



Voices of the Plains

stories and songs from Colorado's High Plains

Loveland - Joes - Sterling - Denver

“Human life depends on the stories we tell.”

(Jack Zipes - The Cultural Evolution of Storytelling and Fairy Tales, 2012.)

Given the manner in which our state is popularly portrayed, first-time visitors can be surprised to learn that Colorado, in addition to being home to great skiing and autumnal aspen, is half-prairie. Specifically, we're talking about the vast swath of flat, treeless, dry, windy, and sparsely populated land that people habitually dread when they drive eastward from Denver¹.

Of even greater surprise is that fact that, in spite of its appearance, this landscape is teeming with wildlife, wild weather, and wild stories.

Voices of the Plains is our attempt to collect some of the great -- and sometimes tall -- tales that float thru the prairie like dandelion fur. Following the examples of Allan Lomax and other musicologists, and with the cooperation of the bARTer Collective, we drove a mobile recording studio and several antique typewriters to four different locations² scattered about the Colorado High Plains. We then tried to convince strangers to speak into a microphone, peck at a manual typewriter, or strum a guitar.

It's not easy to walk into the back of a box truck and spontaneously spin a coherent tale. Nor is it easy to sit across from a hunt-and-peck transcriptionist at a manual typewriter in the middle of a Beet Festival and say something true and good. Easy or not, people were game. Give a person a sympathetic audience and amazing things can happen.

In her book *Reclaiming Conversation*, Sherry Turkle writes, “We live in a technological reality where we are always communicating and yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection... [B]athing ourselves in conversation with others who are actually present rather than connecting with everyone all the time through shimmering screens is where we will find both empathy for others and our own reflective self-awareness.”

Voices of the Plains taps into this human need for connection. By engaging people in face-to-face conversation, and by offering them the tactile experience of pressing the buttons on manual typewriters, we provide a place where people can be fully present and vulnerable, a place that welcomes unedited emotion.

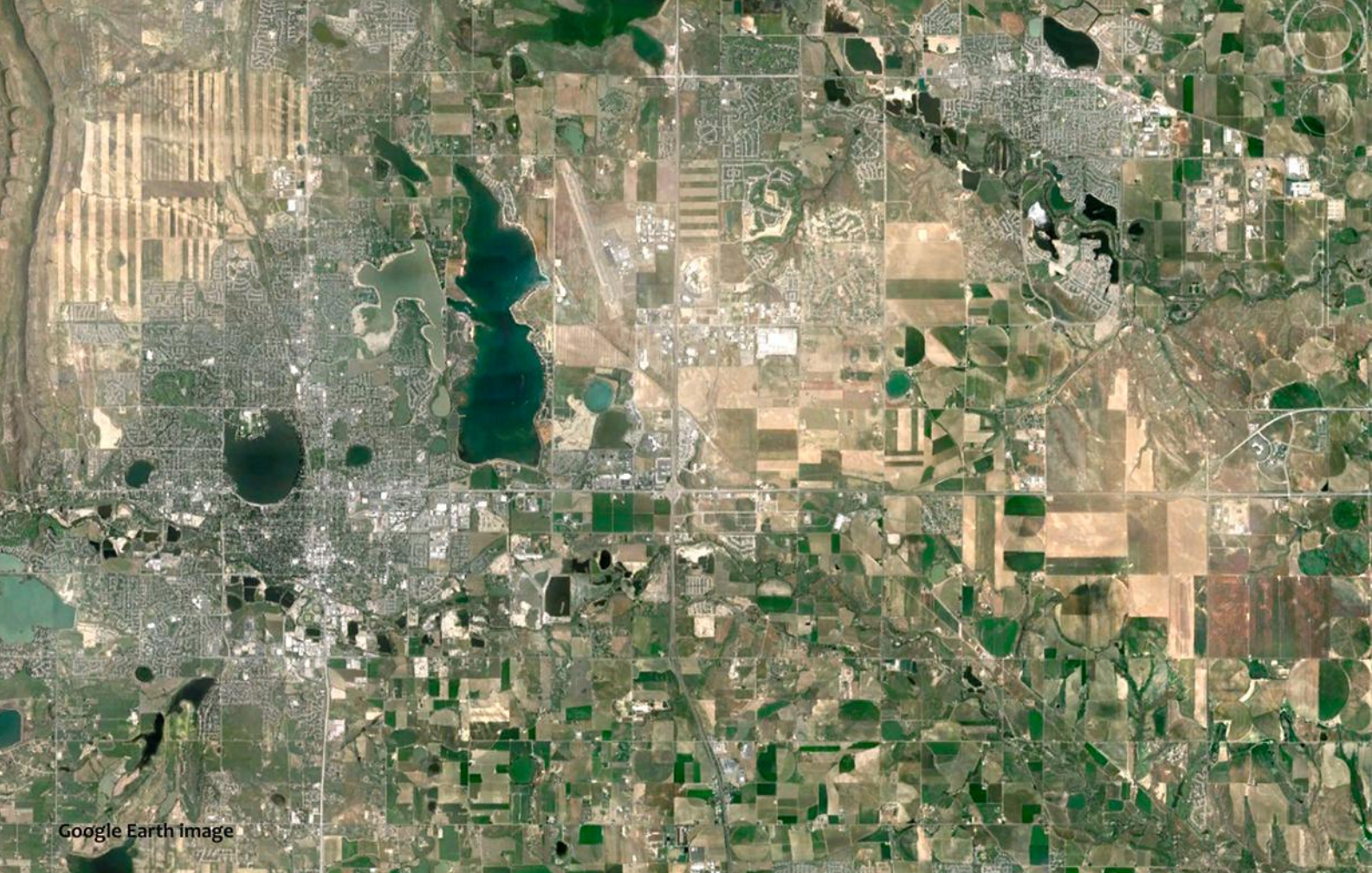
The art of the story is definitely thriving on the High Plains. This was not surprising in rural Colorado, where there are fewer distractions, fewer memes and tweets and viral sensations, and people still sit in a circle and shoot the breeze. But in the city of Denver, where distractions lurk around every corner and within every pocket phone, there was every reason to believe that The Story would be in decline. Maybe, maybe not. If so, we didn't see it.

