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Rachel Wammack Recalls the Night Her Life Changed Forever



Rachel Wammack can credit her career starting point to one fortuitous night in Alabama, when she was just trying to make a little money. The rising star, who released her self-titled EP earlier this year, is now part of the current class of the CMT Next Women of Country, and is also serving as the opening act on Brett Young's CMT on Tour: Here Tonight trek while she works on her first full-length project – none of which would have happened if she hadn't played in a local restaurant one night.

"It's a pretty crazy story," Wammack told [PopCulture.com](https://popculture.com). "I was discovered in my hometown, Muscle Shoals, Alabama. When I was discovered, I was a senior in high school. I've been writing music since I was in middle school, and I'd been playing out since high school. This night that I was playing out doing my regular thing, playing at this restaurant called the 360 Grille. At the end of the night this guy comes up to me and he says, 'I'm Jim Catino from Sony Music Nashville,' and I'm like, 'No, you are not. There is no way.'"

Not only did Wammack not believe Catino was who he said he was, she was sure he had a sinister ulterior motive.

"When he came up to me that night I literally thought he was going to kidnap me," Wammack recalled. "I was like, there's no way this guy is really from Sony Nashville. But he was staying in a hotel right there, and was

just having dinner, and listened to me play. He just saw potential in me that I just can't believe. It's like you can't set that stuff up, you know? I'm so grateful because here I am and it actually worked out."

After graduation, Wammack moved to Nashville, immersing herself in the songwriting community, and honing her craft for two years before releasing her EP, which includes her current single, "Damage," written by Wammack, along with hit tunesmiths Tom Douglas and David Hodges. Wammack had the idea for the song, but it took the skill of the three writers together to bring the song to life.

"At the time, I'd been bartending for about nine months and the one thing that I had learned from being a bartender was how to listen to people," explained Wammack. "I was working at a hotel bar and people would become regulars for me that were staying in the hotel for weeks at a time. They would come down to the bar and sit for like three or four hours and just talk to me. End up at the end of the night being one of my good friends. I learned that we're not all that different."

The song begins with the lines, "I'm a bartender / Best friend pretender / I make drinks to help forget and help remember / Beautiful humans / I am a student . And I've seen it from all sides winning and losing / Oh, love can do / Love can do / Love can do some damage," which drew from Wammack's own experiences.

"I didn't realize that perspective on it until I'd been a bartender," Wammack explained. "I was just kind of spilling out that whole lifestyle for me, listening to people and what a gift that can be. Offering just an ear to people. As I'm spilling out my guts, he's scribbling as Tom Douglas does ... It was just like the song just wrote itself. In the second verse we talk about real stories like this woman who's gone through cancer and this guy who's far from home."

"It's just real stories," she added. "We only touch on a few, but I feel like everyone can relate in one way, whether you've been a bartender or if you've been to a bar."

Wammack is one of the female artists Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild called out during the CMT Artists of the Year ceremony. As the rising star gets ready to release her debut album, she is fully aware of the challenges women in country music are facing, but equally ready do something to change the status for female artists.

"All these women are working just as hard as the men," Wammack insisted. "I just got off radio tour for four months of working around the US and playing at different stations, and it is a time where I just believe people need to believe in women, and believe in our stories, and believe that women do want to hear women on the radio, and that men do want to hear women on the radio. I'm really ready to be a part of that change."