

To the memory of Samantha Craig, who taught me to love words and to never give up; and to Annabelle Hawks (Age 6) who pulled me from the darkness and whose every word is the purest poetry I've ever heard.

Aside from "This Notebook is nearly full," which has appeared in Cherry Bleeds Magazine, all poems are previously unpublished.

A Quick Note (While we're Okay)

My friend, Samantha, was murdered when I was eighteen years old. It's not every day that a teenager living in a small town like mine can say they lost someone so tragically and so suddenly like that but there it was waiting for me on the front page of the newspaper when I got home one afternoon. You know how when you go through something really heavy like that kind of loss where people tell you all the time "It gets easier to take with time." I think that everyone who says it knows it isn't true but what can you say to someone who has been through something like that? It's a knee jerk reaction to be some kind of help, I guess.

The pain of that single event, whether I knew it or not, had a tremendous impact on the next decade or so of my life that I'm just now starting to shake. You may start to notice that many of these poems are rather raw and rather dark and you will be right on both accounts. You will also notice many references to drinking and drugs, self mutilation and suicide, and once more you won't be imagining things. In gathering these poems together for this book I, at first, had no real theme in mind. All I had was a title I had been carrying with me for a number of years and plenty of poems both old and new to choose from. Once I started to go through the works from over the years I noticed how much I still liked the darker pieces dealing with my then current issues with substance abuse and how explicitly I referenced the feelings that would later explode in one of the worst decisions I've made in my life.

In picking up on all of this I began to piece the works together in the closest I could come to a chronological order. What I wanted to do was to create a time line of where I have been and where I finally wound up: sitting in a hospital room realizing that I didn't want to die. So, if this flimsy book seems tough to take at times just know that the later works included are all pointing towards where I am now. I strive to keep my works as intense as possible because life is intense but the things I'm putting together now are intense in a very different way. There's still darkness and there are still things I wrestle with and I suppose I always will, but now I allow myself to recognize the light and beauty in everything completely.

With that in mind let me give you a glimpse back in time to when the world was black and white....

Harvest Time

She's dead and there's nothing you can do, she's dead, and part of you is in the ground with her. She's dead and you are at an age she never got to reach. She is dead and you are recalling store fronts, bitterly scribbling verses fused around the memory of her voice. She is dead and ten years feels like ten days, she is dead and you don't know what to do and it's all been said before.

Again, Nervous Thunder Moves Across Dead Air

Put your head against the door, this is my nervous breakdown, and listen to my heart as it beats in two from within a supposedly shatter proof shell. This is what it feels like to wait outside in the rain for a greater purpose which never arrives. all awash in a storm of lost opportunities with a permanent look of dread and sickness on a pale, moonlit ghost face. Alone. I watch as more feelings flow downwards into the circles of two souls kept apart merely out of fear of what might have been. Again, I try not to focus on the pain, but its presence is always felt within my heart which aches with each clap of thunder, and my thoughts all echo the puddles which slowly form all around me.

Matters of fate never fail to exclude me once more as they make their plans without informing me first, so go ahead and listen close to my being as it breaks if it'll change a single thing you had in mind. I swear I'll make it all up to you in time, but for now I must seek shelter before this storm, which hangs dark overhead, can have a chance to swallow me up and push me to start anymore fires that I can't seem to extinguish on my own.

Eventual Epitaphs

Sure,
I'll drink from
your flask,
Jesus,
I'll accept
salvation.

Searching In Vain For a Safe Place

Imagine fingers caked in blood and holy water, a sacrilege we're oh, so privileged to be involved in. It's becoming harder and harder to trust your instincts, as we coast across asphalt oceans we stare into the eye of an angry storm which is aimed straight at our little haven, which rests there, just in the distance.

Conversations with the Ghost

Throw the dirt on the celibate daisies, cover the face of beauty with anger. In the shadows of bed sheets, we slice the throats of delicate angels. In the morning I will forget my way, lose myself again in the mirror.

Pink is the New Black

Life leads this busy new street into battle, America is war torn once again. Leaving burnt chasms of murder lust bastardizations, as dry heaving shepherds blast industrial jazz for black market lawyers, alone we walk.

The Liar's Ball

Tinted fatigue poetry, seven months in a cloud of spent embers and a slow diet of faded rainbows. Swallow my eyes into my thoughts, taking moments in as hourglass rotations, and spitting out abused rhymes and ugly rhythms through the aging microphone of indifference. My last lines before finale bedtime stories will only contain the ideals of a losing and lost dream, a simple headache following closely behind a self inflicted migraine of desperate music.

