

DEAR JOHNNY DEPP:  
WOULD YOU PLEASE BUY THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA?  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN APPALACHIAN WOMAN

A Thesis  
by  
DONNA T. CORRIHER

Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

December 2012  
Center for Appalachian Studies

DEAR JOHNNY DEPP:  
WOULD YOU PLEASE BUY THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA?  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN APPALACHIAN WOMAN

A Thesis  
by  
DONNA T. CORRIHER  
December 2012

APPROVED BY:

---

Patricia D. Beaver  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

---

Fred Hay  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Eugenia Cecelia Conway  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Patricia D. Beaver  
Director, Center for Appalachian Studies

---

Edelma D. Huntley  
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

Copyright by Donna T. Corriher 2012  
All Rights Reserved

## **Abstract**

### **DEAR JOHNNY DEPP: WOULD YOU PLEASE BUY THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA? AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN APPALACHIAN WOMAN**

Donna T. Corriher  
B.A., Appalachian State University  
M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Patricia D. Beaver

This thesis uses autoethnographic theory to explore the Appalachian region and its impact upon the author. Family and personal experiences are included, and scholarly works and primary sources inform the project. Artistic elements are included to infuse this thesis with examples of autobiographic fiction and memoir. This finished work is offered as a determinedly thorough attempt to create an authentic autoethnography about the stories of migration and multiple strategies for making a living and life.

Autoethnography allows the individual to take on the multiple roles and responsibilities of the ethnographic researcher. The interviewer may be the interviewee. The data evaluation may be infused with opinion. Definitions of "autoethnography" are few, but there are anthropologists, feminist theorists and other scholars who provide guidance and example. Feminist scholar Liz Stanley provides support for the relevance of this thesis. Keyan Tomaselli, Director of the Center for Communication, Media, and Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, and his

autoethnographic work with indigenous South Africans first ignited the author's passion for the genre, and scholar Francoise Lionnet recognizes autoethnographic elements within the work of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston studied and wrote about culture and folklore in Haiti, immersed herself into the social environment there, and shares her findings and personal responses in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. Hurston also provides autoethnographic insight into African American historical and folkloric traditions in her novels, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Autoethnography has more recently been explored within the field of composition studies. Theorists and scholars Jane Danielewicz and Carolyn Ellis, among others, are working towards blurring the lines between participant and observer, as ethnography undergoes self-imposed scrutiny and reinvention.

## **Acknowledgments**

I could not have completed this thesis without the help of a great many people and institutions. I extend my deepest thanks to the following organizations and individuals at Appalachian State University: Cratis D. Williams Graduate School, Office of Student Research, Graduate Student Association Senate, Center for Appalachian Studies, Department of English, Edward J. Cabbell Scholarship in Appalachian Studies, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Cherokee, Yancey County Register of Deeds, Burnsville, Patricia Beaver, Eugenia Cecelia Conway, Fred Hay, Susan Keefe, Katherine Ledford, Sandra Ballard, Conrad Ostwalt, Georgia Rhoades, Debbie Bauer, Dean Williams, Rick Ward, Jean Ward, Shannon Perry, Ashley Brewer, Reverend Lisa Hardesty, pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Cherokee, Travis Corriher, Eva Spriggs Tolley, Marvin Ross Tolley, and my many other family members and friends, here and beyond, much beloved.

## Dedication

For Travis: an artist with a camera, and my son

Travis did not take the picture of me with the horses (see fig. 1). The picture was taken on our first day home from the hospital after his birth. Travis is in my arms, being welcomed by Jewel, a Saddlebred mare.



Fig. 1. Me, Travis and Jewel; "Donna, Travis and Jewel"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; 1983; JPEG.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Dedication .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review.....	1
Chapter 2: Maggie and Buck.....	17
Chapter 3: The Move.....	30
Chapter 4: Portraits of the Depression .....	40
Children of Depression-era Western North Carolina .....	40
West Virginia .....	44
Children and Gender Roles .....	47
Chapter 5: Belief Systems, Distant Kin, and Personal Conflict.....	49
Chapter 6: Sorrows.....	69
Chapter 7: The Cherokee Connection .....	76
The Cherokee, the Color Yellow, and a Pushing Wind .....	79
Chapter 8: My Belief System, An Appalachian Belief System .....	88
Chapter 9: Of War Babies and Long Pauses .....	96
Chapter 10: There's A Man Under That Mountain .....	108
Chapter 11: Something About Coal and Water.....	113
Moving Mountains, Skimming Oceans: Government and Energy Economics ..	125
Chapter 12: Reflections in Cranberry.....	136



Hello Mr. Rockefeller .....	140
Fish Meant to be Eaten.....	143
Finding Out About That Boxcar.....	146
Chapter 13: The Appalachian Diaspora in Florida.....	154
Chapter 14: Who Do We Think We Are?.....	163
Finding a Space .....	168
Chapter 15: Conclusion.....	181
Johnny, I Did Not Forget You! .....	185
The Semantics of a Conclusion.....	186
Works Cited.....	189
Appendix A: List of Family Members and Family Tree.....	200
Appendix B: List of Poetry and Fiction .....	204
Appendix C: IRB Approval and Renewals 2010-2012.....	205
Vita.....	208

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

In the summer of 2009, I joined the Appalachian Writing Project, a two-part summer course at Appalachian State University under the direction of Mark Vogel and Georgia Rhoades. Vogel's section of the course was a creative writing component, and I was a new graduate student thrilled with the opportunity to "just" write. His prompt was to draw a map of the world as it was when I was seven years old, my house, my neighborhood, whatever came to mind as I drew. From the map, I was then to "freewrite."<sup>1</sup> I wrote the first draft of what would become my short story, "From the Map: Black Dirt," and I began to feel the initial stirrings of belonging in the master's program in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University: my history, my worldview, my heart, are all Appalachian. As I have expressed my personal reactions to the events in my life through poetry and fiction over the years, I have come to know myself and where I come from. One theorist clarifies my desire to *understand* where I have come from that shapes my writing of this thesis, express those responses, and share the history of a people. Feminist scholar Liz Stanley writes:

The "writing of a life" is a story, an account of the past by a particular kind of historian known as an auto/biographer. My writing process raises epistemological issues that arise in any historical research [and] . . . concern the interpretive role of the historian, the fragmentary and incomplete nature

---

<sup>1</sup> See Peter Elbow's definition of "freewriting" in *Writing Without Teachers*.

of available sources, and the role of writing in the creation of, not a slice of the past, but rather an account of what this might have been. (Stanley 102)

If you read her definition closely, Stanley's word "auto/biographer" describes much more than our typical expectations of an "autobiography." By taking into account what *might have been* when writing an autobiography, how one's life may have been quite different should social or individual influences been different, one is also looking at the cultural influences and sociality impacting any particular event one is writing about. Contrastingly, I am interested in my past with the curiosity of an ethnographer who identifies specific social and individual influences upon my life. I share my past with the pride of an Appalachian woman fascinated by the self-reliance and tenacity of the family in my past, most of whom possessed many of what Appalachian scholar Loyal Jones termed "Appalachian Values"—including self-reliance, a love of place, a sense of beauty, familism, humility and modesty, patriotism, religious, personalism, and a sense of humor.

This introduction and literature review serves to introduce the Tolley side of my family (see appendix A), begins to locate them geographically, and provides definition and theory in support of the autoethnography genre. Chapter two, "Maggie and Buck," introduces the Spriggs side of the family, my mother's side, and is a romantic story that begins in prosperous times before the Great Depression. Margaret Spiva was a child bride of George "Buck" Spriggs, a young soldier returned home from World War I. The chapter about their lives begins with a move to West Virginia to get work in the coalfields, and their adaptations to life in a coal camp. Chapter three, "The Move," fast-forwards to a major move by my immediate family, from West Virginia to Florida, as the mines began shutting down. Those were the years of my childhood, that introduce me—the

autoethnographer. I include stories about my aunts and uncles then living in both states. In chapter four, "Portraits of the Depression," I look continue the autoethnography, looking back to the Depression era again, through stories told to me by family members, and other primary research. The chapter touches upon gender roles and family dynamics in the years of my parents' childhoods. I discuss religion and folk belief in chapter five, "Belief Systems, Distant Kin, and Personal Conflict," and include parts of interviews with Watauga county residents Jean Ward and her son, Rick. I secured approval from Appalachian State University's Office of Research Protection and Institutional Review Board (IRB study number 10-0154) in 2010 and subsequent renewals to conduct interviews with human subjects (see appendix C). The Wards have lived in western North Carolina for generations. Their ancestors walked the same lands as the Tolleys. Chapter six, "Sorrows," opens on a somber note as I discuss the sorrows of childhood, primarily death. The chapter closes with a short story, "Blossoming Bosoms," celebrating opportunities to build community, even at a funeral.

Pappy (Grandpa Tolley) told me stories about members of his mother's family, Cherokee people, who hid up on the "ball of Yellow Mountain" to avoid "The Removal" of the Cherokee to Oklahoma. They avoided what came to be known as "The Trail of Tears." Chapter seven, "The Cherokee Connection," includes stories and research from my visit to the Qualla Reservation of the Band of the Eastern Cherokee, observations of the mutual impact of Cherokee tradition and Christianity upon families, and a discussion of Cherokee medicine and healing. In chapter eight, "My Belief System, An Appalachian Belief System," I discuss my belief system as it aligns with historical Appalachian religion. My focus chronologically shifts again to Depression-era history, specifically, the tragic

incident at Hawk's Nest in West Virginia, in chapter nine, "Of War Babies and Long Pauses." Stories of family military service and race relations are also in chapter nine. Coal, coal, and more coal are discussed in chapter ten, "There's a Man Under that Mountain," and in chapter eleven, "Something about Coal and Water." "Reflections in Cranberry," Chapter twelve, returns back to the Tolleys. Significant discoveries within my family's history, hunting, fishing, trains, and meanings revealed around kitchen tables, are shared in chapter twelve. In chapter thirteen, "The Appalachian Diaspora in Florida," I discuss the move to Saint Petersburg, the move from Florida to North Carolina, and include a list of genealogical evidence of my diverse family background. Work of historians Ronald Lewis and John Williams informs understanding of Appalachian historical class differences in chapter fourteen, "Who Do We Think We Are?" My conclusion reflects back on the contents of this thesis and my research. A short story that I wrote about race relations in the 1960s is included, and it further prepares me, and the reader, for conclusion. Also in this chapter, I again challenge Johnny Depp to "buy" the state of West Virginia.

Throughout this thesis, one will find poems, short stories, and brief asides, strategically placed to support the autoethnographic spirit of my project. My intention is to encourage the reader to determine the connection of the historical to the resulting creative products—my products.

My family saga begins with my dad's father, Howard Nelson Tolley, called "Pappy." He was born in a boxcar in Cranberry, North Carolina. At that time, his father, Handy Sebastian Tolley, was working in the Cranberry Iron Mine. My great-grandmother, Howard's mother, Mary, was from that area, at least three-quarter Cherokee, and was tall.

At some time, her ancestors lived on the Ball of Yellow Mountain.<sup>2</sup> That land, since acquired and protected by the North Carolina Nature Conservancy, is quite a challenge to visit. An average two-wheel drive vehicle cannot make the climb. There is a dirt road, more a path now, that grows so steep near the top that car wheels spin and engines roar, but the driver makes no progress. There is a gate across the road with a keypad lock. I found and contacted the local guardian about ten years ago. He told me he would meet me up there some time and let me pass, but at that time I did not have the right vehicle, or the right husband, or the right spirit to go. The guardian also told me that no one had ever lived on the "ball." Ha. I responded in poetry, for I knew they lived there and escaped "The Removal" and "Trail of Tears":

#### Black Walnuts

There's a family of Indians live up on the ball of the Yellow.

We ain't supposed to know they're there, but we do.

Zeke says one of 'em is a preacher.

JoLynn says one of 'em's married to a Scottish man.

Granny says that woman's six feet tall and that Scottish man's barely five and a half.

We just sit there thinkin.'

---

<sup>2</sup> "Bald" is the term more commonly used, but Pappy always used the phrase "Ball" of Yellow Mountain. The etymology of the word "bald," according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, Douglas Harper, 2001-2012, is from the Middle English, circa the thirteenth century. A Celtic word, "bal," meant a "white patch or blaze spot on an animal," usually a horse.

My father, Marvin Ross Tolley, was born in 1937 at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp<sup>3</sup> located on a dairy farm in Tazewell, Virginia. Each family had three rooms in what has been described to me as a single-level, u-shaped complex of wooden buildings. Why they lived there is not lost. My grandmother, Hazel Pauline Gaultney, called "Polly," was pregnant. Daddy's older brother, Doug, was only six years old. They needed a place to live. They ended up in the camp. But at least it was at a dairy. Daddy told me his middle name, Ross, is also the middle name of the owner of Beaver Dairy (see fig. 2). There was milk for Daddy and his brother, at no cost, and Daddy believes his mother gave him the middle name of Ross to thank the owner. I wonder why Daddy *needed* the milk—he was an infant. Grandma Polly must have lost her milk, and I hate to think of all the possible reasons why. Also, Pappy was suffering from an episode of typhoid fever, most likely caught by drinking from a stream while hunting or fishing. In the early 1930s, he had been a hunting and fishing guide in the areas of Watauga and Avery counties, and he was a good one. But, typhoid is a recurrent and debilitating disease.

---

<sup>3</sup> See "Legacies of the New Deal in Virginia," on the Library of Virginia website for more information about the CCC.



Fig. 2. Beavers and Son Dairy in Tazewell, Virginia, the dairy that provided milk for Daddy; "A. B. Beavers & Son Dairy in Tazewell, Virginia"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; 1956; JPEG.





Fig. 3. The company store in Elbert where Polly worked around 1946; “Elbert Company Store”; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

When Pappy got better, Daddy’s side of my family eventually ended up in the coal camp of Anawalt, West Virginia, where Pappy found work. Not in good health to begin with, Pappy got black lung, too, from working in those mines. My grandmother, Pauline – Grandma Polly – also found work in Anawalt, taking a job in the company store (see fig. 3). There, she honed the skills that would enable her to support herself and Pappy for the last years of their lives when they moved to Dobson, North Carolina in 1970. She opened "Pauline's Dress Shop" right across the street from the courthouse. She clothed the women of Dobson, the county seat of Surrey County. She had a float in the annual Christmas parade every year and made semi-annual buying trips to Charlotte. On occasion, we, the feminine persuasion of the family, received some of the finest lingerie to be had, once we got old enough for it to fit. "If you're out of shape and need control, and don't have time to

bend or roll, then let Pauline, with Gossard<sup>4</sup> answer. She'll make you trim as a ballet dancer!" She told us she made that tagline up, and I have searched the internet for information to the contrary, to no avail. I have determined she was a marketing genius, for there seems to be a gene predisposing us to brilliance in sales techniques. Many of the family had or have successful careers in sales.

This autoethnography is a family history within the scope of a regional history. I have found history to be typically limited in scope by the type of individuals who document it. While this thesis indeed awakens awareness of any number of perspectives, my reasons for creating an autoethnography are simple. My memories and family histories are uniquely mine and in this thesis I explore how they are Appalachian.

To further explain my motivation I look to historian Annette Kuhn. In her book, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Kuhn writes:

If pressed to slot these pieces of memory work, my memory texts, into some sort of category, I would hazard first of all that they tread a line between cultural criticism and cultural production, or rather that they try to span the gulf between those who comment on the productions of culture and those who actually do the producing. (Kuhn 3)

I find myself and my family to be indeed 'producers' of history. Perhaps we have controlled the production, perhaps we have not, regardless, we are exemplary examples of American survivalists. However, except for me, we are not, overall, the sort of people who write down historical accounts, or journal our responses to them.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Gossard company was still making lingerie in 2011.

I have been a writer since I was ten years old, often documenting in poetry or short stories my emotional responses to personal life experiences and global events. These accounts are fictionalized just enough to keep me and my family members safe from judgment and heartbreak. If, as Kuhn explains, "the source materials of the written life story are subjected to what psychoanalysis calls secondary revision" (Kuhn 149), then I find fiction to be a revision of the subconscious, for I was unaware at the time of writing that I was indeed writing about my own life. Liz Stanley clarifies this phenomenon in "The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography":

Because memory inevitably has limits, the self we construct is necessarily partial, memory ties together events, persons and feelings actually linked only in such accounts and not in life as it was lived, it equally necessarily relies upon fictive devices in producing any and every account of the self it is concerned with. (Stanley 62)

Although memory links people and events meaningfully, fictive devices may or may not be involved. Nonetheless, drawing upon Stanley, events and persons linked through my life, memory, research, and my short stories and poetry, merge here as an "autoethnography" based upon cultural experiences which can be accounted for from the late nineteenth century to the present, and which will document aspects within the history of an Appalachian family. My family stories connect random events into a meaningful account. Folklore memorats<sup>5</sup> reveal historical clues, but, more importantly, these memorats

---

<sup>5</sup> "Von Sydow called memorat a personal narrative involving an encounter with a supernatural being. The expanded definition of memorat includes any personal narrative . . . . A memorat could become a legend if it is accepted by the whole community" (Dunnes).

show the values and fears of the tellers and the listener [for example, me]. According to folklorist Cece Conway, "They provide a community and personal history of the mind and heart" (Conway).

An "autobiography" is only about oneself, but an autoethnography includes examination of the community historical and social influences. What expands my story is the ethnography which helped create me. Personal, political, social, and cultural environments color perspective and offer opportunities to enliven history and awaken awareness as to what might be. Research about my family, their friends, their work, and all the aspects of the society they came from serves to complete my autoethnography. Thus, as Keyan Tomaselli, Director of the Center for Communication, Media, and Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa writes:

Where conventional social science writing eliminates the observers (and often reduces the observed to mere statistics), autoethnography strives to write all participants in the encounter – their observations, their dialogues, their subjectivities – into the story or stories being told. (Tomaselli 21)

I must write about coal. Not only did coal feed Daddy and his family, it also fed Mama and her family. I must write about the Cherokee, if for no other reason than to possibly discover more about who my great-grandmother was and where she came from, and to account for that part of my family's identity claims. I must write about hunting and fishing in Avery and Watauga counties of North Carolina, in the lands in and around Troutdale, Virginia, and in the mountainous terrain of southern West Virginia, to acknowledge aspects of my family's, and Appalachia's, survival.

These chapters contain personal observations and historical commentary that family members reported to me, scholarly arguments regarding accuracy and ethnographic truth, and, as warranted, interviews with nonfamily members. A solid foundation of wise, hard-working adults, my witnessing their sacrifices, and education at the knee of native peoples and Americanized immigrants, has created the individual who is "me." This autoethnography includes my story, a rich ethnography, and, a story of Appalachia. Unique because, as a scholar, I at times am both the researcher and researched, the interviewer and the interviewee.

My primary methodologies in researching relevant topics included gathering primary source information by conducting oral and written interviews, as well as poring over newspapers on microfilm and old maps. Online collections, such as state and national archives, political and news agencies, and the *U. S. Army Corps of Engineers* the *Washington Post*, were valuable resources. Secondary sources used in research were varied, and include journals, books, and periodicals. Research and the gathering of information about the history of hunting and fishing, the removal of the Cherokee from western North Carolina, mining, general histories of western North Carolina and southwestern West Virginia, transnationalism, religion and other belief systems, labor, and unions, took place over the course of two years. I looked to the works of historians Ronald Lewis, author of *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields* (2008), and John Alexander Williams, author of *Appalachia: A History*, among other historical works. Deborah Vansau McCauley's work, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*, and Loyal Jones' *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* inform my section on religion and

belief systems, as does the work of folklorist Cecelia Conway. Anthropological and ethnographic theoretical grounding, as a result of the work of Patricia Beaver, in *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*, Susan Keefe on research methods, and many other scholars and theorists, supports my undertaking in a study of Appalachian history and culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As I go to the original primary source for this work, and conduct an "oral interview" with myself, I take on the role of not only narrator, but also of researcher. I am in control. As feminist theorists Dana Anderson and Katherine Jack write, in explaining the benefits of an oral interview "structured by the narrator instead of the researcher," I am free to express myself, and to reveal my "uniqueness in its full class, racial, and ethnic richness" (20). [A valuable point when doing oral histories with others!]

Because any thesis is a serious undertaking, in considering my methodology for this project, I found myself speculating about my ability and the validity of the subject matter. I recalled the days of picking up a pen and creating those characters of fiction that I could so easily deny. But, there was no denying the people I have written about here. I wrote as a scholar, remembering as I conducted the interviews the inherent responsibilities of an ethnographer, as outlined by oral historians Karen Olson and Linda Shopes in "Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Doing Oral History among Working-Class Women and Men":

Thus, the interview relationship might properly be understood as a triangular one: the interviewee, us, and the larger society. If the larger society is the ultimate recipient of the insights of the interview, then, in terms of this model, the researcher is cast in the role of mediator. The

informants we interview assume that we know the necessary [information and] procedures for setting the public record straight. They enter the interview hoping that our academic role will provide the means for injecting their own worldview into the elusive arena of public knowledge...thus we are led to believe that our interviews are not so much records of facts that are more or less true – although they are that – but social texts, records of a social interaction situated within the context of class relations in the larger society. (Olson and Shopes 198)

The title, "Dear Johnny Depp: Will You Please Buy the State of West Virginia? Autoethnography of an Appalachian Woman," is from my repertoire of 'one-liners' waiting their assignment in my creative portfolio. I find West Virginia so enmeshed in political, social, economic, cultural, environmental, and scholarly-induced hypothetical analyses that perhaps complete ownership by a single individual, and all the power and authority that entails, is the only way the mess will be sorted out. For example, actress Kim Basinger bought Braselton, Georgia. Why shouldn't Johnny Depp, being the genius, celebrated, *wealthy* actor that he is, buy West Virginia? (I have also included a discussion about the impact popular actors, actresses, and musicians have upon residents of Appalachia, in live performance or through movies and television. For example, I recalled the sorrow of Mama when Jayne Mansfield died in a car wreck, her head severed from her neck while her children slept in the backseat. And then, there was Elvis.

A great deal of my research was collecting oral histories, and I have included a lengthy list of works consulted that provides cultural and social insight into the region. I have also cited sources for autoethnography as a whole. My working definition of

"autoethnography," and one which served to validate my desire to indeed write this thesis in this format, is provided by Andrew C. Sparkes, Professor of Social Theory and Director of the Qualitative Research Unit in the School of Health & Sport Sciences at Exeter University, in his essay, "Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More?" During his career, Sparkes has published journal articles about autoethnography, contributed chapters to books, and presented his findings at conferences. His definition best explains all aspects of the genre I find appealing, and important:

[Autoethnographies] include the following: the use of systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall, the inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit, the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality, the celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail, the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning, a concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences, an encouragement of compassion and empathy, a focus on helping us learn how to live and cope, the featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue, the seeking of a fusing between social science and literature, the connecting of the practices of social science with the living of life, and the representation of lived experience using a variety of genres – short stories, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. (210-211)

The opportunity to conduct research about my family background, as well as include some of the poetry and short stories I have written over the years, was too much to resist. Finding a genre, autoethnography, which allows me to do both, was serendipitous.



This thesis is a compilation of the components of autoethnography as identified by Sparkes, including in particular the voices of my family members, those living and past, as well as research. I include samples of the culmination of my human experiences as shared through my poetry and short stories (see appendix B). The exciting situation I find myself in allows me to *do* something exciting—to write in a genre as one of the coparticipants, as the researcher, and as the creator of the "fragmented and layered writing" Sparkes describes.

## Chapter 2: Maggie and Buck

Maggie was the only child born to parents with children from earlier marriages. America Lewis and James Henry Spiva had married for companionship, and to help each other raise those children. Each had lost a spouse to death. Their marriage culminated with Maggie, Margaret Elizabeth, their last child, and something of a surprise. America was forty-two years old and James was sixty-one. They were living in Meadowview, Washington County, Virginia, just outside Abingdon.

When Margaret was thirteen she met George "Buck" Spriggs, twenty-one years old, handsome and tall, with icy blue eyes, and newly home from military service (see fig. 4). There were Spriggses living in the area, some were property and business owners, others rented and farmed. At the time, Margaret was all but engaged to a Porterfield, of the Barter Theater Porterfields from Abingdon. Mr. Porterfield had sought and secured permission from Margaret's father to court her.

Porterfield would have been quite a catch. His family owned and ran the Barter Theatre, a wonderful venue where community members could barter the cost of a ticket to watch a live performance. Vegetables, grain, eggs, perhaps meat, all had potential for trade, and most was accepted. A marriage to a Porterfield would have most likely provided Margaret with a secure future, which was her father's intent. Being older, James and America sought to see Maggie married and safely in the care of a good man and Porterfield fit the bill. But before a relationship could begin, Margaret met Buck.



Fig. 4. My grandfather George "Buck" Spriggs in uniform during World War I, just before Grandma Maggie met him; "George "Buck" Spriggs in Uniform"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

Sitting beside the springhouse at her home in Meadowview one day, Margaret saw him come walking over the hill, coming to visit her father, James. Family lore insists it was the proverbial love at first sight for both of them. Buck—straight of carriage, good-looking, smart, and ambitious—met Maggie, as he came to call her, thirteen years of age, beautiful, and of "marrying age." She offered him water; he took it, and all thoughts of Mr.

Porterfield left her mind. Within the year, Buck and Maggie crossed the state line, traveling from Virginia to Tennessee, and married, lying about Maggie's age. She gave birth to their first child a little more than one year later.

There is an early photograph of the couple with their child, Preston. It was the 1920s, Maggie's hair is bobbed; Buck is dapper and well-groomed. Buck has a look of rapt contentment on his face. Maggie's face is glowingly happy (see fig. 5). Although Preston looks a bit confused by all the fuss of having a photograph taken, the overall mood of the picture is one of a young couple confident of their future. They did what young married couples of the times did—they loved and multiplied. Three years after Preston was born, came Lawrence, then Jane, Chester, Peggy, Buddy, Eva (my mother), and finally, Walter. Walter was born when Maggie was thirty-three years old. All of their children were born in West Virginia, and raised in coal camps. The family lived the longest at Elbert, in McDowell County.



Fig. 5. Buck and Maggie with their first-born child, Preston; “Maggie, Buck, and Preston”;

*Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

Buck and Maggie made the move from Virginia to West Virginia just before Preston was born, with Buck's father, James Walter, and James' second wife, Nellie. Nellie was only two years older than Buck. The 1920 census of McDowell County lists them as ten living in the same household. The family members all shared the space for a time, but the dynamic was interesting, to say the least. Buck and Maggie soon found their own place, partially furnishing it with household items bought from a family who was leaving the camp. That purchase caused a little discord in the Spriggs household. Maggie had

happened to overhear Nellie telling James Walter about the sale, and suggesting that she and James buy some of the items. Maggie, more than ready to move into a place she and Buck could call their own, got up early the morning of the sale, took money out of Buck's wallet, and went and bought everything she could before Nellie knew what was happening. Whether Maggie's surreptitious method was to avoid bad feelings between Buck and his daddy, or due to her being a spirited, rash, young bride, one-upping another young bride, we do not know. Regardless, Maggie bought the furniture before Nellie could, and Maggie and Buck moved into their own home.

