

The Eastern Arts Society Presents

EAGLE'S NEST

Volume III

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Cover Photo by Dystiny Kern

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Dear Patrons,

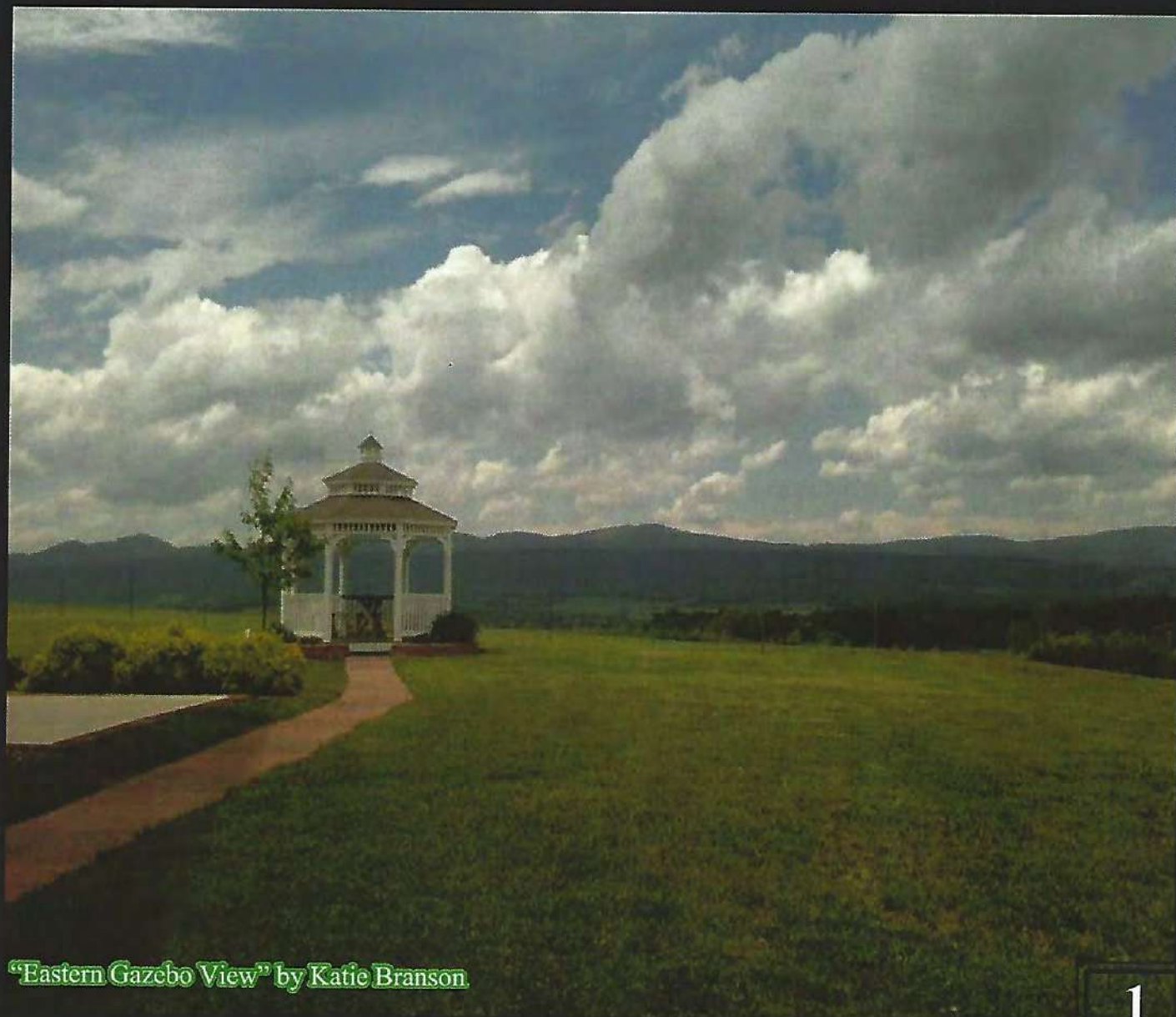
The third edition of *Eagle's Nest* is a passionate collaboration between many creative students and faculty at Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College. These poems, photography, and short stories all reflect the imaginative and diverse population of the Potomac Highlands. We would like to thank the students and faculty for their creative efforts and willingness to publish their work in our diminutive literary magazine.

Sincerely,

Curtis Shakala

Ryan Zirk

Chris Windley



"Eastern Gazebo View" by Katie Branson

"Father Fallacies" by Curtis Hakala

Your tar-ticked teeth were like wooden tombstones, rippled and warped from smoking Camel Lights. To my ten-year-old self, you were puffy, bloated, pickled in alcohol; your yellow teeth and claws sharp, always biting, always swiping, never smiling, never holding. No, you caressed a high ball of Jim Beam with a surgeon's precision and care, but I felt squeezed, puffing, gasping for some fresh low tar air. Your breath was like a thick winter coat on the coldest of nights -- all enveloping, smothering tightly, and impossible to fight. You were -- pointed-- sharp, and piercing, playing the flesh, but what I needed was soft, round, encircling, pillow "ness." You stuffed a .45 down my pants, thinking its barrel would make me a man, but the one that once awed, became spam, processed meat, in all ways a scam. Looking back through the pied kaleidoscope of the past's crooked lines, you grow that much more gruesome, cruel and unkind.



What's real or made up, truth or a lie; you are pastiched junk, pieced and ply boarded together, in the bottlenecked function of both memory and time. What's real is your presence; twenty years ago died -- but like the pierced points of stars, you still shed dark light, denying what's fine and finite.

