**History of the Organization**

In 2011, a group of student veterans at Eastern Kentucky University came together to publish a collection of their short stories, poems, and artwork. Rooted in the most recent research in bibliotherapy and healing arts interventions, their collaborative writing process proved useful as a means of coping with the trauma of war, articulating wartime experiences for loved ones, and defining one’s postwar self in order chart a path into the future.

A large number of the authors in the first volume of *The Journal of Military Experience* chose to deal explicitly with combat trauma and the inability of civilian culture to understand military veterans. After making these concerns known to the administrators at EKU, the students were given several small grants from different departments on campus, allowing for the print publication of the JME in 2011.

Local and national news media picked up on this small campus journal, covering it as an alternative approach to healing in some cases, as pedagogical strategy in others. Seeing the benefits creative writing had for students, those responsible for the JME attempted to take their brand of collaborative writing to the masses, publishing a second volume which contained works from veterans throughout the world, from current generations as well as those dating back to WW2, and a scholarship section intended to raise interest in veterans’ issues in the academic sphere. Chiefly, the printing of the second JME was paid for through one of 14 national literacy grants awarded in 2012 by The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, and the EKU community—then the most respected institution of higher education in the country—funded the rest. The group “Friends of the EKU Library” sponsored the JME’s online publication through “Encompass,” which still hosts JME content today.

In publishing the first two volumes of the JME, a small community began to form around veterans engaged in the creative act, a group which decided to host an all-expenses paid event for veterans to gain skills in writing, art, and expressive therapies. The KY Department of Veterans Affairs awarded an $18,000 grant to the mission, and the first ever “Military Experience & the Arts Symposium” took place in July 2012.

The event brought more than 130 veterans, their spouses, educators, clinicians, and arts therapists together for three days of workshops and events. Included in the nightly events were a performance by the Exit 12 Dance Co., a theatrical performance of SNAPSHOT, a play written and starring Mitzi Sinnott, and speeches by the founder of the Veterans Writing Project, Ron Capps, and Dr. Christi O’Hare, the director of ArtReach: Project America, an Atlanta Based non-profit which offered an array of arts therapy workshops during the symposium. Veterans paid nothing for room, board, meals, supplies, workshops, or anything else.

The group of volunteers who created the first MEA Symposium at EKU remained active in online communities following the event, publishing a third volume of *The Journal of Military Experience* and first volumes of *The Blue Falcon Review*, *Blue Nostalgia: A Journal of Post-Traumatic Growth*, and *Blue Streak: A Journal of Military Poetry*. Volunteers and staff members pooled their monies and raised donations, establishing MEA as a federally recognized, 501(C)(3) non-profit organization in spring 2014. The publication which started it all, the JME, was officially leased to MEA as a licensed product of EKU around the same time.

A number of staff members, volunteers, and contributors represented MEA at places like the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention, the Royal Military College of Canada, the Conference on Composition and Communication, and in invited guest lectures and conferences throughout the country. Contributors began to provide regular materials for the MEA blog and as the number of MEA published authors and artists approached 400, it was decided by the MEA Executive Board that the organization would move to a single journal, published in the spring, summer, and fall. Special issues of genre-specific journals continues when the amount of content permits.

*As You Were*, the name of MEAs newest journal released its first volume in Fall 2014. In May 2015 the second MEA Symposium will take place in Lawton, OK. Already more than 70 workshops are scheduled along with four days of offerings and special events.