When the World was Black and White

Ted Jackins
Scars Publications
2013 chapbook
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Aside from “This Notebook is nearly full,” which has appeared in Cherry Bleeds Magazine, all poems are previously unpublished.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
nothingness-
smoke 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 speak-
soft strings,
perhaps stray Miles’
blown blues will
become wind worn
soundtrack to my alone
thoughts-
no 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 found-
where the brook no longer
babbles,
no,
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,
yes-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 complete-
no 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 treasure-
x 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,
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 abandonment—
just 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 sleep-
to dream-
to wake again to a
different kind of Earth:
that of the mid afternoon-
and 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 sixteen-
a 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,
twilight-
sing 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
twisted-
thoughts 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.
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Children, Churches and Disabilities (local magazine), founded June 1992; Drawn in the Dirt: utilitarian supplement in 1994, founded 2008

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