

HOW

R.E.M.

TOUCHED OUR LIVES

(AS TOLD BY YOUTUBERS)

VENKAT RAO

“Whats cool about YouTube comments, especially in songs, is sometimes you find sweet stories. Love stories. Sad stories, happy stories. Cryers nonetheless. What I am here for”

(The YouTube comment that inspired this amalgamation)

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Find The River**
- 3. Nightswimming**
- 4. What's The Frequency, Kenneth?**
- 5. We Go Back To Where We Belong**

Introduction

You already know which band this book is about! R.E.M. has had a tremendous influence on my life and has shaped my personality since I was a teenager. I have always been curious about how others perceive R.E.M. and the influence this band has had on them. Recently, I found myself reading some really lovely comments on some R.E.M. videos on YouTube. These comments were not necessarily about how amazing their music was but were very intimate anecdotes of what R.E.M. meant to the commenters and why. There were stories about the band helping someone survive hardship, depression and even suicide; how they helped someone else connect with their family, process deaths of loved ones and helped them capture beautiful memories from their childhood.

As I continued to read the comments, there was one (that's on the front page of this book) that caught my attention. That commenter was right! These comments were full of stories - happy and sad, sweet and painful, and they were all personal. They were written by the ones who directly experienced them and there is just something magical and impactful when you hear these true stories. You don't have to know that person - actually, the beauty of the Internet is that everyone is practically a stranger yet the way they tell their stories (in a YouTube comment no less!) makes you want to befriend them and know more about them. As you read the comment(s), you experience joy just knowing there are more people out there that your favorite band has influenced. Now, that is definitely a *fist pump* moment, but that excitement immediately disappears, paving a path for something more deep and profound, after you get a tiny glimpse into this commenter's life - past or present.

Another thing I realized is many of these commenters articulate their thoughts very well! I find myself mesmerized by their words that shower appreciation and gratitude towards

the musicians. These commenters are artists in their own ways - they captivated my heart with their words after all!

Anyway, the comment about the stories made me think - why not put some of them in a collection and share it with others? These comments are raw, personal, and sweet. If there are other fans out there, the comments/stories will resonate with them. If someone doesn't know the band, hopefully these stories will have some sort of profound impact on them (or not!), enabling them to be better and kinder human beings.

So, here's a small collection of stories in the form of comments I grabbed from four R.E.M. videos on YouTube. You may see spelling and/or grammatical errors in some and that's because these comments were grabbed "as is" - in their original form. I'd encourage you to personally connect with these stories and see if you experienced anything similar. If you experience any sentiment, add a comment to the video or even better - write me an email about it. (contact@venkatrao.co) I would love to discuss and share stories with you!

Thank you for giving this experimental amalgamation your time and thought. I hope you enjoy it.

Find The
River



“I’m 20 and trying to figure out where I’m going with my life. It’s been a long hard journey so far and I still have so far to go. My parents have divorced, I’ve been fighting off depression and I have tried so many times to figure out just who I am and where I belong in this world. This song really does speak to me. It gives me hope that someday I will find that river. In some ways I already have and the river came in the form of a very special lady that came into my life recently. She understands me and we relate so well. You’ll probably never see this hun but thanks for being there for me. I may not have found the river yet but I’m glad you’re here to help me seek it. :)”

“My cat passed away last night. This was his favorite song. Every time he heard Michael stipe’s voice he’d get this ethereal look on his face. I played this for him as he passed. RIP my cat Vedder and God bless REM.”

“I’m 42. I got Automatic for the People when I was 14 and had forgotten about this song until now. I can’t stop listening to it. One of the most beautiful REM tracks.

I never knew what this song was about. I have struggled with depression since my teens. Now I have two children who I adore. Things do get better and circumstances always change. It’s worth holding on. Keep searching until you find your river y’all xxx”

“How gorgeous is this song. Have the great distinction of having Michael Stipe sing this while looking at me for about 4 seconds at a concert when I was in the front row. Was on a high for a week.”

“‘Nothing is going my way’, that is sure to say. After bad luck over the years I am 52 now, still alive after several attempts to get rid of my miserable life and listening to R.E.M. comforting my recent relaxed life style because I am fed up by family and so called friends who’ve fucked up my life. I find peace in this soothing, beautiful music and thank R.E.M. for making a smile on my face every time I hear their music.”

