

WHEN IT BREAKS



A teacher following his passion. A musician starting a conversation. A family on the road.



“I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT OUR LIVES ON EARTH ARE HERE TO HELP”

-KONRAD WERT

When It Breaks is the inspiring story of Special Education teacher Konrad Wert and his personal journey to avoid becoming another victim of teacher burnout. After 15 years of service within the special needs community, Wert steps away from the classroom and turns to his musical side career as a means to tour the country with his family and engage teachers, parents, and audiences in a conversation about the current state of Special Education.

As opportunities arise, Konrad must decide how his service is most effective-as an advocating artist or as as teacher in the classroom.

THE ROAD

In the storied tradition of the American Folksinger, Konrad uses his platform as a traveling musician to raise awareness. In sharing himself and his songs, he's able to engage people in a discussion that is larger than the music. The crowds for his shows are eclectic and can just as easily be populated by punks with face tattoos as teachers and hippies.



Regardless of the make up of the crowd, every show has at least several people that are personally effected by special needs education. They are excited to be able to share their story with someone who understands and they're inspired to see someone trying to nurture a national conversation on the topic.





WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHEN IT BREAKS

The family sets out from Boerne, TX excited but unsure of what lies ahead. They are eager to try out this alternative lifestyle, and connect with teachers across the country, but it definitely comes with a set of variables that could make or break the projected year-long experiment. Among them are; concerns about money; the happiness of the kids; the practicality of trying to school them on the road; and Konrad's voice. After undergoing vocal cord surgery only two months prior, it's uncertain how well Konrad will be able to perform under the demands of a full touring schedule.

KONRAD

Konrad Wert was born and raised in the Mennonite church in the small but ethnically diverse town of Immokalee, Florida. His parents both worked through the church, his mother as a nurse and his father as an educator and pastor. The family's faith was rooted in the service of helping others, living simply, and pacifism.

Even after breaking from the church, Konrad has held strong to the belief of living a life of service.





THE FAMILY

An integral part of this film is looking at the dynamics of a modern family. We live in an age where higher numbers of people are freelancing and creating their own jobs. Families that are willing to live outside of the traditional spectrum are improvising and building upon what it means to get an education, to build a community, and to follow your passions. Konrad, Jenny, Jonah, and Kai are one of those families.

Jenny Gillespie is originally from Chicago and met Konrad roughly 9 years ago when he was busking for money in New Mexico. Jenny is a painter and an excitable spirit filled with wanderlust who was tremendously supportive to this journey. She's also a dedicated hardworking mother who took care of the boys and the household in TX while Konrad was putting in demanding workweeks.

Jonah (7) and **Kai** (5) are Jenny and Konrad's two boys. Their energy is relentless and they're as rambunctious as any two young brothers. Adding this journey on to previous summer tours, the boys have been across the country more than most adults. They also both show an openness and a thirst for knowledge. Like most kids, they're unaware that their lifestyle may be different. Konrad and Jenny hope that this trip will give them opportunities most people never get but are also keenly aware of the potential setbacks that could come from being out of the traditional classroom and separate from their peer group.



JONAH



JENNY



KAI

MUSIC

The New York Times

"Sounds That Lingered: Critics' Top 10 Concerts"
Selection 2014



"Playing To The Rafters, Singing Like A Man Possessed"
Featured guest on NPR Weekend Edition

billboard

#12 Billboard debut on the Bluegrass/Country chart
for "There Will Be Nights When I'm Lonely"

The name Possessed by Paul James comes from the combination of Konrad's late grandfather Paul and his father, James. The intent was to say that the music encompasses far more than just one person. It is a living breathing collaboration that draws influence from a range of subjects and people.

Sonically, PPJ is rooted in the folk elements of fiddle, banjo and acoustic guitar but when performing live there is a visceral punk energy that permeates the air. The songs tell tales of forbidden loves, broken hearts, and broken homes but they also glimmer with a hope that once you've hit bottom there's nowhere to go but up.

The content is familiar territory for indie roots music but it's shared with such raw sincerity that it's impossible to not feel like you're exorcising demons as a community. The shows are a sweaty, pleading, celebratory act where the audience is just as important as Konrad on stage.



**"THERE MUST BE A BOND BETWEEN THE WORLD OF MUSIC PERFORMANCE
AND THE WORLD OF SOCIAL JUSTICE."**

PRODUCTION

Filming began in July 2015 and concluded in 2017. As of late 2017, the film has been in post-production with Emmy award-winning Eryn Walanka coming on as editor.

SUPPORT

We have received tremendous support from **Lagunitas Brewing Co.** including a commitment for promotion upon completion. **OWC** digital has come on board to help us meet any tech needs in post-production as well as committing to promotion and a case study about the film. Chicago International Music and Movies Fest is our fiscal sponsor, making all financial donations tax exempt



AUDIENCE

When It Breaks differs from a lot of docs by being a social issue film wrapped in the narrative of a modern family's journey. There are built-in audiences such as the education community and PPJ's music fan base but the film can crossover beyond those. With its narrative pillars of activism, family, music, and travel, it's a film capable of reaching an audience much broader than it's educational foundation. We also plan to cross-promote and incorporate the eventual release of the next Possessed by Paul James' record along with the film.

OUTREACH

We plan to coordinate outreach with special needs organizations across the country to make sure that groups such as Autism Speaks can have a presence at screenings. By having organizations and local school district representatives in attendance we hope to further then discussion started in the film and also provide opportunities for audiences to get involved in positive change.

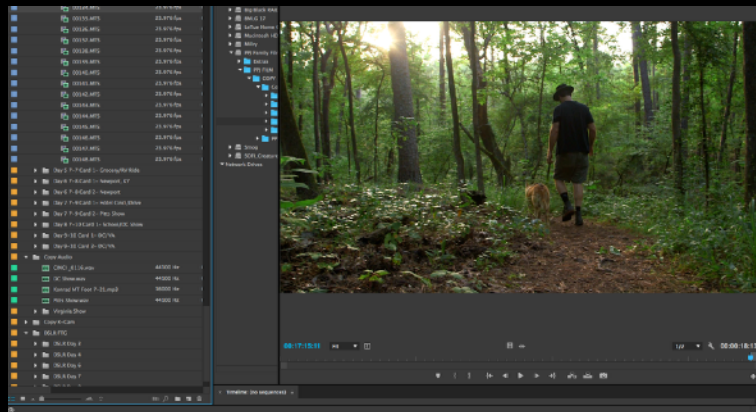
THE FILMMAKER



Todd Tue has over 12 years of award-winning and festival-recognized production experience, including documentaries, live concert films, and promotional spots. Todd was a co-producer and editor on the award-winning documentaries **Charlie Louvin: Still Rattlin' the Devil's Cage** and **Seven Signs: Music, Myth, and the American South**. Other recent projects include music videos for **CMT**, a short film for **Shooter Jennings**, and documentaries for **Chicago Public Art Group** and **Laurel Valley Creamery**. He currently lives in Chicago where he works under his company name **Milk Products Media**.

Todd Tue first saw **Possessed By Paul James** play an outdoor festival in 2008 and it was a life-changing moment for him: "The music and songwriting felt so much like an open nerve, so sincere, raw, and honest about our successes and failures. I was blown away then and with each album it's just become better. The meanings and importance have even changed since I became a father. I think Konrad's passion for youth and the under-served, combined with his powerful songwriting makes him someone whose story absolutely needs to be shared."

Todd and Konrad have developed a close and dedicated relationship over the past five years. Their projects have included a short documentary about Konrad's music and three official music videos including the fan favorite "Hurricane".



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