Maggie and Buck lived in a “company” house, owned by the coal company running the mine. The building had a single hallway that originally stretched from one end of the house to the other, but had been walled up in the center and divided to provide separate “homes” for four families. Each family basically had a corner of the house, and each corner had an upstairs and a downstairs. Each family section had an outside entrance and a small amount of yard. Maggie’s and Buck Spriggs’ section had three small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. Their daughters shared one bedroom, the boys shared another, and the final bedroom was Maggie and Buck's. There were five to seven houses on their street, and directly behind the line of houses was a mountain. The front yard was a steep slope down to the road and railroad tracks. The Spriggs had three gardens, one was just outside the door, one was on the mountain top, and one was just across the tracks.

The coal camp at Elbert, as with most camps, was a diverse mix of nationalities and socio-economic classes. Many of the miners were of European heritage, having moved to America for work. Maggie and Buck's ancestry is primarily of German descent. Their ancestors arrived in America sometime in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and were, in part,

landowners in the mountains of western Virginia. Maggie, Buck, and their extended families were some of a few native born Americans in Elbert. The 1920 McDowell County Census lists people from not only Virginia, like the Spriggs, but also from Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan, North Carolina, and Indiana. Native countries outside the United States represented on that census include Italy, Austria, Poland, and Russia, to list a few. The men, most bringing families, came to work in the coal mines.

Being as young as she was, Maggie did not know a lot about cooking and housekeeping. She had helped at home during her childhood, and learned a bit from her mother, but managing her own household was a different matter. It was not long after Maggie, Buck, and Preston moved into their own home that her neighbor-women began sharing recipes and teaching her how to cook. These women from Poland, Germany, Italy, Russia, Wales, and other European countries had menus limited only by the ingredients they could raise or get from the company store. They taught Maggie how to cook cabbage rolls, spaghetti sauces, desserts, and many other things, including wine. The Italian neighbors made wine on a regular basis. Walter, Maggie and Buck's youngest son, had a particular fascination with the wine-making process. One day, Walter's "fascination" led to a frightful afternoon for Maggie.

Maggie believed in the supernatural, and she was a Christian, raised in the Baptist church. Signs from God were a part of life. Eva (my mother), almost two years older than Walter, came home from school one day to find Maggie sitting outside in the swing, anxious and fearful. Maggie told her daughter that she had been hearing strange popping noises all day, and that she thought it was a bad "sign." Of what, she did not know. Together, they walked to the cellar and Eva bravely opened the door and peered in. There

were Maggie's jars of preserved food, some intact, some shattered, and food splattered everywhere. Bottles of cherry wine were exploding in the wine cellar! Walter, Grandma's youngest son, had tried to make wine out of cherries as he had seen the Italian neighbors do with grapes. His bottles exploded, "boom, boom, boom!" the corks bottles shot like bullets into the glass jars. The loss of the foodstuffs was not punished. Grandma Maggie and especially Grandpa Buck encouraged ingenuity and experimentation. Buck, as a matter of fact, was the person who eventually brought the wonder of television to the hollow.

The task was simple once Buck learned about the need for a "signal." He corralled a son-in-law, George Reynolds (married to Jane), to help him and stationed Eva at the house by a window through which she could see the television. Buck's Model T was parked steps away. Eva's job was to honk the horn long and loud when she saw a picture. Buck and George took off up the mountain, dragging pieces of coated wire behind them. They connected the pieces with shiny, metal hair rods, the kind used in those days to curl women's hair for permanents. The two men walked the ridge, dragging the wire and an antenna made out of a bicycle tire, stopping on occasion to test for a signal by listening for Eva's "honk." At a spot on the crest of a ridge, they found the signal. Below, an image appeared on the television screen and Eva blasted out the news on the horn, over and over, desperately wondering if she had honked enough.

The Spriggs family was the only one with television for a while, and they shared it. The men from the community gathered in the living room to watch the fights. Maggie would cook a pan of fudge on those nights, for a treat. Years later, in 1956, she would see



Elvis Presley for the first time, on the Ed Sullivan show. Mama recalled that Grandma Maggie pulled her stool up closer to the television set, and exclaimed to the family, "That boy's going to make it!" Mama became a fan that night, too.

The Spriggs family shared what they had, but there was at least one communal activity Maggie would not tolerate—shooting "craps." Gambling, especially throwing dice was a pastime of many men, and probably some women. Buck would try to, and did, get away with a game at the house every now and then when she was away—until the evening she walked in on them. She stopped, smiled, and then said, "Evening, boys," and scooped every penny of the money into her purse. And she kept it. Her hospitality did not extend to gambling. But she allowed the occasional drink. Wine, whiskey, and moonshine were a part of life tolerated within limits.

Buck went off on "benders" every now and then. A bender, according to Mama, is a way of stepping outside of life for two or three days, with the help of enough alcohol to pave the way. Buck always came back; sick, promising never to do it again, and he always went back to work. He managed to keep, and was respected at, his job. He was given many opportunities to make extra money and more and more responsibility, but Buck liked to drink. Maggie tolerated it in moderation, although it may not have made a difference in Buck's drinking if she had not. More than likely, there were other reasons he stayed in line. Drinking led to fights—there is nothing worse than a mean drunk—and Buck broke up enough fights to not want to be *that* man. But, more importantly, one of Buck and Maggie's daughters, Jane, had a problem with drinking, and many a night found Buck driving to a dance to pick up his daughter when she got out of hand. To the family, her problem was not without cause. The young woman's first and only pregnancy ended in a miscarriage,

she hemorrhaged badly, and the medical care she received afterwards was inadequate, resulting in her never being able to conceive and carry a child. She went a little crazy and retreated into herself, and while shock treatments brought her back to reality, alcohol was the longstanding "cure." And life went on.



Fig. 6. Most of the Spriggs family relaxing outdoors at the house in Elbert; Grandpa Buck is at center; "The Spriggs' House in Elbert, West Virginia"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

The men worked in the mines; the children played outdoors, went to school, and went door-to-door exchanging comic books. The women tended the house gardens, cooked, and preserved. Families took occasional breaks to socialize, typically on Sundays or holidays (see fig. 6), but all work never truly stopped. Cooking always had to be done. Families had to eat.

Maggie preserved the surplus food they grew in their garden by canning and storing the jars of tomatoes, pickles, corn, green beans, and sometimes jellies and jams in that root cellar. The cellar, like those of other families nearby, was basically a square hole dug out under the house by Buck and men in the community, working together. Buck and Maggie's cellar was unique because Buck put a shower in. He was a coal miner. The shower allowed him to clean up before he ever went into the house.

Cellar digging was not the only way the men helped each other out. Hog slaughtering also required a group effort. One year, after his oldest sons had married and moved away, Buck was assisted by not only neighbors, but also one of his younger boys, Buddy. Buddy was young and small, not truly able to help, but allowed to watch. Hog slaughtering required that one man shoot the hog, and then another man quickly grab the hog and slit its throat to allow it to bleed out. Buddy was insistent that he was old enough to help. He was not allowed to handle a gun yet, but told his father that he could be the one to slit the throat. Buck finally agreed to let him try.

Everyone took their places, Buck outside the paddock with the rifle; Buddy just inside with the knife, and the rest of the men leaning over the fence watching. Buck took careful aim—and purposefully overshot the hog.

Buddy pounced as Buck and the other men gleefully watched him wrestle and attempt to slit the throat of a huge hog completely and totally alive. In recounting the story years later, Eva said, "That hog 'bout beat him to death!" And Buddy most definitely learned an important lesson and a very basic aspect of a community's survival—cooperation.

Maggie and Buck and other men and women in Elbert certainly "lived off the land" to a great degree, growing vegetables and raising livestock. The mine work provided cash for clothing and gas, books, a picture show every now and then, and other things families could not grow or create themselves. They bartered at the company store, shared tomato plants grown from seed, started under glass weeks before planting time, and shared ways of food preparation passed down from generation to generation, recipes that would be altered and adjusted to whatever food source was available. They shared medical cures from their home countries, such as "head wrapping," used by one of Maggie's close neighbors, an Italian woman, for headaches. Mama recalled that the woman suffered headaches often and would bind her temples with white cloth to ease the pain.

Buck had a mandolin, banjo, guitar, and a trombone, and played them all in a community band. The band members were all from in and around Elbert and played at each other's houses, or outside their houses, in the road. They played mostly country and religious songs, and some they made up. Many played songs learned during World War I. They were people living on the cusp of the past and the future, taking and sharing and using the best of both, adapting to their environment and making it better.

Maggie's strength of character, as well as Buck's, caused the couple to earn a reputation as the "go to" people in Elbert. If someone needed help, Maggie and Buck provided it if they could. Maggie served meals to beggars, and cared for a family when a mother was ill. Buck provided car rides in his Model T Ford. Open house television nights, a craps game (when Maggie wasn't home)—all and more were willingly done.

Preston, Maggie and Buck's oldest son, married a Polish girl, Helen. One of Maggie's favorite dishes, and one that her descendants make to this day, was Polish

Cabbage Rolls. Some recipes for cabbage rolls include sausage, but Maggie's does not: ground beef, cooked rice, egg, salt and pepper, tomatoes, and cabbage are all she used. She also loved to bake desserts, and had a century-old recipe for a black walnut pound cake, and one for a fruitcake, covered in wine and soaked in a crock. Those were family favorites, among many. Her biscuits could not be duplicated. She eventually wrote what she had learned in notebooks, and those notebooks have been handed down to her granddaughters.

There is no way of knowing for certain if the women who taught Maggie how to cook had written recipes they shared with her, or if the information was shared in true foodways fashion—mouth to ear, hand to hand, heart to heart. Some of the women who were her neighbors could barely speak English, much less write it. There are hundreds of recipes written down in Maggie's hand. Her documentations of these foodways are guarantees that her grandchildren and great-children, at the very least, know of these things, these foods, and these ways. Transmissions of music and food and culture which took place in the coalfields of Appalachia in the years just before and during the Great Depression continue to impact individuals and families to this day.

Although my personal recollections of my early childhood in West Virginia are vague and highlighted by instances of what I now recognize to be psychologically charged occurrences, such as the giant paw print of a bear in the strawberry patch above our house, or the sight of Pappy on his hands and knees, peering under a refrigerator to help me search for my imaginary puppy, the environment of that Appalachian beginning was nurturing and precious.

The unique appeal of Appalachia and the inspiration for continued research about the region and its people are found in that curious, ongoing ability to adapt and balance nature and technology. West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina—all were regions of Appalachia settled by immigrants and peoples with cultural knowledge and skills of survival. Maggie's neighbor-women saw a young woman just like themselves, with children to feed, trying to build a life, and so they helped her, unquestioning in recognition that she, in return, would help them. Everybody helped each other. This was so. This was the way a community was to operate.

### Chapter 3: The Move

When the mines closed in Anawalt, Daddy put me, my one-year old sister, and Mama on a bus, and then hitchhiked down himself to save the price of a ticket. We moved in with Mama's parents, Grandma Maggie and Grandpa Buck, until Daddy got us established (see figs. 7 & 8).

My dad, Marvin Ross Tolley, loaded watermelons onto a truck in Saint Petersburg, Florida in 1961. He earned a nickel for each one he loaded, working in 90-plus degree heat the day after he arrived from Anawalt, West Virginia, where the temperature had been a good fifteen degrees cooler. He does not remember how much he earned that day, but he does remember that he was offered a job that evening before he left. He was soon appointed manager of that *7-11* convenience store, and within one year Daddy was offered the opportunity to pick up and deliver fresh produce from the local markets to the other *7-11*'s in the area, traveling a route that took him from St. Pete to Tampa to Clearwater. During his time off, Daddy drove a cab.

Within two months of moving in with Grandma and Grandpa, we were in our own little house, just a block away from them. Family helped family and stayed close, but the culture from which we came demanded that a man work and provide for his own. To do otherwise was shameful and humiliating. Daddy worked hard, and Mama stayed home with the children.



Fig. 7. Grandma Maggie and Grandpa Buck's house in St. Petersburg; "Maggie and Buck's House in St. Petersburg, 1960"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; 1960; JPEG.





Fig. 8. Donna (me) and my middle sister, Sandy, St. Petersburg, 1964; "Donna and Sandy on The Truck, 1964"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p., 1964; JPEG.

Many members of my family migrated to Florida in the early 1960s. My dad's sister, Freda, was already in Deerfield Beach with her husband, Clarence, and their daughter, Becky. Daddy's parents remained in West Virginia, as did his older brother, Doug. Some of Mama's siblings, Peggy, Lawrence, and Jane also remained there. Four of her brothers, Preston, Buddy, Chester, and Walter, and, as mentioned, her parents made the move. And we were *tight*.

Displaced, dislocated, and looking for work, the families made the move to what had to have seemed like another planet. As I have spent the time in remembering, and returned to a mountain vista over the past few years, I realize just how much that move must have affected them. Glorious sunshine and blue skies and the smell of ocean salt and air replaced the cool, shaded landscape and fresh waters of those decades in West Virginia before mountaintop removal. I do not think the adults regretted the move, but the difference must have been numbing for a while. To the children, it was wonderful.

We children did just about everything together—celebrated holidays, played, more like brothers and sisters than cousins. Florida was idyllic during those days, with roads made of crushed seashells. We went fishing, and picked oranges right off of the trees in our yards. We spent hot summer evenings at the beach—it was much too hot to go there during summer days—and the sand, even at that time of day, just before dark, would still be warm on top, and you could dig your feet in to find any coolness underneath. We pretended to be dolphins in that warm water, the Gulf was cleaner then, and never did we have a thought to learn how to swim because we did not know what being in water over our heads felt like.

We invented hurricane parties. Gathering at one house or the other, we spread sleeping bags and blankets on the floor and had popcorn and Kool-aid. And we watched *Batman!* KAZAAM! POW! BAM! I and Bud, Mama's brother Buddy's oldest son, and closest to my age, would read the words to Sandy, my younger sister, and Phillip, next oldest to Bud.

Buddy had found work driving for Greyhound, and we children hated the Greyhound belt and loved the Greyhound bus. The belt, a part of Buddy's uniform, was wide, thick, black leather, and Bud seemed to get the worst of the whippings with the belt.

We children did not think much of it—a spanking was a spanking, and everybody got spanked for misbehavior in those days, at least in our culture. And Uncle Buddy would take us on "illegal" trips on the bus, all around St. Pete in the evenings. Some of us, I cannot remember who all went, were allowed to ride along on a tour to Disney World when it first opened. We did not get off the bus in Orlando, but the ride itself was a treat. We were too poor to even think, at that time, of actually *going* to Disney World. It was one of those things that "would happen later."

We made a bus trip to West Virginia during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Mama, me, and my sister, Sandy, my aunt and my cousins, another advantage of my uncle working for Greyhound. Daddy and Buddy stayed in St. Petersburg, ready to do what they were called to do, if anything. I recall losing a sticker book in a late-night transfer to another bus, and Sandy sick in the tiny bathroom as we went around curve after curve after curve after curve. There were no interstates. I remember that there was an October snow in West Virginia that year, and wrapping plastic bags over our tennis shoes to keep our feet dry.

Buddy's boys were my friends. Chester, Mama's brother, had one son, Joe, and he was too old to really spend time with me. Walter's children, Matt and Jenny, were much younger, and Preston had no children. Douglas, Buddy's third son, was born a few years before my family left Florida to move to North Carolina, and Roger, their youngest, only a year or so before we left. I did not get to know him well at all until adulthood. My youngest sister, Kathy (see fig. 9), born in 1968, did not get to know any of the boys very well until later. We left Florida about six months after she was born.



Fig. 9. Me, my middle sister, Sandy, and baby sister, Kathy, Gulfport, Florida, 1968; "Donna, Sandy and Kathy at Gulfport"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; 1968; JPEG.

I remember the Florida baseball games. Bud and Phillip, Buddy's sons, played, and those games were our social outlets. We had family to cheer for! There was a huge field-complex, and also an area where circus performers practiced their trapeze acts. Florida was

where circus groups "wintered," and those huge nets were both mystifying and electrifying. We could watch the trapeze artists for free, and, one summer, two blocks from our house, I rode an elephant. (Yes, I rode an elephant.)

Aunt Ruth, Buddy's wife, was always at those baseball games. Since Buddy drove a bus, he was not home a lot but, at least to us children, it was not a big deal—it was just what dads did. Fathers were away, making money, and then they were back home, and then they were away again. Solid and true, the certainty of the securities we grew up in is something that is bred into my soul and heart: Family. Family would be there, no matter what.

Like a second mother, as Mama was to her boys, Aunt Ruth helped me grow up and feel good about myself while doing so. When I was fifteen years old, about two years after we moved away from Florida, she made me the most popular girl in my then hometown of Mooresville, North Carolina. We had gone down to visit them during the summer, and I went to a beauty parlor to get my hair cut, with bangs, like the "Coppertone" girl. The cut was horrible. The beautician, if you could call her that, cut my bangs straight across and I looked like I was ten years old again. I was devastated. Ruth took a razor, trimmed the sides, and made me beautiful and sassy. When I got back to Mooresville, my boyfriend did not recognize me, and it was the talk of the junior high. I was a teenage girl seeking acceptance just like other teenage girls—the attention was heady. (And, no, I did NOT want to look like the Coppertone girl with the dog pulling her pants down! I was another Coppertone girl.)

Before we moved up to North Carolina from Florida, I had no idea of any negative connotations or stereotypes held against my parents or other family members in or from Appalachia, in our case, West Virginia. I knew Aunt Peggy, Mama's sister, talked differently, she had the strongest accent of us all, but she and my Uncle Bill lived in a two-story house in Bluefield, one of the nicest houses in town. They had plenty of disposable income. Bill owned an Italian motorcycle made for hill-climbing, and several Indian motorcycles.

Uncle Bill was the West Virginia State Motorcycle Hill Climbing Champion in 1961 and 1962 and we received clippings about him through the mail. He was fearless and did not stop competing until he was physically forced to. The bike rolled over backward onto him and broke his back.

Bill and Peggy's daughter, my cousin, Too (yes, as in "also," and named such because she was *also* named Margaret, after Grandma Maggie) had her own mini-motorcycle. I recall getting a newspaper clipping about her, pictured riding in the Bluefield Christmas Parade of 1963, a little girl with a little white helmet on a little white motorcycle.

Bill and Peggy had a convertible that they drove to Florida one time when we were still living there, and we all piled in for a ride. Florida summers are hot, so the ride happened after dark, and cars of the day were big. Full-bench front seats and back seats always held more people than they were designed to hold. The seven of us were comfortable, but my view was basically of the night sky straight above me. Poetry stirred in my soul, and years later I wrote about that night sky.

*August 1965*

I recollect sittin' out late in a hot dark with Pappy lookin' at that Milky Way.

He tells me to look hard and often cause one day when I'm old I won't be able to see it no more.

I asks why?

He says cause people's makin' the air dirty.

I ain't old. And it's gone.

The years in Florida were the years of my childhood, and I still consider Gulfport something of my "hometown." The move away from Florida happened in 1968, again, my Daddy moved us in order to have a job, and although we received regular news through the mail from the family members who remained there, phone calls to Florida were expensive and trips were exhausting *and* expensive. To take time off from work was unheard of. Life happened, and we settled into North Carolina, about two hours south of Dobson, where Pappy and Polly, my grandparents on Daddy's side, were living.

We visited Polly and Pappy relatively often, but Daddy was a traveling salesman by this time and wanted to be home on the weekends as much as he could. We naturally drifted apart from the Florida family, and did not see a lot of the West Virginia family either, but we did maintain relationships and any vacations that took place were spent visiting our families to the north or south. I actually got to know my West Virginia cousins a little better. Mama's brother, Preston, still lived in Welch with his wife, Helen. Mama had

Peggy in Bluefield, and another sister, Jane, who had remained living in Elbert with her husband, George. Lawrence and his wife, Rita, were in Logan, and Daddy's brother, Doug, settled in with his wife, Dorothy (Dot), in Beckley.



## Chapter 4: Portraits of the Depression

Mama's brother Preston chewed tobacco and I do not recall it in any way deterring from his polished appearance. Preston loved to golf and he was good at it. Lean and muscled, he also looked good in the clothes designed for golfers, and he had the money to buy them. He and my Aunt Helen could not have children. They both worked for US Steel in Welch, West Virginia, Preston as an engineer, and Helen as a secretary. They were an odd couple, she could have picked him up and thrown him over her shoulder, she was so strong and large-boned, while Preston was relatively slight in overall stature. With no children to support, they lived in a beautiful brick ranch in Welch until they retired to Ocala, Florida in the early 1970s. They were both older than Mama and her younger siblings, Preston was the first born of the Spriggs siblings. During the Depression years, he and Helen had been fortunate enough to have jobs, and were securely entrenched in the coal industry, as was Mama's father, George "Buck" Spriggs.

### *Children of Depression-era Western North Carolina*

I have ancestors on both sides of my family who lived in western North Carolina—Watauga, Ashe, Yancey and Avery counties—as well as in eastern Tennessee, before the moves to West Virginia, and some who traveled back and forth between the regions, depending upon whether or not the mines were working.

Marriage was the primary goal of my parents and their brothers and sisters when they came of age. We know marriage has been an important part of western cultural practices. But in Southern Appalachia, according to Patricia Beaver's work, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*, caring for kin took priority over marriage for the youngest child in a family. Mary Norris, a woman I met when I was conducting interviews in Chestnut Grove, North Carolina, a tiny community near Meat Camp in Watauga County, told me that she started high school, but soon quit in order to help her father on the farm. And she never married. Mary's mother died in 1931, when Mary was twelve years old, and Mary took over the duties of cooking and canning and performing any kind of farm work she could. She could not get it all done and go to school at the same time. The Norris farm was over sixty acres and the family grew crops and raised livestock for their own food and to sell. Mary made and sold butter. They harvested apples and cherries, blackberries and raspberries, and grapes, in addition to corn, cabbage, potatoes, turnips, and tomatoes. They kept dairy and beef cattle, hogs, and chickens. Mary still lives in the house she was born in. She heats her house with a woodstove, still draws her water from the well twenty feet from her side door, and uses an outhouse. The grapevines grew in the front yard until the state paved Chestnut Grove Road several years ago, widening it to two lanes, and plowing under the vines. Mary mourns the loss of the grapevines and of a cherry tree also lost to the road construction.

Mary Norris and Margaret Miller, a close neighbor in Chestnut Grove, are only five or six years apart in age, and neither woman ever married. Beaver reports in *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* that "There is a general agreement that a man alone cannot, and should not be expected to, take care of his own domestic needs" (100), and

Margaret and Mary stayed at home to care for their fathers and help with the households after their mothers died. A daughter shouldering the duties of a mother who died was not unusual in Appalachia.

Even with two surviving parents, older daughters often cared for younger siblings and helped wash diapers while mothers sewed, gardened, and prepared food. Babies were welcome additions to families, especially farming families, as children provided helping hands. Mary Jane Putzel, a graduate of the Appalachian Studies graduate program at ASU, provides some insight into this custom by sharing a conversation in an interview she conducted with an eighty-year-old man, reminiscing about his childhood:

As soon as we could count to three we was taken to the field to work. If we could count three grains of corn or three beans, then we could foller Mam or Pa and drop beans or corn in a hole. If a youngun' was too little to work then it could sit under a shade tree and play with the baby so Ma could work. (11)

Mama came from a large family, but the size of the family was due to her parents not using birth control. Their last child, or so the family story goes, was the last because Grandpa Buck did not make it home for the birth. Because he did not make it home Grandma Maggie told him that was "it." No more babies. [I ponder this story as an adult and cannot help but wonder if "it" meant no more sex! Perhaps!] My father came from a family of five children, although two of his siblings died in childhood. A sister, Mina Jean, died of complications after a tonsillectomy when she was seven years old, and another sister, Geraldine, died at the age of seven months, we believe of dysentery. My Grandma

Polly did not talk much about that baby. Geraldine was her first child, and the loss was painful. The fact that many children died in infancy or youth before the advancements of modern medicine did not lessen the pain or sorrow.

There is an interesting family story about a childhood illness suffered by my Aunt Freda, Daddy's sister, and home remedies. Freda was my grandparents' fourth-born child, and she suffered a bout of dysentery as an infant. The ailment was common in those days, caused by bacteria, difficult to cure, and very serious if suffered by children, especially infants. For most people, the course of treatment was plenty of liquids and to "wait it out." But Freda's little body could not take much more, she could not keep enough fluid in to replenish what she was losing, and Pappy, my grandfather, went to work that day in heartbreak, expecting to be called home at any time. A fellow miner, an African American man who worked alongside Pappy, told him that burnt whiskey would cure the dysentery. He told Pappy to pour whiskey into a teaspoon, light it, cool it, and then give it to Freda. Pappy went home and did it. Freda was cured, and survived. However grateful the family may have been at Freda's survival was sadly overshadowed by ramifications of the treatment method: Pappy's side of the family—his parents and siblings—were Holy Roller Baptists. Alcohol in any form and for any reason was forbidden. Because he gave Freda the whiskey, he and the rest of his little family were disowned and barred from the church. I always found it odd that Pappy insisted that Polly take the children to the Baptist church when they got older. I did not find it odd that she subtly resisted, leaving the house on Sunday mornings "on their way" to the Baptist church, only to go to the Methodist church. The children were sworn to secrecy.

### *West Virginia*

Children in the coal camps of McDowell County and around the areas where my parents lived in West Virginia traveled to school by bus if they lived more than two miles away from the school, even in the snow. The elementary schools were typically in the various camps, but older youth were bused from the hollows and camps to Gary for high school, where the school was located. There were separate schools and buses for black children. Both of my parents finished high school at Gary, and Mama went on to study for a year at a cosmetology school in Welch. Daddy joined the army. My parents were married when he was eighteen and she was nineteen. Both planned to stay and work in the region. In 1956, work was still available.

"Handy was mine foreman here," reads a quote on the paper coin protector around a piece of scrip I keep in my china cabinet. Pieces of scrip, some smaller than a dime, others as large as a silver dollar, all carefully enclosed in coin protectors, help tell the story of my family and coal. From Number 17 mine in Havaco, West Virginia, the scrip with Handy's name on it was payment for hours spent underground, digging coal. Currency for the company store owned by the owner of the mine, that particular piece could be used at the N R & P Store. It is a tiny piece of metal, a little smaller than a dime, and made of copper. Another piece from near Havaco, this one from Number 19, is noted, "Handy's brother, Lawrence, [was] mine foreman here." The scrip from Capels, West Virginia reads, "Jones Gaultney died in this town." Another piece of scrip, from the Kingston Pocahontas Coal Company, reads, "Jones Gaultney worked at this mine." "Grandma Donnie lived here," reads a piece from Bartley. The piece from the Cannelton Coal & Coke Company reads, "Doug worked." I have a piece of scrip from the Olga Coal Company in Coalwood,

labeled "Home of the Rocket boys." Superior, West Virginia is represented by a scrip from the Lake Superior Coal Company, and the note reads, "Where J. R. [James Robert Tolley] died." West Virginia has been our home, at one time or another, five generations past, and coal remained the impetus of our survival for most of that time.

