

"Matthew McGevna has given us a great gift. Superb."
—Larry Heinemann, author of *Paco's Story*

LITTLE BEASTS

A NOVEL



FORTHCOMING FROM AKASHIC BOOKS JULY 7, 2015

PRESS KIT



Matthew McGevna

— A KAYLIE JONES BOOK —

FORTHCOMING FROM KAYLIE JONES BOOKS JULY 7, 2015

Matthew McGevna's powerful, evocative debut captures the aftermath of a Long Island working-class town shaken to its core by a local teenager's brutal murder of a young boy.

CONTACT: SUSANNAH LAWRENCE | 718.643.9193 | SUSANNAH@AKASHICBOOKS.COM

IN THE MIDSUMMER HEAT OF JULY 1983, EIGHT-YEAR-OLD FRIENDS DALLAS, JAMES, AND FELIX SPEND THEIR DAYS ADVENTURING AROUND THEIR TOWN TOGETHER.

What none of them can guess is that before summer's end, one of the boys will lay dead—murdered by a neighborhood teenager in an instance of bullying that takes a horrible turn. Matthew McGevna astounds with his incisive, moving debut novel, the latest from Akashic's Kaylie Jones Books imprint.

- *Little Beasts* is **loosely inspired by the 1979 murder of thirteen-year-old John Pius in Suffolk County, for which four teenagers were convicted.** The case was finally settled for good in June 2003, following eight trials and five successful appeals in what has become “one of the worst crimes that was ever committed in Suffolk County” (according to Suffolk County DA Thomas J. Spota)—and one of its most controversial. McGevna grew up on Long Island, and his mother reminded him on a near-daily basis of this local murder, meant as a warning to stay away from teenagers and keep close to home.

- “The novel questions the seemingly absurd fragility of life and how **violence is often a rippling circle perpetrated by governments, communities, and school districts, eventually rippling outward toward the children,**” McGevna writes. *Little Beasts* is a poetic meditation on the type of violence that is almost unimaginable: the violence that can grip the American teenage boy and lead him to kill. (It is not strictly a male phenomenon, but it is overwhelmingly skewed that way; **of all juveniles convicted for homicide cases, 92% are male. As recently as 2012, juveniles (not just male) represented 7% of all known murder offenders, a staggering—and frightening—statistic.**) McGevna examines the horrors of this type of murder from all angles: that of the victim, the victim's family, the young murderer, the spectators, and the town.

- Murder is not the only type of violence examined in the novel: McGevna skillfully colors the **latent violence of alcoholism and of many high school environments, as well as the dueling violent and redemptive natures of fundamental Christianity.**

- *Little Beasts* is **the newest release from Akashic's Kaylie Jones Books imprint. Curated by acclaimed author Kaylie Jones,** the imprint seeks to publish books that bravely address serious issues—historical or contemporary—relevant to society today. Composed of a collective of emerging and established writers who play an integral part in the publishing process, Kaylie Jones Books embraces the philosophy that just because a book addresses serious topics and may include tragic events does not mean that the narrative cannot be amusing, fast-paced, plot-driven, and lyrical all at once.



LITTLE BEASTS | a novel by Matthew McGevna | Publication Date: July 7, 2015 | 288 pages

Trade paperback original, \$15.95, ISBN: 978-1-61775-347-3 | E-book, \$15.95, E-ISBN: 978-1-61775-370-1

Review copies upon request | Digital review copies via Edelweiss | KAYLIE JONES BOOKS, AN IMPRINT OF AKASHIC BOOKS
NEW YORK | CONTACT: SUSANNAH LAWRENCE, SUSANNAH@AKASHICBOOKS.COM | tel. 718-643-9193

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

When I was a little boy my mother taught me to avoid teenagers. I grew up poor, in a working-class town on Long Island called Mastic Beach. With few local activities and even less money to participate in them, teenagers were almost entirely unavoidable. Nevertheless, I did my best to heed her warning. Whenever possible, if I saw a pack of teens hanging at the corner near the local deli, I would change direction or take to the nearby trails.