Fumbling Towards a Switch

It is within this bottle that I drink toasts to nothingnesssmoke curling 'round my face, like grey brush strokes tracing burrows from cheek to lips and back. At night I hover over secret typewriters which hum and click with all the words I'm too afraid to speaksoft strings, perhaps stray Miles' blown blues will become wind worn soundtrack to my alone thoughtsno more mischief in life, sad 26 and unstable along highway walking home barefoot drunk and raving with miserable laughter, I will be found here-I will be foundwhere the brook no longer babbles, it merely mumbles as incoherent as I feel.

Waiting on the Higher Tide

A sea change, "everybody out of their costumes, this is a scene change," teachers asked me for more rhyme schemes and a definite rhythm: "too many drug dreams, you treat this assignment like a prison," well, it all seems that your bits of wisdom filed my teeth down and now I nervously chomp pen caps 'till I draw blood.

The View through Lucifer's Wisdom Teeth

Don't waste a single page, spit blood and make it count, sweat and wheeze and crawl into the cracked bathtub for a cigarette, the first of too many to name, and try not to think of all those yesterdays. Just paint the porcelain, lay back and wait for the light show.

By Now, I Should Be Used to the Rolling Blackouts

Guilty bloodstains line nervous sentence fragments, as I crack a comma in half and carve a question mark into my arm, letting little streams of red tape spill out with which to hang myself, and now there are scars all along my paper thin edges, as the pen tip was far too sharp and it sank right through the surface, cutting away to the roots of depression's bitter incisors, the same ones which chomp down with such brutal force upon my brain stem, breaking my vision before suspending me in total darkness for weeks on end.

Crawling Towards the Light

If I sit perfectly still for long enough some new idea, ves-something with a little substance will eventually bubble up into the back of my mind and begin to whisper something approaching stage directions, a guide to the next path, the next thought, the next image for me to capture in both hands and place under a display glass, or perhaps upon a poetic pedestal for the entire world to gather around and look in upon it either in awe, or in absolute horror: the choice is all in the mind of the beholder. all I have to do is draw it to the surface, and wait.

On Escapism

Feel for a pulse, this soul is yours to completeno spaces or line breaks, only truest letters and funeral wreaths for the ones who fade and wither, poetry for battle keep it like a shield and you will be safe. Call this mine shaft a home, this crowded bar an apartment, this bruised and broken bottle tonight's dinner. Batter typewriters in the name of countless angels too beautiful to forget, and too bitter to forgive, thoughts compose a roadmap, follow it forever and you will be free

....and he did eclipse the moon but he neglected the stars

As the sun slowly Out stretched his arms to cast a lack of shadow all over the landscape I am struggling to remain alert. No amount of black coffee or chain smoked cigarettes seems enough to yank my eyelids open just a little wider, to shake me alive and as wild as it takes to approach getting anything else done today other than sitting by idle and watching the gentle picture show that is the world just outside my window.

Running Out of Current

Went on a three day drunk blacked out and never woke up, I was talking to Jesus Christ as he was swimming in my cup. Hunting for hidden treasurex marks the spot, I am who I am but sometimes I wish I was who I'm not, 'cause I'm stuck on a sinking ship rogue waves all around neck deep in this shit that you dug up from the ground, I was feeling desperate took the masthead for my wife: should have second guessed it, she went down with my life. I packed up and headed for the shore and wandered the town in a daze. my friends ask if I'm okay, others think it's just a phase. My whole world is in storage, in the closet safely kept I know you want to visit but it's been a while since I swept, there's dirt beneath my nails but a finger hasn't been raised I just walked out of a hell that was in the middle of being appraised. I know there's love in store, I see it in every dream but patience has become a chore mulling over the thought of what it all means. These boots weren't made for walking,

These boots weren't made for walking, just for waltzing out this door, your mouth's still busy talking but out here I can't hear you anymore.

This Notebook is nearly Full

Raise a glass to the new shape of things, to the new order, to the act of reaching the bottom of this fucking stairwell, so what if you tripped and rolled down the last two flights? Your legs are broken, your ribs exposed, organs spilling out all over the place, but your arms maintain some semblance of strength, so dig those nails into the wood frame, boy, and start climbing back to the top: let's get it right this time, what do ya say?