In sharing this collection of authentic, spontaneous expression we hope to pass on the empathy and intimacy gained in our process. An understanding of the range of experiences that make up the people of the High Plains, as told by those people.

1-In fact, Denver is part of the prairie. Even though it's within sight of the Rockies, and even though the grass has been replaced by streets and buildings and football fields, the Queen City of the Plains is most decidedly part of that lee-side chunk of real estate that's second only to eastern Florida when it comes to frequency and severity of thunderstorms.

2-Loveland, Joes, Sterling, and Denver.





Loveland, Colorado
Gallery 970
JUNE 5 2015

The city of Loveland is often thought of as a mountain town because it's a popular entry way to Rocky Mountain National Park. However, Loveland is on the high plains at the base of the mountains and lies in a fertile farm area, irrigated by the Colorado– Big Thompson project (diverting water from the Colorado River).

It is a processing and shipping center for sugar beets, grains, fruits and vegetables, beans, and livestock. The city also produces building materials; electrical, computer, and medical equipment; and chemicals.

We joined Gallery 970 for the opening of the art show 'On the Land'. A Wendell Berry inspired show; "Until we understand what the land is, we are at odds with everything we touch." Which is a concept we really connect with.

The art opening was a fun filled family event with art, food and music. We pulled the BARter Collective mobile recording studio alongside the gallery and everyone played along.





Once there was
a boy eating cheese
sticks while he waited for his
friend





I moved into a house because of the storms.
When I saw the tornado sky, I was totally freaked
out. Daddy said it would be okay. There was a
tornado nearby, by it wasnt going to get us.

Daddy yelled.: Theres a tornado outside!

but it was going th other way. I remember
that tornado made a lot of puddles. It rained
for a long time. Past bedtime. When I woke up,,
it wasnt raining anymore, but ther were lots
of puddles.

I can remember I caught 4 or five
frogs. I caught flies for them.

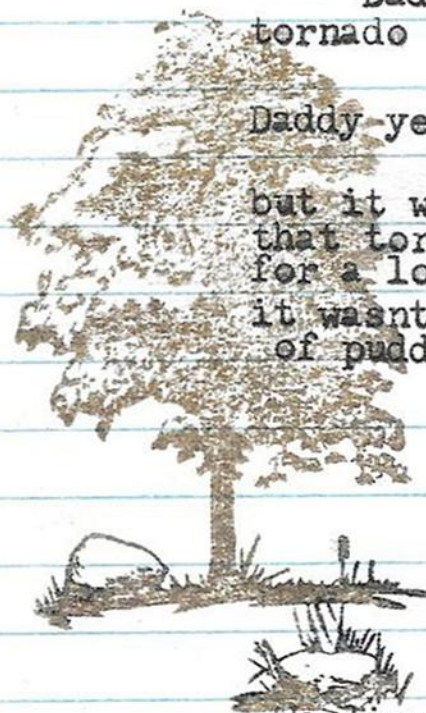
I liked watching their tongues.

Those were red eyed tree frogs.

I let them go.

We lived on county road.

by: Leah 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old
October 9th





Then a window Opened up

Driving back from Michigan, There was a storm
rolling in. I actually had to stay in Iowa.

