing) we have had to come to terms with that fact over the pandemic. So I'm just grateful to get to go out and play again. And I just want it to be meaningful when I go out again. Like I look at it like less of a job now than I did before. Not that it ever felt, you know, I couldn't do a 9-5 and I know that. But I'm really grateful and not having the opportunity to go play for people, not getting to feel that, you know, connection. That connection we have with each other.

**SID:** Which you can't take for granted.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Exactly, that's what all this has taught for me, is just like—well, one, I'm extremely lucky to have a gig, you know, like how many years did I want a gig when I was a teenager. I was like, "Man, if I could just get a gig. If I could go play a show that would make my life." And now I'm right back there. (laughs) It's great.

**SID:** Any plans to go back to Oklahoma to perform?

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. We're gonna get there in November it looks like.

**SID:** That must be a special thing for you to play on your home turf.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. I always loved playing in Oklahoma. There's just not as much opportunity to see music, or hear music, or play music in Oklahoma, I mean, there's lots of opportunity, but it's not Nashville, it's not New York City, it's not Los Angeles or something where it's like all the time, every night. And I think this is true for a lot of the Midwest. I've done a lot of shows in small towns all over the country. And people who are from small towns really appreciate the arts in a way that it just feels different. (laughs) You know what I mean?

**SID:** Yeah, yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Like, people who live in New York, or even Nashville here, like, somebody comes to play a show, "Oh, you wanna go see so-and-so, uh, play?" It's like, "Oh, they'll be here again next year." Or whatever. There's always a show going on. But then in Oklahoma when there's a show going on, it's like, "Wow. They're coming here?"

**SID:** (laughs).

**PARKER MILLSAP:** You know what I mean? Anytime you play in a smaller place, people are just like, "Wow. You came all the way here to do music?" So, yeah. There's just like a different kind of energy and gratitude that happens. And as far Oklahoma goes, it's home.

**SID:** Yeah.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** You know, it'll always be my home. The more time I spend in Oklahoma, the more I realize like, I don't need that much. I need family, food, shelter, love. You know.

**SID:** Right.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. I don't need a fancy anything.

**SID:** Well (laughing), Parker Millsap, thank you so much for being on Biscuits & Jam.

**PARKER MILLSAP:** Yeah. Glad to be here, thanks so much for having me.

***(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)***

***Voice Over from SID EVANS:*** Thanks for listening to my conversation with Parker Millsap. His latest album, *Be Here Instead*, is available wherever you get music.

*Next week, we'll celebrate what would've been singer-songwriter John Prine's 75th birthday with stories and anecdotes from his widow, Fiona Prine.*

**FIONA CLIP:** Kentucky was very important to John. In fact, I think it's true to say that when John and I met, it was our rural beginnings, our rural backgrounds that really connected us in a pretty deep way from the get-go. He was proud to be from Kentucky stock. Family was important to John. We met in Ireland and I brought him to visit and see some of my relatives over those first couple of years when we knew each other. And honestly, the more humble and happy and chaotic, some of those family homes were, the more content John was. We were country people. He and I were both country people.

**Voice Over from SID EVANS:** *Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, TN. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program. You can find us online at [southernliving.com](http://southernliving.com), and subscribe to our print publication by searching for Southern Living at [www.magazine.store](http://www.magazine.store).*

*Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Danielle Roth, Andy Bosnak, Matt Sav and Rachael King at Pod People.*

*We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!*