Reading Matter

Heart and heat flutters with the mild fluctuations of these currents forever running beneath my dirty feet in the most dissonant of tones which feel simultaneously distant and very familiar to these battered ears right now, a source of comfort and a means of exorcising a rage which can't be allowed to manifest any longer. So you let it all out through the headphones clamped in a tight death grip around your skull and silently join in on the screams as you scratch this notebook dirge onto a filthy page and turn your head to spit out the shells from the deepest wounds inflicted by now empty rifles. Later on the war drums will slap back at the boot stomps you make along the sidewalk en route to your favorite filthy bar, it's not abandonmentjust need some time alone to think/drink/not speak, just for an hour or so, baby, then I swear I'll come home.

I'll climb the stairs only to collapse onto the broken couch with tiniest angel tucked in my arms as all those thrashing field songs continue bouncing in my head until I clear my throat and reimagine one as a gentle lullaby... within minutes she's amused and asleep, yet I am still awake with these songs, these words. this child, these four walls, and what is a bed for but simply wasting half of one's life away? The sun starts to peer in and it is now time for my forceful exit to the waking world, escaping these dreaded mornings with their chipper asshole mentality, to sleepto dreamto wake again to a different kind of Earth: that of the mid afternoonand it is beautiful to be me.

Theme from a Bar Stool

I walked in just in time to see someone get the toss, "the lunatic is in the grass," I will drink until I achieve some kind of temporary numbness from electronic messages sent telepathically to someone else's heart, something approaching brain damage. Singing songs to forget, I shout into the night of my truest regrets, and I trace a name into the top and encase it in a broken bottle just to see if you even bleed when the pain pricks your skin with its sharpest of edges: psychic, or otherwise.

I have been surrounded by lies all along, and my voice, alone, will bring these walls crashing down. You used to define perfection, but now, as I sit on my barstool, I think I know you better than that.

Somewhere Between Nostalgia and Night Terrors

Sitting in your kitchen with last crescendos of TV Eye fading into thin air, I was only sixteena street walking cheetah with a heart full of chewed glass with a limp in my step and that tired old grin glued to my lips with smoke spilling out of both corners, a nightmare screaming somewhere in my memory, and overflowing into my waking vision. Hallucinatory film strips eclipse the walls of my periphery, and now I know that hindsight is far more than 20/20 as the skyline explodes before crashing downward in distant shards of song and misery, collapsing with an echoed thud and catching a bystander by total surprise.

He hits the pavement hard and swallows teeth and bile, blood forming stray pools on either side of what was once his face but is now crushed well beyond the realm of recognition somewhere beneath the imposing mass that was mere moments ago one with the clouds, and all I can manage as some attempt at acknowledgement of this strange trapeze act is to utter a simple "Humph!" before sidestepping the unexpected obstacle, and not even once looking back.

8:45 am Blues

Gotta Open tomorrow, wine floods right through me, who gives a fuck? Two glasses and I'm fine, eat dinner, smoke too much: dream.

A Writer at Dusk

Darkened crystal seeds drop downwards from frozen, cracked and broken limbs on first breaths of winter. they were once perched skyward, yet now find themselves bitterly lining the forest floor with the empty promises of a new life. The fingers of their mother inch upwards in an effort to choke back the coming cold, but they are stopped short by a fever hanging desperate in the air. and all that I can do is sit here, my back to a tree's trunk and write about this dull ache which screams from within.

Things Witnessed Through Tiny Windows

These are the words of the sidewalks as they crumble into asphalt oceans only to be swallowed up by the passing cars, and it is within this space where I can finally over think every little thing. Self conscious and still breathing, I am building bridges for the bonfire.

Taking the Witness Stand

There is no spiritual pause in my stance, no God in the way that I speak, I just spit and crawl from one end of this room to another and as day bleeds into night I sleep, but do not dream. I am far too concerned with my guilty misgivings to allow myself any sort of rebirth or even a mental cleansing. No. I use scars as roadblocks, but nothing can ever be halted from within. Perhaps I lean too easily on these pages of piss stain poetry to ever give myself a break, but besides, I cannot control what happens between the nine to five hours, I can only hope to control the weather.