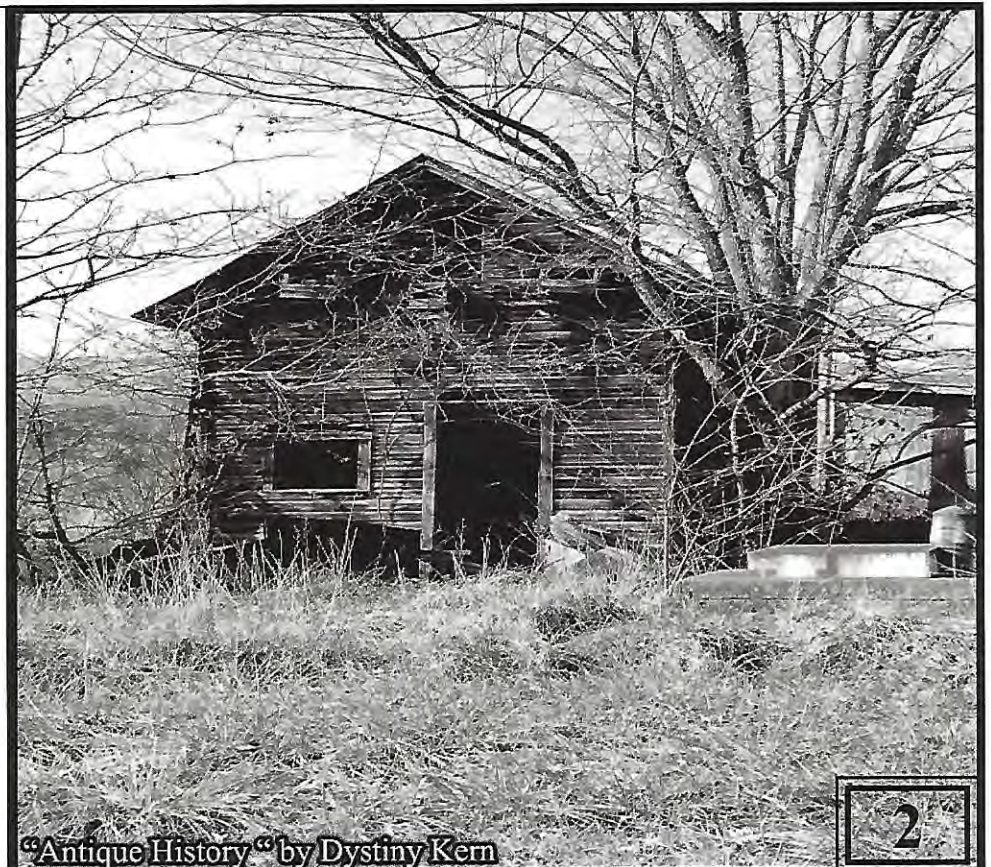
"Classic" by Christy Pastro

The traditions of ages past,
Are left behind so very fast.
I smiled one time at memory.
Bye-gone age does yet flow so free.

Do any of them think of me?
I know they don't remember me.
I study ancient history.
The flow of time, as out to sea.

Pretending dreams and memories,
Could lead me to the very seas
And there see all, as is and was.
I dig to find the root and cause.

The classicist they will deride,
For lacking quite the reckless stride
To embrace all new things in bold.
Betray the past, forget the old.



"Untouchable" by Carla Hill

Oh I wonder what's going through your mind?
Oh I wonder what you see when you look at me?
Oh I wonder, wonder why I need to know?

Tell me what I want to know.
Tell me what I want to hear.
Tell me because I long for it.
Tell my heart you want me too.
Tell my heart you need me.

Take away my uncertainty,
Take away my fears.
It is hard yearning for something
so far out of reach.

"Tie-Dye Sky" by Ryan D. Zirk



"The Flip-Flop" by Ryan D. Zirk

"Call if you will, but who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? Resentment kills a fool, as envy slays the simple. For hardship does not spring from soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born unto trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." – Job 5: 5-7

* * *

Finally, he remembered the last time he had seen her; he sat down at his computer and tried to get it out before it consumed his soul. Roger closed his eyes and stole away into the vivid memory; his fingers typed automatically. A vast panorama sprawled out in front of him in deep shadows; the air was dampened—tinged with pink phosphorescence. Her hand in his, they shuffled lazily on the crowded boardwalk near the ocean. She had become increasingly aware of his existence as something happened inside her—the tides had shifted; his card had been drawn, for the happiness and sorrow that came to pass was to be one of the most profound curses he would ever be reluctantly forced to bear.

Earlier that day they had been swimming in the ocean; as the waves carried them further out, he noticed that she was drifting closer and closer to shore. Finally, Roger was so far out, that he gave up looking for her after she'd walked back up the beach. Suddenly, he felt something brush against his leg. A thousand needles pierced his flesh, sending electric shudders up and down his side. The sensation had jumped right on top of him; his head whirled in red vapor trails; he swam in a sea of red, thrashing and flailing his arms, more drowning than waving. By some divine magnetism, Roger rolled his seething flank over the froth and muddied sands of the shore; tiny wave pools sent out rivulets—circular and expanding, reflected in his dilated pupils. His eyes burned with sea salt; obscured, they unfocused and then focused themselves again trying to adjust to the sun's careening rays. They closed as his exacerbated state worsened. The muscles were expanding and contracting and violently doubled his torso, like a shivering baby in a pool of placenta.

"Hey! You alright buddy?"

Roger heard a man's voice and felt hands touching his face; they slapped him frantically. Faintly aware, he tried breathing but coughed as salt and brine caught the air in his passageway. His eyes blurred as they opened to numerous pairs of eyes blinking back at him; mouth agape, a curly-headed man with concerned blue eyes yelled, "Can you breathe?"

"Something bit me," was all he said. Roger's leg was pulsating electric muscle friction.

"Oh hell," the man yelled, "There's half a jellyfish hanging from the pocket of your swim trunks!"

Lifting his head to look down, Roger's eyes beheld the transparent perpetrator with its stringy tentacles and purple veins, and then, he beheld a vast darkness; a great and comforting blanket of darkness took Roger into its arms and held him there.

She was already in the hotel room when he awakened disheveled and naked under freshly laundered linen; as the faint aromas of lemon-scented air-fresheners clung to the insides of his nostrils he breathed deep—his lungs hurt.

“Bye,” she said hanging up the phone.

“Who was that,” Roger asked.