Surrounded by storms.

Then a window open up. It was just a little
bit ahead of me.

Clearness.

I think the angels brought me home.

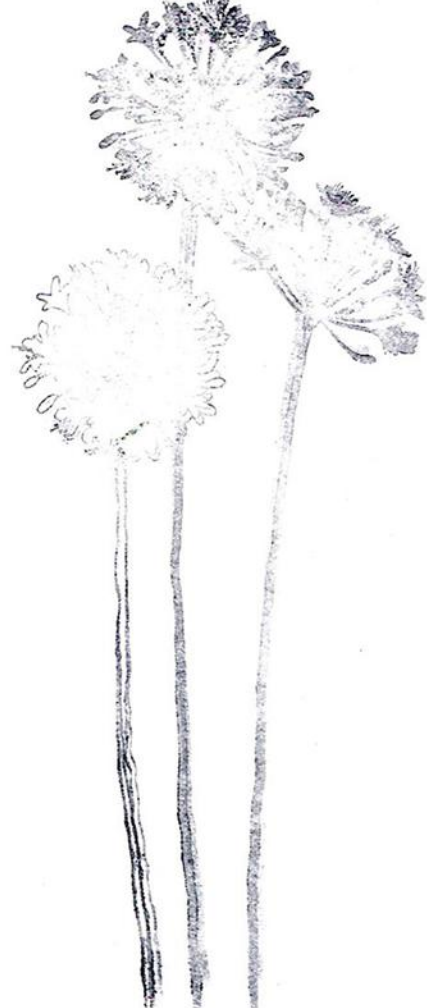
I came home. 20 inches of snow. No work.
in Boulder.

Kim





Old fashioned,
I love to do a lot
of things.





this is a bird story.

i like feeding them sunflower seeds. i like feeding birds because they are cute. i feed the birds so they visit my house.

i like blue jays but they don't come to my house, sometimes they come to our cabin in red feathers.





Joes, Colorado

Grassroots Community Center

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015

Joes is located in southern Yuma County about 40 miles west of the Kansas border where the population density is approximately 4 people per square mile, among the most sparsely populated areas in the continental United States, and is currently experiencing depopulation.

Eastern Colorado is largely farmland, with many small farming communities. The major cash crops of the area are corn, wheat, hay, oats, and soybeans. There is also significant livestock farming. Over 90% of the farms in Eastern Colorado are family farms.

Grassroots Community Center is on Highway 36 and serves 3 local towns: Cope, Joes and Kirk. The combined population of all 3 towns is approximately 300. We visited Grassroots during the Highway 36 Treasure Hunt and local music night. The Denver music project Detour, featuring the band the Flobots, joined us with their similar goal of community song sharing.





Weather is Serious

There was a group of us pulling out a giant tree stump.

There was a tractor, front loader, several pickups and lots of beer. as I was shoveling dirt I hear mention of the big cloud moving in. Then by the time I looked up from my dirt pile I was the only thing left out. Wow, I thought, people sure do get scared of clouds. As I drove home I began to understand, gunning my truck and only going 20mph into the scariest head wind I,ve ever seen. Ahhh, now I get it.





When I Was 6 Years Old

My job was to get down in the well

They would lower me down *

I guess 10 or 15 feet.

Since I was small - the smallest I had
to go down there. I would fill the bucket up
with dirt and send it up. Sometimes it took
all day.

truth is I hated it.

those damn water dogs. every morning I had
to fish out at least three of those suckers
slimy sticky slippery - they gave me the
heebie jeebies.

anyway, that's what I did when I was
six years old

-Perk

(jim perkins with sue perkin



SEP 8 1 2015



One of the most unnerving days of my life involved the plains of eastern Colorado. After I graduated high school in Ft Collins in 1986 my mom moved to Lamar to teach elementary school. One Christmas when I came home from college she picked me up at Stapleton airport, and we started the drive back to Lamar. I drove, and my mom gladly rode in the passenger seat. Just south of Denver on Hwy 287, it began to snow. The snow turned heavy and then to a blizzard. As we continued south of Lamar through Kit Carson the snow was so heavy I couldn't see the road. I remember my mom asking how I was doing but I was so nervous I couldn't answer. You don't realize how dark it is outside the city until you drive three hours through an eastern Colorado snowstorm.



The Story of the Dowsing Witch

It was the early 70s and ah this family came in. They moved to these parts. They were from somewhere with lots o water like Florida. They had the idea to homestead...The Buchtells

They went on and built a gigantic house one of those with a seven car garage. 120,000 \$ or more. It was time to drill the well and they called on none other than Rich Mead, master of water, master of drills. Sadly Rich relayed no water here. He proceeded to drill three out. Nothing but dirty dirt.

