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ARTS/99

The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado



Poetry Out Loud,
Word for Word

Veterans Find Their Voices

Nate Reifke:
Designing by Nature

Healing with
Placerville Friends of Tibet

THIS ISSUE

COMMON GROUND

Dear Reader,

The diversity of culture and the arts in El Dorado County is one of our greatest strengths. This diversity is reflected in the spectacular variety of creative expression found in our community. In this edition of *Arts 99*, we take a cross-section of various cultural and artistic activities in El Dorado County, revealing these disparate activities to be the strata of a larger, brilliantly variegated whole.

These stories chronicle a wide range of people, perspectives, and mediums—from students to veterans, from sand mandalas to snowboard graphics. We announce the young winners of the El Dorado County Poetry Out Loud competition for 2022, whose skill in poetry recitation inspires faith in the next generation of artists. We take a look inside the Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop, which equips veterans with the tools to tell their stories and share their vital perspectives. We speak with Placerville Friends of Tibet, which recently expanded our collective cultural horizons when they hosted the monks of the Gaden Shartse Monastery for two weeks of spiritual instruction, artistic creation, and cross-cultural dialogue. We meet Nate Reifke, a local artist and graphic designer working with “misfits” and “outsiders” to bring the fringes into the mainstream.

Taken together, these cultural and artistic activities can be seen as the vibrant sedimentary layers of a common ground in El Dorado County—each of them containing nuggets of gold.

Thank you for your support.

Nate Reifke
Bad Apples, 2022

ARTS/99

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COVER IMAGE *CA Strong*, by Nate Reifke



Hwy 49 + Hwy 50 = Arts 99

Poetry Out Loud, Word for Word

Poetry Out Loud is a national poetry recitation competition for high school students.

In El Dorado County, the competition is administered by Arts and Culture El Dorado in partnership with the California Arts Council. A vehicle for inspiration and instruction, Poetry Out Loud provides students with a variety of resources to help them memorize, interpret, and recite poetry, instilling in students not just an appreciation of poetry, but also a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their public speaking abilities.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Poetry Out Loud has been virtual at every level of competition for the past two years. In El Dorado County, the competition has also been streamlined—rather than beginning at the classroom level before advancing to the school level and eventually the county level, the competition now begins at the county level, providing every high school student in El Dorado County an opportunity to compete for cash prizes and a chance to represent our county at the statewide California Poetry Out Loud competition. The virtual format means that students submit pre-recorded recitations of their poems, a development that some students have found beneficial, as it allows them to submit the best version of their recitation.

The videos are judged by a panel of local poetry aficionados: Dennis Johnson, a long-time English teacher; Audrey Keebler, a perennial supporter of Poetry Out Loud and several quilt guilds, genealogical, and historical societies; Taylor Graham, a prolific poet and former Poet Laureate of El Dorado County; Tina Ferguson, the owner of Face in a Book bookstore; and Lara Gulate, the County's current Poet Laureate. The panel of judges considers multiple criteria as they evaluate the video submissions, from the accuracy of the recitation to the evidence of the student's understanding of the material.

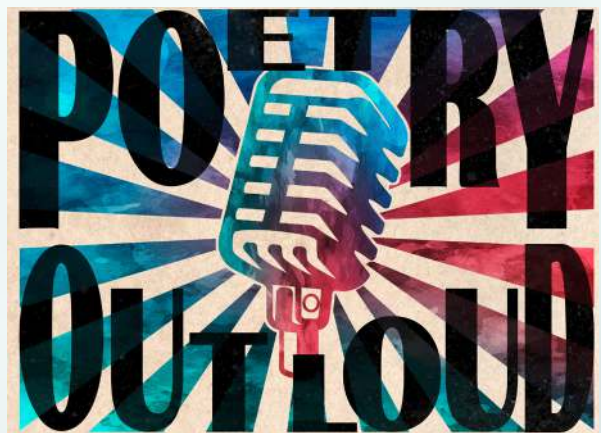
Poetry Out Loud has a profound impact on the students who choose to participate. Beyond their exposure to a rich literary heritage, collected in the