She paused to answer, as if searching for the right words, and then she said, “Um, it was the concierge. They said to ring them if you need anything, anything at all.”

The room stayed silent for a moment.

“Tell them to send up a bottle of rum and a bucket of ice,” he told her. “I’m paralyzed from the legs down.”

“That must feel awful,” she said.

Her comment made him laugh a little. She left obediently, but it must’ve taken her a while because he drifted back out into a blissful state of unconsciousness. He dreamed the hotel room was floating in the ocean and taking on water at the same time. They were sinking more than anything as tiny blue and yellow fish, various squid and octopi, and a friendly seahorse floated in all on their own; they bathed lethargically in the hot tub the hotel room was furnished with. As she closed the door behind her, Roger awakened to a dry room—not in the ocean, not taking on water. The multicolored fish and the friendly seahorse were gone; it was only her and a big damn bottle of rum.

“Time to start cussing like a sailor,” he told her.

“You’re good at that.” She smiled; it was a mysterious smile, if ever he’d seen one. The whole thing made his stomach uneasy, like getting sea-sick or being trapped inside a drifting Molotov cocktail and getting high on the fumes.

Later that night, in the faint light of August, they could taste the humidity in the air. They breathed in the salty vapors of the churning sea as the waves crashed inward like a giant implosion of perfect harmony; they laughed so hard, it sent their hearts straight into an uncontrollable crying spell. They walked hand in hand, as the luminescence of the sporadically placed lights lit the cement sidewalk under their sandaled feet, and a single, lonesome gull was heard crying his woes off into the horizon.

Further up the boardwalk, the blinking lights of the Ferris wheel made circles in their eyes as they watched the passengers and their expressions of adolescent wonder; they nibbled bits of cotton candy and tried to fit their mouths around whole candy apples without getting the peanuts that covered them stuck up their noses. Their eyes reflected psychedelic visions of neon game rooms and stacked hotels where people enjoyed iced drinks on their balconies. Two different types of music could be heard at any one time, depending on the position along the boardwalk. A country western bar called The Broken Wheel had the talent of Johnny Come Lately and The Tardies blaring out of every reverberating amplifier in the entire club. Fuzz-toned electric guitars strummed out hit after clod-hopping hit in rolling droves.

A little ways up past The Broken Wheel was a giant stage erected in honor of Billy Idol’s return to the city, and it was sure to be a *white wedding*. All over the place, hurried workers scattered in every direction; blue-prints and schematics blew and flailed in the wind. There were workers atop a fifty foot scaffolding who were securing the multicolored stage lights for tomorrow night’s *rebel yell*.

If you looked to either side of the boardwalk, all sorts of people could be seen, riding tandem bicycles or lounging in outside eateries with the cozy confines of a roof and mosquito net, and a bar with all the fixings for a good time; it was in this capacity that they found themselves asking the question, “What next?”

“I know!” she said. “Let’s go to one of those bars and order a tropical drink with one of those cute little umbrellas in it! I’ve never had one of those.”

She was so elated, her eyes filled with anticipation.

“Anything you want, baby,” he replied.

Two or three of those cute little umbrellas later and something bad happened; she talked faster than a college student cramming for finals, like she’d just put away several pots of coffee.

“And snorkeling, I’ve never done that before either! We must go diving with the dolphins!” Her eyes held an excitement that her mouth couldn’t contain.

She excused herself and with her purse in her hands, she ran off to the lady’s room.

It was at this point that Roger thought about the \$223.58 in his bank account and wondered how in the hell he'd ever manage to swim with the dolphins and rest in the hotel room comfortably. After all, they had kept his card and he had only thirty-three dollars in his wallet. When she came back, she was brushing the bangs from her face and had adorned a more serious expression; it was as if she'd been caught laughing at something funny but nobody else got the punch line. Poised, she composed herself.

"Damn umbrellas," he thought to himself.

"Oh baby, let's go sailing!" She grabbed hold of the table and nearly sent it off its legs, crashing onto the tile floor below.

"Listen now, calm down would ya? There will be plenty of time to do all that," he said, with a reluctant smile that forced his clinched teeth apart. "Check out time is at 11:30 tomorrow morning. There's no way we'll be able to swim with the dolphins."

He thought of taking her to the aquarium.

"Wouldn't you like to see the sharks and the eels? Ooh and what about the giant manta rays? They have that giant tank that you can walk through like a tunnel and they swim all around you! Wouldn't that be lovely? Don't you want to see the sharks?"

The aquarium was a cheap date, but they both enjoyed themselves. The next day he managed to finagle his credit card from the smirking smug gentleman at the front desk with his arms and legs intact, bankroll included. The man had a tiny nibbling mouth with whiskers coming out both sides that resembled a field mouse laboring and twitching over a hunk of cheese in a dank corner. He snickered uncontrollably.

"Now if we can just get the hell out of this sand-trap before she realizes I'm broke," he thought to himself. He looked at the receipt the man had handed him; attached was a bill for \$200.00 in phone calls to another hotel on the beach—*The Flip-Flop*. Underneath it read the words, "Thank you for your business. Sincerely, all of us at *The Sandpiper Inn*"

He didn't recall ever using the damn phone.



"Doting Zombies"
by Christy Pastro

A zombie's a wonderful thing.
Death, decay, rotting flesh alive.
All so free from pain and regret
And yet we run away in fear.
The responses are all so set,
Yet something for which we all strive.
We seek something else than being.

Flames and black smoke are sky painting.
A haze for those left to survive.
We prayed destruction would be met.
Idolized apocalypse's here.
In the end we paid such a debt.
Waiting expectation, Arrive!
We seek something else than being.

Sarah's hopeful despite fleeing.
Solving problems with star-eyed drive.
Lonely survivors are beset.
"Gather around and listen here.
Pair together and form a set.
Maybe love can help us survive."
We seek something else than being.

Can they pace death? Watch them trying.
Zombies catch me, I've no regret.
Sarah, a pillar, turns arrear.
Watch me caught in the zombie's net.
They seek something else than being.