That's when they hired a dowsing witch.

The dowsing witch walked the entire area of the land with here diviner's stick. She found a spot the diving stick where there was water. When they dug down...sure enough
NO water...

...nope, it was oil.

the Buchtells struck it rich -b then moved away



Colorado

When I was four and a half years old my father got a new job and it was time to move to a place called Colorado. I didn't want to leave Texas so I made a plan. On moving day I would climb the trees in the backyard and refuse to come down.

When moving day finally came I lost my resolve. Instead of climbing the trees I hugged each one of them while the girls who live across the street giggled with my younger brother. I was jealous of him because he got to stay a week longer than me and drive up with my grandparents and my dog Bernie.

I left a bucket of acorns in the backyard. ~~W~~ I had been collecting them since I could walk. When my father and I got to Colorado my mother sent us a picture of a squirrel on the side of the bucket, eating one of the acorns.



Sterling, Colorado

Sugar Beet Days

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

Sterling, in the northeastern plains on the South Platte River, is a residential and agricultural community with industrial and commercial development increasing. Population is approximately 7,800. Fun fact: Mary Sawyer, whose pet lamb was the inspiration for the poem, “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, was born in Sterling in 1806.

We joined Colorado Creative Industries’ project Detour in Sterling for the Sugar Beet Days and Pedal the Plains bike event. Detour joins touring musicians with communities across Colorado in song-sharing workshops. Sugar Beet Days celebrates the 80 years (1905-1985) the Sterling Sugar Beet Factory operated, harvest time, and the hardworking people of Northeastern Colorado. Pedal the Plains is a cycling event celebrating the agricultural roots and frontier heritage of Colorado’s Eastern Plains.





Supper at sunset



On the parairie I serve a supper with linnens and local food.
Ive nbeen here in Sterling for 4i years and I love it.

My husband is a biology teacher and talks about agriculture and history. We include our story about the dinosaur fossile we found at our ranh. this use to be an ocean. Imagind that. Things change. Ilove iy

I love it out here. I love my husband so much too but dont tell him that.

By Peggy, from Sterling





Smith-Corona

SEP 25 2015

Prarie Woman

Oftem times folks think that women out here on the plains hold more traditional roles only. That is not true anymore.

My daughter just started babysitting for a woman because s he just had her 3rd child and can no longer manage all the children and her fully operational grain farming operation. She does it all by herself, growing corn and wheat.

Another lady I know is single and is a rancher, moving the cattle, building fences, birthing the calfs, everythingall by herself. And both these women are just a few miles out of Sterling.

by Rebecca



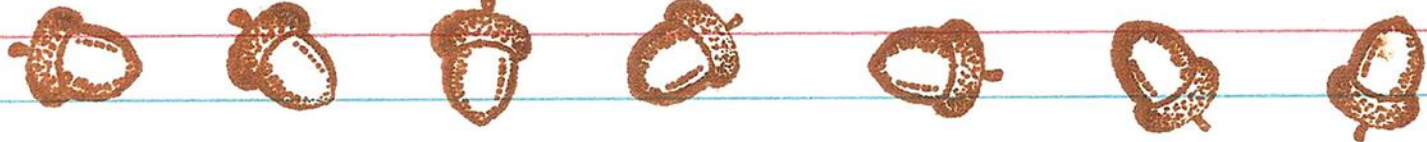


this short story involves a Jackrabbit. Contrary to popular opinion, his name was not Jack. HER name was Jaqueline, and she was the fastest goshdarn Jackrabbit in all of Yuma County. She had been clocked at a cool 45.7 miles per hour at the State Championships in '94 and had aspirations to Compete at the Bunny Olympics in '96 which were to be held in Hamburg, Germany at the Red Light District where the Beatles used to rock the house. Anyway. Jaqueline decided one day that she was going to set an example for young female bunnies everywhere (NOT just Yuma Co., mind you) and break her own land speed record. The moral (haha) of the story is that She DID break her own landspeed record by 904 mph that fateful day and she did so because she fucking BELIEVED in herself, goddammit. She set a goal and she achieved it with ha rd work and practice and a belief in her bunny self. Do the same, kids. THE

[illegible]

collective

ABSOLUTELY NO MONEY
ACCEPTED

A decorative border at the top of the page features seven acorns arranged horizontally. Each acorn is brown with a textured cap and a smooth, light-colored nut. They are positioned along a red horizontal line, with blue horizontal lines above and below them.

