

Three Poems

Chad Erickstad

After the Fire

Headline: *Fire ruins Cannon Ball school playground. "Sunday's fire destroyed a swing set and charred other play equipment at the facility on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation," Amy R. Sisk, The Bismarck Tribune, Oct. 12, 2015.*

After the fire
 crawls slowly
 into the playground,
 surrounds each steel pole
 holding the whole works
 in the air,
 after the
 vivid yellows and blues
 blister and blacken,
 after the plastic slides
 drip, then drizzle,
 the swings melt
 and drop into the flames,
 and the merry-go-round collapses
 and tilts unnaturally
 to the scorched ground,
 after this creeping horror
 gently decimates
 all in its inching path,

it disappears like smoke
dissipates, seemingly out of
existence, and later,
when the children
come out for recess,
little do they know
that right now, as they
stand around the structure and
stare with blank faces,
this will be the most honest
and seminal lesson
they will learn at this school,
or any other.

Half-Staffed American Flags

Americans

forget

Americans

ignore

Americans

dismiss

Americans

turn out

Americans

shut out

Americans

gun down

Americans

in the recent past, lowered the American flag rarely—to honor the passing of dignitaries or signify a resonant national tragedy—not eulogize weekly gunshot casualties who lay bleeding and dying in schools and churches and public squares, victims of psychologically distraught Americans lacking any real human connection or ancillary support for serious mental afflictions, packing semiautomatic pistols and bump-stocked assault rifles that spray bullets like drizzles of rain, shooters unable to cope with an unending barrage of sensationalized media voices in their heads, grasping at any relevance available from a mention on the 24-hour TV news, swathing other Americans with bullets and leaving a windrow of dead to winnow in the draft of talking heads howling and pointing fingers without a single significant intimation to help stop the bleeding and the dying and the killing of

Americans

disparage

Americans

antagonize

Americans

outrage
Americans
shout at
Americans
scream at
Americans
gun down
Americans.

Message Received

Dear Writer,

Thank you so much for sending in your writing—reading it was truly an interesting experience. This was clearly an earnest attempt at artistic expression. Unfortunately, we are unable to accept your submission. We feel that your creation needs work. Although we rarely do this, we have included some suggestions:

Consider replacing every word in your composition with a *different* word. Try not to use synonyms. We feel that it is important to change the structure, tone, rhythm, and meaning of your work. Replacing every word will expedite this process. We think that making this minor change will result in a better piece and possible publication (although not in *this* publication).

Honestly, though, publication for a writer of your “talents” is a bit of a longshot. Have you considered other lines of work? Based on your submission, we feel that writing may not be a hallmark of your current abilities. Although, again, we rarely do this, we have assembled a list of possible, more reasonable occupations that you may find more suitable to your talents:

- Restroom attendant
- Chicken sexer
- Self-storage unit manager
- Elf assistant to a mall Santa
- Toll booth operator
- Exorcist (minor order only)
- Test subject in clinical trials
- United States Senator

We at this publication fervently believe that by submitting your work, perhaps as a “cry for help,” you are putting yourself on the right

track toward self-improvement and, hopefully, some primitive form of happiness. Ideally, you will take this advice and bury your artistic dreams deep, deep underground and become a useful member of our crumbling society. Good luck!

Sincerely,

The Editors

Chad Erickstad is a junior at UND; he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English.