“This song can always put tears in my eyes and I can never explain why. It just hits me on a level that I’m not even conscious of...something deep underneath in places where perhaps I don’t want to explore or know about”

“I’m 46, R.E.M got me through many hard times in my life. And is still the best band in history. I am teaching my 17 year old all the songs and they’re meanings. They’re songs, music, poetry are the soundtrack to my life and give me strength.”

“Pure poetry. This should be played at my funeral.”

“such a beautiful song, I remember listening to it , at night in my bedroom, in the dark, from an old tape, more than twenty years ago...this song was just at the end , it was strangely joyful and gave me some hope after those sad but beautiful songs before it. One of my best favourite albuns ever..”

“I’m an average middle aged Yorkshireman from England. I bought this album on release. Always has and will always be my favourite track. Absolutely sublime.”

“My son passed away last Sunday at the tender age of 28. Been looking for a song to be played in church. This is is so fitting, it’s beautiful. My heart goes out to all parents who have lost their loved ones.”

“such a beautiful song, I remember listening to it , at night in my bedroom, in the dark, from an old tape, more than twenty years ago...this song was just at the end , itt was strangely joyful and gave me some hope after those sad but beautiful songs before it. One of my best favourite albuns ever..”

“This song brings back strong memories and emotions for me from back in 1993. It was difficult time in my life, but I bought Automatic for the people and that album and particularly this song made getting through it easier. The whole album is a thing of beauty.”

“Does Michael Stipe know
that he’s the coolest guy
that ever lived?”

“My mum loved ‘Everybody hurts’ at a time I was at my lowest. I selected this one to play at her funeral, many years later. Needless to say, R.E.M. is important for more people than they ever will know”

“The final three songs on Automatic are the most beautiful the band ever wrote. I always think of them as a part concept, within the whole concept of mortality that the album explores. Man on the Moon is about not accepting life for what we’re told, Night Swimming is about innocence, regret and the need to enjoy every moment from our lives, and Find The River is acceptance of mortality, that we are all here for a finite time and not to worry what we do or don’t do with the time, because at the end there’s a river for all of us that leads to whatever or wherever we believe it does. I’m sure this isn’t anything that Michael had in mind....and I don’t care because my version of this has brought me great comfort over the nearly 25 years that I’ve adored this album. :)”

(blank)

Hey now, little speedyhead
The read on the speedmeter says
You have to go to task in the city
Where people drown and people serve
Don't be shy, your just deserve
Is only just light years to go
Me, my thoughts are flower strewn
Ocean storm, bayberry moon
I have got to leave to find my way
Watch the road and memorize
This life that pass before my eyes
And nothing is going my way
The ocean is the river's goal
A need to leave the water knows
We're closer now than light years to go
I have got to find the river
Bergamot and vetiver
Run through my head and fall away
Leave the road and memorize
This life that pass before my eyes
And nothing is going my way
There's no one left to take the lead
But I tell you and you can see
We're closer now than light years to go
Pick up here and chase the ride
The river empties to the tide
Fall into the ocean
The river to the ocean goes
A fortune for the undertow
None of this is going my way
There is nothing left to throw
Of ginger, lemon, indigo
Coriander stem and rose of hay
Strength and courage overrides
The privileged and weary eyes
Of river poet search naiveté
Pick up here and chase the ride
The river empties to the tide
All of this is coming your way

Find The River



(blank)

Nightswim- ming

“It was early 90s... I was a stupid teenager in his holidays. Not knowing, what my life would be. A head full of bullshit. It was 3 A.M. one hot summer night, I was watching TV. On one Channel this video started... this melody started, with these pictures, these lines, these words I never heard before. I still don't know, what it did to me. I started crying like a child, it gave me kind of a feeling that my youth will be over soon and a new chapter of life will start. I still remember sooo many years later, like it was yesterday. Now, today, when I go back to this moment nearly 30 years ago, all the words in this song make more sense then ever. Thank you R.E.M. for being with me all those years on my way from a child to a father...”

“A song about nostalgia and loving the night-time. Late summer and harvest moons. Whilst I can still remember the first time I heard it back in 1993, the feelings it invoked in me then as a 13yo kid and now as a 41yo whose life has thrown up more than a few surprises, are very different. I rediscover Nightswimming from time to time and it always makes me reflect on change, growing older, and all the people we lose (and find) along the way. There are not many 5-minute pop songs that can do that (and those that can were mostly written and recorded many years ago.)”