"Untitled"
by Mande Hyre

Shadows of the past
Whispers of what once was
I didn't know it wouldn't last
What was will never be again

Will there be a new dawn?
Is there a better day approaching?
Or is all hope gone,
A casualty of the fallen world in
which we live?

The former glory will never be
I can never go back to reclaim it
But I know someday I will see
A day when the specter of the past
is a distant memory

Though now I must tread
Through hardship and difficulty
My soul and spirit can still be fed
On Word and Spirit, all God's glory

For even in suffering there is gain
To learn, to grow, to feel
There is purpose even in pain
He who treads with me can work
all things for His good purpose.

"Silver Reflections" by Dreama Kelly





"Angled Falls" by Dystiny Kern

"Temporary Farewell" by RJ Wilson

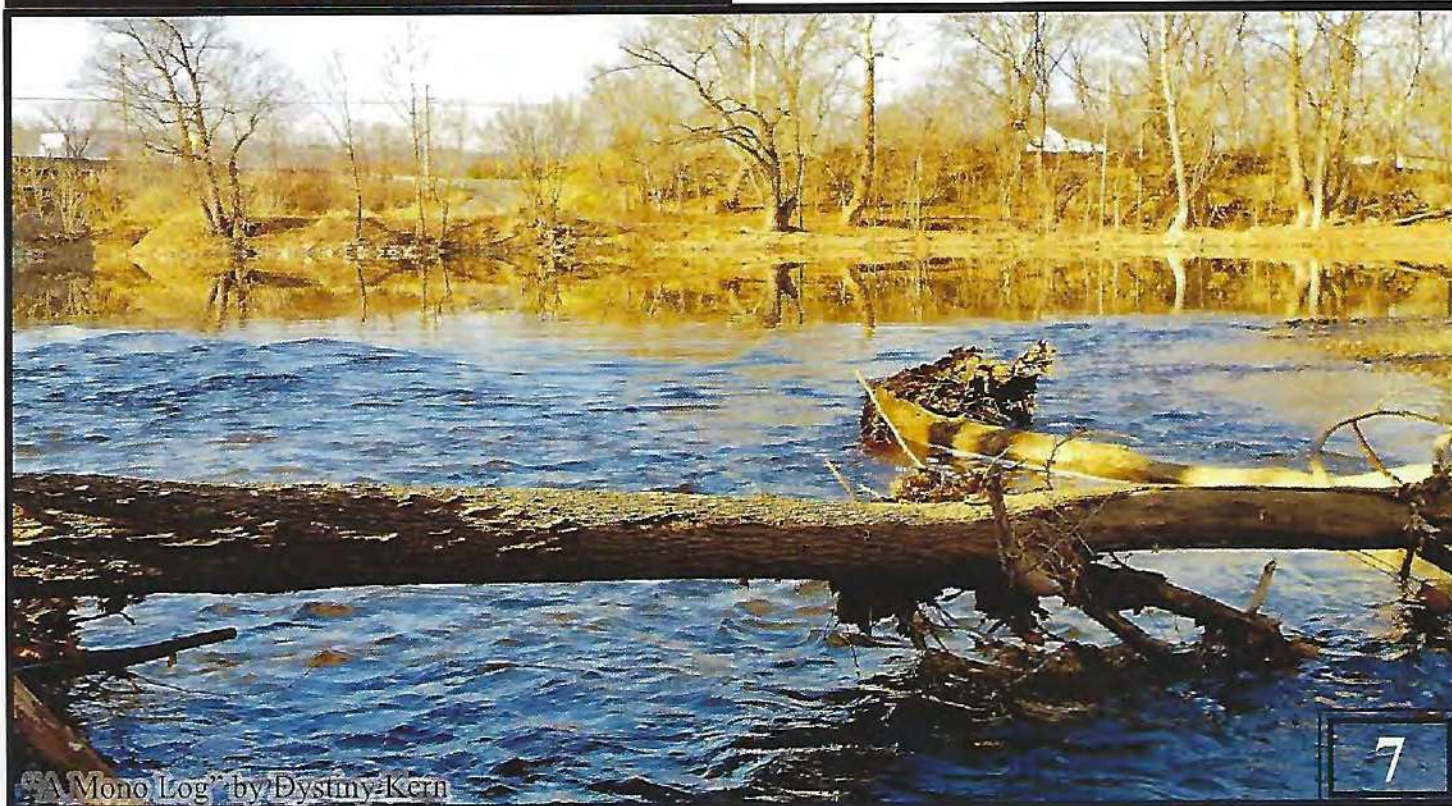
As the tears flow free, I begin to smile.
 You're gone right now, but it's just for a while.
 We've said our goodbyes, and watched others
 do the same. You can finally rest now.
 It's the end of the game.

Or is it the beginning? An adventure unknown!
 The start of something new, that has yet to be shown.
 I know that you're happy, and no longer sick,
 but we miss you so much, and the words are so thick.

They hang in our throats and keep out the breath.
 The sadness that comes only after a death.
 It hurts to write this, but the emotion escapes.
 Through these words I am writing. It's all I can take.

I love you now like I loved you before.
 Although you're not here. They love you more.
 It's been so long since you've seen them,
 those who have passed.

I'll join you all someday, when my time has passed.
 Goodbye for now is all I can say.
 The tears are streaming,
 but we'll meet again someday.



"A Mono Log" by Dystiny Kern

On the outside the beast runs wild and rampant, dodging obstacles like a linebacker avoiding the next tackle. On the inside, however, the beast is quiet and reserved, wide-eyed and full of wonder. Never knowing exactly what the beast's next move is tricky and can catch one off-guard on many occasions. The beast's moods change faster than a silver bullet leaving a smoking chamber. The beast leaves behind messes that compare to national disasters in small foreign countries. The stench of the beast can be downright unbearable some days as it appears to dodge water whenever possible. Oh, the joys of being a parent.