The first time I visited Yuma CO, I didn't know where I was. In 1990 I started graduate school in Boulder. I lived with a friend and another friend of his I'd never met. The friend I'd never met was named Thom. Thom and I had basketball as a common interest and I remember spending hours at the rec center playing pickup games with Thom. Thom died in a plane crash in southeast Asia later that year. I didn't attend his memorial service but a few months later wanted to visit his gravesite. Our common friend drew me a map telling me what exits to take from I70. I followed those directions without any idea where I was going. I knew Thom was from Joes but I didn't really know where Joes was. I also knew he wasn't buried in Joes but in a nearby town. I visited Thom's grave without knowing I was in Yuma. I learned that years later when I married a woman from Yuma and visited the same cemetery for her grandfather's funeral.



Easy Going Cops

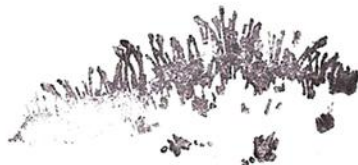
We would go out drinkinga anf if the cop pulled you over they would just send you home. Sometimes my mom would call the pholice and ask them if they saw me would they send me home.

though the time I was so drunk I hit the coyote on the dirt road and rolled the car several times in the dith it got a bit more complicated.

This was in Holyoke. Everyone knew each other.
often your parents would arrive before the ambulance just by the word flying around fast,

This was before cell phones.

by Lena





Denver, Colorado
Denver Art Museum
SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

Denver is located in the South Platte River Valley in the High Plains at the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Denver has also been known historically as the Queen City of the Plains because of its important role in the agricultural industry of the High Plains region in eastern Colorado.

Denver, the largest city in the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains area (population 665,000), serves as a regional hub in wholesaling, finance, and transportation. Much of its industry—such as grain milling, beet sugar refining, and meat packing—consists of processing farm and ranch products from the surrounding area.

We were invited to be a part of Denver Art Museum's plaza programming. We parked the truck and set up our type-writers in front of the museum for an afternoon and night where we had the opportunity to meet and talk with a wide variety of fascinating folks.





BARTER
collective

Voices of the Plains
record a song or tell a story

TR... collective & Sparky the Dog Records

NO MORE GUSHERS
AS USUAL

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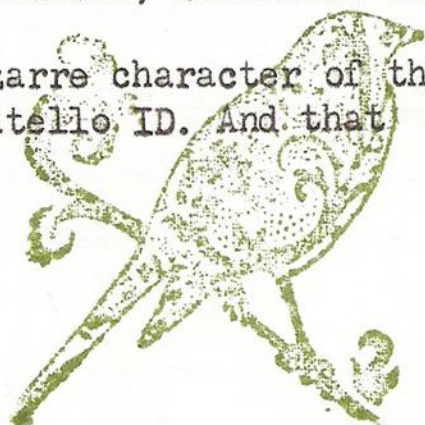
corn



Grampa Jerry's Clown Museum

A few years ago, I took my daughters to the museums on the Eastern plains. We saw the telephone operators' museum, an old jail, the Burlington carousel museum and finally we stopped at Grampa Jerry's. It is more hoard than museum, narrow rows of tall shelves holding an indiscriminate collection of equal parts antiques, flea market stuff and plastic cups from the last Barnum & Bailey trip to Denver. It is a collection both deeply disturbing and whimsical, equal parts vintage Saturday morning cartoons and Stephen King. It is so droll that clowns are popularly seen as beloved by children, when most kids are terrified of them.

The only museum that even came close to the bizarre character of the clown museum is the new Museum of Clean in Pocatello ID. And that one is worth the road trip, trust me.





Denver, la ciudad en la pradera.
Viajando desde los Andes hasta Las Rockies.
Mi vida dividida entre dos continentes.
La gente de esta ciudad es amable, generosa y alegre.
La belleza de la naturaleza te ininda y te convierte
en objeto.
Los colores te cautivan y todo se vuelve magico.
Feliz de vivir aqui.





Untitled
FINAL FRIDAYS

DENVER
ART
MUSEUM

Story Swap
bARTER collective

#UntitledDAM




BARTER
collective

Voices

1307



DENVER ART MUSEUM
CULTURAL COMPLEX



Now wadys the plains are just
plain and boring.

The dream of living off the land ceases to exist.

Our spoons and fôrks clink against our plates
without the thought

Where has this fôod come ffrom?

We don't have the time to ask these questions.
We work hard so we don't have to.

Even if we wanted to know
would you want to believe?



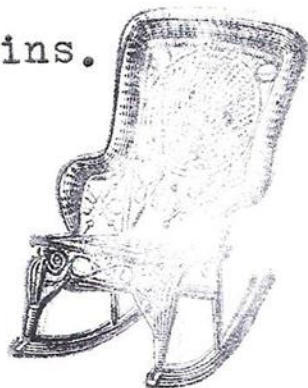


When we came west less than a year ago we were in the mountains. We only came to Denver to escape. I can't wait to escape again. Denver no longer exists as the plains. Everyone living here pretends they live in the mountains. In conversation, on the internet, in their minds. I feel badly for the plains.

