

# JEFF BUCKLEY WORLD

## ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ

The folk singer Tim Buckley, who was to become Jeff's father, married Mary Guibert in 1965.

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It was spring 1966, Mary Guibert was three months pregnant, 18 years old, and Tim was out of town. Even before Tim left for New York, his wife suspected he was spending time with other women. "By no stretch of the imagination was this a marriage made in heaven," she says. "He hadn't been faithful to me for very long. And I thought that was perfectly acceptable because, after all, he was so wonderful, and I was so nobody."

Mary says she told Tim about the pregnancy before he left for New York, but that he told her he had to leave town and that she should move back in with her family in Orange County, near LA, get a job, save money, and "maybe get an abortion or whatever you want to do", she recalls him saying. Even then, Tim made no mention of another woman. "I just had no idea," Mary says. "A lot of denial going on. Tons of denial on both sides, because he wouldn't bring himself, to the very end, to say, 'You know, I really don't love you very much.'" She sent Tim letters to various addresses in New York; his replies came fitfully and were pointedly vague. Finally, a mutual friend gave her the news: Tim was in New York with a new girlfriend, and would be back in Los Angeles shortly.

Lee Underwood, guitarist in Buckley's band and a great friend, recalls the situation being a topic of discussion while he and Tim were in New York that summer. Given the choice of returning to Mary and Orange County or following what Underwood calls "his destined natural way", Tim "decided to be true to himself and his music, fully aware that he would be accepting a lifetime burden of guilt. Tim left, not because he didn't care about his soon-to-be-born child but because his musical life was just beginning; in addition, he couldn't stand Mary. He did not abandon Jeff; he abandoned Mary."

Finally, some action had to be taken. Tim came to meet Mary at a coffee shop near her home. What exactly happened remains unclear. Tim never talked to his friends about it, while Anna Guibert, Mary's mother, recalls Tim giving Mary an ultimatum: divorce or abortion. According to Mary, she asked Tim what they should do about the marriage and pregnancy, and he replied, "You do whatever you have to do, baby", and hung his head.

Afterwards, Mary, who was by now many months pregnant, walked home, told her mother the news

and cried. As Anna Guibert remembers, "I said, 'That's the best thing, honey. If he doesn't want you, be free.' She was crazy about Tim. But he wanted his career. There was no place for a baby in his life." Mary, however, did want her baby.

He was born on Thursday, November 17, 1966, at 10.49pm, after 21 hours of labour. The issue of identity loomed even before the child left the hospital. Mary named her son Jeffrey Scott – "Jeffrey" after her last high-school boyfriend before Tim ("my last pure boy-girl relationship, my last pure moment") and "Scott" in honour of John Scott Jr, a neighbour and close friend of the Guiberts who died in an accident at the age of 17. Yet because Mary preferred Scott, the child was instantly called Scotty by his family. Tim was not available for consultation, since no one knew his whereabouts.

At school, Scotty was the eternal clown, making jokes, craving attention and being more interested in music (including cello lessons provided by the school) than grades. His second-floor bedroom became a rock enclave, his most valuable possessions being a Hemispheres picture disc by the prog-rock band Rush and all four of Kiss's solo albums.

He had a guitar given to him by his grandmother, and although he hadn't learned to master it, he would sit and cradle it, "like Linus's blanket", according to Willie Osborn, his childhood friend. Although Jeff had taken his father's name, his music tastes reflected none of Tim's influence. He was just eight years old when Tim died; they had had their only proper encounter just months before.

## **The meeting between Tim and Jeff Buckley, April 1975.**

Mary Guibert was flipping through a local newspaper when she saw a listing for Tim Buckley's upcoming show. It was, she says, "an epiphany". It had been six years since she and her first husband had seen each other, and nearly as long since they had spoken. Mary and Jeff took the hour-long drive to Huntington Beach, an oceanside town 10 miles southwest of Orange County, and arrived at the Golden Bear just before Tim walked on-stage. They took a seat on a bench in the second row.

Jeff seemed enraptured, bouncing in his seat to the rhythms of Tim's 12-string guitar and rock band. "Scotty was in love," Mary says. "He was immediately entranced. His little eyes were just dancing in his head." To Mary, Tim was still a dynamic performer, bouncing on his heels with his eyes shut, but she also felt he looked careworn for someone still in his 20s.