“That boy would have been graduating high school by now,” my mother would say as I’d be heading out the door to play. *That boy’s* age would expand, contract, double, triple; I became convinced that my mother didn’t actually know his precise age. That boy was John Pius. That boy, I can say now with certainty, would have been forty-seven, had he not been murdered one spring day in 1979, by four teenagers, who suffocated him by stuffing rocks down his throat. He was thirteen. A local search party found his body near his home in Smithtown, New York, approximately twenty-five miles west of where I grew up.

The Pius murder was a regional sensation. It would evolve into something of a ghost story. A cautionary tale mothers told their kids to keep them from venturing too far from home. I was raised on it. Lived by it. Acted irrationally sometimes because of it.

This became the impetus for my novel *Little Beasts*. I re-imagined the crime, perhaps as a way to capture the nuance of my own underprivileged upbringing—to tell the story of a voiceless people in a voiceless town.

Turnbull is both a modern and provincial town. Set in the early 1980s, the novel takes place while the country is beginning its transition into the technological age, where skilled labor is becoming more commonplace. But unskilled laborers, many of whom only hold a high school diploma, populate Turnbull. Desperate to convince themselves that their lives have value, the residents find solace in notions of patriotism or salvation through God. In what might be considered the third wave of anti-Soviet fervor in America, Turnbull has become enveloped by both fear and pride in the American dream.

This social backdrop sets fifteen-year-old David Westwood, a moody but intelligent teenager, on a collision course with eight-year-old Dallas Darwin. Within forty-eight hours of the novel’s opening, Dallas lies dead from suffocation after what starts out as a mild case of bullying escalates to murder.

The novel is not entirely without hope. In the wake of the murder, the families directly impacted seek ways to cope and move forward. Those moments of salvation come from unlikely sources. In the end, we are left to question the seemingly absurd fragility of life and how violence is often a rippling circle perpetrated by governments, communities, and school districts, eventually rippling outward toward the children. In the midst of this, there are those of us calling out for rescue. *Little Beasts* captures both the violent storm and the rescue.

—Matthew McGevna

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I have watched Matthew McGevena's developing career with interest. His short stories have always had a luminous quality, a poetic compassion for the underdog, for the disenfranchised, that I have rarely seen in modern literary fiction. You will find no guile or condescension in this brilliant and complex novel. You will only find a downtrodden town and its people, bent and broken by their condition. Yet, despite the squalor and hardship, some do prevail. They, like their author, who came from a town quite similar to the one he describes here, persevere simply through an inert sense of goodness, a faith in a better world.

I've come to believe that cynicism is quite easy; it is much harder to maintain compassion and hope when staring darkness in the face. That is what this novel does: it stares down the darkness, and still manages to see glimmers of light.

—*Kaylie Jones*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What are some key details in the early chapters that lead readers to believe Turnbull is a poor town?
2. What does the narrator's description of each parents' reaction to their children attending the evictions say about the three main characters and their upbringing?
3. Why do the kids object so strongly to Motor Murray taking away some of the discarded belongings after the sheriff's eviction?
4. What does revealing that there will be a murder in the early pages of the novel accomplish in terms of plot development and theme?
5. How would you describe Janet Illworth's reflection on how she first met her husband back in high school? Has her memory of the moment soured? Why?
6. What does David Westwood's story about running into the cone during gym class suggest about his life? What does it suggest about life in general?
7. Why is James's determination to build the tree fort important? What might it symbolize?
8. Describe some of the reversals we see in certain characters from who they were at the beginning of the novel, to who they are at the end.
9. Analyze Ivan's statement that "a thing doesn't stay ugly forever" using textual evidence that supports this claim.
10. The author has stated, "Violence is often a rippling circle perpetrated by governments, communities, school districts, and eventually rippling outward toward the children. In the midst of this, there are those of us calling out for rescue." What specific examples can you provide that support this statement. Who, in the novel, is in need of rescue, and do you believe they have been rescued?

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NATIONAL EVENTS FEATURING MATTHEW McGEVNA

Friday, March 13, 2015, 5:30 PM

JAMESPORT, NY

Diliberto Winery, 250 Manor Lane

*With Kaylie Jones (*The Anger Meridian*). Pizza and beverages from 5:30 to 7:00 PM. Author talk from 7 to 8 PM, followed by book signing of *Long Island Noir*.

Saturday, June 6, 2:00 PM

LIVINGSTON MANOR, NY

Catskill Art Society, 48 Main St.