The coal industry provided scrip, and cash, the miners' families gardened, and there were other jobs available around town, typical of jobs in most small town. Some of those jobs were held by women.

Mama's sisters trained to be nurses, and Mama studied and became a licensed beautician. Polly worked at the company store at Anawalt. Mama's family traded and bartered at the company store in Elbert. I cannot say for certain that bartering at a company store was typical, but other scholarly research suggests this was rare. Mama recalled that her daddy bartered their vegetables, however, and one of her favorite trades was vegetables for a pineapple.

Both of my parents fondly recalled life in the coal camps. They were well-fed, housed, and loved. They had happy childhoods. As children, my parents explored their Appalachian landscapes. Mama particularly enjoyed playing with a family of turtles in a creek close to their garden on the mountaintop behind the house. She and her brothers roamed the woods and mountainside. She told me she was a tomboy. Racing a stick-horse down the hill at high speed one day, she fell and punctured her leg. Puncture wounds can be dangerous, because infection can easily set in if they are not cleaned well. I was taught that it is best to let them bleed a little while, if they are not too serious, to allow any dirt to

be washed free. Her wound on that day was bad, bad enough for a thorough scolding from Doc Whitney, and an admonition to start "acting like a lady." Mama was always a lady in my eyes, but I do not know if that was the day she began to "be" one.

Daddy roamed the mountains, too. His play was a bit more adventurous. During my research, he shared with me a description of his childhood friendship and adventures with Jimmy Chisgar, a neighbor at Number 12:

If it could be imagined, we would try it! We went blackberry picking, barefooted, half way up a mountain[, and I] got a switching from mother. We built forts out of trees we cut with an axe[, and I] got a switching from mother. We built a swimming hole with railroad ties that we stole from the Company[, and I] got a switching from mother and the Company dynamited it. We retaliated by putting cow manure in a bag, put it on the boss['s] porch, set it afire[, and] when he came to the door he put the fire out and splattered cow manure all over him and his porch[. I] got another switching from mother. It seems [J]immy and I could never get home before dark [and I would get] another switching from mother. We cross wired his daddy's car, drove it to Anawalt when we were twelve [years old, and I] got a switching from mother. I ran away from home to go to the Southern 500 stock car race when I was fourteen[, and I] still got a switching from mother. I ran away from home again when I was fifteen to take Pechu [another friend] to Fort Knox, Kentucky because he missed his bus[, and I] got my LAST switching from mother! Bless her heart, she tried!

We never learned how to not get the switchings. We had to live life and we sure did. We were all inseparable until 1955, when Jimmy and I graduated from high school. (M. R. Tolley 2011)

### *Children and Gender Roles*

In spite of the "switchings" Daddy got from his mother, Grandma Polly, boys overall were allowed a great deal of freedom in childhood. According to Appalachian scholar Cratis Williams, this pattern was common in Southern Appalachia. Children were typically "disciplined by both father and mother to the age of 12, the year of 'accountability'" (187). Girls were more protected. Until they married, a girl or young woman was "supervised when she went away from home, and accompanied by brothers when she was permitted to go to church, a play party, to the country store, or wherever young people might be meeting" (187). By the age of eleven or twelve she would be matured to the point of attracting male attention. If she should "'happen up with an accident' and become pregnant" (187) she often would be married to an older widower, upon which time her "mistake" would be forgiven.

In the coal camps where my parents grew up, children of all races played together, but that was not the case in the Pottertown/Meat Camp areas of North Carolina where I interviewed residents Mary Norris and Margaret Miller. There were a few African American families in Watauga County, and they were scattered, living in Boone Town, Junaluska, and at Beaver Dam. Daddy recalls playing with black children, and Mama recalled visiting their church in Elbert. But the communal childhood event Mama recalled most fondly was the trading of comic books.



The children went door to door. Bundled as best they could be against a bitter West Virginia winter cold, perhaps rushing into kitchens for a quick warm-up before moving on, more often conducting business on a back-door stoop, Mama, her brothers, and their friends took this socially constructed network seriously. When satisfied, they rushed home to devour the newest editions of the comic books they had traded for. (Quite often, the editions were *not* the newest, but reading them out of sequence was better than not reading them at all, and although everybody knew who *usually* bought the latest, around Christmas time there would be more than enough of those. Sometimes an anomaly would make its way into the coal camp, a brand new comic, usually a gift from older siblings visiting home. A much older version, or one about a character yet to make its way into the network, was discussed and debated until worth was determined, but nonetheless moved along.) During the war years of the 1940s, while fathers pored over newspapers and got to know Hitler, and mothers read Pearl Buck to escape into China<sup>6</sup>—parents coping with a reality of an adult child, a soldier, fighting for democracy—the "Golden Age" of comic books glittered just as brightly in Appalachia, perhaps more so, than it did in the rest of America.

---

<sup>6</sup> Award winning author Pearl S. Buck was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia. She published many novels set in China, where she lived with her parents for many years of her childhood. Her works include, among many others, *The Good Earth* (1931), *East Wind: West Wind* (1930), *China Sky* (1941), *Pavilion of Woman* (1946), and *The Big Wave* (1948), a children's book I read when I was around ten years old. Buck was a visionary and an activist who spoke out in support of the rights of women and children. She was a novelist, short story writer, essayist, playwright, children's book author, lecturer, and inspirational speaker. Buck's peers were the leaders of her time, and included Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Mead, Paul Robeson, Richard Nixon, John F. Kennedy, and Robert Frost.

## Chapter 5: Belief Systems, Distant Kin, and Personal Conflict

The women in my life had a spiritual slant about them. My Grandma Polly went to the Methodist church regularly, and I rarely heard her talk about superstitions or folk beliefs. I never doubted Polly's faith. It always, simply, was. I never knew my Grandma Maggie to go to church, but she was the first Christian woman I saw in testimony, and the one who made my Mama how she was. They, and Polly, made me how I am. There was a difference, however, in the belief system I learned through Mama and Grandma Maggie. They never saw a conflict between faith and folk beliefs. They had somehow worked it out to blend into a different type of belief system.

In the past, I have challenged Mama many times. Evaluating my own lifestyle in accordance with Biblical instruction, I cautioned her to avoid superstitious beliefs. I would tell her they are against Christianity and then cringe and go silent when she would say, "Well, MY Mama believed in them!" I knew Grandma Maggie was the daughter of a Baptist minister. And I also knew that she was one of the most demonstrative, Christ-like living Christians I had ever seen.

Mama told me that the only time Grandma Maggie ever got sick was when she had to have her gall bladder removed. Grandma delivered her babies at home, assisted by Doc Whitney. She often assisted him on his rounds, Mama tagging along whenever possible. I remember daddy making comments that Mama was a witch and that *her* Mama was a witch—that grandmother who never got sick. What he meant by that was, based

upon his observation, whenever anyone "wronged" Mama or Grandma Maggie, that person would end up with trouble, in some shape or form. (He also told me that Grandma Maggie believed she could curse you!)

There are centuries-old correlations between Biblical scripture and folk beliefs. There are belief systems, religion, and folk beliefs at times deemed superstition in place and minimally shared among me, Mama, Grandma Maggie (Mama's mother), and the Ward family, well-known storytellers in Watauga County, North Carolina. Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand helps to clarify the experiences and practices I have witnessed within my own family, and descriptions and stories shared with me by Jean Ward. Brunvand explains: "Superstitions include not only belief, but also behavior and experiences," ethnographic influences that explain and define who we become. I personally do not believe in coincidence. I am a Christian and cannot remember ever being otherwise. My sisters and I were not raised going to a church building on Sunday mornings, so I never developed a belief or prejudice that my faith demanded doing so. I look back now and realize why we were never "denominationalized." The denominational choices made by my family members, current and ancestral, have included Methodist, Regular Baptist, Holy Roller Baptist, Episcopalian, Catholic, and multi-faith. Our methods of religious worship vary from loud and shouting in great gatherings to personal, quiet, and private experience.

Scholar of Appalachian religion Deborah Vansau McCauley discusses church denominationalism in Appalachia, and the lack thereof, in her book, *Appalachian Mountain Religion*. One of the characteristics of Appalachian Religion is the *lack* of insistent denominationalism. Alongside the Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, Catholics, and Jews, are practitioners for whom organized religion simply makes no sense, people

who see denominationalism as a major hindrance to worshipping God as the Holy Spirit directs, and responding unencumbered to the work God would have you do (McCauley 67). Anthropologist Patricia Beaver documents this refusal to delineate in an interview with western North Carolina native, Evalina Idol. Idol explains,

We attended Elk Knob Baptist Church. Daddy was very involved—he was the one who pushed to install the Sunday school room at the back and bathrooms. He asked for more property from Grant Snyder so that there would be room for the addition. There was a beautiful baptizing place at the side of the church beside the picnic tables where they would pond up the creek with stones to make it deep enough.

I was baptized at Proffit's Grove Baptist Church where they would pond up Meat Camp Creek and have baptizing alongside where the parking lot is. Mother and Daddy took us to church and to revivals. I made my profession of faith during a revival there, and we witnessed to my brother, who also made his profession of faith the next week. Leroy and I were baptized together. Victor Trivette was minister. He was Mother's favorite minister. He carried out her wishes for her funeral.

We did not make it a point to say what religion you were. You believed in God. Your faith was in God. It was not a denomination. I remember growing up, we went to other churches and different denominations (Idol).

McCauley provides an in-depth history of early religion in America, but focuses primarily on the elements that remain and came to be identified with Appalachian mountain religion. She writes, "For the English-Puritans, conversion was 'intensely

personal', for the Scots-Irish, it was 'vibrantly communal.' Appalachian mountain religion has carefully blended both aspects of personal and communal conversion[.]"(178). As I read the book, then later discovered the spiritual beliefs and practices of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian as part of my heritage, and began the process of documenting my autoethnography, I grew more and more convinced that my viewpoint regarding religion, formed as the result of my parents *not* insisting I choose one denomination over another, is the epitome of Appalachian *mountain* religion. My research into the folk beliefs of the region, and those of Mama and Grandma Maggie, led me to additional discoveries: There are beliefs considered to be superstition that are also manifestations of Christian instruction as found in scripture.

My great-grandfather (Spriggs) was a Baptist preacher. My Grandma Maggie often told the story of her father going walking into thunderstorms to shout and talk and pray to God. Maggie was quieter in her religion, only occasionally offering up unadulterated, honest praise. But I have one single memory of her during a long drought in the piedmont of North Carolina that is branded in my soul. When the rain finally came one evening just before dark, she rushed out the back door, silver hair shining, wearing her house dress, rubber-soled shoes certain on the concrete, to stand at the edge of the carport and look up into the rain. She raised her hands up and exclaimed, "PRAISE GOD!" It was the first time I had seen such exuberance in Grandma. I was a little surprised because of that quietness of spirit about her as a rule. I now know and understand, as the result of what I have learned through family conversations and my studies of the hardships in the Appalachian regions she grew up in, why that exuberance exploded in the rain. She knew the rain meant life, quite literally, and she believed God sent it.

In another part of southern Appalachia, western North Carolina, I met Jean Ward, mother of traditional musician Rick Ward, for the first time in the winter of 2011. Her perspectives, and Rick's, would expand mine. The day was unseasonably warm for a Watauga County February, and although Highway 194—where Jean lived—had been closed in December due to its icy, dangerous condition, that day in February it was closed to thru-traffic for repair. Highway 194 is quite a road when it is open! It is a beautiful, winding, narrow two-lane that loops around from and back to Highway 421, with a cut-off through Valle Crucis to Highway 105. I had been given good directions—there would be a towel, or something, on the mailbox, the house sat just beside the road, and I was to watch for Rick's old Volkswagen van in the driveway. I arrived early, sat in my car for a while looking at the scenery, noticing the steep mountain almost immediately behind the house, the wire fence, and wondering if Jean kept cows. She must have seen my car because it was not long before I saw her walking out of the house and towards me. We hugged in greeting—we had talked on the phone a few times before this. I gave her a gift of rooted cuttings from an Angel Wing Begonia my great-grandmother potted seventy-five years ago, and she invited me in. During the few moments it took to walk to the door, I learned that she did not have a green thumb, did not "keep" plants, and that she had not had plants around since her mother died, when the porch was covered with baskets and planters. She took the cuttings to the kitchen, talking over her shoulder about a bonsai tree Rick had brought her, and that he told her they do not live long. (The bonsai tree had been a gift from me about three weeks earlier in thanks to Rick for visiting my classroom, "Introduction to Appalachian Studies," and playing music for the students, free of charge. You can imagine the rueful smile I was now hiding.)

We settled in comfortably in Jean's living room, with the cat on the daybed, and an old, nearly blind dog on the couch. What I learned that day in a little over an hour of conversation was enough to create awe, and wonder, and to rejuvenate my curiosity-driven search to discover just what went on in the mountains of Yancey, Avery, and Watauga Counties during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My family had walked the same roads, lived beside the same river, and praised on the same mountaintops. I, unlike Jean, cannot point to a field where a house stood or even *find* those mountaintops. But Jean Ward, in sharing her own family history, provided hints and direction towards my own.

Jean talked some about her son, Rick, her daughter, Jewel, and Jewel's daughter, Mindy. Laughter over the pictures of her children in high school, and herself in a bathing suit, sobered to a serious moment of sharing an upcoming bone marrow scan for Mindy to see if she was strong enough to begin receiving chemotherapy treatments again. The twenty-two year-old young woman was fighting a battle with cancer.

Jean knew I wanted to know about the history of the region, particularly as it applied to work, farming, religion, and her mother's Blackhawk ancestry. Jean's mother, Bradie, Jean, and Rick all carry the physical traits of dark hair and dark skin from that ancestry. Bradie's story is both a classic example of a woman fighting her way through poverty to provide for her children, and a classic example of Appalachian spirit in the face of adversity. What has been preserved are stories, music, luthier skills, a unique banjo playing style, and perhaps most importantly, an outlook that embraces the goodness in life.

I heard stories and words and opinions come out of Jean's mouth that could just have easily been spoken by Mama, or either of my grandmothers. Jean told me about the Holy Roller Baptists when she was a child, and how they would "Shout and scream and throw their hands up, it was wild!" (J. Ward) My thoughts wandered briefly to Pappy, and Freda, and I wondered if any of his family members had been at any of the gatherings she was describing. Probably so. Jean told me about a man named Bud Isaacs who was out fox hunting with his dogs one night, around midnight. The Holy Roller Baptist had gathered at Beaver Dam, on Forest Grove Road in Watauga County. Bud came up on the meeting and the fire and shouting scared him so badly, he ran home, his dogs right behind him. He burst into the house yelling to his wife that, "Jesus was coming! 'The rapture is here!'"

Both of Jean's grandfathers were preachers. She recalled to me that one was a good man, but the other cussed so much her mother was afraid of him and would hide under the bed when he was around. Jean told me that Rick had taken her up to the top of Old Beech Mountain where there is an old family cemetery. The mountaintop is also that location where Primitive Baptists and Holy Rollers from all over Avery County gathered to worship in the 1940s. Jean's widowed mother, Bradie, started seeing a man who worked at a logging camp on the mountain, and eventually married him. Jean and her mother would often walk up to see him. They would sometimes stay to watch a meeting. Bradie did not like the style of worship because the church believed that Jesus came to only save sinners and not for the righteous. According to Jean, Bradie said, "That's just crazy talk!" (J. Ward) Jean told me that she personally could not stand the screaming at the services, so they began attending an Old Baptist Church in Flat Springs, North Carolina.



The Ward family later moved to Forest Grove, North Carolina, and began attending the Baptist church there. Jean remembers that some of the church members there argued over the Bible, had fights in the churchyard, and conducted extramarital affairs. The preacher was criticized for pulling babies out of their cribs to emphasize scriptural points he wanted to make. Jean and her family left that church and area in 1959, and moved to where Jean currently lives and has raised her family. Her mother, Bradie, lived with them, and took care of Jewel and Rick while Jean worked. Bradie was with them until she was ninety-three years old when she had to be placed in a nursing home. She lived another six years, dying at the age of ninety-nine.

According to Jean, Bradie's sister married a coal miner, and moved with her husband to West Virginia. Her sister died in her forties, and they lost track of her family. Jean reinforced my knowledge of the amount of moving around some Appalachian families did to survive. She told me that when Charlie Henson, Bradie's first husband, froze to death they had to sell what land they had, and, according to Jean, "Couldn't nobody help us" (J. Ward). She told me a woman called Elizabeth Cora had a woodshed and let them live there. There was only a dirt floor, and a stove pipe through the window for the woodstove, but Jean, her mother, and her little brother survived. According to Jean, "It was just poverty" (J. Ward). Bradie gathered potatoes from fields already picked because the small remnants would feed them. She walked from Beech Creek all the way to the Tennessee line where a family lived who gave her tomato plants. Living the hard scrabble life of mountain people, outside of the coal or lumber camps, they did survive.

Bradie eventually remarried. Jean recalls, "Mama married Matheson and we moved to Forest Grove, and I thought I was in heaven" (J. Ward). Matheson had a big two-story house, and although snow would blow in the cracks around the window of her bedroom, Jean says, "It didn't matter. Everybody had that happen" (J. Ward). In her later years, Bradie worked in the lunchroom at Bethel School, hooked rugs, and pulled galax to survive. Jean says, "That was life" (J. Ward).

After my initial conversation with Jean, I pondered the many things she had told me, and wondered if she, her mother, and Jean's son, Rick, all blended a strong Christian faith with what I had believed to be superstition, but was beginning to discover were folk beliefs. Mama and Grandma Maggie had possessed that worldview. I began my investigation.

Grandma Maggie always came out of a house the same way she entered in. The scripture upon which that practice may be based is found in the Christian Bible: "It is for the prince, the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord, he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and he shall go out by the way of the same" (*King James Version*, Ezek. 44.3). Later in the same chapter, we find: "And the Lord said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws thereof, and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary" (Ezek. 44.5). I wish I had asked Grandma Maggie if these were the verses which guided her, but my personal assumptions, and ignorant youth, prevented me from doing so. I have found the practice of entering and leaving by the same door across cultures, and many other folk

beliefs involving doors. But Grandma Maggie's Christian faith was not compromised by the act as one based upon folk belief, whether she was consciously aware of its scriptural basis or not. Her religion was a blend of folk belief and scripturally grounded instruction.

Another belief taught to me at an early age which I then considered a folk belief is the presence of a red sky in the evening as an indication of bad weather: "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky at morning, sailor, take warning." However, this belief is also based in scripture:

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times? (Matt. 16:2,3)

Jesus exclaims that we can look at the sky and tell when bad weather is ahead, but we do not recognize the signs of His presence.

Rick Ward grew up watching the sky, often seeing the Brown Mountain Lights out off the Blue Ridge Parkway, west of Boone. These mysterious lights, long documented in oral histories and songs, have recently been taken seriously as a rare, natural phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Rick's parents took him out on the Parkway when he was a child, and when he got older he and friends did some of their own investigating:

I was in high school, and we'd go out there on top of the Table Rock, and you could see them glow. When you got up close to them they'd make a sizzling sound. You'd back off and they would kind of come toward you and if you went closer, they'd disappear. (R.Ward)

---

<sup>7</sup> For information about the various interpretations of the Brown Mountain Lights, visit [www.brownmountainlights.com](http://www.brownmountainlights.com). The website includes videos and links to various scientific agencies that have and are researching the phenomenon (Brown Mountain Lights).

I asked Rick if he was ever scared.

I remember as a small, small kid, there's a place on the Parkway and Dad would take me there, and we were looking at the Brown Mountain Lights one time, and I remember a panther screaming in the background. I remember that night, how spooky it was. Yeah, when I was real little it scared me. I still go out there today. I've seen them go up and burst into colors, and then go down, and go out, and then light back up. (R. Ward)

Rick recalls a story his mother told him about Stella Hicks Ward, Tab Ward's wife, and Rick's grandmother. Tab Ward was a well-known musician whose work is preserved in the Library of Congress and may also be heard in the Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University and the collection at East Tennessee University. Rick's style of banjo playing, the double knock, was developed and perfected by Tab. Tab played the "banjer," as the family calls the banjo. Rick shares the story of a premonition experienced by Stella:

I believe they were picking beans – Grandma Stella, Tab's wife, this would have been in the '50's. She [Stella] was a Hicks. Stella was out picking beans, and she said, 'Look at that.' And she looked up and she saw a banjer, a homemade banjer come flying out of the sky, and it hit the ground. And, it disappeared. And, she got stomach cancer after that and passed away at the old hospital in Banner Elk. [Mama] said Stella explained to her that she saw a banjer, and then she died after that and Grandpa started playing the banjer. Yes, we believe in premonition . . . . She [Stella] was walking down the road going to get help because her son had an abscessed tooth. His jaw was

all swollen up. He had a high fever and she was trying to walk to go to find a doctor to help her. She got down the road and she looked up and there's this bush beside the road and his face had come up and appeared over the bush, just like it was floating, and his face started smiling. She knew his fever had broke and he was better so she turned around and went back home. And he was better. (R. Ward)

The Ward family, like most Appalachian families, remains close. They have supported each other through the illness and eventual death of Rick's niece, Mindy Harmon. Their faith has been the foundation of their strength, and they have prepared themselves for approaching events by signs from God of what is to come. Rick explains:

My niece, you know she's dying right now [Mindy died on Friday, October 14, 2011, a little over a week after this interview took place.], and we've had a catbird living in a bush in front of the house for the last three or four months, and it comes out there and screams at me, and for the past month or so, when I come home at night it's flying around the door, flying in my face, and flying all over me. Me and mom both think that's a sign of death – death is coming. Mom's scared to death of owls. Birds were messengers. When Noah was on the ark, you know the dove brought the twig down. And when the spirit of God descended into Christ, you know, he descended as a dove, so we believe that birds are messengers. One of my best friends passed away when I was about 19, and, I guess I was 20, and a cardinal bird flew up and hit the window. If a bird hits the window and gets killed, or gets addled, we believe that's a death in the family, but, yes, that catbird, it's

really weird, it flies in my face. Once she [Mindy] passes it won't be around. Mom and I think it will go away.

I was on my way to St. John's Church one time. I had a little Volkswagen Beetle, driving down through there. I was by myself. I was just going to go out to the church and sit, see if I could see anything. I got halfway out there and this big Great-Horned Owl flew out of the trees and landed right in front of my Volkswagen and just sat there. He lifts up his wings and kind of hissed. I put it in reverse and got out of there. Ain't meant to be! I don't know, those birds, they give you signs. [I asked Rick if thought owls are of the devil, or of God, or just a spirit?] You'd think it'd be from God. God sent. (R. Ward)

I grew up knowing to watch the animals. "Lassie," the smart, beautiful collie most children watched weekly on television during the 1960s as she saved Timmy or someone else from certain disaster, was not an exception to the rule, but a representation of it. A portion of "Unchained Religion," a collection of short sayings I have written in the voice of a young, curious Appalachian girl explores the wisdom of the animals:

### *Taffy*

Billy's cows are laying down in the pasture, all huddled up together like I never seen. They've been there all day. It's as cold as I ever knowed it to be, but I imagine they're right warm. Mama won't let me go out, but I don't really want to anyway. Every time I go to the window to look at the grownups standing around out there my breath makes ice on the window

glass. Daddy's forehead is all wrinkled up. He's come in and is whisperin' to Granny while she's pokin' in the woodstove. She turns around and asks me do I "want some taffy, Hattie?" I am most sincerely confused, but I would "surely love some taffy, Granny."

I was taught as a child that the animals will lie down or huddle close together when bad weather is coming, especially snow, to keep a patch of land clear so they will have something to eat. Swarms of birds on the ground, eating voraciously, also indicate bad weather to come because they will not have a chance to eat for a while. This belief in animal signs is one I chalked up to superstition in my younger years, but gradually began to see held truth. And the belief may be scripturally based: "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. 6.30)

Arriving home one afternoon in December of 2010, the coldest December in Boone, North Carolina recorded history (Russell), I pulled into the parking lot and caught my breath as I saw five deer not two hundred feet away from my car, eating rotting apples under the tree just beside the Watauga River. There is a path the deer typically use in the early mornings and at dusk, on their way to get water, and they will eat whatever apples have fallen, but I rarely saw them otherwise. On that day, the group looked at me momentarily and then continued to eat, by all appearances unafraid, at 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon. The weatherman was predicting rough weather, and I remember thinking "He got it right this time." Nine inches of snow fell that night, and over the course of the next

few days more than eighteen inches fell. The temperature at times was in the single digits, and wind gusts reached forty-eight miles per hour at the Watauga Medical Center in the city of Boone (Oakes).

I not only learned to watch the animals, I learned to watch the food-producing trees to get some idea of what the coming winter would be like. The summer of 2010 that apple tree in my back yard was loaded, as were nut and berry producing plants. A summer of exceptional bounty means a winter of hard weather, and the abundance is God's way of taking care of the animals, and us. I was taught He always does.

Rick Ward and I eventually got into a discussion about witches and witchcraft. Mama removed warts by melting the wax of a bayberry candle on the wart, allowing the wax to cool thoroughly, and then removing the wax. The wart did not drop off at that instant, but would go away within days. Bradie Guy, Rick's grandmother, also removed warts, only she used a potato. According to Rick, she would cut a potato into pieces, making sure to include an "eye" of the potato. She would then heat a pin over a candle and prick the wart until she brought blood. She rubbed the potato over the wart, wrapped the potato in a piece of white cloth, and buried the cloth and potato together. As the potato plant grew, the wart would go away. Rick said, "I saw her take seventy-two off a man. She took twelve off of me" (R. Ward). Rick added a story about a boy he went to high school with who also had warts removed by Bradie. In that instance, she used another method: She walked up to Rick, curled her fingers in his hair, quickly said some words, and then rubbed her fingers on his warts. The warts soon went away. The words were spoken so rapidly Rick could not catch what was said, and he and I both wish we knew.



I told Rick about comments by some of my family members that Mama and Grandma Maggie were witches. He told me, "They said the same thing about Grandma Bradie. And Granny Guy [Rick's great-aunt], they thought she was a witch. She was the one who birthed Mama and a lot of them up on Beech Mountain" (R. Ward). I asked Rick if Bradie thought of herself as a witch. "I don't know," he said, "She had some strange powers" (R. Ward).

Bradie Guy also told fortunes with cards, and could tell the future by "reading" wax. This entailed dropping hot wax into a glass of water and looking at the shapes the wax took on, thereby, in a secret understanding of what the varying shapes meant, she could predict the person's fortune. Jean Ward told me that Bradie told fortunes until "the church made her stop. Her church believed it was a sin" (J. Ward). This determination was perhaps derived from Deuteronomy: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch" (Deut. 18.10). But, in spite of stopping the fortune telling, Jean told me that Bradie held on to her beliefs, beliefs that Jean would come to hold as well. Jean is a devout member of the Baptist Church, and is fully aware of the inconsistencies of believing in folk beliefs and wisdom and scriptural teachings at the same time, but she accepts this as the part of her carrying on the beliefs of her mother. We laughed together over our personal conundrums: Do we really believe in the folk beliefs and wisdom, or are we only following the rules "just in case"? I had to find out what was going on here. I discovered that religion, folk wisdom, folk belief, folk practices, Christianity, and witchcraft were sometimes compatible.