“In the summer of '90 or '91, Craig, Rick, and maybe Roger (?), and I went swimming off a dock in Kingston Harbour, Ontario after an evening shift at Fort Henry. In our early 20s, we swam laughing in the jet black water with the harbour lights in the distance, half naked, carefree, and unworried about our impending careers and marriages and grown-up life. This song came out shortly afterward and captured that summer for a few of us.”

“My father died quite unexpectedly that summer night. I swam unabashedly, naked, looking for spiritual comfort, any comfort. Water has always been my relief and that night, it was once more. This song has the most powerful effect on me, I can feel it washing over me once again. The joy and sadness both. Joy for being in my element, joy for this song that revealed more emotion than I could. And for finding comfort in the rewinding of it (over and over) old school style. So much angst and beauty here.”

“Everytime I listen to this song I remember my highschool friend, Julia. We were like brother and sister, I literally knew how she looked naked, that’s how much we trusted each other (we were only friends all this time). I knew her secrets and she knew mine, I was sure we will be friends our whole life. Then our mutual friend accused me of something I didn’t do, and ordered me to apologize in front of her, Julia and all of our other friends. Instead of swallowing my pride and keeping my best friend, I’ve decided not to apologize. Julia told me she’ll never be my friend again. Since then she ignored me, she literally pretended I wasn’t here. In the end, I’ve given up trying. It’s been more than 10 years now, and I still miss her. Julia, if you ever read this, I wish I could turn back time now and apologize.”

“How is it possible to compose a piece of music this totally wondrous and this movingly beautiful? Just how is it done? I am sometimes scared of playing this in company, as when I do I know the tears will come streaming down my checks, I just cannot stop them. I am a man of 66 years of age, I am not that emotional, but this is just one piece of music that gets to my heart. There is no way to describe the feeling it gives me, its just got something that touches me deeply. Perhaps REM did not realize the deep attachment many of us have to this, the miracle of it, the sheer miracle of total art. As long as I live, I cannot forget this piece of music, its just heaven and a master piece of music. God bless REM for giving me the feeling I get from this, God bless them.”

“I’m not a person who gets star struck very easily. But, around midnight on a balmy summer night back in ‘91 or ‘92 (my friend) and I were driving to the north end of Wrightsville Beach (in New Hanover County, NC). I looked to the right in the old parking lot just north of Shell Island Resort and there stood Michael Stipe, River Phoenix and a few of their friends. We pulled in, got out and Michael Stipe broke away from his friends to come greet us. We chit chatted and he asked if the cops were bad about busting people for drinking on the beach. We walked on the beach, went our separate ways. They all jumped into the ocean and started night swimming. About a year after we saw them that night, Automatic for the People came out with the song Night Swimming on it.’ - Jacob Sickles”

“As beautiful now as it was when I first heard it in the early 90’s . Life is too short to waste time thinking about doing something you dream of just do it and be at peace with yourself!!!”

“When I was a kid I thought this song was called ‘Knight Swimming’... “Knight, swimming. Deserves a quiet night.” I imagined a wounded knight in armor swimming home in calm, moon-lit water among the shadows of willow trees after having fought in a bloody battle. He was low on energy and using all his will to get home to something I never allowed myself to know. I always felt sorry for the knight and I agreed that he deserved a quiet night... Obviously most of the lyrics contradict that scenario and we all know the knight would drown if he kept his suit of armor on, but it’s always what I think of when I hear this song. It reminds me of the curious mind I’ve always had and it never fails to get me in touch with my inner child.”

(blank)

Nightswimming deserves a quiet night
The photograph on the dashboard, taken years ago
Turned around backwards so the windshield shows
Every streetlight reveals the picture in reverse
Still, it's so much clearer
I forgot my shirt at the water's edge
The moon is low tonight
Nightswimming deserves a quiet night
I'm not sure all these people understand
It's not like years ago
The fear of getting caught
Of recklessness and water
They cannot see me naked
These things, they go away
Replaced by everyday
Nightswimming, remembering that night
September's coming soon
I'm pining for the moon
And what if there were two
Side by side in orbit
Around the fairest sun?
That bright, tight forever drum
Could not describe nightswimming
You, I thought I knew you
You I cannot judge
You, I thought you knew me
This one laughing quietly underneath my breath
Nightswimming
The photograph reflects, every streetlight a reminder
Nightswimming deserves a quiet night, deserves a quiet
night



Nightswimming



What's The
Frequency,
Kenneth?