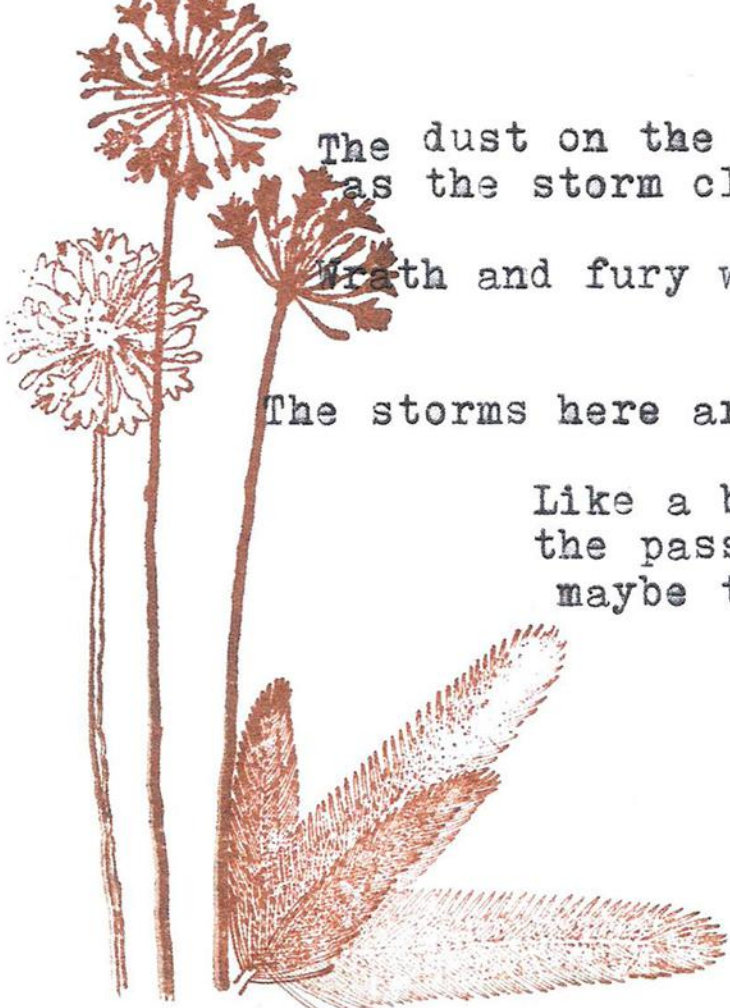
No one dreams off flat open spaces.

No one is okay with plain and boring.
Plains don't look good oninstagram
Plains don't sound good in conversation.

I wish the world valued the plains.







The dust on the antiques rattled
as the storm clouds swelled for hours.

Wrath and fury were starting to bloom

The storms here aren't what they used to be.

Like a bad lover in bed,
the passion only lasts
maybe ten minutes.



BARTER
collective

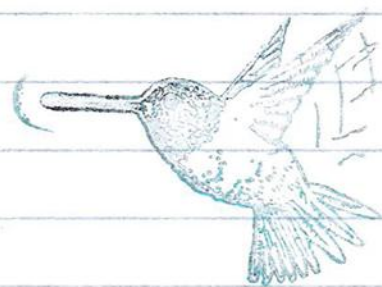
Voices of the Plains
record a song or tell a story

The BARTER Collective & Sparky the Dog Records

NO TOWN BUSINESS
AS FOLLOWS

living in the plains means seeing
everything fôr miles and miles and miles

I lost my virginity in a corn field
I don't regret that.



DENVER ART MUSEUM

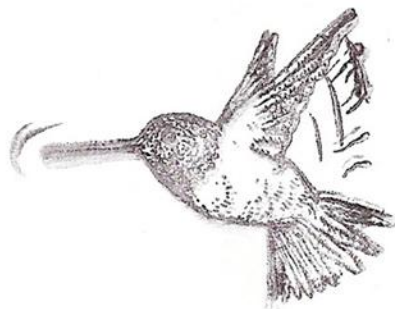


Hot Rodding on the plains
Kim Kennedy White

When I was a kid, we visited our cousins in Joes, Colorado. It seemed a long way out, away from our mountains on the front range. On this particular visit, my cousin Darryl was getting married. He was quite a bit older than my brother and I, so we were not very interested in his upcoming nuptials. We were interested, however, in our cousin's three-wheeler. My brother and I took turns riding the three-wheeler with our cousin Mike. He got carried away and went to fast sending us flying off and into the dirt. needless to say, my mom was not pleased... My favorite thing about the plains -- and it was true then and it's true now -- is the amazing neverending sky.