*Akashic All Stars presents Matthew McGevna, Stacy Wakefield (*The Sunshine Crust Baking Factory*), Eliza Factor (*Love Maps*), Zachary Lipez (*Please Take Me Off the Guest List*), and Kaylie Jones (*The Anger Meridian*).

Monday, June 15, 7:00 PM

BROOKLYN, NY

BookCourt, 163 Court Street

*Brooklyn launch event for *Little Beasts* and *The Anger Meridian* by Kaylie Jones! Part of The Salon reading series.

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LITTLE BEASTS

A DEBUT NOVEL BY MATTHEW McGEVNA

A KAYLIE JONES BOOK



In this evocative debut, the accidental murder of an eight-year-old forces a working-class community to face its demons.

PRAISE FOR LITTLE BEASTS

“Here is Matthew McGevna’s *Little Beasts*, a story about growing up in the 1980s and making one’s way into the world. It’s all here: discovered ambition; poignant exasperation; abundant mistakes and triumphs and regrets. And what turns out to be the bitter downward path to wisdom. Matthew McGevna has given us a great gift. Superb.”

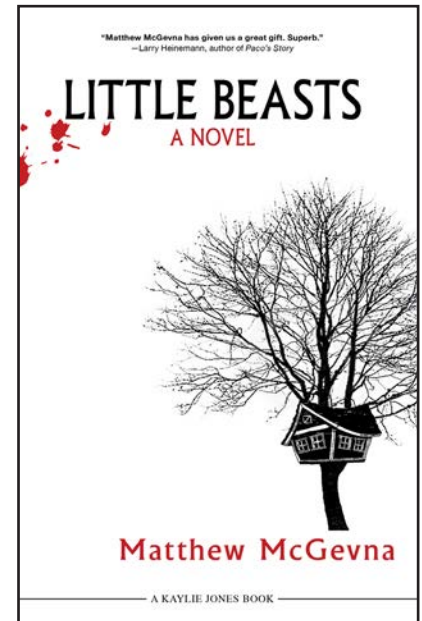
—Larry Heinemann, author of *Paco’s Story*

“*Little Beasts* is a serious novel about lost teenagers with questionable futures and just about no adult guidance. Inevitably they take their confused and violent emotions out on each other, which leads to tragedy. A serious and compelling debut.”

—Robert Ward, author of *Red Baker*

“Mathew McGevna’s *Little Beasts* gives us the people of Turnbull, New York, as their own tragedy begins to envelop them. And in the sure hands of this gifted young novelist, we know them well enough to feel the history in our nerve-endings—we live it. This is a brave, beautiful book.”

—Richard Bausch, author of *Before, During, After*



ABOUT LITTLE BEASTS

Turnbull is a working-class town full of weary people who struggle to make ends meet. Evictions, alcoholism, and random violence are commonplace. In the heat of July 1983, when eight-year-olds James Illworth, Dallas Darwin, and Felix Cassidy leave their homes to play in the woods, they have to navigate between the potentially violent world of angry adults and even angrier teens. Little do they know that by the end of the summer, one of them will lay dead, after a bit of playful bullying from older teens escalates to tragedy.

Loosely based on a real crime that took place on Long Island in 1979, *Little Beasts* is a panorama of a poor neighborhood surrounded by the affluent communities of the East End. After the murder, the novel’s main characters must come to grips with the aftermath, face down the decisions they’ve made, and reestablish their faith in the possibility of a better world.

ABOUT MATTHEW McGEVNA



Matthew McGevna was born and raised in Mastic Beach, Long Island. Born of Irish descent, he attended fiction and poetry workshops in Galway, Ireland, through the University of Arkansas Writing Program. He received his MFA in creative writing from Southampton College in 2002. An award-winning poet, McGevna has also published numerous short stories in various publications, including *Long Island Noir*, *Epiphany*, and *Confrontation*. He currently lives in Center Moriches, New York, with his wife and two sons, Jackson and Dempsey. *Little Beasts* is his first novel.