I never thought when I first held that sweet-smelling baby girl in my arms fourteen years ago that I would see so many unbelievable challenges in the long, winding journey of her life. Knowing that her life rested in the unsure hands of a nineteen-year-old was enough for my family to rally around me and become the village it takes to raise a child. Each day presented new heart-pounding questions that remained unanswered, leaving me quivering like the leaves rustling in the crisp, fall breeze.

The years flew by like someone had taken the clock hands of life and spun them at such a rapid pace that I found myself dizzy. Sweat beads formed on my head as I sat and waited on the edge of the couch for her to arrive home from her first football game without me there as her ever-looming bodyguard. Many times, I bit my tongue, leaving a disgusting taste of defeat in my mouth, when she begged to go to one of her rambunctious rebel friends' homes for the night. I would have rather kept her safe and at home with me, but I knew that my gangly caterpillar would never turn into a beautiful butterfly if I kept her caged up in a dark cocoon forever. I felt a knot in my throat and a red, hot flush cross my tear-stained face as we argued about the daily ins and outs of the rules of life. Failure was not an option as we crashed together like cymbals in the middle of a silent movie – out of place yet waking one up to the reality of what occurred. The words coming out of my mouth were deafening, ringing in my ears. These words were no longer my own, but the exact words my mother said to me nearly eighteen years ago. I shuddered as if I were left out in the cold snow with no shoes upon my feet. Could I really be becoming a shadow of the woman who stood before me? Would my child fall prey to the same outcome? I looked longingly at the radiant sky above and prayed that I was a good example for her even when the horns held up my halo.

When the squeaky brakes of the school bus came to a stop and dropped her off at my door, the disaster left behind was like a cyclone constantly spinning in a confined area. The house that was recently spotlessly clean became littered with a tattered notebook on the couch, a lonely glove in the middle of the hallway. Her book bag hung haplessly on the side of the chair; her shoes tattooed with "BFF," hearts, and skulls were deposited by the front door and in front of the fridge. Their stench from being worn without socks permeated throughout the entire house.

Never underestimate the ferocity of the beast. The beast changed into a beauty as fast as the pit crew changed the worn out tires during the Daytona 500. Overflowing make up case in hand, the beast painted such a picturesque view of herself that I hardly recognized that there once was a scruffy, young girl under there. As she posed like a super model for her next set of self-portraits to be emblazoned across the vast social media, I couldn't help the smile that crept across my face. It seemed that no matter the distance the years may put between us, my little girl was still right there under the surface – still wide-eyed and full of wonder. The beast will one day become dormant when she too faces a beast of her own. She will chase dreams that may seem unobtainable, but she will chase them anyway. It's the thrill of the hunt that keeps the beast motivated. Through every step, every crushing heart break, every glorious victory, every smile- warm as a sunny day, nothing will ever compare to the joys of being a parent.



"The Fifth and Final Stage" by Stacie Thompson

Panic, confusion and insecurities,
threats and a cold tongue are unflattering.
My longing for you was a loving, sweet song,
but endless days and nights, I'm reminded why
I'm wrong.

The kids make noise and play annoying little games,
they run, fight and scream, holy hell,
what a shame! I've cried, hurt and begged for
your loving hand, but you strapped your boots
up, said "You're crazy!" and then you took
and ran. I went through every emotion,

I believe under the Sun. But never was my
love stronger than your fastest run. I let my guard
down and opened up my heart, only for another
rock- bottom fucking start.

My bed is an ocean of silence, the clock ticks away.
I lay awaiting sleep before the alarm starts my day.
I fly around the house in a blur of morning rush,

The bus is coming, we're late again,
it sometimes seems too much. I'm tired of
looking for a grown-up resolution, it seems to me,
forgetting you is the only real solution.

Goodbye is a release now
and I can breathe again,
But I do want to thank you
for setting fire to my pen.

"Golden Reflections" by Dreama Kelly



"Moon Over Eastern" by Dreama Kelly



"Solitary Refinement" by Chris Windley

Fighting the urge to light myself on fire,
my life feeling like a cigarette I once desired. Tobacco
wrapped within a white strait-jacket, burning out of control
as my breath pulls at and attacks it.
The dancing smoke alerting me to the world's constant
dangers, the wind lifting it up, swiftly whispering in
threatening anger.

I'm willingly throwing myself into solitary refinement.
Strengthening my core with a leap of faith into
confinement. Welcoming the pain that accompanies this
lonely Hell since the pain's looking better than smashing
my face against the bars of the world's cell.

Its prisoners only looking for answers to define IT,
without correcting their own slanted alignment.
Deception twisting the
perception of everyone's assignment
Taking potential givens for granted, striving for Heaven,
the path unknowingly paved by unending
sin times Seven.

Feeling groggy...my vision blurry,
my movements slow...

There's very few places for me to go;
Show me somewhere I can truly grow!

And no one around me seems to care or to know that
my mind is burning, charred and increasingly crisper,
out of options, waiting for the wind to whisper.

Once again I'm left behind, all alone.

Lost in the Unknown.
Speak to me wind~
...which way will I be thrown?