Historian Michael D. Bailey sheds light on this compatibility, in his essay, "The Disenchantment of Magic: Spells, Charms, and Superstition in Early European Witchcraft Literature." Rituals and healing practices of individuals, and the church, predated an assignation of demonic association with those practices. Evolving from an ancient system of beliefs, the blend of folk belief and wisdom with Biblical instruction is a worldview in which spirituality is extremely strong and personal, not a vision of only a spiritual world far away.

Folk beliefs and sacred beliefs helped define the identities of immigrants into the Appalachian region from the British Isles, and elsewhere. Escaping religious persecution in many cases, immigrant peoples brought with them belief systems and moral codes defined by their ancestors before them. However, even though early immigrants had rejected aspects of a European past,<sup>8</sup> there were aspects of past religion that were maintained. Bailey explains the intellectual and psychological rationale:

Prayers and approved blessings drew on divine power, while magic spells relied on demons (394). . . . Most laypeople surely understood at least the basic nature of demonic menace as the church depicted it. They did not; however, seem to connect familiar practices with this menace, or they viewed possible involvement with demons far less seriously than did clerics. Common discourse about interactions with supernatural or occult forces typically reflected care and hesitancy about engaging with such power, but also some casualness, evidenced by claims that most laypeople

---

<sup>8</sup>Bailey's work draws heavily from the works of scholars of European history, Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), and Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago, 2002).

did not well or fully understand the specific nature of the operations involved or the powers invoked. (391)

Historian Alexandra Walsham sees the paradox of multiple and often opposing belief systems that came about after the religious upheavals of the Middle Ages, as "ingenious adjustments." Walsham writes:

The use of the Bible as a tool of divination or for medicinal cure and the miracles allegedly worked by incombustible portraits of Martin Luther may superficially smack of the Catholic cult of relics and sacramental and bespeak a reluctance to embrace an ideology that fiercely repudiated the localization of the holy, but they too attest to the ingenious adjustments and compromises that accompanied and eased this moment of rupture. (205)

I asked Rick Ward if growing up surrounded by a Christian-folk belief-superstitious worldview is what made him an artist. His answer?

There's no doubt that being raised with all these ideas and stuff made me think the way I think. No doubt about it. You're a result of what you see and feel. I believe in the paranormal. And spirituality. I believe in angels. Yes, I certainly believe in guardian angels. (R. Ward)

Rodney Clapp, writing in *Christian Century* magazine, explains that, "In our highly pluralistic society, superstition is not easy to define. One person's superstition may be another person's religion" (45). Clapp also offers an explanation of the difference between superstitiously believing something will come true by lieu of an action performed, and

prayer: "Faithful prayer differs from superstition in that it does not presume control. It petitions God, the power at the center of all that is, while it does not presume on God's 'answer' or response" (45).

So, for me, the mystery of the reconciliation of religion and folk belief is resolved. We are tradition-bearers of traditions centuries old.<sup>9</sup> I have had a tendency to literally pray away the potential truth in a folk belief if I could not ground the belief in scripture. I rationalize this in an intellectual and psychological battle raging within me, fueled by my faith in God. If I believe enough in the folk belief, could or would I find some way to find a truth? I do not know. I see wisdom in the behaviors of the animals, and prepare. I consider the wisdom to be a gift from God. A tendency to "disbelieve" nothing is as well a part of my personality, psyche, whatever defines me as me.

Rick and his family believe in spirits, as do I, however Rick surprised me with his perspective, and I now find myself processing his final comments, moving forward in my faith, continuing to learn, speculate, and determine:

The Bible tells me that there are spirits that we can see. I don't think it's the soul of the person – it says the absence of the body is to be present with the Lord. I think the soul is with God, but the spirit stays here. You've got body, soul and spirit as separate, see, the spirit is the countenance of the person, how I act right now, my personality, that's my spirit. But the soul is the inner being. (R. Ward)

---

<sup>9</sup> "We" refers to me, Mama, Grandma Maggie, and the Wards, as well as what I suspect were numerous other family members I will never have the opportunity to interview.

I now realize that the belief systems shared by Mama, Grandma Maggie, me, and the Ward family are products of centuries of communal living, anecdotes, folk medicine, church politics, class-based opportunities, and methods of survival. My parents, in having broad viewpoints as a result of their own ancestral memorats, have provided me with a worldview open to continued interpretation, and miracle. There are elements of faith in all beliefs. Science is not the enemy of faith, but its authentication. I sum it up, tongue-in-cheek, laughing:

*Some Folks*

Some folks said Granny was a witch 'cause she never did get sick.

Course, when she was doctorin' them they said she was angel.

Granny says folks are contrary.

## Chapter 6: Sorrows

The last time I visited my Grandma Maggie in Florida, she told me, "Your Grandpa visited me the other night." I said, "He did? What happened?" She said he just stood by her bed. I asked her what she thought it meant. She said he was coming for her.

We were in her kitchen at the time, drinking coffee at her little enamel-top table, eating toast and jelly prepared in her little toaster oven. She then said she'd been up awhile and was going back to bed.

At that time, Grandpa Buck had been dead for over twenty years. So, I called Mama, reported what I had discovered, and prepared to go back home to North Carolina, hating to leave Grandma Maggie, but doing so on the promise from Mama that other family members were around, and that she would come down within days. It was not until around the 1<sup>st</sup> of July that Mama got down there, arranged to have Grandma transported to North Carolina on a plane, and met the ambulance that transported her from the airport to the hospital. Grandma Maggie went from the hospital to a nursing home and died within a month, on July 31<sup>st</sup>. I was with her when she died, saw her sit straight up in the bed, eyes wide open, then cough, and then lie back and die. I remember my dad saying, "That's it." The nurse later told me that the way she died was called "breaking the window." That seemed okay to me—whatever it takes, as long as you get in.

More recently, as she grew close to her own death, Mama shared with me and my sisters her own near-death experiences, and visitations. Her daddy, Grandpa Buck, visited her, as did a man dressed all in white. She was frightened and my sisters prayed with her, and asked God that the man reveal himself to her as the angel he was, if that was so. Mama's face relaxed. She said the walls were covered with flowers and that the man was lying on the floor with her, keeping her safe. Her passing, within two weeks of the vision, was easy, a breath one moment and then no more, just before dawn. When we walked outside into the darkness the birds were singing, and as a friend drove home a sparrow fluttered in front of her windshield and then flew away. "His Eye is on the Sparrow" was one of the songs we had already chosen for Mama's memorial service, at her request before she died, and unbeknownst to our friend. That bird.

Death is a part of life, a sorrowful part of life, during which neighbors usually play an important part in taking care of things, seeing that what needs to be done gets done. Mary Norris, one of the women I interviewed at Meat Camp, told me that neighbor women sewed her mama's white burial dress, because white was the color her mama wanted to be buried in. The neighbors also took care of making sure the casket was built, and sat up with the body, "laid out" in the house, all night. Neighbors dug the grave, and made sure there was food for the family (Norris). Practicality governed the lives of rural and mountain communities.

Mary does not recall feeling fear upon her mother's death, and Mama told me that children in those days did not fear death. Whether due to their innocence in understanding the finality of death in their physical worlds, or being so churched in the continuance of

life in their spiritual worlds, the gentle resignation in which death has been discussed in the interviews with Mama, Mary, and other people testify to this lack of fear. Childhood cut short upon the death of a parent was not rare. Serious illness could lead to death in a matter of days, as Mary Norris remembers happening to her mother. She caught pneumonia and died within a week.

Mama recalled traveling to rural Virginia when her grandfather died. He, too, was "layed out" in the house, the casket in the cool dark of a curtained room. The house was crowded, and she told me she curled up in a chair in the room at nightfall and fell asleep. Her daddy found her there, angry because he had not known where she was or if she was safe. She recalled telling him that she "wasn't afraid of grandpa!" (E. K. Tolley)

A recollection shared with me by an uncle tells the story of the death of my great-great grandfather, J. R. (James Robert) Tolley. As described in other stories I heard, the body was placed on a table in a room, and all furniture removed with the exception of another table. On the table sat a clock, a glass, and a bottle of whiskey. The men gathered to show their respect, one at a time, poured a drink, said a few words about J. R., and drank the whiskey. When the clock struck 4 p.m., they took J. R. out and buried him. The Tolley side of my family hails from Scotland, or Ireland. In genealogy searches, I have found ancestors from both countries. And I have researched funerary traditions, but found nothing to show that J. R.'s memorial was anything other than a wake. J. R. was a whiskey maker, arriving in the mountains with his recipe, and licensed to make it during Prohibition. My cousin told me J. R. received the license because the whiskey was "so good." It was only natural he be celebrated at his death with a drink.



I looked into the story about J. R.'s whiskey recipe. Yes, there are records of a Tolley Distillery, which later combined with Eaton Distillery. Lem Tolley, son of John Tolley, was the third Master Distiller for the Jack Daniel Distillery. I cannot find a certain blood connection, although the name John is found in family genealogies. I know that there were licenses granted to make whiskey for medicinal purposes during Prohibition.

In his later years, J. R. lived near his daughters, taking turns staying at their homes. He carried with him a satchel, in which was a pistol, one change of clothes, a packet of letters, and that recipe. J. R. could not read, and I *ache* to know what was in those letters and who they were from.

Funerals continue to be a time when families and acquaintances come together, to show their respect and express sympathy. Daddy's family celebrated Decoration Day around the Memorial Day weekend until Grandma Polly died. Placing flowers on the graves in a cemetery in Troutdale, Virginia, where my great-grandmother, Grandma Donnie (also known as "Granny Gaultney"), Polly's brother, Parks, and his wife, Emma, are buried, and gathering for a meal, offered an opportunity to reconnect with other family members, meet new spouses, and exclaim over how children had grown. The tradition, for my family, died with Polly. My immediate family did not participate, although I wanted to. I had to settle for second-hand reports from Polly in the days following and imagine the interactions. I imagined and celebrated the opportunities to strengthen kinship ties and build community, even at a funeral, in a short story:

*Blossoming Bosoms*

Amos moved to New York City, and his Grandma Compton died of worry. He came home for the funeral of course - walked right by his Uncle Joe before Uncle Joe even knew who he was. He had his hair all slicked back, smooth as a snake, and a little tiny earring in one ear. His cousin Annie burst out laughing. He just looked at her instead of telling her to shut up like he would'a use to have done, and then he walked up and hugged her real tight and they both started crying. Uncle Joe just stood there crushing the rim of his hat. We all knew if he let go he'd probably hit Amos or something, that's what some of us thought, or start bawling, that's what some others of us thought. There was a real nice breeze on the hill that day and we all fit under the shade of Compton's Oak. You couldn't help but look around at the view even though we'd all been there lots of times because everyone around these parts gets buried on that hill. Most of us never walked up as far as the oak tree though because those plots belong only to the Comptons, and one of them hadn't died in a while. The whole hill's a nice buryin' place. But this up here is the best. You can spin around on your toes and see all sides of the hills below and the mountains around. I felt just like that Julie Andrews. I tried not to look at the hills too much and pay attention, which wasn't all that hard considering Amos was there. He's not bad lookin' when he ain't talkin', and he ain't doin' that now. He's still don't have no beard, but his skin looks different. Wonder if he uses some of those cosmetics for men. And them colognes. We got a catalog in the store with

some of that for sale in it, and we just laughed and laughed. Lord, I'll bet he does smell good. I guess I oughta be glad I've got my good dress on, but I know I got sweat circles from walking up that hill. I'll have to talk to him, I guess, though I don't want to. Don't know what right he thinks he has to take off and leave everybody like that. Joe was just getting ready to bring in the straw, I remember. And Annie had her mensurals and couldn't help Grandma put nothin' up that week. The refridgeratin' unit was down at our store and couldn't nobody fix it like Amos could and we had to get a man from way over Marion. Damn him. He'd always told me that there wasn't no place on earth like these hills and a body'd be crazy to leave 'em for the rest of the world. He was always talkin', talkin', talkin', like none of the rest of us had any sense at all, and he'd make me mad most always. But then he'd say, "that's what hill livin' is all about - a handful of people a takin' care of each other in their own little space and if everybody done that everywhere the world would be a better place," and that'd make me love him and get to wantin' him to talk to me all the time. And then I'd get sick of his talkin' again and want him to just go on. Wonder who's in his "handful" now. Probably a bunch of women who don't know a damn thing about cannin' or growin' or sweatin' out a flu. Some who ain't never washed a dish in their lives and don't no more know what it takes to keep a hill man happy than . . . I do.

Oh, shit, here he comes.

I can't believe he walked right by me without a single, solitary word. I shoulda' known he'd put on airs. I wonder did he look at me. I wonder did he notice my bosoms have grown. Maybe he don't even know it's me! I guess I oughta' offer my condolences.

Lordy, the man smells good.

## Chapter 7: The Cherokee Connection

I thought it to be obvious: The Cherokee influenced Christianity in Appalachia, just as Christianity influenced Cherokee beliefs. One little sentence in Deborah Vansau McCauley's, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*, "His mother, Frances, was in large part Cherokee" (288), sparked a research fire which I have come to see can never be quenched. Drawing upon my own personal experiences and beliefs, I immediately saw a connection between Cherokee spiritual beliefs and mountain religion. McCauley was writing about Richard G. Spurling who is attributed with laying the foundation of what would become the Church of God in the mountains of North Carolina in the mid-1800s.

Spurling and his family, including his Cherokee mother, Frances, moved to Monroe County, Tennessee, which bordered Cherokee County, North Carolina, around 1859. This was more than twenty years after the forced removal of the Cherokee nation from the area in 1838. McCauley writes, "In 1859, Cherokee land was almost being given away for settlement" (288). The land is now a part of the Cherokee National Forest.

Spurling settled in Holly Springs and helped establish the Holly Springs United Baptist Church of Christ. The church grew to more than two hundred members, and the Spurlings were with the church until around 1886. At that time, Spurling organized the Christian Union church, due to what has been speculated to be increasing dogmatic practices within Holly Springs Baptist, identified by McCauley as *Landmarkism*. "The

Landmark movement wedded its successionist theory to an extreme exclusivity, limiting fellowship and preaching to Baptists, recognizing no other Christian fellowship, and eventually becoming exclusive even of other Baptist churches" (289). Because he left Holly Springs and created the Christian Union, the United Baptist Church of Christ charged Spurling with heresy. But he returned to Holly Springs Church a few months later, as reported by McCauley, "to help with church problems," (292) first ordaining his son, Richard G., who carried on the work of the Christian Union.

Although the history which led to the eventual formation of the Church of God and the Tomlinson Church of God is extremely convoluted and fraught with divisive interludes, including a legal battle to determine which group could legally use the name, "Church of God," Richard G. Spurling, grandson of Cherokee Nancy, is recognized for laying the foundations of both churches. Richard G. Spurling's book, *The Lost Link*, originally published in 1920, is considered a treasured historical document of the early church. Spurling writes:

We here give the agreement or basis of union as it stood in 1895. First, the new Testament is the only infallible rule of faith in practice, so we reject all other articles of faith and men-made creeds, and for the basis of our union we accept the law of love instead of faith, faith in Christ being the only faith required in the gospel and love being the commandment of Christ, by which we should know each other as His disciples...each member shall have equal rights and privileges to read, believe and practice for themselves in all matters of religion that may not prove contrary to the law of love of the true spirit of Christianity. (45)

McCauley finds that the Lost Link, with its emphasis on building "a Christian fellowship based on the law of love," (308) was the result of Spurling's immersion in mountain religious culture. Among the Cherokee, women's roles and opinions were tremendously respected and valued. Although the familial role played by Richard G. Spurling's grandmother cannot be proven, the family was not far removed from the years of freedom prior to the removal, and there is no reason to suggest her opinion was not respected or her influence on the family was not profound. Pentecostal scholar Wade H. Phillips writes:

[*The Lost Link*] is almost completely preoccupied with the basis for Christian fellowship and . . . in breaking down the walls of denominationalism. That is why Spurling called 'love' the 'lost link.' He desired to build a fellowship that was more of a manifestation of people's hearts than their heads. (qtd. in McCauley)

We know that the man who is attributed with beginning the Church of God, Richard G. Spurling, was the grandson of a Cherokee woman, Frances Spurling. The Cherokee were, and still are, a pragmatic people who adapted to the ways of the Europeans, so Frances Spurling may have been thoroughly acculturated into the Christian culture. We know that less than twenty-five years after the 1838 Cherokee Removal to Oklahoma, Spurling and his family, including Grandmother Frances, lived in Monroe County, Tennessee, on lands that bordered what would become the Cherokee National Forest. We know that Christian missionaries had already been in the region for at least seventy-five years. There were mission schools for Cherokee children in the early 1800s. But Cherokee scholar Theda Perdue explains that not all Cherokee women chose to give

up their native spiritual practices. Perdue writes, "They preferred their traditional religion, which did not distinguish between the physical and spiritual worlds, which emphasized harmony and balance, and which placed the needs of the community above those of any individual" (178). Perdue is writing of a time around 1819. Frances is listed in the 1850 census, living with her husband, James. James is recorded as eighty-one years old (McCauley 287). Although Frances could have been much younger than he, she is the mother of Richard G.'s father, so she would have been alive during the times of resistance mentioned by Perdue. We do not know how and why Frances escaped the removal. What we do know is that Richard G. (Green) Spurling "founded independent churches wherever he settled" (McCauley 295). Those churches were indirectly influenced by Frances Spurling and her beliefs, whatever those beliefs may have been. Children who become men are influenced by the women in the households they grow up in, and Richard grew up in a household with Frances.

#### *The Cherokee, the Color Yellow, and a Pushing Wind*

A visit to the Qualla Reservation of the Band of the Eastern Cherokee found me there on a Sunday morning. Church services had already begun. Interviewing and asking people about their faith is alien and unnatural to me, so observation of the area and the churches was my plan, talking with people if opportunities presented themselves. I stopped in at a little shop on Main Street to look around, and inquired of the girl behind the counter if she knew the denomination of a church, just in view across the road, on the side of the mountain. I had noticed the church before going into the shop. She answered me, in a



heavy European accent, "I am not Christian." (I smiled to myself: Here, quite obviously, was *not* a native source.) She hesitated a moment, and then added, "...probably Baptist," and proceeded to give me directions about how to get to the church.

It was indeed a Baptist church, quaintly named, "Yellow Hill Missionary Baptist Church." The building was simply made, one-storied, with a steeple tower built of stone. The view overlooking the town was beautiful, as was the setting of the church within its landscape. Most churches in Cherokee are Baptist of one type or another. Reverend Lisa Hardesty, who pastors the Church of the Nazarene in the Big Cove community of the reservation with her husband, shared with me some observations about the community, the churches, and the parishioners:

Most want a Christian burial complete with an all-night old-fashioned 'sit up.' People literally sit up all night with the body while a continuous stream of gospel hymns are played or sung by many different people. More than one preacher will be asked to speak during the evening as well as during the actual funeral, itself.

Most of the churches in the area are Baptist. A few of us are Methodists, Nazarene, Pentecostal Holiness, Lutheran and even Catholic. There are a couple of non-denominational churches. There are a couple or so churches, that I know about, which have incorporated some Native practices with their services. The Lutheran Church has incorporated the medicine wheel with their prayer circles. They have even painted the colors of the prayer circle in the room. They also use smudging or incense at their services. The Catholic Church will celebrate some of the cultural holidays, such as the

Green Corn Ceremony within their church. One of the non-denominational services uses music that blends a native beat with their songs. For example, the drum is played with a song that goes, "Jesus is good medicine!" Several churches have translated hymns into Cherokee. The Bible has also been translated into Cherokee. One or both are often used in a number of services. Some will also offer prayers in the Cherokee language. A few years ago, several churches offered an apology for the way the gospel was misused in the conversion of Native Americans. It was made clear that the apology was for the way the gospel was presented and not for the message of the gospel itself. The churches which offered the apology included the Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, and one non-denominational. (Hardesty)

The importance of balance is reiterated again and again in Cherokee culture and symbolism. Cherokee scholar J. Edward Sharpe writes: "The Cherokee didn't differentiate between energies of good and bad, as all things and events in nature are related to the balance in life" (24). The Cherokee believe that a supreme being, "Yowa,"<sup>10</sup> "created the world and universe and placed the sun and moon as governing agents" (Sharpe 20). Religion, balance, healing, and having "good medicine" are all interwoven into a worldview of harmony. Having "good medicine" or healing is not explained nor achieved in the form of a cure as it is classically defined in western medicine. Rather, healing occurs

---

<sup>10</sup>The name of Yowa was so sacred only certain priests were allowed to say the name aloud. This correlation with ancient Hebrew dictations that the name of God should not be verbalized and was replaced with the name 'Yahweh' when spoken is interesting. Sharpe noted that "The belief in the Great Spirit made the movement toward Christianity an easy one."

when the individual achieves harmony and balance with everything in the environment, including plants, animals, and birds. For each disease and ailment there is "a healing agent among the plants that is known in spirit" (29).

An anonymous local native source, who grew up in Yancey County and is the grandson of a woman who is full-blooded Cherokee, shared with me that "nature was [IS] the biggest part of faith and religious beliefs" (Source) for his family. Even though his grandmother was raised Primitive Baptist and later joined the Southern Baptist Church after her second marriage, he recalls hearing about "mountain religion" as a child, during family discussions. He told me that his grandmother will share nothing of her history or knowledge with anyone outside the family, which led me to believe she may be a healer or shaman, protecting sacred rituals. He told me that she has a great knowledge of healing herbs, roots and plants, and moon phases. The Cherokee held ceremonies for the thirteen phases of the moon, seasonally based, and aligned with aspects of nature, including spring renewal, planting, harvesting, and personal ritualistic observations ("Events that Correspond with the Cherokee Moon").

Another parallel between the Cherokee system of healing and religion and mountain, as well as some mainstream religions, is baptism by total immersion, in "living waters." McCauley identifies the practice as being established by the early Anabaptist groups in Appalachia (87). According to the Bible, John the Baptist baptized Jesus in living waters.

Explanations regarding the origins of Cherokee medicine and healing have been passed down orally by elders of the tribe throughout its history. In order to teach secrets of medicine sacred to the Cherokee, elders base teachings on the "Four Directions" (Garrett 22). Anthropologist Anthony Cavender, author of *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia* (2003), writes:

Cherokee medicine is presented in the context of fundamental religious and philosophical concepts such as harmony and balance, the four sacred directions and healing paths, the rule of opposites and the universal circle, all of which comprise the Medicine Way of the Cherokee and other Native American peoples. (50)

Cherokee beliefs regarding health and healing reveal holistic determinations of cause, symptom, and remedy. Western research and culturally inclusive monographs and articles, beginning with the work of James Mooney<sup>11</sup> and including recent writings by members of the *Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians* such as James T. Garrett, are consistent in providing holistic definitions. Plants, trees, and minerals are identified as living in relationship to each other, as are humans in relationship with those and also each other. Illness is a result of some form of disrespect shown to the natural order. Illness happens when man, or woman, does not fulfill an obligation or responsibility as part of living within the 'circle of life' which includes all aspects of nature. The illness affects not only the individual, but also the entire community.

---

<sup>11</sup> James Mooney was a nineteenth-century ethnologist who was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute's Bureau of American Ethnology to work with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee in 1887. Originally sent to study the Cherokee language, Mooney eventually gathered information about Cherokee healing, collected stories and myths, and studied the culture. His work was published in 1932 by Franz Olbrechts in the 99<sup>th</sup> Bureau of Ethnology Bulletin (James Mooney Among the Cherokee).

Like certain religious belief and rituals, in-common healing remedies are also found among the Cherokee and early "non-native" settlers in Appalachia. Cherokee Medicine of the North, also called Wind Medicine, includes trees found in Appalachia. Inner barks are and were used in formulas for colds and diseases of the lungs. Water is a West Medicine, and it is also the basis of elixirs. Western Medicines used to treat arthritis include angelica, black cohosh, devil's claw, evening primrose, feverfew, flax, ginger, nettle, rue, valerian, willow, yellow gentian, and yucca (Garrett 265). Black cohosh (also known as Papoose root, blue-berry cohosh, blueberry, squaw root, blue ginseng, yellow ginseng, and blue cohosh) was used by the Cherokee as well as early American colonists to treat rheumatism, and this continued into the 1800s (Foreman 52). Butterfly weed is another plant used by Cherokee and immigrants alike for the treatment of rheumatism (Boone 28). Rebecca Myra Boone, author of *Native Medicinal Plants of the Shenandoah Valley*, also found that the may apple was used by the Cherokee and early settlers who "adopted some its uses from the Indians" (Boone).<sup>12</sup>

I have some knowledge of natural healing, learned from Mama and Grandma Maggie. I do not recall ever *not* knowing that the aloe plant soothes burns, we always had the plant around the house. Tobacco is to be used on bee stings, but must be mixed with saliva and applied quickly. Tobacco soothes the nerves as well. Grandma Maggie also showed me a plant, Pipsissewa, and told me women used it to induce abortion. We had no discussion about why she knew about that plant, and I wish I had asked. But the learning was for listening, not asking.

---

<sup>12</sup> Boone reported that "May apple was found to have two very powerful anticancer properties, and drugs from the plant are being used to treat various kinds of cancer" (29).

Elbert, West Virginia, where Mama grew up, had a traditional doctor, provided by the coal company. He lived just below Mama's, but it would not have mattered in an emergency—Elbert was not that big. In more rural areas, other than attending in the delivery of children and emergencies, doctors were seldom called.

Home remedies were the major course of treatment for illnesses such as pneumonia, sores, or fever, and home remedies were abundant. They included hot poultices of fried onions applied to the chest for a cold or wearing clothes soaked in turpentine. Creosote, liniment, and kerosene were also kept around the house to treat colds. Catnip and ginseng were used for stomach upsets. Cratis Williams's memories of his boyhood, *Tales from Sacred Wind: Coming of Age in Appalachia*, includes many home remedies. He writes:

Children who were restless at night or suffered from bad dreams were also administered catnip tea. If the child had difficulty urinating, a tea made from crushed watermelon seeds was administered. If he wet the bed or urinated too easily a few drops of ratsbane tea at night was considered helpful. (391)

A cure for head lice was a mixture of castor oil, kerosene and lard rubbed over the head. Earaches were treated by hot wet cloths applied to outside, or, as reported by Williams, "Pouring warm urine into the ear and stopping the ear with wool or cotton batting. Sometimes tobacco smoke was blown into an aching ear" (392). Bee stings were treated with a raw onion, or a poultice of salt, soda, and water. The most common

treatment for bee stings, however, and one that I still use today, is the application of a wad of tobacco, mixed with spittle. Doctors cost money and no one had money to waste on illnesses or injuries that could be treated at home.