“When I was young and stupid and this song came out, I thought it was too simple. Simple chords, small sound, no flash. Now I understand that this whole album is four ace musicians giving a master class in restraint and taste.”

“When I used to work a pub and I noticed one of my regulars, an alcoholic Doctor who propped the bar, bopping his head and singing this song to himself along with the jukebox - I joined in, he looked up and said “this is a brilliant song, isn’t it?”. From that point, every time this one came on the jukebox, he looked at me with a nod - I knew we were in the same boat for those 4 minutes. Those moments, the connections which overcome everything else, are the one thing I miss about working a pub - People being genuine.

Doctor Bob - This one is out to you, pal. Even if it is 5 years” later!”

“This song hasn’t aged a single day. The video looks like it was shot just yesterday. Incredible.
Michael Stipe had better moves than Mick Jagger back in the daythere, I’ve said it.
I am now telling my 27 year old daughter about this music...luckily, she loves it”

“I am 63 and this is on the sound track of my life”

“Love how Peter Buck plays Kurt Cobain’s Jag-Stang that he received as a gift from Courtney Love after Cobain died; he plays it upside-down as Cobain was left-handed. Great nod”

“It’s been almost 30 years since the Dan Rather incident and we are no closer to finding out what exactly the frequency is than we were in 1986. This will always be at the top of the list of life’s unanswered questions.”

“This song will forever remind me of my parents. My step dad came into my life at the age of 14 and his name is Kenneth. My mom would joke around with him yelling what’s your frequency Kenneth. A really good memory of mine.”

“I remember when this song came out— I was 16, was just getting good at the guitar that summer and I pulled the amp into the backyard, plugged in a Stratocaster, cranked up the volume, stepped on the distortion pedal and let this song rip through the neighborhood on a sunny August afternoon. It would take a long time for us 90’s kids to realize what happened in the 90’s, but I think most of us have figured it out by now.”

“If I were in a place
where I can’t listen to
music right now, I would
dream of this song.”

“In the 90’s I had an alarm clock that I could set up to wake me up to the radio so I could prepare for school. I remember waking up to this song with a smile on my face, ready to face the day ahead! Good times.”

“When a guy rocks the mic with a dance and a voice like that, he’s devoted to his listeners 100%”

(blank)

"What's the frequency, Kenneth?" is your Benzedrine, uh-
huh

I was brain-dead, locked out, numb, not up to speed

I thought I'd pegged you an idiot's dream

Tunnel vision from the outsider's screen

I never understood the frequency, uh-huh

You wore our expectations like an armored suit, uh-huh
I'd studied your cartoons, radio, music, TV, movies, mag-
azines

Richard said, "Withdrawal in disgust is not the same as ap-
athy"

A smile like the cartoon, tooth for a tooth

You said that irony was the shackles of youth

You wore a shirt of violent green, uh-huh

I never understood the frequency, uh-huh

"What's the frequency, Kenneth?" is your Benzedrine, uh-
huh

Butterfly decal, rearview mirror, dogging the scene

You smile like the cartoon, tooth for a tooth

You said that irony was the shackles of youth

You wore a shirt of violent green, uh-huh

I never understood the frequency, uh-huh

You wore our expectations like an armored suit, uh-huh

I couldn't understand

You said that irony was the shackles of youth, uh-huh

I couldn't understand

You wore a shirt of violent green, uh-huh

I couldn't understand

I never understood, don't fuck with me, uh-huh

equency, Kenneth? (Official Music Video)



What's The Frequency, Kenneth?



We All Go
Back To
Where We
Belong

“Kirsten must be some sort of empath. When she smiles, I can’t help but smile, as well. It’s an involuntary reaction.”

“The first time I saw this video, I got the impression that she was listening to words, perhaps from a diary page she had written, put to music. But that’s almost certainly not the case. However, in this context, her reaction seems to be purely natural that someone got to the root-feeling of important moments in her life. R.E.M. blessed the world with a 32-year career of music, thoughts, feelings and hopes that inspired people to search themselves for their inner-most being . . . Call it a soul, or a tangible one-ness with other souls. You actually “grow” younger as you “get” older listening to their music. No other band has done this quite so effectively as R.E.M.”