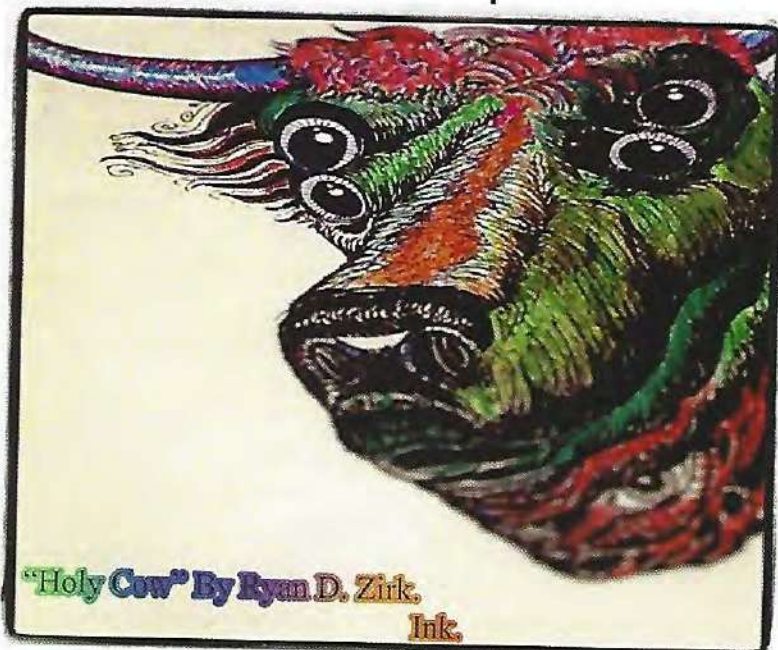
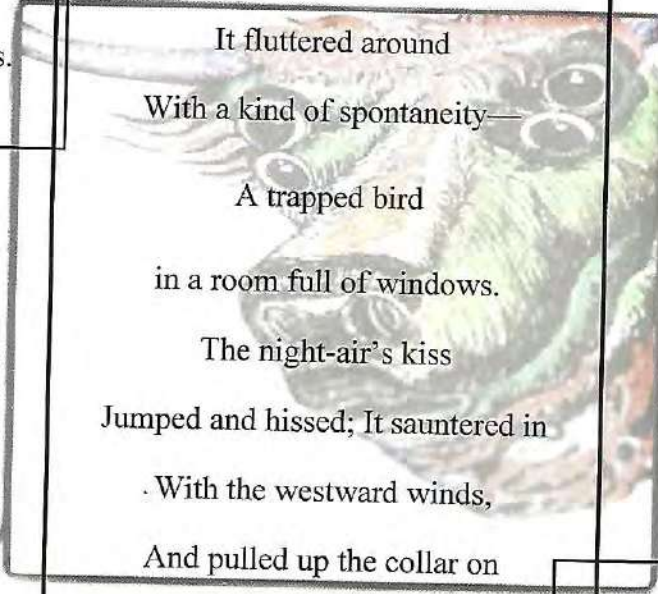
"The Park Bench" by Ryan D. Zirk

He sat on a park bench
And bounced his knee;
The hard wood
Covered in frost underneath,
Froze the backs of his legs,
And chiseled away at them
With handfuls of the broken—
Jagged shards in piercing points.

These sharpened splinters
Met the dingy exterior
Of his unwashed trousers
With half-cracked smiles
And ice in their throats.
He had worry in his heart;

It fluttered around
With a kind of spontaneity—
A trapped bird
in a room full of windows.
The night-air's kiss
Jumped and hissed; It sauntered in
With the westward winds,
And pulled up the collar on
His double-buttoned pea coat.

He sighed.
His breath—in plumes
Rose high into the mountains
Built from the inside.
The stars hung lazily overhead,
Behind a faint cloud
That covered in contours.
The streets on both sides—
Empty in their confines.



"Holy Cow" By Ryan D. Zirk.
Ink.

"Ol' Red" by Nicole Yurcaba

I.

worn-out U-joints; broken-latch driver-side door;
mountain mud,
caking the floor boards,
an aluminum dogbox, where we stowed Ike, ratchet-strapped on the eight-
foot bed ... the priceless Ford pick-up of my early twenties.

II.

How many arctic December days did I waste away bouncing brain-
jarringly along ice-slicked logging roads
in that ol' Red Ford,

after having run breathlessly on leather-booted feet after Ike and the
hounds and the ol' black bear bruin
through winter-deadened briars, endlessly tangled laurel thickets;

riding shotgun beside The Ol' Bear Hunter who apprenticed me--his
youthful protégé--in his bear hunter's ways: to unnecessarily cuss when
the dogs sniffed the bear back from where he came instead of to where
he was going, to drink the five-dollar-and-thirty-nine-cent a bottle cheap
liquor when winter's cold nipped our bones, to turn a straining ear again'
the wind searching for the crossing hounds' cries?



"Trees and Stream" by Dystiny Kern



"Sun Kissed Cloud" by Chris Windley

"Shooting Star" by Christy Pastro

Let me fade, let me fall
 'till I'm nothing at all
 Let me fade, let me fall
 Use all my wishes love
 Until I'm all used up
 and falling from above
 Let me fade, let me fall
 'till I'm nothing at all
 and crashing from the sky
 one wish left 'till I die
 Let me fade, let me fall
 Let me fade, let me fall
 'till I'm nothing
 Nothing at all

"Every Night" by Amanda Thompson

Every night we dance with the candle light.
 Every night we look at the stars in the sky.
 Every night we wish slumber comes quickly.
 Every night we analyze the consequence of the day.

Every night we leave things left unsaid.
 Every night we gather around the coffee table.
 Every night we think about those we have lost.
 Every night we ponder if life is really worth it.

Every night we feel the beat of the music.
 Every night we play Who Fed the Dog?
 Every night we clear our minds from the daily grind.
 Every night we wrestle with our emotions.

Every night we become inspired to continue on.
 Every night we fear the darkness and hate being alone.
 Every night we hope morning doesn't come quickly.

Every night we are restless thinking of things to do.
 Every night we prepare for another day lost to the ages.
 Every night we rifle through the fridge for tasty treats.
 Every night we adjust our eyes to see what we want.

Every night we accept that we are trapped.
 Every night we are haunted by the past
 Every night we dream of better days.
 Every night we let our anger escape us.

Every night we are tired and worn out.
 Every night we wish we had more time.
 Every night we remember to appreciate love.
 Every night we live to see the sun rise.

"Sunny Eyes" by Chris Windley

I peer through my rainy window panes,
 and into your Sunny Eyes.
 My mind basking in their tranquility--
 My soul's troubles wave and say, "Goodbye."

You were nothing more than a stranger,
 a short-passing friend.
 Yet-- your Sunny Eyes entrusted more to me,
 more than I ever requested you to lend.

How cruel a fate, witnessing
 only the first moments of Dawn.
 The rising of your Sunny Eyes~
 one quick glimpse, one brief blink,

and they were gone.