Poetry Out Loud anthology from which they select their poems, the students also get the opportunity to engage with poetry outside of the classroom, which situates the poems in a fresh, vibrant context. The act of recitation recasts poetry as an embodied art form rather than an abstract work of contemplation, igniting a lifelong passion for poetry in some students. As Lara Gulate says, "Poetry Out Loud encourages finding the voice of the poem, the meaning, sound, and the rhythm."



Kelsi Havercroft, first place winner

In the 2022 competition, Union Mine High School senior Kelsi Havercroft took first place and will represent El Dorado County at the statewide Poetry Out Loud competition. The runner-up was Emily Lieber, a senior at Oak Ridge High School. Coming in third was Molly Grant, a sophomore at Charter University Prep. Their powerful recitations were a testament to the immense talent, passion, and potential of El Dorado County's young poetry lovers.



Veterans Find Their Voices

In El Dorado County, veterans find their voices through the Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop, a free, ongoing writing workshop that is open to all veterans, from any branch of service. It offers a supportive environment and the tools needed for the writing of fiction and nonfiction stories, service-related or not, as well as memoir, poetry, and drama. The workshop is facilitated by experienced, professional writers. Arts and Culture El Dorado administers the program with support from the Veterans Affairs Commission of El Dorado County, and generous individuals.

The workshop has most recently been facilitated by Weston DeWalt. DeWalt, an investigative writer and documentary filmmaker, is the coauthor of the New York Times bestseller "The Climb," a nonfiction book about a 1996 disaster on Mt. Everest. A former acquisitions editor, DeWalt has also worked as a cold case investigator and as a university teacher of writing and publishing.



Patrick McCann at a workshop. Photo: Weston DeWalt

"The veterans see it as a safe and comfortable environment to share stories of all kinds."

and a serious focus on learning and artistic creation, with clear expectations on writing assignments. Participants may write on subjects of their own choosing, but they also learn specific elements of the craft, such as editing, punctuation, dialogue, and narrative structure. An important component of the workshops is group feedback. Often the group will reminisce about their combat experiences—stories that are sometimes funny and sometimes grueling—and these moments become opportunities to teach the creative process. "The veterans see it as a safe and comfortable environment to share stories of all kinds," DeWalt says. "There's a spirit of camaraderie that prevails, and a support of each other's work."

When a critical mass of finished pieces is achieved, the writings are published in an anthology, available in print and on Amazon and Kindle. The anthologies are edited and published by Arts and Culture El Dorado staff, relieving participants of any burden in the publication process and allowing them to focus fully on their writing. These anthologies represent significant milestones both for the project and for the participants. Participants receive complimentary copies of the anthologies, giving them a tangible representation of their progress and accomplishments. In the most recent anthology, *Ask a Vet*, the participants' writing pivots from comic to tragic, bawdy to heartwarming; the vagaries and vibrancy of real life are reflected in the diversity of veteran voices contained in its pages.

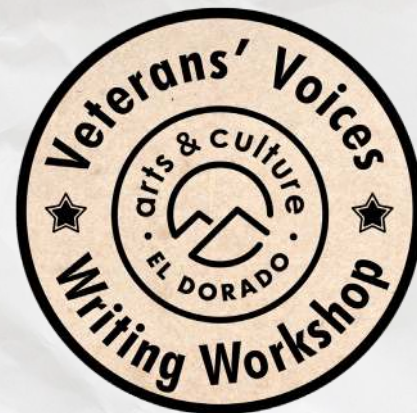
The Covid-19 pandemic affected the workshop, but only to an extent. In the characteristically resilient and resourceful fashion of veterans, the workshop

participants continued to meet virtually, preserving their connections to each other and mining their isolation for material. The workshop returned to an in-person setting as the pandemic waned; after a phase of endurance against the odds, the workshop has shifted into a growth phase. Arts and Culture El Dorado has begun to host new writings from workshop participants on its website, and the possibilities of expansion to other areas of the county, including Georgetown and South Lake Tahoe, are being explored.

The Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop provides El Dorado County veterans with a wholly unique experience. It is the only service of its kind in the area, and the synergy of its many parts—support group, writing workshop, social occasion—make it a dynamic, adaptable platform for artistic and personal growth. "It does a kind of double duty," DeWalt says. "They feel more comfortable to talk about their experiences, and when they do talk about them, they are surrounded by people who are able to say, 'I've had that same experience, or a similar

experience, myself.'... They are also surrounded by people who are equally motivated to learn about the writing process, and to better themselves as writers." As many veterans struggle with a constellation of interrelated issues after completing their service—ranging from PTSD to homelessness to depression, substance abuse and even suicide—programs like the Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop are invaluable. As one recent participant wrote, "What is the value of Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop to our community? You need only answer the question, 'What is the value of saving just one veteran life?'"

The Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop is open to all veterans, and drop-ins are encouraged.



*Mike Durant shares some of his writings while Bill Blaylock listens during a Veterans' Voices Writing Workshop.
Photo: Weston DeWalt*

VETERANS' VOICES WRITING WORKSHOP

MONDAY NIGHTS
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

VETERAN'S MEMORIAL BUILDING
130 PLACERVILLE DRIVE

Nate Reifke: Designing by Nature



Nate Reifke—local multidisciplinary artist, freelance graphic designer, and lover of all things outdoors—knew early on what he would like to do with his life. Walking into skate and snowboard shops as a kid “felt like being in a candy store”. There were the boards, clothes, and assorted accouterments of the activities he loved, displayed on the walls like pieces in a gallery. And then there were the graphics: little works of art imprinted, as if on a canvas, on all of the products in the store. It was an overwhelming—and formative—aesthetic experience for a budding artist. “And then I realized, oh, people are getting paid to do this? That was the spark.”

Born in the East Bay, Nate and his family relocated to Folsom when he was eight years old. At eighteen he returned to the coast to attend UC San Diego. An early break came when the founder of Sector 9 noticed some T-Shirts Nate had designed for local surfers. He was offered a job at the then-upstart, now-renowned board shop. After five years he left Sector 9 to work at another start-up, this one focused on outdoor recreation, a near neighbor of board sports. “We were kind of elbowing space for a lifestyle brand to exist in the outdoor world,” he says. After

the company dissolved, Nate moved to Pollock Pines, where he created his own graphic design business, Salty Timbers. The name is a kind of triple entendre, tying together a few of his sources of inspiration: the ocean, the sarcastic streak that runs through his family, and the forests



Land and Sea
by Nate Reifke

of Pollock Pines. As a freelance artist, Nate continues to focus on board sports and outdoor recreation. “I wanted to stay in a space that I was a consumer of... I love the outdoors and board sports, so it’s a really simple thing to stay true to. Because I’m a consumer of it, I understand the aesthetic.”