Children were treated for worms in the spring, and took laxatives in order to make sure the bowels moved regularly. Regularity remained important to my parents and grandparents, and no amount of talking or scientific evidence to the contrary could convince Mama otherwise. Black draught sold at the country stores helped serve as a laxative. Children were also given tonics in the spring. The ingredients in the tonics could vary from year to year. Williams describes the ingredients in his father's tonic, although he cannot remember all of them:

After the sap had risen in the trees and tender young plants had shot up from the floors of the woodlots, he would take an axe, a mattock, and a sack into the woods one morning and gather barks and roots needed for making bitters. A few times I went along with him to help carry the tools...He dug roots of the slippery elm, the wild cherry, the red oak, the yellow willow, the poplar, and the sassafras. He peeled the tender bark from the spicewood bush, the sweet birch, and the ironwood bush. He included roots of a few blackberry bushes. We found wild ginger, the rattlesnake weed, mayapple, and yellow roots. We then gathered dandelion, wild lettuce, sheep sorrel, and ladyslipper. (400)

Stories of disgusting spoonfuls of castor oil were told to me in my youth, and my Grandpa Buck had to take it regularly. Mama's horror story of "constitution" treatment is being threatened with having to eat raw liver! Her blood iron level was low, and Doc Whitney told her she could eat cooked liver every day for one week, or get over it in a day by eating it raw. She chose the cooked version.

The origins of Mama's and Grandma Maggie's knowledge of natural healing practices cannot be verified. During the course of my research, I found a Cherokee connection on Mama's side of the family. This was surprising since I previously only knew of the Cherokee connection on Daddy's side.



## **Chapter 8: My Belief System, an Appalachian Belief System**

I was not raised to believe I have to attend church, or make a denominational choice. I find denominationalism can be divisive. My viewpoint, I have discovered, is very "Appalachian." Deborah Vansau McCauley writes, "Mountain religious life is characterized by an anti-organizational or anti-institutional outlook that stands in contrast to denominationalism" (143). My suspicion of denominational religion, and, according to McCauley, the suspicion felt by others from Appalachia, is due to the delineating factors of denominational religion—the potential to claim that one denomination is any better than another, thereby, claiming one individual to be better than another.

The Appalachian Region, and its history, is that of America at its most basic definition, the land of the free, where one can practice religion as one sees fit. This bottom-line American guarantee was driven by the massive numbers of Europeans who came to this country to escape religious persecution, and many of those people moved into Appalachia. We must also be mindful of the African Americans and indentured servants who came to the colonies by the force of their owners and employers rather than by choice. But, regardless of how peoples in early Appalachia got to Appalachia, they brought with them faith-based practices which were a result of the cultures and societies they came from. This demographic truth is representative of Appalachian tradition that I see impacting religion in America, and I know it has impacted me.

Aspects of the "Appalachian tradition" of religion can be found in any part of the United States, even though certain communally practicing areas of the tradition were not necessarily *directly* influenced by Appalachia. Consider, however, the general principles identified by McCauley and others as Appalachian regionally-specific indicators.

Residents of the Appalachian region have been characterized as independent, while at the same time communally-oriented. This worldview is broadly typical of Americans, and is an aspect of the Appalachian tradition that is typically most revealed during national or community-wide crisis, such as the attacks on September 11, 2001 and following Hurricane Katrina, to name more universally known incidents. Meaningless deaths of children within a community also drive the exposure of the communal worldview as individuals attach themselves to a perception of the greater good, notably, empathy or sympathy, and understanding in light of basic human suffering. Aspects of personal biases that would otherwise negate communal perspective are repressed, or, at times, cast off.

Early residents of Appalachia found a way to reconcile the spiritual with the natural. The beauty and magnitude of the region, and the isolationism created by the physical geographical boundaries, reinforced the traditions of mountain religion, especially when multitudes of peoples, and their specific denominational religions, began moving in. Historian of religion Catherine Albanese writes: "The confusion (for some) of too much manyness, the seeming excesses of the culture of expansion with its new peoples and religions, and the preference by many for the old and the familiar all helped to share the various regionalisms that developed" (325). This happened predominantly in the years after the Civil War within the mountain communities and families that chose to stay in the region rather than move into the industry-driven large cities, but continued into the

twentieth century as people did eventually move into the more populated regions due to economic need. As a result of the mechanization of the coal fields by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the lack of jobs overall, many moved out of the region only to return on the weekends to stay with family or friends. Albanese sees this as "an expression of the culture of contraction, the hills had become necessary in a spiritual and emotional sense to their survival" (331).

As the Cherokee accommodated themselves to Christianity due to aggression by colonizers and found ways of accommodation with their own belief systems, acculturation on many levels and by many cultural groups occurred within Appalachia. The Cherokee believe in living a balanced life, and they define balance as harmony with other people, mind, body, and nature. Professor of Religion William A. Young writes, in *Quest for Harmony: Native American Spiritual Traditions*, that "Cherokee Christians see no conflict in participating in traditional rituals as they continue to attend Christian worship services" (149). Yes, Christian missionaries and denominations impacted the Cherokee belief systems. But the Cherokee belief systems have also impacted Christians, as the acculturation of the Living Waters Lutheran Church in Cherokee, North Carolina.

*This* is where I find myself to now be, in a blended spiritual existence much like that of the Cherokee, yet different, too. I strive to live as Christ-like as possible. Love—that is the bottom line, love of family and shared crises and successes, love of neighbor, love of nature, love of God, walking the walk, talking the talk, attempting to refuse to engage in hypocrisy or judgment, prayerful, thankful, and humble. Mountain religion is difficult to define, but it is ridiculous to try to "denominationalize" a way of believing that refuses to "denominationalize" itself. Loyal Jones probably sums up the

Appalachian/mountain religion/church tradition best: "These churches, despite what some have written, serve the needs of their members very well. [. . .] For one thing, they [the churches] teach that each person must be treated with respect" (210). Amen.

The impact of the EuroAmerican capitalist worldview was not limited to the Cherokee. The societal, class-based, cultural interactions that took place in the coalfields were tremendous. As coal was discovered in the eastern Pennsylvania anthracite fields and American investors realized the financial potential, Welsh miners were recruited to the colonies to help establish the mines. The Welsh were mining and still are, to some degree, experts, as were the British, due to the amount of coal in their native countries. Mining was a highly technical, skilled trade, of which men were proud.

Like most other early immigrants in America, religion was the first factor that brought the first Welsh to America, as early as 1663, but later the emigration grew. According to Lewis, "the burgeoning demand for coal prompted American capitalists to import British miners as early as 1827 to inaugurate a more 'methodical system' for the extraction of coal, according to a report in the *Pottsville Miners Journal*" (6).

The Welsh brought with them a high level of knowledge regarding the science of underground mining, and as the coal was discovered to be a reliable fuel that could be used in the making of iron, the industry grew and so did the Welsh migration. A Welshman, David Thomas, is known historically as the "father of the American anthracite iron industry" (5) due to his development of a new furnace that burned the anthracite, burned hotter and therefore produced iron faster.

Lewis goes so far as to state, "the American Industrial Revolution can be read as a story of Welsh technical skills being transferred to Pennsylvania and from there dispersed to other regions as the market economy expanded, with the Welsh mine and mill managers in the vanguard" (61). But the Welsh did not only contribute to the development of the physical mines, their management, and the production of iron that would lead to the Industrial Revolution in America, they were also instrumental in the formation of early safety regulations. The Welsh were some of the earliest mine inspectors. Before this, mining accidents and disasters were more numerous in America and more miners died in mining accidents than did in Britain. Although the Welsh inspectors met great resistance from the mine owners, the owners believing that implementation of the regulations would destroy the industry due to the costs, Lewis writes, "Their persistence was instrumental in establishing a professional inspectorate" (173). The Welsh also held positions of leadership in the unions, again, unionization a factor of the mining industry in Britain transferred to the American.

As the immigrants from Poland, Russia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, Italy, Austria, and Hungary began arriving in the early 1900s "coal operators learned to appreciate the value of surplus labor in depressing wages and deflecting the demands of organized miners. They accomplished this by recruiting much more labor than they needed, and from those parts of Europe that were non-industrial" (220).

The first Welsh who migrated to the United States settled primarily in Pennsylvania. They were assigned the jobs of managers in the mines. Greatly clannish, when they did move they moved primarily as a group, from coalfield to coalfield as new

mines opened. The cultural influence of the Welsh was felt in not only the construction and management of the mines, but also in the development of unions (R. L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans*).

The very early Welsh migrations were of those people seeking to escape religious persecution. Eventually, coal was the greater motivator, until around 1840. At that time, a wave of relative prosperity in Wales slowed the migration, until a mass migration to America occurred between 1871 and 1920. The Welsh, in their positions of management, hired other Welshmen until employment practices changed around 1883. At that time, a new labor force entered the coalfields, African Americans. They were paid one third less than whites in the northern coal fields. This led the respectability of being a miner to lessen in the eyes of the Welsh, and other citizenry, and many Welshmen either returned to Wales or moved into positions within the union. The letters to family members in Wales encouraging them to move to the American continent ceased.

The Welsh, according to West Virginian historian Ronald L. Lewis, were "'Free-labor republicans,' Welsh miners refused to compete with coerced labor used by operators to depress wages" ("Historic Ties"). This is what happened when the Slavs (the group Lewis identifies as peoples from Poland, Russia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, Italy, Austria, and Hungary) began arriving in the early 1900s. These people were willing to work for even less money than what blacks and native "whites" would accept. The Welsh found native whites and Slavs distasteful, holding "a fundamental disrespect for native Appalachian whites" (15), but they found African Americans to be

all extremely well behaved and enlightened people, [but that] one must not quibble with them on no account, for they will take advantage of it

instantly. I treat them very respectfully and shew (sic) them that I respect their race, and they appreciate that more than words can tell, for most white people treat them otherwise, which is the greatest mistake a man can commit, as they naturally feel, and resent, any insult given them on account of their race, the same as you or I would resent it. (R. L. Lewis, "Williams Letter")

Much of Lewis's work focuses on the impact of African Americans on Appalachia, including the coalfields, and the impact of the region on African Americans. He writes in his essay, "From Peasant to Proletarian: The Migration of Southern Blacks to the Central Appalachian Coalfields" (1989), that before the Great Depression employment disparity between blacks and whites in the West Virginia coalfields was nearly nonexistent. Racial conflict between blacks and whites was not significant during this time due to the number of jobs available. However, it was not long before conflict did arise, with the arrival of the Slavs—Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Czechs, and other Europeans willing to work for lower wages than that earned by blacks. Competition for work grew fierce.

Because they were despised for taking work away from existing miners, the first generation of those non-English speaking immigrants to arrive in the Appalachian coalfields was naturally isolated. The language differences reinforced the isolation. Having no social outlets other than among their own countrymen, loyalties to cultures of the old country remained firmly entrenched. The low educational and economic status of the Slavs

also compounded their cultural isolation. However, with the second generation—children born on American soil—differences were relegated to their rightful place. Playmates were more important. According to Lewis:

Through play and school the children lost their parents' ability and need to determine subtle nationality differences. The children played together . . . and were not aware of what nationality the others were. . . . Important as their identity was to the first generation, the cultural nuances generally were lost on their children. (R. L. Lewis, *Transnational* 267)

I can personally attest to having similar experiences of playmates being free of prejudice. Both of my parents grew up in coal towns, lived in mixed-culture neighborhoods, and had playmates from various cultures and races.



## Chapter 9: Of War Babies and Long Pauses

Many Appalachian men went to fight during World War II, as their ancestors before them served in other wars. Historian John A. Williams saw the war as giving "thousands of Appalachian soldiers and sailors a chance to sample the possibilities of life and work in distant parts of the nation" (383). Eventually counted as part of the Great Migration after World War II, and perhaps influenced to some degree by the visualization of life elsewhere, many of my family members moved away from Appalachia during the two decades following the war. But joining the military *to* get away, or because there was nothing better to do was never a part of the decisions to serve during World War II. Being a soldier, serving the country, was simply something men did. All of Mama's brothers attempted to join one branch of the military or another, as did the men on Daddy's side, and all but one joined. We have our family war stories.

Mama's oldest brother, Preston, was flat-footed, which was considered something of a physical deformity in the 1940s, at in the eyes of the military. He ended up working as an engineer for United States Steel and climbed all over the mountains of southern West Virginia, surveying the region. (Mama told me he took a job that required all that walking to spite the Army for not letting him join.)

Uncle Chester, the third born of five sons to Maggie and Buck, was a military hero in World War II, and no one but his daddy and his fellow soldiers ever knew about it until 1995. He was a foot soldier and his unit, among others, a total of more than two thousand

men, was on the S. S. Leopoldville, headed across the English Channel to the Battle of the Bulge on Christmas Eve 1944. A German torpedo struck the ship and a mayday was immediately transmitted for assistance. But signals were mixed, radio frequencies were confused, and precious time went by before the message was finally received. Men went into the near freezing water. More than seven hundred of those men died.

The first rescuers to reach the boat were French fishermen. The American Navy soon arrived, and the sailors began pulling men out of the water as quickly as they could. Chester survived. He recalled being in the water, scared, and finally attempting to climb up a rope ladder. He heard a voice say, "Spriggs! Is that you?" He looked up into the eyes of an African American neighbor—a black angel—from Elbert, who pulled him onto the boat.

When Chester finally got home, he walked into the house, hugged his mother, and told her he needed to talk to his daddy upstairs. We do not know what was said. A release to the media after the accident was deliberately inaccurate. Men known to be dead were listed as missing. The soldiers were sworn to secrecy with a threat of court-marshal if they told what had happened. Silence was ordered to maintain American military and citizenry morale, and so as to not embarrass the British. Those who were there have since reported that British military personnel onshore that night were not paying attention to their radios. It was Christmas Eve.<sup>13</sup>

My childhood Christmases in Florida were big family affairs at one house or another. I recall a Christmas when I received a Hammond organ, and Chester sitting down to play. He played as he drank beer and cried. I did not know why. But now I do.

---

<sup>13</sup> There are many sources now available detailing events of the night the S. S. Leopoldville was torpedoed.

When the fifty-year cloak was lifted, family members and the surviving men themselves began petitioning for recognition, for a memorial, for something. "Something" has yet to happen. Maybe we were asking for too much. It is no matter now. Uncle Chester died in 2010. Daddy served, as did his brother, both grandfathers, all of my uncles, except, as mentioned earlier, Preston. Daddy was in the Army. He was stationed in Africa, and was part of the team that tracked Sputnik when the Russian satellite orbited the earth—such stories I have!

Yes, Appalachia has provided soldiers. And, more often than not, spouse, children, and other family members are left behind. Grandma Maggie visited me in Boone around 1978, when I was an undergraduate. She told me one of her family members, a man, I am sorry to say I cannot remember the direct relation, had left Virginia to serve in the Civil War, and the family received news that he had died and was buried somewhere in the Boone area, "near Linville." So, off we went on a search of old cemeteries, looking for a stone with the name "John Lewis" on it. We had no luck—there are hundreds of small cemeteries in the area—and I forgot about the incident until recently.

During one of my interviews with Rick Ward, whose family has been in the region since the Revolutionary War, he told me about a cemetery on property his grandfather once owned. Graves of many men who died during the Civil War are in the cemetery, and, Rick mentioned one stone kept falling over. Every time he went to the cemetery he would set the stone aright, but the next time he returned it would be fallen again. The name on the stone was "John Lewis."

I went to the cemetery—how could I not? The names of John's parents are on the stone, but the names do not fit into my family genealogy, Barnette and Mary Yelton. The name on the stone reads "John Lewis," but a bronze plaque installed much later reads "John L. Yelton." The closest link I can find is a relative with the last name of Helton.

I try to recall a period in my when I did not visit cemeteries, and I can only remember visits. I once visited a cemetery with my family, I cannot remember where, that had beautiful mausoleums—no one in the family was buried there, we just drove through and looked. It is the cemeteries in Virginia that I first recall—at Meadowview. Mama and her parents are buried at one on the property of the Greenfield Baptist Church. Another is a little family cemetery, the Spriggs family cemetery, where my great-grandfather Spriggs is buried, and my aunt, Rebecca Spriggs Brown Gartin, "Aunt Billie."

Aunt Billie secured the land. The Spriggs family originally owned the farm where the cemetery is located, and when the property was sold out, Billie had paperwork drawn up that protected the cemetery, and guarantees that anyone in the family who needs a place to be buried may be buried there. Billie was a strong, beautiful, adventurous woman. In her early twenties she moved to Chicago, looking for excitement, and she found it. She dated a member of Al Capone's gang.

Mama told me that Grandma recalled Billie coming home to visit, with stories both thrilling and frightening. Billie's boyfriend would toss diamond jewelry on her table, and tell her to take her pick. But Billie wouldn't take anything. She was home on a visit in February of 1929 when she received a telegram the day before she was to head back to not return to Chicago. This happened just days before February 14<sup>th</sup>, the St. Valentine's Day massacre.

Billie stayed in Virginia, and opened up an underground bar called the Purple Rooster. She bought a bottle of whiskey, watered it down, sold it by the drink, bought two more, and her business thrived for a few years. Mama said she was known as Billie Brown the Bootleg Queen. But as the economy slowed down, so did her business.

I do not know for certain what Billie did immediately after that. She ended up in Florida in the late 1950s. Another sibling of Grandpa Buck's, Uncle Charlie, and Billie moved to Dade City. Charlie had an earthworm farm in his backyard. There were beds of rich black dirt, framed out in 2-by-4s, shaded by palms and banana trees. Billie lived right across the street, a road of sand actually, dusty gray and deep. A good rain made the road nearly impassable in parts. But Billie's house was a white wood frame, shaded by pines and oaks. Billie worked picking oranges and gathering eggs. My memories of visiting her are filled with an old country store down the way, and penny candy, "Rhythm of the Rain"<sup>14</sup> (a 45-rpm music record my second cousin, Irene, played over and over), and driving down a narrow sand road, parking by the orchard, and running between the trees for a hug from Billie to last until she got off work.

I heard stories of gangsters, and diamonds, and oranges, and eggs. I heard about family members who served in wars and tracked miraculous machinery across the skies. I wrote.

### *War Babies and Long Pauses*

I believe we are lonely here in the castle, though it is beautiful, with several towers higher than the clouds even. On days of rain we go up higher, above, and the sun is shining on the lake of white; below, the dreary

---

<sup>14</sup> "Rhythm of the Rain" was recorded by The Cascades and released in 1962.

darkness, and the day especially gray, and even the evergreens can't cheer the souls. We watch from the tower, my mother and I, for the men to come home. We look down on the trails of trodden dirt, and the river with tall corn growing on the bottom lands. I've seen children in play far below, and told them at school the next day that, yes, I saw you, and, your dress was red, and, you had ribbons at the ends of your braids.

But these are only mountains really. And things haven't been good since this war started.

Aunt Billie's doing all right, though. She's selling watered-down liquor to the men that are left home. She's here now. I can hear her laughing. It's hard not to, you know, she loves to laugh, and she laughs a lot! She's so damn pretty. Mama'd beat me for saying that, but Billie's not just pretty, she's damn pretty. She don't do nothing to her face (maybe pinch her cheeks a lot), and her hair's got gold in it, as bright as the sun on dry straw, glisteny and always curled just enough. I don't even know if she brushes it. It's her laugh that makes her touchable though, at least that's what the men like to do, touch her. When she's real quiet and still you'd think she'd break, like a doll I saw in a catalog once that Mama said was so fine it'd break if I played with it. Her eyes are blue like the sky. I remember when she came back from Chicago and was crying all the time - the red around her eyes just made them that much prettier. Mama won't talk to me about why she came home. It was something to do with a man. I know. I've found us women do a lot of crying over men. I think Billie's man is dead or something. She has

this ring that they say has a diamond in it and it's huge. She don't even wear it though. I saw it one time in her jewel box when she let me look in there. I think she must've forgotten it was in there when she said I could look because she got all flustered when I put it on and said how pretty it was. I heard them say it was illegal, though what they mean by that I don't know. Billie wouldn't steal anything. She waters down her liquor, but everybody does that. She told me once the damn fools would kill themselves drinking it if she didn't.

Anyway, it's good to hear her laughing. Damn rare to hear anybody laughing around here. (I know, Mama, it ain't right for a twelve-year old girl to swear like that. But what else am I going to do with all ya'll runnin' around acting like there's nothing wrong?)

\* \* \*

Some of the men are back. Margaret's getting married. They say her man fell in love with her the first time he saw her. He was coming down over the mountain to church and crossed over her daddy's land near the spring house where Margaret was sitting there daydreaming or something. She says he had his uniform on and looked awful fine. She let him get some water. Her daddy came out because he and this man know each other. Maggie ain't but thirteen, just a year older than me, and she gets to get married. Mama says my time will come. There ain't nobody around here though that I've seen yet that I'd have anyway. Don't nobody come around the house, and Mama won't let me go to Billie's anymore since those men got back. I think it's

wild down there now. I hear everybody laughing. My daddy isn't back yet. I know he'll take me down there when he gets home. Rosa Corseco said yesterday that my daddy probably wasn't coming home since he ain't back yet. (All her daddy does is drink since he got back, Mama said.) I threw her in with the pigs. She was sitting right there on the fence mouthing at me, and I really just kind of shoved her. Mama switched me for it, but only one time across the legs. She had her face turned and I think she was smiling. Mama don't like Mrs. Corseco anyway and says Rosa's spoiled. I don't know about that. She's got some really pretty dresses and she gives me her movie magazines when she's done with them. I felt bad messing up her clothes when I pushed her in, but I felt pretty good too. I wanted to hit her for talking like that. Daddy is coming home. I know it. We're thinking he must be doing something real important to be held back so long. Mama says he's gonna be so proud of Billie's business. She's pulling in some money—bought us all brand new shoes and coats out of the catalog. She sent me over some dresses of hers and Mama's working on them to make them fit decent. The cloth's so fine. All I need now is some new underpants and stockings and I'll be ready for school. Mama says the old ones will have to do though until Daddy comes home.

\* \* \*

We don't even know where he's buried. They say somewhere in a place across the ocean and that he died like a brave soldier. They didn't even send Mama anything of his, said he was buried in a ceremony with some other



soldiers killed at the same time. Mama's lips got tight when they told her that, the way they do when she doesn't believe something. Billie would say it was woman's intuition working. She said she bet there was more to that story than we was hearing. They told Mama that the place was a lot like our mountains and Mama just said she imagines he's content with that. She got out his Sunday suit clothes the other day and put it all in a box tied with some string and sent it over to Billie. Charlie got all mad and cried and hollered at her because he says he's the oldest and he wanted that suit. Mama just looked at him. It's hard to tell you what her face looked like. It made my stomach feel funny. I just gritted my teeth so I wouldn't hit Charlie for making her face look like that, but then Mama got real mad and said that that suit was Daddy's suit and wasn't nobody else wearing it. That damn fool Charlie didn't remember those were Daddy's burying clothes. Charlie's out there sulking now, and I was thinking maybe I ought to tell him. Rosa's daddy got killed last night in a fight at Billie's. They've got a big chain on the door that the government men put on there this morning and Billie's in there packing to go back to Chicago. Don't know what in the hell she's going to do there. I've been wanting to ask Charlie about him and me maybe going to find Daddy's burying place—they said it was marked with a stone. I've got a map in my history book and I think Billie'll tell me the name of the place and write it down before she leaves. Me and Charlie are the oldest so we ought to be the ones to go find it and make sure it's proper. Mama can't leave the babies.

The story about Uncle Chester and the black sailor, a big black angel, a man who was at the right place at the right time to save my uncle, is woven into the pattern of my life and my stories. In my mind, I can see Uncle Chester's face as he told his story. I can see his eyes and his smile, and I wonder how any of us dare have an ounce of prejudice in our souls.

Race relations in the coal camps were much the same as they were in other integrated parts of the country where civilized people dwelt. There was a racial divide in the community, albeit a blurred line. Race relations in the coal camp at Elbert were influenced by a community designed to reflect cohabitation while maintaining cultural norms of the time. Elbert had a separate church and school for blacks, but the store, the movie house, and working quarters were shared. The theater was located in Gary, it was segregated within, but all races watched movies together. The balcony was typically reserved for blacks, unless a movie was shown which drew more black people than white, as in the case of a showing of *Pinky*, in 1949. The movie earned three Academy Award nominations, including one for Ethel Waters for her performance as "Granny Dysey." Grandma Maggie was a big fan of Ethel Waters and she and Mama (at the age of thirteen) went to see the show. They sat in the theater with the other movie goers, an overwhelmingly black audience, all on the main level, all watching the story of a black woman light enough to pass herself off as white, and choosing to do so to gain a better life. The movie, directed by Elia Kazan, was one of the earliest Oscar-nominated films to deal with inter-racial relations. Perhaps that movie had something to do with forming Mama's character, as much as the parents who raised her.

Daddy has expressed opinions based on racial prejudice over the years, but when he was small, he played with everyone. He and Jimmy Chisgar, of Hungarian descent, went to see Fats Domino when he played in the area. Daddy told me they were the only white faces in the house and, when they walked in, the room momentarily went silent, and then everybody went back to having a good time.

I do not know if I will ever figure out how one individual ends up with prejudices that may never be overcome, while another is repulsed at the thought of racism. And prejudice is suffered by all races against all races. Only God knows why. Perhaps our prejudices are the cause of wars and the walls that divide us.

I watched on television as the Berlin Wall went down in 1990. I had a friend whose husband traveled to Germany on business and she went with him. I remember handing her a twenty dollar bill and telling her to "surprise" me with something for my son. She came home with a somewhat "touristy" but unique gift—a plaque with a German coin on it, a stamp, and an actual piece of the Wall, hot pink spray paint graffiti and all.

Watching the destruction of symbolic walls has always made me happy. I suppose, growing up as I did, traveling, moving from house to house as Daddy changed jobs, or income changed for better or worse, I inherently knew that the walls of humanity, class, race, even gender, were something to be overcome. Children who move around a lot become chameleons, changing to the color of the wall, scampering over or under it, joyfully running into the fray if no wall exists, getting through. So, I also have a thing about tunnels. Daddy honked the horn as we drove through the tunnel at Big Walker Mountain, headlights on in the middle of the day, windows down, the horn and echoes of

tires over the pavement, noise bouncing against the walls that surrounded us, the tunnel was a brief episode of altered reality. The darkness, even in nighttime, was altered. We were not afraid.

*Go On, Daughter!*

Go on, daughter! Go on down off this mountain! Follow that silver ribbon there, the one you can see from Big Walker, GO!

Keep going until you see the brown people running across the gray gravel fields, to Jesus standing on the side of the hill. They are the Israelites.

