



## The AMERICAN HOTEL Story

Mike Brown & The Sneakies: American Hotel

170,000 miles, 48 states, 3 1/2 years and 42 musicians. The Funny parts is this whole thing started as a joke.

Sitting here in this bar in Hollywood, trying to put almost 4 years of living on the road into a two page piece of paper. So where do I begin? Some background perhaps.

My name is Mike Brown and I'm 24 years old. I was born in Geneseo, New York, a very small town between Rochester and Buffalo. My parents are working class, Liquor store owners. Employment there is like most small towns these days, strip malls that weren't around ten years ago, bars that never seem to disappear and the American Rock Salt Mine. Most of the people I grew up with work in the mine or one of the corporate shit holes up the street.

When I was 13 years old I found a mandolin in my grandparent's attic that belonged to my great great grandmother (It turns out she was a performer on the Vaudeville circuit, the only musician I know of in my family). That same year I went to see Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers play up in Rochester. To say it made an impression would be an understatement.

I started playing in a band shortly after that. Around 15 I had my heart broken for the first time. I started writing.

When I was 17 I met Lew, a local musician from a few towns over who heard I was looking for a drummer. We made a record together in three days and started selling it at local shows (VFW halls, dive bars, Ice Cream parlors, street corners and anywhere else that would let us play). It became a local success and ended up selling about 5,000 copies.

I moved to Boston shortly after high school, and Lew followed. We made another record called "Big Jealous You" and started working it pretty hard, doing about 200 shows a year for three years. The record was received well with the college crowd and we ended up selling about 20,000 copies out of our van. MTV, Abercrombie & Fitch and a few other companies licensed the record to play in their stores and on their shows. Over the course of three years we were lucky enough to share the stage with several bands including Cracker, Guster, Graham Colton, They Might Be Giants, Sam Roberts, The New Left and Counting Crows. That's when I met David Lowery, which brings us to this record.

I approached David about making a record with us at a show he was playing in Buffalo. I liked the work he did with Sparklehorse, Counting Crows, and of course his band Cracker. After a few months of talking back and forth, we decided Lew and I would come down to Richmond to Sound of Music (David's studio) and bang out a few songs.



This is when I met John Morand, the engineer at S.O.M. and the person who would have the most impact on me over the recording process.

These recordings would later become the first tracks made for "American Hotel". The sessions were long and went late into the night. Luckily David loves to drink. In a way I owe as much to brown liquor for making this record as anything else. One night David, John and I got into a conversation about what a few of the songs still needed. The idea of pedal steel guitar came to my mind. John suggested David Immergluck (Counting Crows).

Not realizing he was being serious, I started joking about other musicians we could get to play on it. Turns out they knew a few.

After we finished for the night I stumbled upstairs to the studio office and wrote a wish list of every musician I could ever hope to record with. The next day Lew and I drove back to Upstate New York. The plan was to come back later that month and finish up the record. I guess plans change.

I spent the next six months in Geneseo making phone calls, sending emails and writing letters to any contact I could find for the people on the list. Lew painted houses and did construction to, I bought and sold musical instruments and fixed cars to pay the bills. As time progressed, I realized that once you get thru the middleman most musicians want to play. At the end of those six months I had a handful of people agreeing to help so I packed the van and started driving. It's a lot easier to get people involved when you come to them.

That was over three years ago. I'm still out here. I could tell you so many stories about the people I've met and worked with along the way. The musicians, truckers, late night drinkers, the hitchhikers and the homeless. So many people along the way. All the nights spent alone in truck stop parking lots, state parks, on city streets and anywhere else I could get a few hours' sleep in my van without a cop harassing me. So many stories exchanged and forgotten like the way a loved ones face starts to blur after a long time gone. Good thing I took a lot of pictures and videotaped most of it!

I wrote American Hotel long before the idea of how to make this record came to mind, but I can't think of a better title. My van, my American Hotel.

Hope you enjoy the results as much as I've enjoyed making it.

Mike Brown  
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Some bar in Hollywood

