

STORIES from the **HEARTLAND**

By Ned Eckhardt

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...Ned Eckhardt poetry has a hauntingly loving spirit. His 'Stories from the Heartland' are riveting, their rhyme schemes exquisite. "It's a quick, hard ride, my friend / From the Res to the Stone Hotel. / Thick bars and angry brothers / Riding the wind that blows through hell" and, or "Time is the hungry demon / That eats our tattooed lives. / Tight walls and jangled nerves, / It's the beast The Man swears by" 'Slippery Spark': "Too many nights we meet / When the whiskey spins my mind. / Down a long, dark hall of hurt, / She helps me to unwind." "My leather jacket's ripped, / Don't wear it much these days. / The patches fading slowly, / I'm a Nomad in decay" The 'The Logger and the Lady' maybe my favourite but it is hard to chose, "Daybreak is the sweet time / Of my Emma Rose's day / We watch the sun rise up / Before we're on our way" What's yours? ...and to think he submitted his works on the very last day... mostly the "katydids" did it for me...Ned's another one for the ASMR meter—(Spacing is poet's own.)*

Stories from the Heartland

Stone Winds

*Can the Spirit hear me singing
On my Turtle Island stone?
My wolf howls to the sunset
Beat the drum for Crane and Loon*

It's a quick, hard ride, my friend
From the Res to the Stone Hotel.
Thick bars and angry brothers
Riding the wind that blows through hell

The beer in the mornin'
Drove up my big mistake.
The Judge said fifteen long ones

Redbones get no special breaks.

But music rides that dark wind
Casts a Redbone singer's spell.
Can it keep me breathin', brother?
My song that blows through hell?

Time is the hungry demon
That eats our tattooed lives.
Tight walls and jangled nerves,
It's the beast The Man swears by

I'll play a song that digs
Down deep in your chest and cell.
I'll pluck my Juice Card strings
Chasing the wind that blows through hell.

*Can the Spirit hear me singing
On my Turtle Island stone?
My wolf howls to the sunset
Light the fires for Crane and Loon*

I see the broken lives.
Eyes that stare and do not see.
Forgotten fires and pow wows,
Tough guys longing to be free

Nobody did the crime
That bought us all this grief.
Walkin' circles round your mind,
A half-breed they call thief

This life bleeds out both souls.
It's a truth I can't ignore.
Sweetgrass for Goose and Bear
On my smokey lost Lake shore

*Can the Spirit hear me singing
On my Turtle Island stone?
My wolf howls to the sunset,
Play the pipes for Crane and Loon*

My music carves a notch
In the endless yard patrol.
Someday I'll get the Keys
To free my angry soul

I'll check out soon, my brother.
From the cold, damp Stone Hotel.
Is there life for a lost Ojibwe
Riding the wind that blows through hell?

Slippery Spark

Too many nights we meet
When the whiskey spins my mind.
Down a long, dark hall of hurt,
She helps me to unwind.

We were always rebel lovers,
Out of bounds in trailer parks.
Was she ever mine, I wonder,
How'd we lose that slippery spark?

We cruised the roads all night.
Two crazy outlaw kids.
Then lay in the sand and grass
And pinched the Katydids

*Her eyes saw life on fire.
Her smiles were my last hope.
..... Slipping away in the Jack.
Lost in a drifting smoke*

We wore our favorite colors,
Back warmers woven tight.
Can I forget the love
We caught those wild, wet nights?

Just one more long, cold taste,
Single Jack on the rocks.
I feel her breath behind me,
When I turn, her face is lost.

She was always one step faster,
So I never made the grade.
Didn't have the life she needed.
I knew she'd never stay.

*Her eyes saw life on fire.
Her smiles were my last hope.*

*..... Slipping away in the Jack.
Lost in a drifting smoke*

One day the bed was empty.
I was lost for a while. In pain.
Waited ten years on the hope
She'd show up high again.

But all I got was whiskey
In my cold, damp trailer park.
Bike's been broke for weeks.
Can't chase our slippery spark.

My leather jacket's ripped,
Don't wear it much these days.
The patches fading slowly,
I'm a Nomad in decay

Where are those outlaw days?
Why'd our good times hit the skids?
The sand and grass were ours
But we lost the Katydid

*Her eyes saw life on fire.
Her smiles lit the trailer park.
..... Slipping away in the Jack,
I need our slippery spark.*

*But there's only whiskey dreams,
Down a long, dark hall of hurt.
I turn, she stares for a moment,
..... Then lost in a drifting smoke*

The Logger and the Lady

Daybreak is the sweet time
Of my Emma Rose's day
We watch the sun rise up
Before we're on our way

I'll slip my hand in hers
Put a kiss inside her lips
She'll smile and squeeze my heart
Love can't be more than this

But the times are rough and ready
Jobs seem to come and go
We still back down the wolf
But gettin 'ahead is slow

*Sometimes I hear her laughing
Sometimes I see her cry
Sometimes my heart spins wildly
My love will never die*

My Emma Rose smiles softly
She'll make it through the day
I've got some loggin' work
She'll clean a house for pay

Daybreak's still a memory
That quiet golden time
We dream of cars and Katydid's
We'll touch our lonely minds

The chainsaw runs my life
Notches drop the giant pines
The mill eats logs for breakfast
Chipper's always on my mind

My Stiehl's been bucking hard woods
Shag bark hickories on the skids
The jig cart never stops
Double ax is on my mind

My Emma Rose is strong
Leans hard to clean the floor
The beds and towels need changin'
She scrubs the dirt hardcore

It's hard to stand the smell
Those chemicals burn deep
Her hands are raw and red
Her nails are cracked for keeps

She'll polish all the silver
Shine the windows. Do some chores
The sofas need deep cleanin'
But at six she's out the door

Sometimes I hear her laughing

*Sometimes I see her cry
Sometimes my heart spins wildly
My love will never die*

We're beat when day is over
Sometimes we'll share a beer
Two worn out smiles remind us
Daybreak will soon be here.