## **Chapter 10: There's a Man Under That Mountain**

My family men were miners almost exclusively until around 1961, men from the mountains of Appalachia. At least one of those men worked the Cranberry Iron Mine in western North Carolina, many worked various coalmines in West Virginia, but one, only one, worked the Hawk's Nest tunnel at Gauley Mountain. Although that quantifiable mining site was labeled a construction project, he, and others, dug through rock, dirt, and silica, through and under the mountain. Newly married, he was a white man—the crew was primarily African American—and he was young and wired to support his young wife, my great-great aunt, Aretta Tolley. His name was Jack McCrary.

Union Carbide hired the contractors of Rinehart and Dennis to build the tunnel through Gauley Mountain at Hawk's Nest, and work began in 1927. Although, according to court documents of the time, the actual tunnel workers were mostly black, there were white men under that mountain, too. Men came from all over the country for the work. This was during the Great Depression and families were starving.

The lungs of all tunnel workers were invaded by the silica, minute particles that inhibited the natural cleaning function of human lungs, finding no barrier to invasion. The deaths were shameful and avoidable and death does not prejudice itself towards race. Witnesses reported that the trees around the site were white with the dust, clothing would not come clean, and the silica dust seeped into the houses, the minute particles that could

invade lungs, more horrible than black lung. The dust was so thick that perhaps even if the masks had been made available it would have made no difference. The dust was the air and the air was dust.

Jack McCrary is lost in the annals of Union Carbide human resources, legally removed from prying, loving eyes, the truly legal eyes, he is remembered. When he died, he left a wife, Aretta, who moved to Detroit for work, and a son, Jackie, who remained behind with my great-grandparents, Mary Jane and Handy Tolley, while his mother sought their livelihood. Sadly, Aretta was only heard of again when word came that she had died. Probably like most parents who receive their child's body home to bury without knowing the cause, her parents were suspicious of how she died. They buried her body in McDowell County, and raised the boy, Jackie, as their own. Jackie left to disappear, too, as did a great-uncle, James Gaultney, Grandma Polly's brother. James would eventually be found at his final resting place, a cemetery in Texas, when the internet opened up not only the world, but also closets hiding skeletons. James left because he wanted to find his own way. His son traveled to Ohio once, around 2000, to attend a family reunion on Decoration Day.

I come from a great, splintered family, the numbers counted by the names in Bibles and, more recently, online genealogies. (Modern technology, that internet, has done much to drag us back to dwell on things, some best left forgotten.) But I spent thirty dollars a month for four months and never found Jack or Jackie, or Aretta past the age of twelve (see fig. 10). I found her on a West Virginia census list of McDowell County for 1930, before Jack, before Hawk's Nest, before Detroit.



Fig. 10. My great-grandparents, Handy Sebastian Tolley, Mary Woody Tolley, and their daughter Aretta; "Handy Sebastian Tolley, Mary Woody Tolley, and Aretta Tolley"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p., 1925; JPEG.

The tragedy of the Depression is enough to horrify us. It was a time of photographs: Overwhelming photographs of soup lines, shoeless children, starved faces, stark, confused eyes of depravation, in a country known as the light of humanity. These photographs reveal an American history we would all just as soon forget, but they do not

allow us to forget. We cannot and must not forget, and because this is an autoethnography, and because my family was tragically affected by Hawk's Nest, I include what I have chosen to include, and am angry. Below is a portion of *An Investigation Relating to Health Conditions of Workers Employed in the Construction and Maintenance of Public Utilities: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Labor, House of Representatives, Seventy-Fourth Congress, Second Session* hearings and testimony from 1936 that led to eventual safety standards for any employees of companies working under contracts of government agencies. The standards were established too late to help Jack.

Whereas four hundred and seventy-six tunnel workers employed by the Rinehart and Dennis Company, contractors for the New Kanawha Power Company, subsidiary of the Union Carbide and Carbon Company, have from time to time died from silicosis contracted while employed in digging out a tunnel at Gauley Bridge, West Virginia; and

Whereas one thousand five hundred workers are now suffering from silicosis contracted while employed in the construction of said tunnel at Gauley Bridge, West Virginia; and

Whereas one hundred and sixty-nine of said workers were buried in a field at Summerville, West Virginia, with cornstalks as their only gravestones and with no other means of identification; and

Whereas silicosis is a lung disease caused by breathing silicate dust, this dust causing the growth of fibrous tissues in the lung gradually choking the air cells in the lung and bringing about certain death; and



Whereas this condition has existed for years and all efforts to expose it have been thwarted; and

Whereas there are other similar conditions existing in the United States in said industry: Therefore be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That (1) the Secretary of Labor shall immediately appoint a board of inquiry to make a prompt and thorough investigation of all facts relating to health conditions of workers employed in the construction and maintenance of public utilities. (United States. Cong. House. Committee on Labor)

An estimated two thousand workers died of silicosis while medical information about the causal relationship between inhaled silica dust and the illness was suppressed. In testimony at the hearings a Union Carbide contractor bereft of PR packaging finally told the bald truth, saying "I knew they was going to kill these niggers within 5 years, but I didn't know they was going to kill them so quick" (United States Congress).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For more information about Hawk's Nest, see the *West Virginia Historical Society Quarterly*, April 1998.

## Chapter 11: Something About Coal and Water

There is a group of filmmakers working on an independent film about a lawsuit in West Virginia. In late 1994, a young family moved into their brand new home and, in the midst of the housewarming party, discovered they had no water. Explosions and other mining activities used in the process of removing the mountaintop high above them had caused their well to suddenly go dry. A neighbor rigged up a water supply through a garden hose and the party went on. Another neighbor, Patricia Bragg, felt the stirrings of what was to become an investigation that would take her through five years of research and exploration of the legal systems in the coal fields. She had to learn how the coal industry and the government could justify homeowners bearing the burden of proving that mining caused the water loss and other property damages in the area. At that time, the industry did not have to defend itself against damaging personal property unless someone complained. And complaining was expensive, especially when squaring off against the high-powered attorneys the coal companies kept on retainers. For Trish Bragg and other community members living at the base of Horseshoe Bend Mountain, life was getting ready to change, beyond the expense and challenges of digging a second well.

In September of 2009 I was standing at a computer in the W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection in Belk Library at Appalachian State University when I received an email from an old friend. He had been invited to audition to play the part of Arley Johnson, a dynamic member of the West Virginia House of Delegates, and appear in *Moving Mountains*, a

movie about the coal industry. Penny Loeb, the author of the book the movie is based upon, wrote the book about Patricia Bragg's stand against big coal. Loeb identifies Johnson as the politician who "opened the new century, finally standing to his full height against a corrupt legislative handout" (240). My friend, Austin Jetton, was excited. He has been in theater for more than thirty years, performed in one of the early companies of *Cats*, and has traveled all over the world in his career. But this was an opportunity to star in a feature film. Patricia Bragg, who went to high school with Austin and me, had sought him out. He auditioned and got the part. After reading that original email, I searched the online library catalog, found the book, turned around, walked to a shelf twenty feet away, and picked it up. I was immediately captivated. The full title of the book is *Moving Mountains: How One Woman and Her Community Won Justice from Big Coal*.

The home of that housewarming party back in 1994 belonged to one of Patricia's best friends. Patricia and other community members, through years of progress, followed by set-backs, and more progress followed by more set-backs, eventually secured a decision in 1999 from United States District Judge Charles H. Haden which *almost* shut down the coal industry in West Virginia. Judge Haden's decision found that mountaintop removal violated the Clean Water Act and that what had been previously termed "valley fill" was instead, "waste."

Quickly after Haden's decision, the Clinton administration, in fear of reprisals from the coal industry and threatened energy shortages, put together what was to become a newly created environmental impact statement (EIS). But before the statement was completed, a new administration came into office that did not move forward with the development of the statement in time to have it in place before a revision of the Clean

Water Act was created. The revision, influenced by Stephen Griles, a former coal lobbyist who became the director of the Department of the Interior, removed the differentiation between valley fill and waste from the original. The reclassification was fought by Judge Haden, but the United States Fourth Circuit Court overturned Haden's decision and later, in 2003, a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement was released (Reece 27).

The Environmental Impact Statement is five thousand pages long. All the environmental components of mountaintop removal are there: loss of aquatic life due to the covering of headwaters, the poisoning of water due to the leaching of gases, arsenic, and other hazardous underground minerals, erosion, flooding, and the damage caused to homes and property. The rhetoric of the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) statement is noble, but the words have been easily twisted as have those uttered and written since 1936 when the first attempts at control of surface mining were begun.

I was drawn to the pending film and to Penny Loeb's book because of my personal history—I know Patricia Bragg. And coal fed my family. Coal provided our housing, our heat, and our doctors. When the Great Depression strangled the country in poverty, coal saw that we survived. As happened in the life of Patricia Bragg, and as Penny Loeb tries to portray, complicated forces impacted our lives and the cultural and political realities in the coal regions of Appalachia.

The industries of energy production in the United States are probably the best in the world. Electricity may be obtained by any citizen, whether living in a major metropolitan area, or miles into the Montana wilderness, and it naturally comes with a cost. The film will contribute to the ongoing conversation about energy sources and the costs of production, both human and environmental.

Loeb's book primarily focuses on the lawsuit, *Bragg versus Robinson*.<sup>16</sup> The case played out in 1998 and 1999, but it is still relevant, and the tensions of uncertainty and disparity which then existed within the state of West Virginia remain.

Erik Reece writes in his book, *Lost Mountain*, that "Natural capital is destroyed and monetary capital is exported as quickly as the coal" (178). But there is more, and his statement is only partially true. He is not writing about the people who earn the monetary capital. Life in a coal town is tempered with kindness, hope, and the vulgarities of working men waiting on a paycheck.

The day-to-day existence of lower-middle income America is one of a population well-schooled in life's uncertainties, and aware of the rewards of the simple pleasures within an interdependent community of human beings. Harry Caudill was an attorney in Kentucky who attempted to help Appalachia, particularly the areas in and around his home state of Kentucky, by exposing the poverty of the region. But Caudill neglected to consider some of the people as individuals with sensitivities to what in many cases came to be class-based prejudices. Those with much could not understand the importance of maintaining some semblance of pride in basic life achievements, such as marriage, having children, and work, no matter what kind of work it was or how little it paid.

Indeed, there were people who had lived on the land prior to the influx of laborers and outlander ownership. But the population explosion that later became the basis of generational attachment to the land and place as experienced by my family and many of those living in the region now, occurred because of the coal, and the industry, and the deep pockets of those well outside the coal fields. Because of those industry magnates who

---

<sup>16</sup>. My review of *Moving Mountains* can be found in the *Appalachian Journal*, Vol. 38, Issue 1, Fall 2010, page 119.

chose not to live there, those who did live there could remain, put down roots, and discover the essence of the place they had come to call home. And the vision of those high mountains and deep hidden treasures, above ground and below, was one of the vista in its entirety. A hole at the base of the mountain, or a tipple running down the side of the mountain, or train tracks and cars black with coal dust, were much like highways through a valley or bridges over a river, obtrusive and unnatural, but necessary. At that time, the tradeoff was seen as a black rock, coal, for life. The viewpoint that "the great wealth of the land flowed out from the highlands never to return" (Montrie 17), had not yet developed for them. In addition, at least for my family, early attachments to hunting and fishing in western North Carolina contributed to a love of life and place, and mountains.

Caudill colors the Appalachian region with a taint that to some degree remains to this day. He generalizes many aspects of the region, from women who washed the clothes in the creeks to men who threw the trash there. But he does get it right in some circumstances. He writes in his book, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*:

If the nation's rivers are to be subdued and the string of costly lakes preserved for their recreational and resource value, the mountain slopes must be sheltered with foliage. Cheap power purchased by the ruin of vast land areas and the silting up of our precious complex of public lakes will prove a costly bargain, indeed. (324)

Penny Loeb was awarded the 2010 Harry Caudill Award for Outstanding Investigative Work in Appalachia.<sup>17</sup> Loeb chose a path of compassion and understanding in her depictions of Appalachia.

---

<sup>17</sup>. The UP of Kentucky (UPK) announced on February 10, 2010 that author Penny Loeb was selected as the recipient of the 2010 Harry Caudill Award for her book *Moving Mountains: How One Woman*

Coal has been in use as an energy source in North America since the colonial period. There is some documentation of its discovery in areas of Illinois as early as 1660, but surface mining is referenced to have occurred around Richmond, Virginia in late 1783, by Johann D. Schoepf.

The region was wealthy in coal and labor costs were low. As the rate of delivery and freight lowered, industries in the northeast and mid-west began purchasing more and more of Appalachia's coal, particularly from West Virginia. West Virginia's coal production increased 170% between 1887 and 1917, from 5 million to 90 million tons (Ayers in Montrie 16). The number of men—the labor force required to dig that much coal—grew in proportion, and with the men came their families. As coal was discovered and mines opened, class-based economic, social and cultural lines were defined.

In Appalachia, although deep mining was most typical in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was not the only type of mining taking place (Montrie 17).

Ownership of property in the region was often uncertain because of confusion surrounding the original grants and the subsequent purchase of the land by other settlers or occupation by squatters.

Land titles were obscure, deeds were lost, and records were poor in most mountain counties. Speculators with a better understanding of laws, courts, and the workings of local and state governments used their knowledge and connections to their own advantage. As a result, by 1910 outlanders controlled not only the best stands of

---

*and Her Community Won Justice from Big Coal.* The Harry Caudill Award of \$2,000 in books from inventory is presented by Bookworm & Silverfish in Rural Retreat, VA, and is awarded every two years. The award was created in April of 2000 to recognize outstanding investigative writing about Appalachian issues.

hardwood timber and the thickest seams of coal but a large percentage of the surface land in the region as well. (R. D. Eller in Montrie 15)

Surface mining is different from underground mining in many ways. Miner safety is generally more secure aboveground (Underground and Surface Mining Facts - 2008). According to a report from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) released in 2008, when figures of nonfatal and fatal injuries are considered based upon the number of full-time employees, more occur underground than on the surface. The coal is easier to obtain aboveground, takes less time to gather, requires fewer laborers, and is therefore more profitable. But, surface mining defaces the landscape, it is ugly, and the environmental impact is devastating. Attempts have been made to control the visual and environmental impacts, and as early as 1937 the state of Ohio saw a strip mine control bill in its legislature. A Democrat in the House of Representatives, William F. Daugherty, sought a mandate to require the industry to put the land back the way it was prior to stripping. The bill focused on contract restrictions, however, rather than actions on industry company-owned land. The bill included no guidelines for enforcement of the standards set, standards which were vague in themselves and easily susceptible to lawsuits. Ohio senators attempted two more times to get stripping guideline bills passed, once in 1939 and again in 1941, but none, including Daugherty's, ever made it out of committee into law (Montrie 30).

With the advent of World War II the demand for coal exploded and thoughts of environmental aesthetics were subdued until 1948 when Ohio House Bill 314 went into effect. Coal stripping companies were required to pay \$50 for an annual permit, and were



fined \$100 to \$1000 for every day they mined without one. Ohio farmers had pushed hardest for regulation, on economic, spiritual and aesthetic grounds (Montrie 34).

Ministers in Ohio also spoke out against strip mining, labeling the practice a "crime against God" (36) because it destroyed natural, God-given resources.

Ohio came to the forefront in seeking regulatory actions of surface mining again in 1965 when Senator Frank Lausche succeeded in having a federal study of the effects of surface coal mining initiated. The Appalachian Regional Commission also requested a study about the same time, and that committee found that "Society had accepted erosion, acid drainage, lowered water quality, and other detrimental aftereffects [of surface mining] as the costs of 'progress'" (Montrie 133).

The benefits of strip-mining as compared to those of underground became more and more obvious, and impossible to ignore. Underground mining produced 9 tons of coal per man-day in 1958, while strip-mining produced 21.5 tons in the same timeframe. Kentucky and West Virginia were the states where strip-mining became most prominent in the late 1960's.

Early attempts at regulation to require coal companies to follow the natural contours of the mountains when stripping failed. According to anthropologist Patricia D. Beaver, Appalachian scholar and activist Helen Matthews Lewis was a pioneer in what would become ongoing attempts to shift scholarship "away from blaming the culture for the poverty of its people to examining the impacts of the coal industry on Appalachia" (Beaver and Jennings 46). But in spite of the work of Lewis and others like her,

indiscriminate blasting and removal of entire mountaintops above a high-level coal seam gradually became commonplace. Mountaintop removal was inaugurated into the coalfields of Appalachia.

After a blast, the rubble of rock and trees is pushed away over one side of the mountaintop or another. Creeks and streams are covered, and water sources are damaged or altered. As the 1970s progressed, it became more and more obvious that regulatory actions were needed. Montrie believes that, in addition to mountaintop removal being cost-effective, the fact that the industry could place the costs of environmental and social losses onto the public contributed to the growth of the practice. And this was why regulatory legislation was needed (24).

Attempts at creating regulatory legislation were made in the 1970s. As control bills were created, compromise bills were created, primarily to keep people working. Concern began to grow among environmentalists about state mandated controls. Coal states were too economically vested in the industry. West Virginia came close to an abolition bill of strip mining in 1971, but instead a measure was passed for a moratorium in almost half of the fifty-five counties in the state that was to last for two years (108). Montrie writes:

The campaign to stop stripping in the state failed because citizens could not force their legislators to act responsively or hold them accountable for shirking their duties of representation, irrespective of the opposition's leadership. This breakdown in the democratic process is one of the main reasons why many activists in West Virginia and elsewhere began to take their concerns to the national level (109).

In October of 1971, the Appalachian Coalition was formed. There was a need to coordinate efforts to ban strip mining across state lines and to the national level, and the Coalition went to work. The group gathered in Huntington, West Virginia, and, in addition to those from West Virginia, included representatives from Kentucky, Virginia and Ohio. Activist and scholar Jack Spadaro organized a group called Save Our Mountains in the early 1970s. Ongoing efforts at the grassroots level and from 1971 to 1977 forced government at the national level to pay attention (Bryant et al.).

The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) signed into law by President Carter in 1977 was a compromise effort to put regulation of the coal industry into the hands of the federal government, partnered with state government. The SMCRA saw that the dumping of mining debris on steep slopes was outlawed, as well as established the Office of Surface Mining within the Department of the Interior.

But, the law failed in many ways. Surface mining was still allowed through permit. And although surface property owners were somewhat protected, the owner's objections could be overruled if the government determined that retrieval of the coal under the surface was in the country's best interest. If property was damaged, the property owner had to prove the damages were caused by the mining, and pay for attorneys and legal fees. Additionally, Congress was slow in providing funds for the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), and by the time field workers and inspectors were in place the coal industry had established "over one hundred challenges to the legislation in more than fifteen separate law suits" (Montrie 171).

The flaws in the SMCRA, which culminated in the *Bragg v. Robertson* case, were the result of dated guidelines that had not kept up with the technology they were established to regulate. Congressional support in 1977 was based upon an assumption that the removal of an entire mountaintop would occur infrequently. Reclamation requirements state that the coal company must return the land to an appearance and configuration close to what it had been before mining—the "approximate original contour" (AOC).

Reaching a consensus regarding what AOC *means* was and continues to be next to impossible. Coal companies may gain exemptions to reclamation requirements if they agree to build schools, factories, or parks. And although companies are required to submit development plans in order to secure a permit, this does not happen in many cases.

The practice of mountaintop removal has undeniably changed the landscape of West Virginia and contributed to a magnification of natural processes which has caused them to become catastrophic disasters. Mudslides are not uncommon in the mountains. Steep slopes under heavy rain lose rock and soil. The rain that would otherwise flow into upper level creeks and streams and make its way into rivers and lakes below is forced to find alternative routes when mining fill has clogged the natural waterways.

Rocks that burn, liquid that burns, gas that burns, and the physical slamming of two atoms together, all produce the electricity that lights our houses, runs our cars, powers lasers, allows communication, expression, and invention such as we have never seen before, and is the essence of life as we know it. There is no turning back. Energy is and must be. But we are allowed some controls over the trade-offs.

The mining industry employs tens of thousands of people, directly or indirectly, and that is one reason why the enforcement of environmental regulations is difficult or

lacking. The mindset of a lifelong resident of Appalachia whose family has lived in the area for two or more generations is one of a strong attachment to place. The overall beauty and serenity of the mountains is compelling to visitors. To some families, coal mining is seen as *the* way to remain in the mountains. Sons become miners, their fathers were miners, their grandfathers were miners And in some areas, it is. We find, on occasion, that the very men the *safety* regulations are designed to protect assist the coal company in breaking those regulations. This happened at the RB Number 12 Mine operated by Manalapan Mining Company in Harlan County, Kentucky, at the Straight Creek Number 1 Mine operated by the Left Fork Mining Company in Bell County, Kentucky, (Kindy) and may have happened at the Upper Big Branch Mine that exploded in April of 2010.

The *Charleston Gazette* reported on April 28, 2010 that Federal inspectors heard workers warning miners of impending inspections over the radio system, which is in violation of the Mine Safety and Health Act. The Department of Labor sought to bar the mines from further violations. Tom Eley reported on the *World Socialist* web site on March 2, 2012 that Gary May, senior mine superintendent at the Upper Big Branch mine that exploded in April 2010, faces multiple charges. Among those charges are conspiracy to obstruct federal regulators, and tampering with a safety mechanism, rendering it inactive. As a result, miners were not alerted to the impending explosion.

Environmental regulations protect against forces and events that *may* occur. But enforcement becomes an abstract disenfranchised from the reality of the family waiting at home, and the dinner on the table.

To say that there is no easy answer to what I call the "energy dilemma" in America is trite. But I cannot think of a more sophisticated way to say something so simple and true. I see the scholarship, participate in the Appalnet listserv of the University of Kentucky and read innumerable emails, and "like" innumerable Facebook pages supporting sustainable development. But I have basically lived in a bubble of academia for the past few years, and I do not know if the rhetoric or even the idea of sustainable development speaks to anyone outside the bubble. I hope so. Leadership must come from government. Sadly, sometimes government, in representing what is believed to be, and sometimes is the majority of workers in a community or region, look only to the immediate. The big picture is blurred because people must work and families must be fed. Unless an infrastructure of viable employment is established beforehand, stopping the environmental destruction of the coal industry cannot be accomplished.

*Moving Mountains, Skimming Oceans: Government and Energy Economics*

When President Barack Obama took office in January of 2009, environmentalists and citizens of Appalachia had high expectations for his energy plan. At a campaign speech in Lexington, Kentucky on August 26, 2007 Obama said, "We're tearing up the Appalachian Mountains because of our dependence on fossil fuels" (qtd. in "Obama Fires up Crowd in Lexington"). Although he was as much pushing his desire to implement new energy policies and reduce American dependence on foreign oil, the statement was taken by many as his intention to halt mountaintop removal (MTR). MTR is an efficient coal removal practice if measured by the amount of coal mined per man-hour. Activists, environmentalists, and citizens of those regions most impacted by MTR foresaw a

presidential administration dedicated to halting the loss of forest land, streams, and mountain tops that become byproducts of the mining process as mountain peaks are sliced off to the level of a coal seam, and trees, rock, and dirt are pushed into valley fills.

Much of the water we drink in Appalachia and in every other mountain region flows down mountains to rivers and ponds, or into natural underground aquifers. The system of the creation of pure water is ingenious of nature by any measure, in part fragile, in part violent in due season. Surface mining, particularly mountaintop removal, disrupts the natural system of water provision and clarification. For this reason, as the darkest side of human nature reveals itself, and wealth overcomes rational thought, mining is regulated by state environmental agencies with oversight provided by the federal government.

Barack Obama's campaign strategy was revolutionary to American politics. Personal appearances and speeches were supported by communication technology which paralleled that used by the typical American. The campaign was the first presidential political engine to implement those technology communication elements to the point of the successful election of a president. Emails went out over list-serves. *Facebook*, *Myspace*, *LinkedIn*, *Black Planet*, *Flicker* and *Twitter* were utilized, among other social networking programs. Grassroots campaign strategies were encouraged via [barackobama.com](http://barackobama.com). Obama supporters nation-wide hosted campaign parties for friends and neighbors, and made phone calls. The *Organizing for America* web-based campaign linked citizens to an online form where they could register to volunteer, to web pages about current events and appearances, and to pages designed to specifically connect voter to like-minded voter. The environmentally conscious American had access to the candidate's energy policies at the click of a mouse.

A partial clarification of the administration's position regarding coal and mountaintop removal was revealed by November 2007. According to the website, Obama and running mate Joe Biden were committed to:

Develop and deploy clean coal technology. Obama's Department of Energy will enter into public private partnerships to develop five 'first-of-a-kind' commercial scale coal-fired plants with clean carbon capture and sequestration technology. ("New Energy for America")

Additional goals included energy rebates for families, weatherizing homes, tax credits for those who purchased hybrid cars, reducing greenhouse emissions, prioritizing the:

development of the Alaskan pipeline, and the funding of projects to: create millions of new green jobs, ensure ten percent of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2012, and 25 percent by 2025 [and to] set an aggressive energy efficiency goal – to reduce electricity demand fifteen percent from projected levels by 2020. ("New Energy for America")

The "New Energy for America" web page reports that in 2011 thirteen percent of the electricity generated by American power stations was created using renewable sources.

By the summer of 2010, the Obama administration's promises to fund clean technology projects had been fulfilled by the allocation of \$4 billion to the Department of Energy for such projects. But in dealings with the coal industry the administration has found itself in a position confounded by decades of double-talk and legalese. The reality of the interactions between the coal industry and government has been, and is, complicit.



The new administration began imprinting itself on the coal industry in early 2009 when several mining permits were reviewed by the EPA. Two projects in particular were noted as those that "would likely cause water quality problems in streams below the mines, would cause significant degradation to streams buried by mining activities, and that proposed steps to offset these impacts are inadequate" ("EPA to Review Mountaintop Mining Projects").

In September of 2009, the EPA determined that seventy-nine permits from four states, then in the preliminary processes for approval by the Army Corps of Engineers, required further review under the mandates of the Clean Water Act. Linda Jackson, appointed director of the EPA, said, "Release of this preliminary list is the first step in a process to assure that the environmental concerns raised by the seventy-nine permit applications are addressed and that permits issued are protective of water quality and affected ecosystems" (Bontrager).

The EPA sank their teeth deeper in June of 2010. The Army Corps of Engineers, upon the recommendation of the EPA, announced it was suspending use of Nationwide Permit 21.<sup>18</sup> Under the guidelines of the permit as it existed, licenses were granted to projects which could, if taken to the letter of the law, dump waste products into North American waters, particularly into streams during surface mine operations. Although NWP21 was due to expire in March of 2012, the Corps determined to immediately suspend its usage after reviewing more than 23,000 comments collected since July of 2009 when a Federal Notice requested public input. At that time, the Corps was only considering

---

<sup>18</sup>The full statement was published in the 18 Jun. 2010 edition of the Federal Register. A copy of the notice, FAQs and the decision document is posted on the Army Corps of Engineers web site, <http://www.usace.army.mil/CECW/Pages/nnpi.aspx> (accessed 17 Jul. 2010).

modifications of the permit. In the press release announcing the suspension of NWP21, the Corps determined after a thorough review and consideration of comments that continuing use of NWP21 in this region may result in more than minimal impacts to aquatic resources. Activities that result in more than minimal impacts to the aquatic environment must be evaluated in accordance with individual permit procedures ("Decision to Suspend Nationwide Permit 21").