I would've missed a moment of glory,
 if I hadn't peered into your Sunny Eyes.
 And this surreal moment would be nothing more
 than another story
 soaring through untold Cloudy Skies.

This story is dedicated to Mrs. French, my sixth grade teacher. Without her guidance, I wouldn't be the writer I am today. Rest Peacefully, you are sorely missed but remembered dearly whenever I put pen to paper.

Ethan looked around, studying his groggy-faced peers. *It is far too early.* His teacher sat at her desk, sipping her coffee in between sorting through the mountains of paperwork required at the beginning of each and every school year. The morning announcements and pledge rang fresh in Ethan's ears, followed by what he called the "YOU'RE TARDY bell." He imagined its piercing persistence would prelude some silly fool running down the halls in a futile attempt to make it to class. Or worse: intentionally try not to get caught! *How would you not get caught?*

Mrs. Francé looked up after she was finished, eying the first half of new minds she would be interacting with this year, literally. Her left eye did as it was told, while the right marched to the beat of an unknown drum. She could smell the signature scent of pre-pubescence: a mix of hormones, nervousness, sweat, general fear and sheer horror.

And not necessarily in that order. There were only two children to correctly observe which eye was the fake. She smiled at the thought. She made the best of her situation and enjoyed this little game she was able to play.

She used her years upon years of teaching experience to initially assess her class. *She doesn't seem interested at all. Oh! She's already reading a book. Looks like I found the sleeper in the class.* She loved to mold minds, and she had mastered the skill over the years.

"Good Morning, class," she began, her face relaxed yet firm. "My name is Mrs. Francé, your English and history teacher. And yes: I have a glass eye. Try to figure out which one is that one, though," she winked one eye, and then the other with what the youths would soon find out to be a reoccurring dry sense humor. The statement further fueled the youths' sense of wonder.

"Good Morning, Mrs. Francé!" the class called.

"So before we begin today's lesson, I'd like to take roll--Kelly Anderson?...--" "...Present!"...

Ethan laid his head on his desk. *I'm a "Y." I'm practically always last; this is so annoying!* He quickly became lost in thought after tangent thought. He had just started the sixth grade at Nottingham Middle School. The bus was good. There was no one at his bus stop that he didn't get along with. He had enjoyed playing football with three of his friends before the bus arrived. *I hope we play baseball tomorrow. [Now remember, Ethan. You're an Owl. Here is your schedule and naggity blah blah who cares?!]"* he replayed his mother repeating in his mind.

They had already taken a tour of the school a few weeks in advance of class. *"I know, Mom"* must of been said ten thousand times between 6:00 and 7:15 AM before sticking the apple Pillsbury Toaster Strudel in his mouth and walking out the door.

Ugh! I hate the apple ones! The nauseating apple-like taste lingered in his mouth still as he sat in class. He wished he had something to drink to wash it down. Being an Owl wasn't even his first choice. He wanted nothing more than to be a Penguin. *One day I'll have two named Pen and Gwen. I'll become a scientist and build a big room for them to live in. It'll be super cold! They'll love it.* Each class year was divided into 10 teams: for the sixth graders, their theme was birds. It was an incredibly awkward time for him. *Is she still calling roll?* His voice was extremely high pitched.

Yep. Man, I hate these glasses, I look too nerdy! I wonder if Mr. Lawrence wears glasses. Two teachers taught the two core subjects, the other teaching science and math. *Hopefully my voice doesn't crack when I say 'Here'.*

"Ethan Yates?" He liked the school though. *Can't wait for my voice to completely deepen.* His favorit-- "Ethan Yates?" Mrs. Francé repeated for a second time, her expression accurately expressed her thinning patience. "Oh--sa-sorry, yea. Present!" Ethan called, his voice shaky.

"No duh," one of the male students behind him called out.

"What kind of name is that?" a girl behind him remarked.

Ethan glanced around the room to gauge his appropriate level of embarrassment. If he were a shade or two lighter, the other students might have detected how red his face actually was. *Why are you getting embarrassed, Ethan? Get it together, man!*

"Okay. Quiet down you guys. Please? Let's jump right in shall we? Who likes to read?" *Me.* Ethan and nine of the other students raised their hands. Ethan made sure not to raise his hand too fast. "Good. I'll be handing out one of my favorite novels for you to read in a minute. You'll get one each nine-week period. I want you to read it, take notes and write a report to present in front of the class. That'll be closer to the end of the first nine weeks. I'll let you know the exact date during the first week in October."

"No way," Michael blurted. "Yes way!" she returned, her right eye slowly drifting to left. The class openly whispered. *What were we thinking? What is she thinking?! My parents will have TONS to say about it this!*

Mrs. Francé cleared her throat, diverting the class's attention back to her. "Ahem," she began again, "We will go over the *entire* process for this first book report in class. Relax. Look around you," her hand extended, show-casing the myriad of posters scattered throughout the classroom to assist her new recruits in their writing endeavors for the year.

Ethan's eyes widened. He hadn't paid the posters any mind before this point. His eyes then shined. Things clicked. He saw the "next level." It was that exact moment when he first grasped the concept and depth of what it meant to know knowledge. A dormant inner-fire patiently awaiting breath burst forth from his mind, determined to leave its mark on the world. *She has everything! Adjectives for good and bad. Ex-static? Jo-vi-al? Look at these all these new words! Enchanting. I like the sound of that. Prepositions, adverbs and comma rules! Why does this excite me?* A whole new world of wonder was a feast, and Ethan was a very knowledge-hungry beast. "--so I will walk you through it step by step. The title and author of the book is *Hatch--*"

"--What's a appositive?" Ethan announced uncontrollably loud. He instantly covered his face, burying himself deep inside the protection of his arms. Ethan's skin crawled and itched, sensing all forty-three other eyes honed in on him. *Take a picture, it'll last longer.*

He cautiously took a peek from behind his hands, which never really did much because Lefty had a mind all of his own. Try as hard and as many times as he'd like, Ethan was unable to adequately use his left hand to do much other than unreliably grab (non-glass) things. Lefty was dubbed the "Slayer of Glass" by his family after the Great Glass Fiasco of '95. He most commonly used his hand as a place-holder: a glorified paper weight.