“Wow. So raw. Beautiful. I’ve watched this at least a dozen times. It only took three takes to shoot this video. The video chosen, had Michael singing acapella to Kirsten beside her. I’m glad I found this song and video.”

“R.E.M. what can you say about them, I have followed them most of my adult life, those years I didn’t, it’s cuz I’m so much older than them and they were in maybe junior high. Thank you always, this is a beautiful way to say it’s been awesome !!

Oh, and btw, Kirsten Dunst was a perfectly stunning choice. She didn’t overpower the song as she could very well have, she’s perfection in human form. She didn’t though, she was just herself and the combination made me cry....”

“This song was, for my part, the soundtrack of my mom’s final days and her passing, last week, Wednesday. Not sure if it made everything easier or even more difficult - its simple, heartfelt lyrics, the bittersweet melody and Michael’s devastatingly beautiful singing. I just know that I can’t listen to it all the way through without starting to cry.
“..I’ll write our story in my mind..”...RIP mom.”

“The brighter side of his face represents his youth, his feeling of being still young inside, while his darker side represents his oldness, his whole life! this song make you love everything!!!”

“Their genius was subtlety. Some people need to be hit over the head to feel something. I see people show off their scales on stage all the time or explore the same tired range of emotions that rock music usually explores and it's utterly forgettable and completely uninteresting. REM's music was impressionistic, some people prefer a photograph.”

“His face is the perfect representation of the sentiment of the song. Cover the right half of his face and you’ll see him astonished or even shocked sometimes. Cover the left half and he’s subdued in an accepting the inevitable kind of way. He’s human.”

“Fascinating. He's so locked into the lyric, but at 1:35 John's taken by the arrangement. He does like the arrangement. Love the innocence expressed by John Giorno. A little boy listens.

If the camera was on me, I'm reminded of Thomas Hulce as Mozart reading King Joseph's short piece for piano, making a comment I'm paraphrasing now, its all the same after here... Stipe could have written another verse but he does a very expressive low tempered gurgle at 3:08 to keep up interest. This a very good tune and a fine example of REM2.

Big, big, big fan of the band as a four piece, always had a soft spot for them after Bill left. Loved Accelerate and Collapse has some very good songs. All good things come to an end and we still have the recordings. Good luck to the principals.”

“It almost makes me cry listening to this. REM thank you for the soundtrack of my life.”

(blank)

I dreamt what you were offering
Imagine lying next to me
Your shirt and your reputation talks
I will write our story in my mind
And write about our dreams and triumphs
This might be my "Innocence Lost"

I can taste the ocean on your skin
That is where it all begins

I dreamt that we were elephants
With water, sun, and clouds of dust
I woke up thinking we were free

I can taste the ocean on your skin
That is where it all begins
We all go back to where we belong
We all go back to where we belong

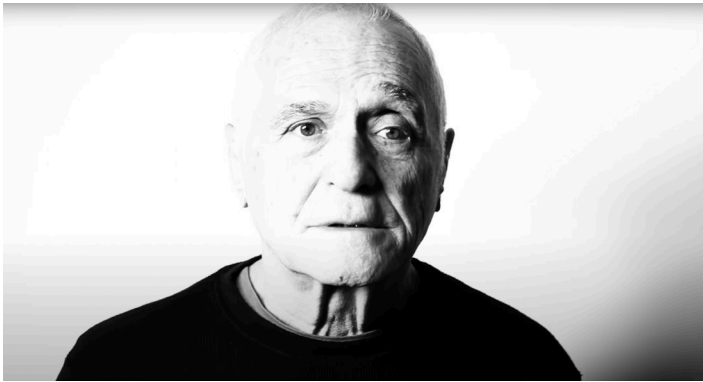
Is this really what you want?
Is this really what you want?

I can taste the ocean on your skin
That is where it all begins
We all go back to where we belong
We all go back to where we belong

Is this really what you want?
Is this really what you want?



[We All Go Back To Where We Belong \(Kirsten Dunst\)](#)

[We All Go Back To Where We Belong \(John Giorno\)](#)


(blank)

Thank you for reading! Have any comments or thoughts? Please share at contact@venkatrao.co!

(blank)

(blank)

(End)