At the time of the Corps' announcement, in June of 2009, there were five permit requests in pending status, including one from Arch Coal Incorporated, a subsidiary of Coal-Mac Incorporated. The permit was for the Pine Creek Surface Mine in Omar, Logan County, West Virginia. The property consists of 760 acres with more than two miles of streams. To the dismay of many environmentalists and citizens, the permit was issued to Coal-Mac in late June. The EPA provided tentative conditional approval of the permit's issuance, basing its decision with the conditions that Arch Coal reduce the impact of its operations on streams by twenty-two percent, haul physical waste products to other mine sites rather than dumping it into streams, and take action to reduce the length of any waterways to be buried.

Resistance by corporate leadership to EPA regulatory action is not limited to the coal industry. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection is considering filing suit against the agency as a result of new regulations the EPA has recommended to measure the electrical conductivity of streams. This measurement is used to determine the health of the water and aquatic life. Needless to say, the coal industry is also not happy with the suggestions. New regulations mean more time is required before licenses are issued.

On Monday, April 5, 2010 the worst mining disaster in the United States in twenty-eight years happened at the Massey Energy-owned Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia. Twenty-nine miners died in an explosion tentatively determined to have been caused by the ignition of methane and coal dust, a type of explosion avoidable if proper ventilation systems are in place. During the week following the disaster, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) swept dozens of Massey's mines and cited 130 "significant and substantial" violations. Insufficient ventilation systems were the basis of four of the citations. While his mines were under the scrutiny of the MSHA, Massey Energy's CEO Don Blankenship came under media scrutiny. Statements made by Blankenship during that time were often blithely telling, particularly one made in his first public comments after the disaster. In an interview with *Metro News: The Voice of West Virginia*, Blankenship said, "Violations are unfortunately a normal part of the mining process. There are violations at every coal mine in America, and (the Upper Big Branch mine) was a mine that had violations" (Blankenship's First Comments on Tragedy).

Blankenship's statement is representative of the environment in which Barack Obama and his administration hoped to implement new energy policies. The Chief Executive Officer of one of the largest producers of energy in the United States accepted violations within the industry to be "normal," and in stating as much found it to be what the American people accept—his blithe statement reveals his personal belief that this be so. I found then and still find this disturbing.

Within months after the Upper Big Branch disasters, widows of miners who had lost their lives at other Massey mines sued Massey and the MSHA. In the course of that suit, criminal negligence guilty pleas were secured from a Massey subsidiary and five

MSHA mine supervisors. Massey agreed to pay \$4.2 million in fines and penalties (“West Virginia Mine Widows”), and the women reached a settlement with Massey in 2008. The women attempted to take their lawsuit against MSHA to the Supreme Court, but the suit was dismissed by U. S. District Judge John Copenhaver Jr. In October 2012, the attorneys for the women appealed.

According to a report from 5News, WDTV.com on October 18, 2012, the Supreme Court is now considering the appeal. Upper Big Branch is not mentioned in the suit. Notably, however, both Massey and MSHA admitted complicity in earlier disasters. And Don Blankenship is still in the picture. The Supreme Court has taken measures to insure fair treatment of the lawsuit:

Cabell Circuit Judge Paul T. Farrell heard the case [for appeal] in the place of Justice Brent Benjamin. A 2009 U.S. Supreme Court decision bars Benjamin from hearing any cases involving Massey after its then-chief executive, Don Blankenship, spent more than \$3 million to help Benjamin win election in 2004. Massey has since been acquired by Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources Inc. (“West Virginia Mine Widows”).

As of November 2012, the situation continues to play itself out.

April 2010 continued to be a horrific month of environmental and human tragedy in America. On April 20, less than three weeks after the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine, another energy-related disaster occurred in the Gulf of Mexico—a horrific explosion at the Macondo project, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig owned by BP Oil. Eleven people died and a chain of events began so tragic and unimagined that scientists are uncertain what the end result impact will be. Oil began gushing from the underwater well and

continued to gush for more than three months, releasing millions of gallons of oil and gas into the ocean. Property damage, poisoning of the waters, and the destruction of marine and avian life was inevitable.

President Obama's rhetoric during the two months immediately following the spill was intensely human. He may well be remembered as the president who emphatically stated to his aides, "Plug the damn hole!" He also commented on NBC's "Today" show that he talked with fisherman on the Gulf Coast and experts in varying fields, "because they potentially have the best answers - so I know whose ass to kick" (Obama qtd. in Kamm).

Securing oil from under the ocean is a dangerous, complicated process. First, a reservoir of oil must be located. Crews are moved in, a drilling platform is built, and the drilling begins. Through hundreds of feet of water and rock and earth on the ocean floor, the drill eventually taps the reservoir, oil flows up through the collection mechanism, and millions of gallons of oil become the property of the oil/energy/conglomerate company which has funded the venture. The oil is refined, distributed, accounting budgets are balanced, and expenses are justified. But something in the process at the Deepwater Horizon rig went wrong.

Deepwater Horizon was licensed to British Petroleum. Built by Transocean Limited, the drill had been noted as the "world's deepest oil and gas drill" ("Transocean's Deepwater Horizon Drills: World's Deepest O&G Well"). Titanic-like, the drill had been praised by Transocean Limited's Chief Executive Officer Robert L. Long in September after the drill obtained 35,050 vertical feet on the Tiber well, another project with BP: "This impressive well depth record reflects the intensive planning and focus on effective operations by BP and the drilling crews of the Deepwater Horizon. Congratulations to

everyone involved" ("Transocean's Deepwater Horizon Drills: World's Deepest O&G Well"). The cement work for the construction of the well site was done by the Halliburton Company. Self-described on the company website,

Halliburton originated oilfield cementing and leads the world in effective, efficient delivery of zonal isolation and engineering for the life of the well. Operators consistently rank Halliburton Cementing No. 1 in total value provided to customers. ("Cementing")

Executives from these three companies, Halliburton, British Petroleum, and Transocean Ltd., stood before congressional hearings on May 11 and May 12, 2010, and blamed each other's company for the disaster.

In the days immediately following the explosion, controlled burns took place in an effort to dissipate some of the oil. The Coast Guard mobilized and approved the use of underwater vehicles to activate a blowout preventer in hopes of stopping the leak. On April 29, President Obama authorized the use of the military to assist with containment of the oil, by then estimated to be gushing at five thousand barrels per day, and Louisiana declared a state of emergency in anticipation of the damage to the state's natural resources. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April an order went out from the White House to halt all new drilling until the cause of the explosion was determined, and on May 2 a fishing ban was implemented in the areas close to the spill. That area was doubled on May 18, to a size equaling 19% of the Gulf's United States waters.

BP was completely unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude. The repair response for the drill had been tested in waters only one hundred feet deep. The Deepwater Horizon drill was at almost five thousand, trying to collect oil rushing through what is equivocal to

a pinprick on a balloon before it bursts. But more ludicrous than the lack of disaster preparedness is the breakdown of the system of checks and balances by the industry and the government. Again, we find an industry writhe with legalese, double-talk, and backdoor handshakes over "acceptable" cheating.

President Obama addressed the nation about the BP spill in a speech released on June 15, 2010. Identifying the spill as "the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced" (Obama, "Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill"), he noted that the country will be coping with the effects of the spill for years, and that the Minerals Management Service (MMS), the regulating agency of underwater drilling, has serious flaws.

The agency had become emblematic of a failed philosophy that views all regulation with hostility—a philosophy that says corporations should be allowed to play by their own rules and police themselves. Industry insiders were in charge of industry oversight. Oil companies showered regulators with gifts and favors, and were essentially allowed to conduct their own safety inspections and write their own regulations (Obama).

Obama announced the appointment of Michael Bromwich to take over directorship of the MMS. Idealistically, the oil industry is to become a well-run, well-supervised provider of energy. Sadly, the corruptions of the coal industry are not so readily identified. Those corruptions lie within courtrooms, boardrooms, living rooms, and even the agencies designed to protect.

The White House is required to face a reality of ill-conceived regulations, lackadaisical implementation, and questionable supervision of energy-producing industries. The challenges may become greater in trying to legitimize alternative energy

sources—new science and technology is expensive—but they will also become more highly visible. If there is any light at the end of this tunnel, that may be it.

Patricia Bragg was changed that day in 1994 when her neighbor's well ran dry. She no longer sees coal as a requirement of West Virginian economic success.

If we are going to change our state's dependency on coal, we educate our people in green jobs, other industries, and show them the importance of their mountain culture to do wood carving, photos, quilting, canning, etc. We are an industrious people and our land and people can lend a great contribution toward the tourist business in West Virginia. Education can change a mindset. It changed mine.

(Bragg)

I learned by reading *Moving Mountains*, and conducting interviews with Penny Loeb, Patricia Bragg, friends and family members, and I have come to more fully understand the impact of coal and the energy industry on America, and the challenges faced by our government. Above all, I have learned to more fully appreciate what miners, past and present, do, and why. Although the traces of my family members, and the iron ore and coal mines of North Carolina and West Virginia they worked have all but disappeared, but when I walk the lands where they were I continue to be humbled by their work, determination, and the personal risks they took to support the family.



## Chapter 12: Reflections in Cranberry

Even though I know nothing is *there*, no abandoned boxcar where Grandpa Pappy would have been born, no path winding up the side of Yellow Mountain, no log house where my great-grandmother was raised—even though I know all that, I still have to *go there*. So, I drive. There are no records in the courthouse earlier than 1911. Pappy was born in 1910. I may believe I am facing no more or no less than hundreds of thousands of other Americans who have researched their family genealogies face, but on my second trip into the high mountains I was not ready to admit that yet.

I found the Tolley name on the side of a transfer truck parked next to a building that housed the Tolley Florist. I found Cranberry and Elk Park and decided to drive on to Elizabethton in Carter County, Tennessee, the next county over, beside Avery, and where, I thought, I might find additional printed documentation that they had been in the area, “they” meaning anyone with a last name of Tolley or Woody or Greene. I found nothing.

J. R. Tolley, as I shared earlier, arrived in North Carolina with a suitcase, a stack of letters tied together with string, a pistol, and a whiskey recipe. J. R. could not read so he would have his daughters read the letters to him. I like to pretend there were words of love.

There is so much room for speculation and supposition as I work my way through my family history and the empirically gathered data from historians. Oral history brings to light the true histories of a family and a people, much like historically based fiction fleshes

out specific events. The writing of scholarly work allows no supposition, so those who write of history, with the exception of a few, typically publish their findings as emotionally devoid nonfiction. (I sometimes think history is a great part fiction.)

On the drive back home, as slow a ride as I could manage without angering the drivers behind me, I just looked and thought and felt. And there is a "feeling" in the mountains. This area, although perhaps only due to sentimental memories and stories I have been told, speaks to my soul in whispers of gentle welcoming. I must look beyond the trailers and abandoned businesses and newer construction and just let it be. The land itself, that physical entity of earth and stone and water, is where my Cherokee ancestors spent years of their lives. And the condition in which I find it is not at all far removed from the way it was then. The trees are not as big, but the stone and waters are. Most people cannot say that about their ancestral lands.

Avery County consists of parts of what once were Mitchell, Watauga, and Caldwell counties. My family lived in and around the towns of Elk Park and Cranberry, and I have since discovered, in Burnsville, Yancey County. North Carolina did not require that births be registered until 1913, another explanation why I never found a copy of Pappy's original birth certificate, but the state *did* require that marriages be registered. On a serendipitous visit to the courthouse in Burnsville with a fellow graduate student conducting research on her own topic, I decided to look for any records about my family. I found the marriage license of Milton Woody, son of Green Berry and Cathern Woody, and Sophie Davis, daughter of Jacob and Susa Davis, dated the 14<sup>th</sup> day of May 1872. The document is signed

by S. B. Briggs, Register of Deeds. Milton and Sophie were my great-great grandparents, parents of Mary who was the mother of Howard, Grandpa Pappy, my dad's father. This is the line of the Cherokee, as yet unproven.

Describing finding the document as serendipitous may be putting it mildly. When I walked into the courthouse and began to look for legal documents, marriage, birth, death, whatever I could find, I was pleasantly surprised to discover the collection was indexed. I quickly found the name of Milton Woody. Better still, I was asked if I wanted to see the original!

The director of the agency told me that when she had been hired she found boxes and boxes of certificates, licenses, and slips of paper. In 1872 in Burnsville there did not exist "official" certificates of marriage to be completed. Details of a marriage were written out by hand by the Register of Deeds, on a simple piece of paper. The simple piece of paper "marrying" Milton and Sopha was in one of those boxes. The director told me she called in her daughters to help and they spent weekends sorting and organizing the original documents and putting everything in protective plastic sleeves. The photocopy I have is a direct copy of the original. Had she not been the one to take that directorship, and had she not been aware and conscientious enough to realize what the boxes contained and then preserve their contents I may never have learned that Milton and Sopha married in Burnsville, or secured a document officially recognizing that marriage and including their names and the names of their parents. Serendipitous, indeed.

Although the find does not provide me any proof as to the Cherokee connection in my family, that area was a primary location of the Cherokee prior to the removal in 1838. Pappy told me that his mother's family hid in the mountains rather than leave for Oklahoma. The pieces are there.

I visited my uncle, Doug, in Beckley, West Virginia in October of 2012. He has often helped me recall the stories that Pappy told us. I remember one day, late in Pappy's life, he and I were sitting in his and Polly's small living room in Dobson, North Carolina. That room was always furnished beautifully, and there were family pictures on the end tables. Grandma Polly kept framed pictures of everyone in the drawer of one of the end tables and, depending on which family came to visit, would switch out the pictures displayed. We kids loved to look in those drawers. We could see who had a new school picture, remove the backs of the frames, pull out the older pictures, and compare our growth and changes over the years. The drawer to the other end table was full of games, puzzles, coloring books, and crayons. There were not a lot of things in the drawer, but we did not care—they were the toys at Polly and Pappy's house! When we cleared out the house after Polly and Pappy died, the younger members of the family took pieces of that childhood treasure trove.

On that specific afternoon with Pappy, he told me about his mother, Mary, and how her family avoided the Cherokee removal to Oklahoma in 1838. He said that Mary's grandfather, Greenberry Woody, took the husks of black walnuts and rubbed them all over his body, staining his skin a dark brown and disguising himself as an African American. Uncle Doug told me in October that Greenberry stained the skin of the whole family with black walnut husks, even the children. I listened, rapt. More importantly to me, Doug

volunteered the information without prompting—I had not asked for the story. He told me about it minutes after I arrived, aware of my thesis research. Doug is almost eighty-four years old. I rack my brain trying to think of questions to ask him.

The genealogy of the Woody name can be traced back to Massachusetts in the 1600s. But a break occurred with a marriage that took place between Wyatt Woody and Mary Robertson in August of 1799. Wyatt's is the line traced back to Isaac Woody in Massachusetts. I have found Mary's parents. Her father was John Robertson, born in 1749 in Virginia, and her mother was Elizabeth Kern, born in Virginia in 1759. But I can find no trace of Elizabeth before that date. I do not know where the Cherokee relatives fit into the picture and I doubt I ever will. Census records are self-reporting and people who did not want their identities known would have lied.

### *Hello Mr. Rockefeller*

Howard Nelson Tolley (Pappy) was an outdoorsman. The son of a part-Cherokee mother and a Scots-Irish iron ore miner in Cranberry, North Carolina, and eventually a coal miner himself, early in life he was a fishing and hunting guide in Yancey and Watauga counties. He once took John D. Rockefeller and friends fishing in the region and got a fly rod from Rockefeller in appreciation. Daddy writes, "Daddy (Grandpa Pappy) was always proud of being a hunting and fishing guide for John Rockefeller, Henry Ford and another man, I believe his name was John Mellon" (M. R. Tolley). "John Mellon" was more than likely David Milton of Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Rockefeller and his wife are reported visiting Blowing Rock in 1934. According to the October 25, 1934 edition of the *Watauga Democrat*, the couple is noted to have visited Mrs. David Milton while they were

there. This information is the only physical proof of the matter that we have, no one knows what happened to the fly rod. We have one photograph of Pappy as a young man, stern-faced Cherokee demeanor, jet black hair, posed with a catch of raccoons and a hound (see fig. 11). But, that photograph does not speak of fishing.



Fig. 11. Grandpa Pappy (Howard Nelson Tolley) with one of his hunting dogs and a raccoon; "Howard Tolley with Hunting Dog"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

Pappy raised beagles and basset hounds for extra income, and both breeds are hunter's dogs. I learned to hate the work of Harry Caudill early on in my research of Appalachian Studies, after reading *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, and discovering Caudill's opinion of the dogs owned by mountaineers. Caudill writes: "The borderer and his family brought. . . a pack of a dozen or more evil-natured, vicious feist and mongrel dogs" (12). My first pet was a gentle-natured beagle named Molly Bea, my love for dogs nurtured by the puppies and hounds (see fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Pappy's beagles; "Pappy's Beagles Outside the Shed"; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; 1960; JPEG.

I do not claim that the Tolleys brought beagles and bassets with them from Scotland, I am not certain where those breeds were first established, but I do know that a German family, the Plotts, brought with them a hunting dog officially recognized as a pure-bred dog by the American Kennel Club in 1986. The Plott Hound became the official dog of North Carolina in 1989. The Plott family arrived in North Carolina in 1750, bringing with them the hounds bred to hunt boar and bear, and to protect cattle, sheep, and horses (Plott). Needless to say, as a daughter of former Appalachian hunters, I was angered by Caudill's sweeping statement about the canines brought to America by the families who settled the region. But, back to fishing.

#### *Fish Meant to be Eaten*

North Carolina streams support many kinds of fish—the brook, brown, and rainbow trout are popular with fisherman, and my favorite to eat. Since 1954, you can also find the gold trout in the waters of West Virginia. More accurately named the golden rainbow, the fish was developed from a single fish discovered in a hatchery in West Virginia in 1954. The pigment on that trout was, according to the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, was "a chimera of golden and normally pigmented tissue" ("Q & A: Golden Rainbow Trout").

I took a trip to Beckley to my uncle's home, to visit Daddy and my stepmother, Joanne, when they were up from Florida. We were all in the mood to reminisce, so we took a ride through Poor Valley in Tazewell County, Virginia. We crossed over a narrow bridge just inches above the Roaring Fork Creek that flows into Laurel Creek that flows into the Holston River to the Holston Dam, and I wonder at the waters. I know that Punch and



Judy, a creek that also flows into the Laurel, is one of Daddy's favorites, no more than three feet wide in most places, and never more than two feet deep, if ever that. He recalls seeing the golden trout there, but his brother says, "No." The brothers argue a lot, mostly good-naturedly.

As we continue on the road, I cannot help but feel pleased at the courtesy of the fisherman, and hunters, meeting on this narrow dirt road with little room to pass. There is a lot of backing up and inching by. I hear Uncle Doug and Daddy discussing the years they visited the valley. Doug bought a cabin in the late 1960s where the brothers, and sometimes friends, would meet for long weekends. There was no electricity, no running water, but plenty of trout in the streams. The old couple living there now have television and cable, courtesy of satellites, electricity from a generator, and a refrigerator humming along on propane. Entering the world of Poor Valley is taking the proverbial step back in time, the traditions of my family menfolk now continued on by people I do not know, unrelated to me. But I am soothed. There are still places to go where the earth's provisions will sustain us, and still people to teach us how to make that happen.

Pappy was Cherokee and Scottish, or perhaps Irish. We have been told both and either, and my personal genealogical research suggests "both" may be most accurate. Pappy's life skill, and what he passed on to his sons (and who knows how many other people), was a knowledge of the ways of nature, streams and rivers, the fish and their habits. He also taught them how to make fishing flies. My uncle tried to pass the skill of tying flies down to his own sons, but times have changed to such a degree they no longer have time or desire to remember. The knowledge is nearly gone, all that remains to the

family are a few flies tied by Pappy. Some are stuck through tablet paper and stored at the back of dresser drawers or in jewelry boxes. A vest displays a few. It is a treasure. Pappy's father, Handy Sebastian Tolley, wore a hat with fishing flies stuck all over it.

My father, uncle, and cousins carried on the fishing tradition with annual visits to Poor Valley for years. The valley is mostly populated now with fisherman and hunters (and their wives and families), or those in love with the utter and complete silence and darkness of an area "unconnected." Poor Valley refuses to become "too" civilized.

One could assume that Pappy's skills as a hunter and fisherman, and his knowledge and ability to make excellent fishing flies would have been learned from family members on his mother's side, the Cherokee. But the skills may have come from a Scottish ancestry. Modern fly-fishing is believed to have originated and developed in Scotland and Northern England (*History of Fly Fishing*). Tying flies, an important aspect of fly-fishing, is a high skill, requiring keen observation of the habits of the fish, when they feed, what they feed upon, and an ability to recreate the food source, i.e., insects, in such a way as to "fool" the fish. I found a book, *Fishing and Hunting* that was printed in London in 1720 by Thomas Bailey. The book details the various kinds of materials used in making flies and the best wood used in making the pole. Photocopies of two pages from the original book that I found online are included here.

Artificial flies are made by the ingenious Angler according to Art, in shape, colour and proportion like the natural Fly; of Fur, Wool, silk, Feathers, &c. to delineate which, I must confess myself not so accurate and skilful a Painter, nor can any pen drawing illustrate their various colours so, as to direct their Artificial Counterfeit; Nature will help him in this by observation, curiously flourishing their several orient and bright colours, after which they take their names, as before-said; And therefore to furnish yourself with both Natural, and Artificial Flies, repair in the morning to the River, and with a rod beat the bushes that hang over the Water, take your choice, and observe these Rules.

*(Fishing and Hunting 49)*

Hazle that can be had, smooth slender and streight, of an ell long, pliant and bending; and yet of a reasonable strength, that a jerk cannot break it, but it will return to its first streightness; lest otherwise you endanger your line. Keep them two full years, before you use them; having preserved them from being Worm-eaten or Rotten, by thrice a year rubbing them, and chafing them well with Butter, if sweet, or Linseed or Sallad-Oil, and if bored, Oil poured into the holes and bathed four and twenty hours in it, and then thrown out again, will exceedingly preserve them.

*(Fishing and Hunting 47)*

#### *Finding Out About That Boxcar*

When I was young and told that Pappy was born in a boxcar, I immediately thought of hoboes and poverty. I pictured them all in rags, in darkness, the inside lit by a kerosene lantern. The truth is much less dramatic, but just as interesting.

Before the times of war and mining in West Virginia, my family was settling into North Carolina and helping to open the mountains to the world. The rails were new, iron ore and mica were the earth-found resources of choice, and the regions of Watauga, Avery, and Ashe Counties were alive and vital. With the coming of the railroad that carried the lumber produced by the Ritter company in the Linville area, the rails were improved in order to carry the larger engines used by the Linville River Railway. The workers, of timber and railroad, were literally housed in train cars. They were called "section houses."



Fig. 12. A section house, reminiscent of the boxcar Pappy was born in; "Section Houses 1915"; *Mary Hardin McCown Collection*; *The Cy Crumley Scrapbook: ET & WNC Railroad*; *Corriher Collection of Photographs*, n.p.; n.d.; JPEG.

Pappy was born in Mitchell County in 1909, in the Cranberry Township, before Avery County was established. His father, Handy, may have been working on rail construction in the area, which would explain the birth in the section house, but we do not know for certain (see fig. 12). Mining of iron ore was erratic over the years. But the area was booming during those days, the trains and work saw to that.<sup>19</sup>

Pappy had been born in Mitchell County in 1909, in the Cranberry Township, before Avery County was established. His father, Handy, may have been working on rail construction in the area, which would explain the birth in the section house, but we do not know for certain. Mining of iron ore was erratic over the years. But the area was booming during those days, the trains and work saw to that.

The importance of trains to the development and industry in the Appalachian Region has been well documented and discussed.<sup>20</sup> But trains also offered opportunities of leisure. During World War II, Mama, Grandma, Buddy, Peggy, and Walter (the children too young to serve in the military) rode the *Powhatan Arrow* for a brief vacation at Virginia Beach. Mama thinks they probably boarded in Bluefield or Welch since those were the largest cities in the area. When they arrived in Virginia, the weather was overcast and they all played on the beach. Grandma Maggie, a novice to the ways of sun and sand, did not know that the clouds did not filter the sun's rays adequately. They were all terribly sunburned and had to return home early. Disappointed, but in too much pain to complain, Mama recalled they were lathered with *Noxzema* which was the treatment of choice at the time to soothe the pain and "pull the fire out."

---

<sup>19</sup> For additional historical photographs and descriptions of trains and the area in and around Cranberry see Michael C. Hardy's book, *Avery County, North Carolina: Images of America*.

<sup>20</sup> For one such resource, see Ronald L. Lewis's essay, "Industrialization," in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, 59-74.

The *Powhatan Arrow* was known as the first train to go over 100 miles per hour, and Mama said she would never forget the ride. She and her brothers and sisters had grown up watching the coal trains coming in and out of the holler. But the *Powhatan Arrow* had nothing to do with working coal. Exciting and different, the train was built for moving people.

While the Norfolk & Western Railway is best known for hauling black diamonds out of the hollers and hills of West Virginia it also had a modest, but very respectable passenger service. The apex of its passenger operations was easily its Powhatan Arrow, a train that served Norfolk/Newport News and Cincinnati, Ohio. This train, pulled by perhaps the most beautiful Northern Type steam locomotives to ever be streamlined (the N&W's famed J Class) was bedecked in a striking livery of Tuscan red and black with gold trim. The N&W's flagship train operated until the spring of 1969 when the ICC allowed the railroad to discontinue running it. (Burns)

Mama cannot remember the exact date of their ride, or if they were riding the maiden run, which happened on April 27, 1946. But we can speculate that they rode before June of that year. On June 12, 1946 the *Powhatan* left the tracks and wrecked just outside of Bluefield, and two were killed.

At least one of my Tolley ancestors worked on the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad, which was owned by the Cranberry Iron Ore Company, but I do not know for certain which man. There were many Tolley men working in the region at the time. The Tolley side of the family migrated back and forth from North Carolina to West Virginia, as one job ended, and another began. Daddy's brother, Doug, recalls that the

greatest amount of time the family spent with Handy Sebastian Tolley, their grandfather, was when Pappy, Handy's son, contracted typhoid fever, around 1934. Handy and his wife, Mary Jane Woody, were living at Blevins Creek, in Elk Park, Avery County, North Carolina at the time. Handy, his father J.R. (James Robert), and probably Joseph (Jasper), J.R.'s father, were working, or had been working, at the Cranberry Mines, either in the mines or at the furnace, as we believe was the case with J. R. (see fig. 14).