Her hair slides through my fingers
And I pray we'll be OK
I hate to chase the money
But that's life another day

The nights are short and fast
Been doin' this too long
We crawl into the covers
The one place we belong

Fresh Daybreak lights mornin'
Opens up our weary hearts
Puts life back into sadness
Gives love a brand new start.

Emma Rose's gentle touch
A quick kiss Then we're out.
I chase the slabs and boards
She scrubs the floors no doubt

We find our time together
Spin gold out of yesterday
Our Daybreaks bind us both
It will always be that way.

THE POET SPEAKS... *"Tales from the Heartland" emerged from a desire to capture the thoughts, feelings, and frustrations of folks whose lives unfold in obscurity. These are the people who don't have a voice in our larger mediated world. There is nobility in grinding a life out of low-paying jobs, prison time, motorcycle romances, trailer parks, auto body shops, and dangerous work.*

There is beauty in the lives of folks who live in abandonment in rural America. People who don't live there call it the Heartland. The people who do live there are usually too involved in survival to step back and see a bigger picture. These hard scrabble folks: farmers, tradesmen, cleaners, homemakers rarely have a voice. Country, folk, and gospel music try to capture their lives, and many times do.

But poetry offers more. It allows you to be part of the experience. A poem is a two-way street where it's easy to wrap the poem's world around yourself and feel recognized. When I write about these forgotten Americans I feel their pain and their pleasures. I've met many of them and honor their struggles and successes.

But poetry on the printed page digs a little deeper. It draws you into your own life. Poetry let's you add your experiences and feelings to the story. Then leaves some time for reflection.

The three poems here are simple in form. The rhyme scheme is every other line, the meter mostly iambic. No big words or tangled thoughts. But the gateways to deep feelings are there. Can I hear music with words? Sure. Hope you hear your own music as you read these tales of the Heartland.

Stone Winds

Native Americans have a special bond with nature. It's in their genes. Their history is tragic and living on reservations is unfair and numbing. But the Ojibwe in Stone Winds is enduring. His music and memories carry him through the boredom and terror of prison life. The fact he can see the larger picture where his life will someday fit somewhere helps him carry on and gives him hope. Prison life rarely gets a poem.

Slippery Spark

Everyone's been jilted. Lost their love because something went wrong. In the rural Heartland the teenage years are often the best. First booze and first loves. Motorcycles and freedom. But then life usually closes in and those first loves slip away. But no-one ever forgets a first love. Especially when whiskey triggers the memories. Even though you live in a trailer park, your bike is broke, and you're drinking too much, the memory keeps you going....

The Logger and the Lady

For this couple the best part of the day is the early morning. Daybreak. That's when they feel the strongest and most passionate. Once the hardscrabble work day begins it takes everything you got to push your way through it. In the evening they're beat. Not much energy left. But the morning is their time. Logging and cleaning houses are two of the hardest jobs out there. It's nice to celebrate their love for each other. Their shared life is challenging, hard, and beautiful.

AUTHOR BIO: Ned Eckhardt is a documentarian and writer based in northern Connecticut. He began his writing career as a playwright in New York City and created a successful career in the writing, teaching, and visual arts.

Recent Highlights

Feature Films and Television

He has recently written a series of Feature Film scripts, one of which, *Redbone*, has won Best Script at three film festivals: Woods Hole Film Festival (2016), London International Filmmakers Festival (2017), and Canadian Diversity Film Festival (2016).

Redbone has also been adapted into a pilot episode for a TV mini-series, *Backroads*.

Another Feature Film script, *Porky C*, has been adapted into a full-length play that is currently being considered for production by Independent

Theaters and Universities.

Plays, Librettos, Lyrics, and Music Videos

He has written lyrics and edited music videos for many musical groups (*Pretty Poison, Faces of Pictures, The Blenders, and Golden Spike*).

Recently, he has written the book and lyrics (23 songs) for a full length, musical stage play (*IMP*). He is on the waiting list for the Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild Artists Residency where he will work with a composer on the score for *IMP* during the summer of 2021.

He has also written librettos for arias with four composers at the Spicy Opera Institute's Mezzo Showcase (2020), and a 10-minute libretto for The Boston Opera Collaborative (2020).

He recently was selected the "Playwright of the Month" (January 2021) by the *New York City Playwrights Association* for his One Act Play "Love Me Back." The play was featured and published in their January 2021 blog. Another monologue "Buttercup's Non-Gucci Makeover" was featured on the theatrical website Loud Voices. Silent Streets.

Books

He has published two books on Documentary Film Production: *Documentary Filmmakers Handbook*, (McFarland Press 2012) and *How to Make Documentary Films and Digital Video* (Southern Illinois University Press 2016).

Atlantic City Film Festival

He has been a member of the Board of Directors for ten years. (2011 - 2021). This small Film Festival has been the showcase for over 300 emerging and independent filmmakers, as well as hundreds of writers, actors, critics, and producers.