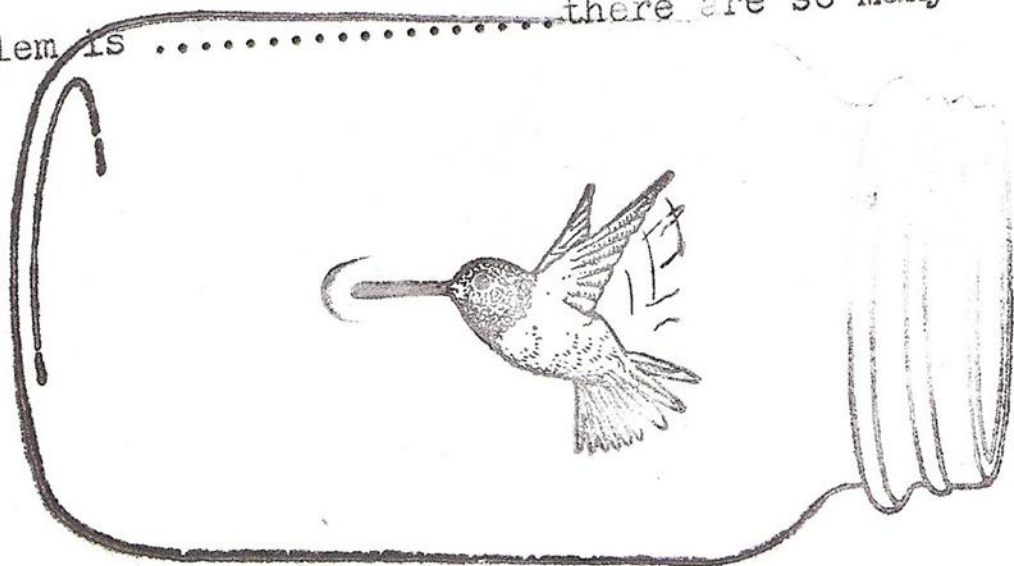
i live with depression. it is a part of my every day
depression makes you search deep within your soul
every moment can be beautifully grotesque
i grew up in the plains
there was spo much space
to fillin the void





i love him so much
more than all the blades of grass in all of the plains

the problem isthere are so many blades





"Mr. P Mr. P" I hear from the voices of 5 small children, with their faces eager and their voices unfettered. How to respond to so many falsetto acapellas with poise? "Shut the fuck up!" I want to scream out. I'm not cut out for the loss that I constantly feel with these abandoned plains carrion the inter_sectional confrontational and purposeful ignorance.

"It'll be better next year" I hear. It's all about surviving the tasteless platform sandals scream out to me in my misery. I don't have the know how to drown out the voices and I've resorted to escapism, the escapism that I've long since condemned. I'm a teacher but I'm also a vagabond.

I'm a teacher but I'm also a lover.

I'm a teacher but I'm also a bastard.

I'm a teacher but I'm also a person/

I'm a teacher that has learned to hate the system and the children that I serve. I hate the system they're born into and that they've been abandoned. I hate that I am now put in the position of the dead beat dad with my tail between my legs. Why am I the only one who cares? Why am I the only one who cares that I don't?

Colorado's native prairie is one of the most intact grasslands remaining in the Great Plains. If you look beyond the apparent emptiness, you will see that the High Plains ecosystem contains its own unique riches. A square meter of short-grass prairie can contain 12 or more plant species.

In addition to grasses, there are yuccas, moss, sandwort, chokecherry, wild plum, sunflowers, ragweed, asters, and more. Asters are the dominant food sources for deer and pronghorn. Plants have evolved to be drought and wind resistant. Most have tough root systems to anchor the soil and to find and store water and nutrients underground.

Afterthoughts from Maureen

When I grew up, I wanted to be a *shanachie*, an Irish storyteller who travels across the land exchanging stories. Instead, I became a sociologist and listened to stories. What I loved most when I was a counselor were the incredible tales from people of all walks of life. I heard stories of perseverance and defeat in the face of poverty, drug addiction, mental illness, and abuse. It was rough stuff these folks were going thru, but no matter how difficult their lives, they always remained people, worthy of respect and capable of brilliant humor. Seeing this universal humanity broadened my knowledge of the world which in turn elevated my empathy, rearranged my priorities, and increased my gratitude.

Now, as an artist and community organizer, I seek ways to blend the creative approach with community and this search has brought me back to my love of story as a way to connect with each other. Partnering with the bARTer Collective and Sparky the Dog Records, along with seed money from Colorado Creative Industries, my plans came to reality and Voices of the Plains was born.