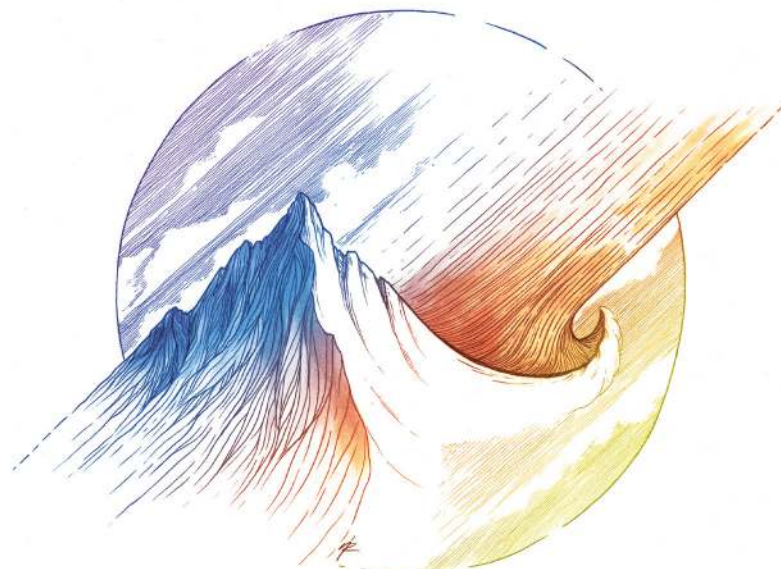
Outdoor recreation and board sports are part of the appeal of Pollock Pines for Nate. So is the proximity to Placerville, and to his parents’ house in Folsom. But the area also has a certain intrinsic value for Nate, serving as a wellspring of artistic inspiration. “Without question, this place is inspiring to me aesthetically. I live in the forest—there are times when you wake up and you literally feel like you’re there while the forest is breathing. It’s a living creature, and being around that



Drifter, by Nate Reifke

is really powerful... Whether it's the texture of the bark, or the rocks, there's endless creative input that comes from being in the outdoors."

As a professional artist, Nate is sensitive to a divide between his personal artistic impulses—"sitting in my house, painting about my feelings"—and the commercial aspects of his freelance work. "The grocery store can be an overwhelming experience for me," he laughs. "I walk in there and I'm analyzing labels and font choices and colors and logistics of package sizes." In his personal art, he finds respite: "It's liberating to not have to make art to pay the bills. It remains art—otherwise it is commercial art." Negotiating the difference between "commercial art" and "painting his feelings" can also be a generative process for him, allowing him to uncover a common ground between the two. "Consumers make their decisions based on art that they are not even aware is art. That's always been fun for me. I'm making art for those people—whether they know it or appreciate it, I almost don't care."



Balance, by Nate Reifke

Nate's future holds the release of a snowboard he designed, as well as a gallery exhibition called *Bad Apples: Skateboarding and the Misfit Culture of EDC*, which will be displayed in Arts and Culture El Dorado's Confidence Firehouse Gallery. He also wants to deepen his connection to the local community and the small businesses in town, such as Motherlode Board Supply Co., which is collaborating with Nate on *Bad Apples*. "People's passion for this town and their desire to improve it and their desire to be a part of something bigger—it's a driver for me. I love working with the local businesses. I feel like I'm contributing to the same cause... And that's way bigger than just a snowboard graphic—that's a personal accomplishment."

Above all else, though, Nate's future as an artist and as a person is shaped by a singular goal: "Freedom. I'd like to maintain freedom. I hope that I don't have to get a real job. When the snow is good and I can work really hard the night before, I want to be able to go ride. I want to participate in life. That's the long-term goal. It's very simple."



Caldor, by Nate Reifke

Once Highway 50 was reopened after the Caldor Fire, Nate went on a hike where he gathered ash and charcoal from the burn scar to create this scene.

HEALING WITH PLACERVILLE FRIENDS OF TIBET

In 2021, the monks were missing from Placerville. Long a staple of the winter season, the Sacred Arts of Tibet Tour, featuring the visiting Buddhist monks of the Gaden Shartse Monastery, was canceled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In January 2022, the monks were welcomed back to Gold Country by Placerville Friends of Tibet, the volunteer organization that facilitates the Sacred Arts of Tibet Tour.

Placerville Friends of Tibet coordinator Rebecca Burnworth explains that the return to Placerville was a particularly significant occasion for the visiting monks. “The monks really love to come to Placerville,” she says. “When they first started touring in the U.S., it started with Sierra Friends of Tibet, which was Grass Valley, Auburn, and Placerville. We’re kind of the originals.” One of the purposes of the Sacred Arts of Tibet Tour is to raise funds for the monastery, and in Placerville the monks have consistently found a welcoming, supportive community. “They get a tremendous amount of support—not just financial, but people coming and asking questions and being inquisitive about the culture.”