At the end of the set, no sooner had Mary asked her son if he wanted to meet his father than the kid was out of his seat and scurrying in the direction of the backstage area. As they entered the cramped dressing room, Jeff clutched his mother's long skirt. It seemed a foreign and frightening world to him, until he heard someone shout out, "Jeff!" Although no one had called him that before in his life – he was still "Scotty" to everyone – Jeff ran across the room to a table where Tim was resting after the show.

Tim hoisted his son on to his knees and began rocking him back and forth with a smile as Jeff gave his father a crash course on his life, rattling off his age, the name of his dog, his teachers, his half-brother and other vital statistics. "I sat on his knees for 15 minutes," Jeff wrote later. "He was hot and sweaty. I kept on feeling his legs. 'Wow, you need an iceberg to cool you off!' I was very embarrassing – doing my George Carlin impression for him for no reason. Very embarrassing. He smiled the whole time. Me too."

Tim's drummer, Buddy Helm, recalls. "It was a very personal moment. The kid seemed very genuine, totally in love with his dad. It was like wanting to connect. He didn't know anything personally about

Tim but was there ready to do it.” The same seemed to be true of Tim; after years of distance from his son, he seemed to feel it was time to re-cement whatever bond existed between them.

Shortly after, before the second set began, Judy, Tim’s new partner, asked Mary if it would be acceptable for Jeff to spend a few days at their place: Tim would be leaving soon on tour, but had some free time. It was the start of the Easter break, so Mary agreed. Next morning, she packed Jeff’s clothes in a brown paper bag and drove him to Santa Monica to spend his most extended period of time with his father.

Tim and Judy lived a few blocks from the beach. As Jeff remembered it, the following five days – the first week of April 1975 – were largely uneventful. “Easter vacation came around,” he wrote in 1990. “I went over for a week or so, we made small talk at dinner, watched cable TV, he bought me a model airplane on one of our ‘outings’ ... Nothing much but it was kind of memorable.” Three years later, he recalled it with much more bitterness: “He was working in his room, so I didn’t even get to talk to him. And that was it.”

Mary recalls Jeff telling her that he would dash into Tim’s room every morning and bounce on the bed. At the end of his stay, Tim and Judy put Jeff on a bus out of Santa Monica, and Mary picked him up at the bus station in Fullerton. When Jeff stepped off, she noticed he was clutching a book of matches. On it, Tim had written his phone number.

By his teens, Jeff was exhibiting impressive musical skills, as another school band member, drummer Paul Derech, discovered when he visited Jeff in the Guibert home in early 1982. Sitting on his bed, Jeff played songs from Al Di Meola’s *Electric Rendezvous* and the first album by Asia. Even though Derech had to listen closely to Jeff’s guitar – Mary couldn’t yet afford an amplifier for her son – his dexterity was so apparent that Derech literally took a step back.

Once, Jeff pulled out a picture of Tim from his closet and softly said, “I’ve spent a lot of time looking at that picture”, before moving on to another topic. Derech, like other kids, sensed immediately that his father was a sore point. Instead, they talked music. Although punk and new wave were the predominant rock styles of the moment, Jeff had little interest in them. He preferred music that challenged him and transported him to imaginary worlds. In the late 70s and early 80s, that music was prog (short for progressive) and art rock – bands such as Yes, Genesis and Rush that revelled in complex structures, science-fiction-themed lyrics and virtuosic, fleet-fingered guitar parts that only a few teenagers could hope to master. In a friend’s garage, Jeff and Derech soon began jamming on versions of Rush songs. Jeff declined to sing, though; he told friends and family he wanted to be a guitarist, plain and simple.

The reason, some felt, was because he didn’t want to be compared to the musician father he barely knew. “He had exactly the same speaking voice as Tim,” recalls Tamurlaine, the daughter of Herb Cohen, Tim’s one-time manager. She befriended Jeff when he and Mary would visit the Cohen family for dinner. (Cohen and Mary kept in touch after Tim and Mary’s break-up.) During those meals, Jeff’s vocal and physical resemblance to his father led Cohen often to mistakenly call Jeff “Tim”

### **Jeff moved to New York City in 1990.**

Often sporting his black Hendrix T-shirt, Jeff immediately took to New York, hauling his guitar into the subway to play for change and roaming the streets. “I talked to him right after he got to New York and he was loving it,” recalls his friend Tony Marryatt, a fellow student at Musicians Institute in Hollywood. “He said it was just like a Woody Allen movie.” To support himself, he took a series of day jobs, from working at an answering service (for actors such as F Murray Abraham and Denzel Washington) to being an assistant at a Banana Republic clothes store.

Read the second part of Remember me? [here](#).

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