Why the Plains? Because as a new resident of Joes, Colorado, I've become hyper aware of the beauty that exists in the landscape and communities of this ignored half of Colorado. I am a Denver native who never gave much thought to the other side of our state. Like so many Denverites, I grew up under the impression I lived in a mountainous region. But Denver isn't in the mountains. It's not even in the foothills. It's a developed portion of High Plains grasslands. How can we have a valid sense of place when so many of us are unaware of the real geography of our home? I decided it's important to share my awakening to the High Plains with others through stories and music.





The bARter Collective, led by Nikki Pike, was key to the success of this endeavor. Nikki lives by the bARter Collective's manifesto: *Every human needs to be actively creative and involved in their community. We create dynamic situations that present alternative means of exchange where active creation gives way to goods and services.* In addition to being endlessly enthusiastic and full of great ideas, Nikki provided the manual typewriters that we set up at our collection spots, as well as the box truck that Gregory Hill (Sparky the Dog Records) converted into a mobile recording studio.

In order to fulfill our end of the "barter" portion of the story collection, we exchanged High Plains wild flower seeds and origami flowers for songs and stories.

One of my favorite experiences during our tour occurred as we were driving out of Sterling after the Beet Festival. Driving the bARter Collective truck, completely lost, we pulled up to a liquor store to ask for directions. There, I met the two most friendly liquor store clerks ever. As I walked away one of them noticed the truck and hollered out the drive-thru window, "What business are you in?"

"I'm a story collector." I responded, while my inner child screamed with delight at finally becoming the *shanachie* she always dreamed of.

The clerk shouted back, "I've got lots of stories!"

Well damn, I think to myself, why not. I run to the truck and ask Gregory to grab the recording equipment and join me behind the liquor store.

Oh, what mind bending heart wrenching tales we heard! We could've stayed there all night, but a Saturday night at the liquor store is busy and the drive home was looming so we said our goodbyes. As we drove away, one of the clerks yelled, "Please come back. I've got more stories to tell!"

What we have here is only the beginning. We're onto something that can be very successful -- so stay tuned for more Voices of the Plains.

If you are interested in contributing or collaborating please contact me at mauxheart@gmail.com and visit our website at www.voicesoftheplains.com

The Team:

Maureen Hearty is a sculptress, gardener, community organizer, and drummer. She uses art, horticulture, and music as tools for community activation, education, & opportunity.

Gregory Hill is the producer for Sparky the Dog Records, a boutique recording studio in north Denver and with a new location in Joes, CO. He's also the author of two novels, *East of Denver* and *The Lonesome Trials of Johnny Riles*.

Nikki Pike, a founding member of the bARTer collective, spends her days working as an artist and a professor. Her art is interwoven with the necessities of all humans: food, water, shelter, and love. Gift economy, surprise, curiosity, and music are among the strategies of engagement in which participants are lured into her cultural projects. Nikki creates projects that value experience over product echoing the importance of empowerment, vulnerability and connection to her audience.







Voices of the Plains mobile recoding studio recordings:

1. Popsicle by Matt - **Denver**
2. Benefits of Country Living by Gary - **Joes**
3. The Hustle by Antonio - **Denver**
4. Ox-Tail Stew by Reed - **Loveland**
5. Job Hazards (Upside Down Cow) by Rich - **Joes**
6. Acrostic Lullabies by Monica - **Denver**
7. Grandma's Panties by Clay - **Denver**
8. The Swarm by Renny - **Joes**
9. Veal by Lena Jo - **Sterling**
10. How to Slaughter a Chicken by Ruby (9) and Emma (13) - **Loveland**
11. Conception Pt. 1 by Kirstin - **Sterling**
12. Conception Pt. 2 by Peter - **Sterling**
13. Conception Pt. 3 by Kirstin - **Sterling**
14. Conception Pt. 4 by Kirstin - **Sterling**
15. Waylon and Willie and a Job at the Mall by Ann - **Loveland**
16. **Because They Ripple** by Jane Doe - **Denver**
17. Addendum to Waylon and Willie and a Job at the Mall by Ann - **Loveland**
18. Migration by Vincent - **Denver**
19. Hike Ooh by Riley - **Denver**
20. Travis Doesn't Do It by Travis - **Sterling**
21. Make the World Go Away by Rodney - **Joes**

To hear more of our collection visit our website:
www.voicesoftheplains.com

A wide-angle photograph of a vast, flat landscape covered in golden-brown grass, likely a field of wildflowers or tall grasses. The horizon is straight and distant, with a few small, dark structures visible on the left and a tall, thin tower or antenna on the right. The sky is a clear, solid blue, occupying the upper half of the frame.

A bARter Collective project sponsored by Colorado Creative Industries

Prepared by MagCloud for Maureen Hearty. Get more at mauxheart.magcloud.com.