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Jared Rypkema

BRIDGE EIGHT

By Heather Henderson | Staff Writer

Despite what he says, Jared Rypkema is a starter. "I'm not really a starter," he told me right off the bat.

He's a Jacksonville transplant who fell in love with this city after moving here for work, but felt it was missing something. Jared is the founder of Bridge Eight, Jacksonville's only print literary magazine. It comes out twice a year and is packed with short stories and poems submitted by writers from all over the country. Each

piece is loosely linked by a central theme.

Before Bridge Eight came along, there wasn't anything in place to bring all of our city's writers together. Many had tried but failed to establish the sort of tight-knit writing community that Jared was seeking. He started a small group in Riverside, inviting other writers to get together at his house each week, with the goal of tying together the various scattered

groups of writers that already existed.

From there, it grew. That group, called *Left on Mallory*, reached out to the people who had long ago begun laying the foundation for a writing community here.

Jacksonville has a serious problem with follow-through. Plenty of fantastic ideas fizzle out in the early stages because the thinkers either give up after a short time or are afraid to take a chance and get started in the first place.

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Left on Mallory wasn't enough for Jared. He's a man of lofty goals and grand visions, a caffeinated mad scientist of the writing world. He wouldn't settle for just forming a writers group and stopping there. There needed to be something bigger to tie everyone together. After speaking to writing teachers and professors from several local schools, his grand plan was given the blessing from the established writers of Jacksonville.

Although he had no previous experience in publishing, he wanted to create a physical magazine to showcase great writing. Something he himself would enjoy reading, something that would represent the voices that need to be heard, something that could unite people and start conversations. It had to be good, most importantly. Starting a publication was the easy part. Keeping it consistent and high quality is another story.

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Bridge Eight made its public debut at *One Spark* in 2014. It began as a small zine featuring the work of a few local writers. Now, they receive submissions from established writers around the country. Each issue is overseen by a handful of local editors and different guest editors who help choose the pieces that get published. The man who started it all — well, his job includes a little bit of everything. He calls himself "a glorified project manager." He trusts his editors to make the right choices when it comes to curating the issues, while he keeps everyone on track and takes care of the less-exciting aspects of running a publication.

Jared comes from a family of visual artists, but he's a writer to the core. By day, he works as a copywriter to pay the bills, with *Bridge Eight* as his passion project. On top of that, he's working on his MFA in fiction writing. It's a lot to juggle, but he seems perfectly happy being consumed by writing and reading. "It makes me feel like I'm alive," he said of the 30 or so unpaid hours a week he puts into *Bridge Eight*. Did I mention he's only 27? He's only a year older than I am, but already a lot more accomplished than most people I know.

Bridge Eight is coming up on its fifth issue this fall. The first four were experimental in a way, and the kinks have mostly been ironed out by now. There are big plans for the future, both for the magazine and for guy who won't stop dreaming.

Bridge Eight aims to be around for a long time, whether or not its founder remains along for the ride. He's been busy building up the brand to stand on its own so he no longer needs to serve as the reluctant face of it. "It can't live or die with me," he said, implying that he's ready to move on to other projects. Whatever happens though, "writing is gonna be part of my life forever."

What's next? He would love to open a writing center in town. It would be a space for writers to work and collaborate during the day, with readings at night. It sounds like a crazy idea, but so was starting a magazine from nothing and building a dedicated community around it. Check out BridgeEight.com to get your own copy of the magazine.