Counting Broken Teeth

There are pirate ships along the crystal seas flying tattered sails of bloodstained sheets alongside fluttering flags of torn ideas with their wisdom bent in half by plastic behavior patterns, and all these words, so loud in their deadening silence, that they weave a tapestry of bruises along a fleshy spirit cocoon. You bit too deeply upon the tongues of the vampires before swallowing the very idea of running.

Fountains of Misfortune

Melt these mountains of city blocks downwards, on and on they go, cold and endless, and then swallow the spent embers from where the smoke builds palaces in the clouds as pathways begin to circle your mouth and mind. forming roads of social injustice and indulgence in an overdose of bitter conversation starters as a kind of cover letter to introduce any stray survivors to the new world order. Cast aside any doubts and consume this serum in a single dose, anymore and your mind couldn't take it, it'd begin battling itself until it completely crumbled lifelessly into the sea that was once a sidewalk, all at once forcing you to finally open your eyes to all the tiny details which are now exposed to the harsh yet pure elements of truth: there is no beauty without a hint of destruction.

Twenty Seven Stories Up Looking Twenty Seven Stories Down

When the wind blows through my hair like this, it reminds me of a time when we were forever tattooed to that street, moving along sidewalks stiff as chess pieces, wide eyed and mystified by the emptiness of small town breathing, and the endless possibilities that we all dreamed lay in waiting just outside the city limits. Now my lips move but don't even know the words to these silent songs stabbed deep into my frontal lobe as the headphones hum along but the notes which come through are twisted, incoherent and as fuzzy as distant hallucinations. I recall the smoke twirling around your eyelashes as it crawled from lips to sky, all lit up in liquor and pine needles to reflect the trembling sunlight we're trying so hard to ignore, twilightsing along with me.

Untitled

A live-in wife slips into my mind, frees me from the reins of this neurotic night terror and delivers me unto simple daydream. Grab onto sharp edges to gash my wrists and flood this earth with broken promises, and at day break, the day breaks my spine and composes bitter poetry in my blood.

Capture and Release

"The way the smoke curls around your sun kissed eyelids reminds me of the songs that only the children of a certain place can recall..."

She sings these to herself from the back seat of the wagon carrying her off to meet a newly unsealed fate as a means of some sort of recognition, an acceptance of what may only be obvious to the most cautious of observers. the facts are all there, laid out and undressed before her. She can't believe they loosened the shackles so she could seek solace in cigarettes, she wasn't even a smoker until five minutes earlier when she discovered the unopened pack in her borrowed jacket and whispered of the need for a match. The phrase

"any last requests" only proceeded this moment in an implied manner, it had clung to the air of every passing second even before they had tracked her down, so desperate and lost on that winter sidewalk all dolled up in dirty snowfall, broken benches and bus stops for a route no one ever takes anymore these days. There's nowhere left to go anyway, except for away. Away from here... Away from now...

...and it is with that thought that the familiar image of the plain and imposing white of the hospital appeared before her, just up that hill... just out of reach... like so many lost and unwanted things.

As the Frost First Appears

Guilty bloodstains line nervous sentence fragments as I crack a comma in half and carve a question mark into my arm, letting little streams of red tape spill out with which to hang myself. There are so many scars along your paper thin edges as the pen tip was far too sharp and it slipped right through the surface, carving away at the roots of depression's bitter incisors, the same ones which chomp down with such brute force upon your brainstem, breaking apart your vision before suspending you in total darkness for weeks on end.

Psych Ward Blues

A few days on lock down for things I barely recall, the pain of previous ten years finally getting the better of me, swallowing me like tidal waves and sucking me to the bottom of whirlpools. My head so twistedthoughts distorted to the point of total blurs, total blues: I survived. where to, now? What path should I move down? Do I travel? Do I remain? Something has to change, the pills I take move away the clouds, and let the sunshine in. I will find my path-I will do the math, before I finally drift off into the gentle ocean. Splish-sploosh-splash

Ted Jackins is 30 years old and lives in Statesville, North Carolina. His work has appeared in Cherry Bleeds, Red Fez, Flash Fiction World and Zygote in My Coffee. He intends to spend the next year working on his first novel about his years in the dark. He has been clean and sober for three years.

When the World was Black and White

Ted Jackins

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Compact Discs: Man's Franche Vice the dame tapes, Kaypers the final (MFV Indicains), Waeds and Finwers the beauty & the decolation, The Second Axing Samething is Sweating, The Second Axing Use in Alexka, Pethra & Kaypers Use at Cale Aloha, Printees

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