ABOUT KAYLIE JONES



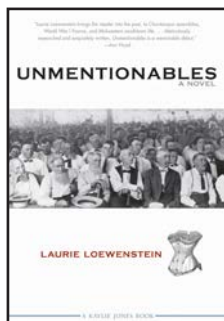
Kaylie Jones has published six books, including a memoir, *Lies My Mother Never Told Me*, and her most recent novel, *The Anger Meridian*. Her novel *A Soldier’s Daughter Never Cries* was adapted as a Merchant Ivory film in 1998. Jones has been teaching for more than twenty-five years, and is a faculty member in the Stony Brook Southampton MFA in Creative Writing & Literature program and in Wilkes University’s MFA in Creative Writing program. Her newest endeavor is her publishing imprint with Akashic Books, Kaylie Jones Books.

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ALSO FROM **KAYLIE JONES BOOKS**



UNMENTIONABLES | by Laurie Loewenstein

Trade Paperback Original | \$15.95 | 320 pages | January 7, 2014 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-194-3

A MIDWEST CONNECTIONS PICK!

“Immensely entertaining and illuminating . . . Exceptionally readable and highly recommended.” —*Library Journal*, Starred Review

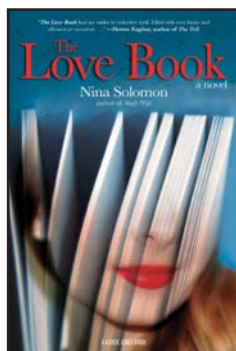
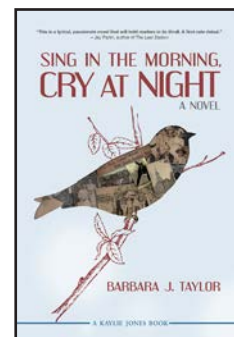
A powerful debut historical novel that launches a new imprint, Kaylie Jones Books, curated by acclaimed author Kaylie Jones.

SING IN THE MORNING, CRY AT NIGHT | by Barbara J. Taylor

Trade Paperback Original | \$15.95 | 320 pages | July 1, 2014 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-227-8

A Best Summer Book for 2014 (*Publishers Weekly*)!

A page-turning debut novel set in Scranton, Pennsylvania, during the height of coal mining, vaudeville, and evangelism.



THE LOVE BOOK | by Nina Solomon

Trade Paperback Original | \$15.95 | 320 pages | January 6, 2015 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-317-6

“A compelling mix of story lines . . . plenty of good banter and characterization.” —*Publishers Weekly*

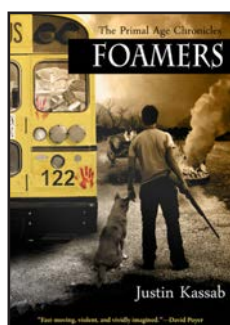
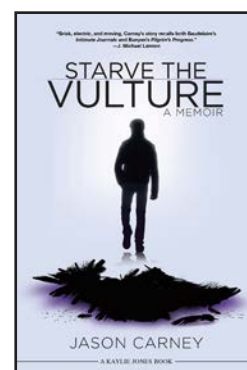
An anti-romantic comedy about the misadventures of four women who meet on a singles' bike trip.

STARVE THE VULTURE | a memoir by Jason Carney

Trade Paperback Original | \$15.95 | 300 pages | January 6, 2015 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-301-5

“Brisk, electric, and moving, his story recalls both Baudelaire’s *Intimate Journals* and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.” —J. Michael Lennon, author of *Norman Mailer: A Double Life*

A stirring story of criminality, drug addiction, recovery, and unlikely fame.



FOAMERS | an e-first release

a debut novel by Justin Kassab

e-book | \$4.99 | 268 pages | e-ISBN: 978-1-61775-260-5

Trade Paperback | \$16.95 | 268 pages | March 25, 2014 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-309-1

The first book in the Primal Age Chronicles, a debut series from Justin Kassab and Kaylie Jones Books.

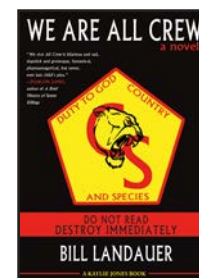
WE ARE ALL CREW | an e-first release

a debut novel by Bill Landauer

e-book | \$4.99 | 288 pages | e-ISBN: 978-1-61775-371-8

Trade Paperback | \$16.95 | 288 pages | January 6, 2015 | ISBN: 978-1-61775-356-5

A satirical adventure story featuring two young teens, in the style of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.



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