The 2022 Tour marked not just the return of a beloved tradition in Placerville, but also a milestone for the development of the program. “It was one of the best visits they’ve had, if not the best.” Part



Monk getting licked while blessing a dog.

of the success of this year’s tour stemmed from a slate of new offerings. Placerville Friends of Tibet introduced programming targeted specifically at the senior population, which featured a series of daytime workshops and teachings. They also introduced Pet Blessings, which saw a wide variety of pets and pet owners turning out to spend time with the monks. “It was really fun to see the diversity there,” Rebecca says.

One of the most significant new additions to the monks’ itinerary was a visit to Mercy Hospital of Folsom. The monks performed a blessing for the frontline workers at the hospital, who were facing yet another Covid-19 surge in early January, at the time of the visit. “They were under a lot of stress at the hospital, clearly, and it was palpable. You could feel that the blessing was so needed. When they finished it felt like a deep exhale from everyone. That was particularly memorable and emotional.”

The monks also visited Grizzly Flats, which was one of the communities ravaged by the Caldor Fire in 2021. They performed a Land Blessing for the



Monk telling a young child about his culture.

community on a private property whose structures had burned down in the fire. The property owner told the monks that one of the very few unscathed possessions in his home was a jade Buddhist statue that had been blessed by the monks on a prior visit. As the Land Blessing unfolded, a spontaneous interfaith gathering developed—nuns from the Aloka Vihara Monastery on Pleasant Valley and members of the Miwok Indian Tribe contributed blessings of their own, and the daughter of a civil engineer who built parts of Grizzly Flats offered a Jewish prayer.

The new elements of the Tour were tied together by a common theme: Healing. Every year, the monks create a beautiful but impermanent Sand Mandala. This year, they created a Dukar Mandala, also called the White Parasol, or White Umbrella, which symbolizes environmental healing, protection, and restoration. For a community in need of healing, the monks' visit couldn't have come at a better time. "Being with the monks is a meditative thing, whether you're intentionally meditating or not. It's peaceful, and it makes you feel optimistic. Like the world isn't as bad as it can sometimes seem."

Rebecca and the rest of the Placerville Friends of Tibet coordinators plan to build on their renewed momentum with summertime programming and a special celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Sacred Arts of Tibet Tour next year. "It changes and builds, and we're in a little bit of a renaissance right now. We're doing all of these new things." As Placerville Friends of Tibet looks to the future, they will continue to treasure the support of the El

Dorado County community—from the volunteers who contribute their time over 12 days, to the guests who show up to support and learn from the monks of the Gaden Shartse Monastery.

Placerville Friends of Tibet is a partner in Arts and Culture El Dorado's Arts Incubator program. The Arts Incubator program provides support and guidance to grassroots arts organizations throughout El Dorado County.

*Learn more on our website:
ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org/Arts-Incubator*



*Above:
Finished Dukar Mandala (also called the White Parasol, or White Umbrella) which symbolizes environmental healing, protection, and restoration.*

*Left:
Participants learn Tibetan writing and how to make sand mandalas in a workshop led by the monks.*

ON THE HORIZON



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THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2022 ▪ 6:00 – 8:00 PM ▪ DAVID GIRARD VINEYARDS
CATERING BY OLIVER RIDGEWAY OF CAMDEN SPIT & LARDER IN SACRAMENTO

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Proceeds support the programs and services of Arts and Culture El Dorado.

For donations and tickets, go to ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org/benefit-2022

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Arts and Culture El Dorado's mission to promote, connect, and empower arts and culture throughout the county is achieved by targeted programs and services, a vibrant gallery exhibition series, and a focus on initiatives which support and sustain the cultural life of the region.