Mrs. Francé stood in front her desk, both eyes focused on Ethan. To his surprise, she cracked one of the most sincere smiles Ethan had seen to date. It touched him in a place he had not previously known. He would need time to properly process what was going on, but he knew in his gut it was good.

"An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun right beside it. The appositive can be short or long 'strings' of words. For example," she instructed, turning toward the board, "My student, Ethan Yates, just asked me to give him the definition of an appositive. See?" writing the sentence as she spoke. Ethan nodded in excitement, "Sure do!"

Bouncing slightly in his chair, he opened his penguin Trapper Keeper, removing his favorite penguin pen. He flipped to the first page. *Blank.* He labeled the piece of paper English Notes: August 26, 1996 and quickly wrote down his teacher's example. "Great. You're a fast learner aren't you?" she questioned. "You could say that," he smiled in response.

"Teacher's Pet!" one of his classmates repeatedly threw, and then another, and another until the sudden chorus ensued. "Enough!" Mrs. Francé judged swiftly, acting just as fast, "I will not tolerate belligerent behavior--" Front-row, Chris' head cocked to the right side, "What's be-lidg.."

"Look it up! I may test you on it." she warned with authority. "Belligerent behavior will not be tolerated in *our* classroom. This classroom values respect amongst its peers. You four," pointing them out. One eye was locked on the pair of boys on the right; the other eye locked on the guy and the girl on the left. "You have been

warned. For the rest of you: I suggest you familiarize yourself with the term belligerent as well. There are definitely more of these kinds of words. Words that carry meaning in the form a poor grades if you don't take them seriously. Poor grades and classroom disturbances will be reported in the form of a note informing your parent or parents of your actions. This note requires one of their signatures and must be returned back to me promptly. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes Ma'am!" The expression of dread and horror quickly revisited the students' faces.

"Lovely! Now, where was I? Oh yes, the book! The book you all will be reading is titled *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. It was first published in 1987. It's a daring tale about one boy's struggles with himself, nature, and in a metaphorical sense, the 'outside world.' I'd like you to keep that in mind as you read the chapters. We will be discussing it in further detail in class."

She paced the front of the class as she spoke, weaving through the maze of students and desks. "Also, as you read, I want you to take notes. Make a list of words you don't know and define them. Hold onto the list. You'll be turning it into me along with your book report. There will be a quiz on the first three chapters next Thursday. Now, come up to my desk and pick up your book. We'll go in reverse order of the roll. Ethan, that means you're up first."

Yes! Ethan walked to the front of the class and peered into the simple cardboard box on Mrs. Francé's desk. The books filled the entire box perfectly. The covers were colorful, soft, and lightly used. The painting of a teenage boy dominated the front cover. The hatchet was a watermark, its hilt spanning most of the teen's face. A simple depiction of mountainous forests at sunset seemed to be swallowing the teen boy.

Ethan picked up the first book on the pile. It was slightly cold, but smooth. It was lightweight and fit nicely in his right hand. *Lefty is NOT allowed to hold this kind of book. He'd bend it, tear it or spill something on it.* He glanced briefly at the inside cover. Stamped in bold, red ink clear as day, it read:

PROPERTY OF MRS. FRANCÉ

A small gridded box was stamped underneath. The box contained the two previous owners' names and the years they were responsible for the book. Beside each name, a red owl wearing a graduation cap was stamped and initialed by a simply magnificently written cursive *AFrancé*

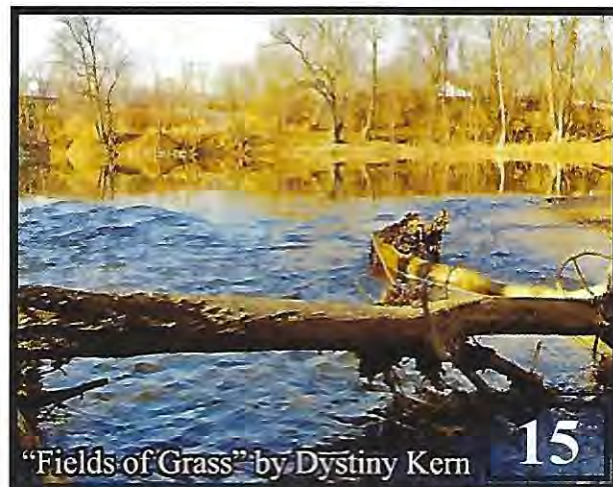
Ethan loved the way Mrs. Francé made her F's instantly. *I love them so much I'm going to start making MY F's like that from now on. Can't wait to go home and practice.* An exceptionally wide grin grew across his face. "Ethan? You can return to your seat. Go ahead and get started. We're reading for the next thirty minutes. Don't forget to put your name and the date in the book please," scooting him away with her hand and a warm smile. "Class, did you hear that?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" Ethan piped along with the class on the way back to his desk.

"Okay, who's next?"

The class was silent ten minutes into reading. Mrs. Francé thumbed through her highlighted and tabbed copy of the book, preparing next Thursday's quiz. She glanced up occasionally to see if anyone was obviously not reading. All of her students seemed engaged. *I hope the rest of the day goes this way.* You could have heard a pin drop by the twenty-eighth minute. Ethan was already on page thirty-three when he ran across a random nothing he found incredibly amusing. *Uh oh, here we go again!* The uncontrollably loud laughter.

It was an embarrassing seventy-five percent nerdy, twenty-five percent painful-sneeze sounding kind of laugh. For the second time within the first hour of sixth grade English, Ethan managed to make a fool out of himself. He sunk slowly into his chair with his forehead on his desk. His mind pleaded for the ability to suddenly become invisible or stealthy like his favorite Ninja Turtle and escape the first of many of his educational "experiences." *This is going to be one helluva long nine-weeks...* He thought, stewing in his embarrassment.



"Fields of Grass" by Dystiny Kern



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"Secluded Falls" by Dystiny Kern