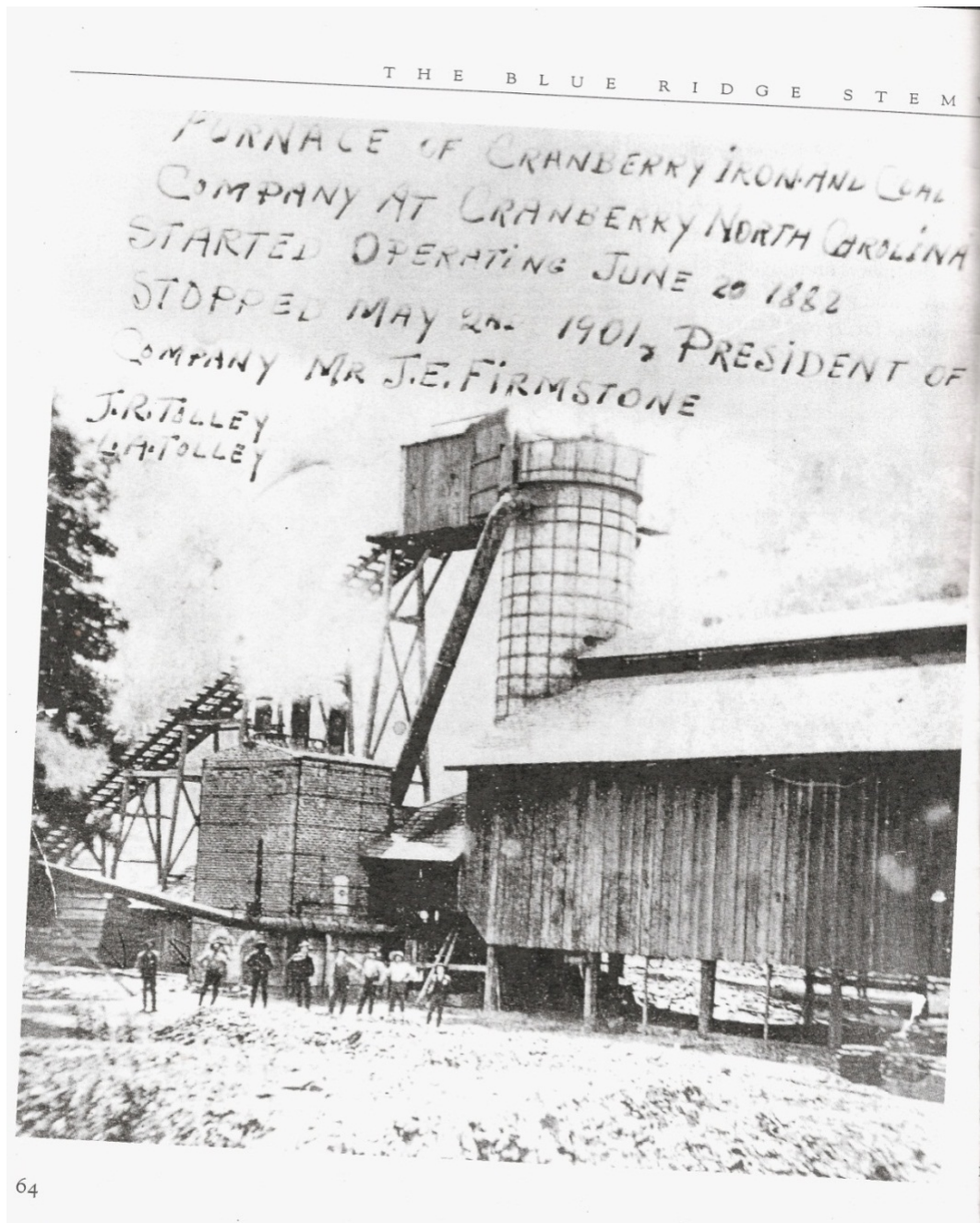


Fig. 14. My great-great grandfather, J. R. Tolley with other workers, in front of the furnace at the Cranberry iron ore mine; Waite, John R. *The Blue Ridge Stemwinder : An Illustrated History of the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad and the Linville River Railway*; Johnson City: Overmountain P, 2003; Print.



I recall a Saturday at my grandparents' house in the 1970s. Polly and Pappy were living in Dobson, North Carolina at the time. The kitchen table still had the remains of our meal on it, but instead of being told to help wash the dishes I was "shooed" out of the room. I had not really been paying attention to the conversation. Often the adults talked and we kids listened, or we did not, but either way we did not comment or interrupt. From the hallway, I heard Grandpa Pappy's raised voice, looked in and saw his thin face flushed and the veins standing out on his neck and temple. I learned later that the subject was unions.

Pappy worked in the coal mines from around 1937 until the mid-1950s, the glory years of the United Mine Workers. The union brought about safer conditions, fairer wages, and health care unmatched in quality. At Number 6 mine in Anawalt, Pappy had found work, as had Polly. She worked in the company store. Strikes happened if and when the union demanded. The family had housing. The argument at the kitchen table was between Pappy and his oldest son, my Uncle Doug. Doug had worked his way up the hierarchy of the mining industry and was then a superintendent making what was considered a lot of money. And, as management, he was anti-union.

I can only speculate on the emotion felt by Grandpa Pappy that day and on other occasions when the "union argument" happened. By the time of the kitchen table incident that I witnessed, he and Grandma Polly were settled in Dobson, Pappy was too sick to work at all anymore, and Polly was the owner of Pauline's Dress Shop. Dobson was chosen because Polly had a cousin who lived there. "Uncle Arley," as the children called him, had bought property before Interstate 77 was built in anticipation of a windfall once the road

was finished. But his property was on the east side of town, and "77" went through on the west. He had a nice farm, and raised beef and dairy cattle. My strongest memory of him is from the day I received my first electric shock, from a fence around his cow pasture.

The move was hard on Pappy. He did not want to leave West Virginia. But the mines had closed, the dress shop Polly had opened there obviously had no business, and there was no choice. He still fought to stay. Daddy told me that Polly finally had to say, "Howard, get your ass in the car." She opened the store, and he kept busy repairing small engines, lawnmowers mostly—it was more a hobby than work. A dachshund replaced the beagles, and tobacco fields of the Piedmont replaced the mountains. We all settled for Dobson (fig. 15), on holidays, anniversaries, and when the Floridians drove north.



Fig. 15. Many members of the Tolley extended family, at Dobson, North Carolina; "Tolley Family 1976"; Corriher Collection of Photographs, n.p.; 1976; JPEG.

### **Chapter 13: The Appalachian Diaspora in Florida**

When things slowed down at the Number 10 mine in Elbert in the mid-1950s, my maternal grandfather, Grandpa Buck, was near retirement. Grandma Maggie moved to St. Petersburg, Florida in 1959 to oversee the construction of a small retirement home for the two of them. Grandpa Buck worked out his last months, and joined her. But for the timing of his retirement, and this move, I would now be part of the Appalachian coal miner diaspora in Detroit or other northern industry town. Throughout the course of my research I have often thought about this. I was unaware of the stereotypes assigned to Appalachian people due to that simple twist of fate that removed me from one natural paradise and placed me in another. The mountains were not stripped during those years. The air was basically clean and the waters clear. The black dirt I knew could be found in Florida as well as in West Virginia. And we lived two blocks from the ocean, near Boca Ciega Bay.

Three of Mama's brothers and their families eventually moved down, too. We were part of the Appalachian diaspora in Florida, and years later I would learn to be grateful we had not been a part of that group who moved north. At the time of the move, I was four years old and my middle sister was barely one. We lived with my grandparents until a tiny little house one block away opened up to rent, and we moved. One of Mama's brothers worked for Greyhound, a bus line, another found work with Sears, Roebuck and Co., and the third held various odd jobs during those years, as did Daddy.

Daddy worked three jobs at one time, for 7-11, as a cab driver, and he also sold insurance. I have already shared the story of his first job loading watermelons. He eventually earned enough to move us again, into a little two bedroom house they bought about a mile away, in Gulfport. We eventually ended up in North Carolina, just north of Charlotte, when Daddy found better work. Moving was bitter for me as a twelve-year-old. As an adult, I understand, but the questions of that twelve-year-old girl reemerge in poetry.

*Am I a Gypsy or Not?*

Moving a little slower, headfirst into the wind,  
 I watch headlights and fenders of those who pass,  
 Going down to God knows what.  
 Weather on a mountain brings ribbons to the shadows  
 And alarming reality to dark corners.  
 The peace of warmth, and the security of shelter  
 Is reinforced by memories of struggle.  
 When horses stood with low-hung heads  
 And icicles dropping off main and tail,  
 In those Piedmont fields.

I now love to travel, at times I even feel almost a need to move. Had we not moved to North Carolina I may not have married nor had my son, Travis. Although we divorced in 2005, primarily due to what I now see were cultural differences between my husband

and me that we could not overcome, I regret nothing. The struggle to find a common ground where we could both function and be both happy was too great.

I am the first-born daughter of three daughters born to my Mama and Daddy. I am three years older than my middle sister and eleven years older than my youngest sister. Although my family is categorized "Appalachian," and I spent the first four years of my life in West Virginia, I consider Florida my childhood home, where I was "raised." Mama was primarily a stay-at-home mom, but she held various part-time jobs over the years, as did Grandma Maggie, as did I. Mama never worked a full-time job until she and Daddy divorced in 1989. Grandma Maggie had to go to work full-time when Grandpa Buck died.

Mama did not learn to drive until she was in her thirties. We moved to Charlotte in 1968 when Daddy took a job as a traveling salesman. I was eleven at the time and when Daddy was gone, I, Mama, and my sisters would all sleep in the same bedroom. I can remember helping Mama push a dresser in front of the door, she was so afraid. As the oldest daughter, when Daddy was traveling, Mama looked to me as a helpmate.

I became a self-aware Christian around 1977 after an intense awakening experience while walking down King Street in Boone. The only way I can describe it is as being suddenly washed over with pure, soul-reaching joy, there one minute, and gone the next. I knew immediately that I had felt Christ, but it was not until weeks later when I was reading the Bible from cover-to-cover in an attempt to more fully understand what I had experienced that I found the scripture that began to help me comprehend what had happened: "Behold, I shew you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-

42). In the 1970s, there was a great deal of criticism by society of Christians and Christianity. The "moonies"<sup>21</sup> were said to be kidnapping and brainwashing people for their sect, there was a cliché about 'Jesus freaks,' so I was naturally thoughtful about what to do with what I had discovered and experienced. Fortunately, I had never had a problem in judging anyone other than myself, so that was not an issue. What I did was share my experience whenever I had a chance to, if people wanted to hear, and probably sometimes when they did not.

I feel a responsibility to witness but am sensitive to and aware of each individual's need to make his or her own conscious decision regarding belief. I am a non-dichotomous thinker, I value my privacy, I have a few good friends, I am a problem solver rather than a blamer, and I have experienced a sense of awe come over me often.

I believe God is, to borrow a "Hatchism,"<sup>22</sup> the "great architect," and that His mysteries are more than we can bear to know in their entirety. Everything on this earth and in the universe is interconnected, and we share a common consciousness unconsciously. I have wondered if perhaps there is no past, only an ongoing present that is taking place on different planes according to where each individual, or group of individuals, is in spiritual achievement. I have wondered if all of us are perhaps parts of individual beings, me, a part of one consisting of hundreds, you, the same, that the fellowship of man as reported by Christ, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May

---

<sup>21</sup> The followers of Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, were known as "moonies."

<sup>22</sup> This refers to Eric Hatch, deceased, former Jungian Psychologist and professor at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17.21), is meant literally. I am a "wonderer," curious and thoughtful—I had a wonderful time conducting research.

My primary sources for genealogical information were family members, family Bibles, and notes that some of my cousins and I have written down over the years after conversation with aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents. I have to say that ancestry.com is an exciting resource, and invaluable in providing scans and transcripts of census records and other legal documents. That website is where I discovered the roots of my ancestry off the North American continent. The sample below includes only a few of those ancestors, selected to represent the diversity of my heritage. I do not believe I am exceptional to the Appalachian historical gene pool, but rather, the rule.

Mama's side:

1. Gerichtsschultheiss Alberts (1625 - 1687), born in Baumholder, Birkenfeld, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany, was my eighth great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.
2. Lydia Atkinson (1660-1739), born in Armagh, Ireland, was my eighth great grandmother on my mother's father's side.
3. Little Carpenter White Owl Raven Attakullakulla (1708 - 1777), born at Seveiers Island, Tennessee, United States, was my seventh great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.
4. Ursula Hepp (1652 - ), Gachlingen, Canton, Schaffhausen, Switzerland, was my eighth great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.

Daddy's side:

5. Symon Alderson (1620 - 1688), born in Yorkshire England, was my eleventh great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
6. Joshua "John" Cox (1694-1747), born in Ulster, Monaghan, Ireland, was my seventh great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
7. William Gowen (1634 - 1686), born in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland, was my ninth great grandfather on my father's father's side.
8. Isaac Jones (1708 - 1755), born in Wales, was my fifth great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
9. Agnes Maria Keller (1702 - ), born in Gy, Loir-et-Cher, Centre, France, was my seventh great grandmother on my father's father's side
10. Jean LeGrand (1694 - 1731), born in Amsterdam, Noord-Holland, Netherlands, was my eighth great grandfather on my father's father's side.

Germany, England, Ireland, United States, Scotland, Switzerland, Wales, France, and the Netherlands—the sampling speaks for itself. I am an American. All those races, as well as the Native American tribe of the Cherokee, are me. And sometimes the poetry comes as raw with natural elements as the lives of those Cherokee of centuries past.

*Panther*

Hunger waiting until darkness.

World of water done and wind gone down

Rock is grey and tree is black and the scent of the air is a knife.

Find me. Find me one who knows these paths, the challenge of men



with guns.

Leaping down into a dream of soft and warmth, where jewels shine  
in many colors.

Sometimes, the poetry remembers where I am now, in this century, and tries to help me.

*Turtle's Reason*

Turtle waits.

High up, above the poisoned water, turtle's space is shared with  
insect and hawk and eagle and crow. Where the water begins,  
whispering softly at the source, rushing harshly over the rockhewn  
path, to meet the souls below, turtle waits. Quietly, watch deer and  
fox go up, and panther reemerge from hollow hope. Turtle sits in  
clean mud in crystal water, liquid ice, mineral food, through mouth  
and pores, crystal water.

Sit and be nourished. Become Holy before you walk back down, you  
can always look back when you need to catch your breath. A clean,  
single portion of this place will remain inside you.

Stopped on a street within a choking heat, close your eyes and  
become turtle.

We must appreciate the cultural diversity of the Appalachian region because we cannot truthfully define the region otherwise. Inter-marriage between ethnicities occurred often. Ethnicity and diversity are what drove the development of the initial and continued

labeling of the region, as Henry D. Shapiro reiterates in the introduction to his book, *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*. Shapiro writes that Appalachia was seen as "a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people, a discrete region, in but not of America" (xiv). As much as that particular sentence has been quoted, and quoted again, and as much as scholarship has sought to negate the stereotype, and however often the people have been defined as a single entity, "mountaineer," and racially-profiled, the citizens of Appalachia were as diverse, and still are, to some degree, as the Native American tribes of the continent, which were also singularly labeled and racially-profiled.

John Alexander Williams explains that when Europeans started coming into the region in large numbers in the latter part of the eighteenth century they met native peoples who were multiethnic and multilingual due to warfare—where one tribe would absorb another—migration, and other factors. Williams writes that, "Rather, it was a zone where the familiar categories of human difference—languages, economic roles, ethnic identities, customs and habits, even the distinctions between men and women and between slave and free—blurred and overlapped" (26). The Native American tribes on the eastern side of the continent consisted of the Delaware, Iroquois, Shawnee, Tutelo, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora, Susquehannocks, and other societies, such as the Saponi, Conoy and Tutelos, which had already retreated to the regions of the Carolina Piedmont, coalescing into the Catawba Nation. Those societies had either been absorbed or retreated to escape the Iroquois, who had formed an "ethnic confederacy" in the sixteenth century. Although the Iroquois Confederacy and some mass tribe migrations occurred

before the non-natives entered into the region, much of the impetus for those events was the arrival of the Europeans. For example, the Tuscarora people had come to the Piedmont from eastern North Carolina after losing a war with white settlers.

## Chapter 14: Who Do We Think We Are?

The ways in which Native American, European, and African peoples have impacted Appalachia are numerous, not only from an interactive social standpoint as human beings coming into contact with each other, but also upon the landscape itself. These groups, to state the obvious, comprise the primary biological gene pool from which most of the region's peoples have come, and most peoples in the United States for that matter. The Native Americans, the bulk of which were Cherokee, living in the region at the time of the earliest European visitation initially found the newcomers unthreatening and helped them with provisions of foodstuffs and sometimes physical labor. Cherokee men helped de Soto in his travels during the 1500's (Williams 21).

Author James T. Garrett is biracial, part EuroAmerican and part Cherokee. He writes that the Cherokee still refer to "those people of European descent who settled in the Appalachians and smoky Mountains of eastern North America [...] as 'mountain folks,'" and that they "were hardy people respected for their values and for their willingness to live in harmonious cohabitation with the environment" (3). Perhaps the early peoples living in the region were imbued with a common worldview. Some of the first immigrants to the region were indentured servants escaping the plantations of the south and, later, slaves also escaping plantations. Both groups were primarily seeking freedom and basic survival

rather than the accumulation of wealth. But, sadly, not all Europeans (or all Indians for that matter) did hold the same worldview, and eventually the lure of material wealth, no matter the cost to others, or the environment, overshadowed people and environment.

The removal of the Cherokee from their native lands in 1838, by order of law under the administration of Andrew Jackson and implemented under Martin Van Buren, actually encouraged and solidified some existing inter-racial relationships in the region. The Cherokee were helped to hide from the soldiers of the new government by sympathetic "legal" residents. Helping the Cherokee was illegal. But there were subtle, legal ways of resistance, and more than 1200 Cherokee managed to stay with help from "whites."

The Cherokee at this time were probably more civilized than the culture that sought to remove them, and were definitely more acclimated to the terrain and natural provisions. Mostly illiterate, but fully aware of the power of the written word, they eventually became predominantly literate as a nation with the invention of a Cherokee syllabary. In 1821, Sequoyah introduced a syllabary he had worked on for twelve years. According to the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum, "within a few months thousands of Cherokee were literate" ("Overcoming Challenges"). The syllabary led to the publication of a newspaper in 1828, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, written entirely in the Cherokee language. The newspaper was the first bi-lingual newspaper in the country ("Overcoming Challenges"). Sequoia was himself illiterate prior to creating the syllabary, and his accomplishment speaks strongly to his intellectual abilities. The Cherokee were a highly civilized people, and in my opinion, this was threatening to capitalists venturing into the region.

The arrival of the Europeans confused and redirected Cherokee life, particularly the aspects of society based upon gender roles and daily life. Prior to occupation of the region

by Europeans, Cherokee men rarely ventured far from home. They hunted near villages, providing foodstuff and furs enough to feed family and tribe. With the fur trade and its lucrative capacity, the Cherokee men, and men of other tribes in the northern regions of the country, were forced to venture out further and further from home to supply the non-natives with the skins they wanted. According to Cherokee scholar Wilma Dunaway, "Prior to European incorporation, [Cherokee] males were involved in agricultural production, leaving only the lighter field maintenance to the women, children, and elderly" (33). Women were now forced to manage the more difficult aspects of farming. In addition,

a large segment of the labor-time of the women was drained away from agriculture and household production. Export production required many hours of labor by Cherokee females to help with animal drives associated with annual burning and to cure and dress the deerskins to meet British standards. (John R. Swanton qtd. in Dunaway 33)

Pelts were highly valued in England, especially beaver used in top hats. The fashion culture of European society on the British continent drove some of the fur trade in early America.

The overall lifestyle of European society also transferred to the early colonies, particularly in the more European-like cities where hordes of immigrants lived and sought to build a new country, however much like the old. As industry grew and cities grew, and the new world became civilized (by European standards), the market for meat also grew.

According to Appalachian scholar C. Clifford Boyd, Jr., benefits of trade were relatively mutual. The Native Americans were provided with guns, allowing them to hunt more efficiently and quickly, metal cooking pots were bartered, as were blankets and many other items alien to their societies (10) Some exchanges, however, were not mutually beneficial, and greed and Manifest Destiny eventually tipped the scale. Many treaties were ignored or altered, always to the benefit of the whites (11).

Cherokee society, matrilineal in which women held significant authority and held strong voices in tribal planning and organization, was gender-balanced (T. Perdue). This was confusing to the Europeans, but because treaty negotiations took place primarily between men (although Cherokee women attended ceremonial signings of treaties), the influence of the women was ignored by the Europeans. Over time, women grew to be less involved in land issues as Cherokee men became, according to scholar Theda Perdue, "increasingly influenced by materialism and individualism . . . [and] saw little need to incorporate women into this system" (105).

Social class differences in Europe were based upon family lineage, and wealth. Power was inherited or bought and individual worth was based upon those criteria. Although wealth among the Cherokee might also be measured by material items, this was historically not at the expense of others, as European society defined. One's wealth, among the Cherokee, was an extension of family size and overall societal need. Gender roles existed, but they were not fixed. If a woman needed to hunt, she did. If a man could not provide, others would. Power roles were identified based on ability and benefit to the community as a whole. Towns were self-governing, a necessary, logical component of

Cherokee society due to varying natural features and nature's provisions—and the communal worldview. This, again, alien to European mindset, may be the primary cause of the ease with which the eventual removal took place. The Cherokee worldview was civilized to a point beyond that of the European when considered from a mindset of social benefit and equality for all.

But as horrible as the removal was, and implemented by Anglo/Europeans, there were those 1200 Cherokee who remained in the region and were *helped* by an Anglo/European, William Thomas. Thomas had been adopted by a Cherokee man named Yonaguska. Geographer and scholar Thomas E. Ross writes that, "By 1842, Thomas had bought 50,000 acres for the North Carolina Cherokee. The bulk of this land would later form the Qualla Boundary" (85).

The Iroquois, in Williams's words, "unlike the Cherokees, were fierce warriors and empire builders" (24). The seventeenth century found the Iroquois, through confederation, serving as middle-men in the fur industry that had developed. Trade led to the cultural and diversified interactions, as well as the development of two important cities, Shamokin, on the Susquehanna River, and Keowee, in South Carolina. The cities were amalgamations of natives, including members of many of the tribes previously listed, and non-natives including Germans, French, French-Canadians, British, and African Americans. Shamokin was overseen by the Iroquois and Keowee by the Cherokee. Although occurring on the fringes of what would eventually be termed "Appalachia," these interactions were happening in the early 1700s, driven by trade, but infused with other aspects cultural exchange entails. My point? Ethnic diversity *is* the story and history of Appalachia.



When the mass migrations of nonnative peoples into the region occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the British, Germans, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh, the country was already diversified, as it would remain. The Native American demographic would eventually, with the exception of very few tribes, become a product of genetic variations within the bloodlines of peoples in the United States today who have no idea from whence they came. We often attempt to simplify an explanation of an event or some other pertinent "fact" of history, such as the racial blending which has occurred in Appalachia, and "Native American" is the broad brush, as is "European," as is "African," etc., etc. We have missed much in simplifying our history this way.

We cannot deny the impact of ethnic diversity upon Appalachia. And *every* ethnic component, no matter the size of the population, is invaluable to the history of the region and its development. The Welsh population was consistently the lowest British-born population in the United States between 1850 and 1920 (R. L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans* 46), yet the magnitude of its contribution to the mining industry was tremendous. Had that *single ethnic group* not been a part of Appalachian history the entire scope of *American* history, including the American Industrial Revolution, would be different.

### *Finding a Space*

Perhaps it is in attempts to find one's "space," perhaps it is a result of human reaction to the laws governing "survival of the fittest," or perhaps it is some inherent evil in mankind, but I cannot think of a time in history when some faction of humanity was not seeking to oppress another. The concept of "other" that was so eagerly latched onto by the

local color writers and their reading public is not foreign to anyone, except perhaps young children. But I hope to never understand the mindset or mentality that led to the horrors inflicted upon the Native or African Americans.

Lewis explores one aspect of a process of assimilation that was deemed necessary in the 1920s as a result of the influx of immigrants entering the country. He writes that although there were some people who sought to help newcomers into the coalfields, there were other aspects of "Americanization" that were in no way benevolent. Anything different, anything considered un-American, was to be repressed, and considered, in some cases, to be radical. In West Virginia, the "otherness" was seen as a direct threat to American ideals. Lewis writes, "For many conservative Protestant natives, immigrants, radical anti-American ideologies, and booze were inextricably intertwined" (276). Immigrants were blamed for labor strikes and rioting, with alcohol being the primary contributing factor to the disorderly conduct. Frederick O. Blue, the West Virginia Commissioner of Prohibition, writes in 1916: "The great present-day problem of immigration to this country is that of assimilating these outlanders, ignorant of our tongue as of our institutions and ideals, into the fabric of the American nation" (qtd. in R. L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans* 276).

According to Ronald Lewis, ironically, African Americans were

united with the American Federation of Labor and on that question . . . with the Ku Klux Klan. [African American miners also supported] restricted immigration because most foreigners . . . are not accustomed to the American standard of living...and they can work cheaper than you. (274)

In order to protect their economic survival, African Americans sided with one of the most racist groups in American history. Mining definitely brought people together.

I recall my maternal grandfather's death and funeral. Grandpa Buck died in St. Petersburg, six months after his retirement and leaving Elbert. A mechanic, colleague, and friend, he was well-liked and respected. My aunt, his daughter Jane, had remained in Elbert with her husband, George Reynolds. George continued to work in the mines. When word reached Elbert that Grandpa had died, Jane was visited by two African American men who had worked alongside Grandpa, asking permission to attend "Mr. Buck's" funeral.

I feel sad that the two men had to "ask" permission. I am grateful that they loved him and respected him enough to want to attend his funeral. I do not remember his death, or the days following. But I remember April 4, 1968, and watching Grandma cry because Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated. I remember the black men who rode on the backs and sides of the garbage trucks that drove slowly down the oil-packed dirt alley that ran behind our house in Gulfport, jumping down to lift, toss, the clatter of aluminum trash cans placed back down, the graceful swings back up to the sides of the truck, there in my space and place, and then gone with shouts and smiles, and strength. I wrote.

*Of Abraham and a Different Kind of Sixties*

She'd watched him for days from the screen porch. A luxury, that screen porch. You had to walk through it from the carport to get into the house. They had a table and chairs out there, and two steps down to the concrete of the port. She could see the cans beside the alley through the wall of hibiscus bushes along the side yard. She could walk straight to them if she left out the door, walked across the porch, jumped the flower bed where Grandma'd

gotten bit on the thumb by a baby rattlesnake, tiptoed across the yard avoiding sandspurs, and ducked through the tunnel near the ground between the hibiscus. She'd sit under there and watch him lift the cans and dump them into the truck, thinking, Lordy, he was tall. She bet he could see over the hibiscus. He was really skinny and his skin was like chocolate, she could see the bones in his face, and he had little gray spiky hairs all over his chin, and one day when he'd taken off his cap to wipe the sweat off she'd seen his hair was really short and almost white. She'd never seen his eyes until that day he'd said, "What you doin' under them bushes, girl, looking for a snake?" She'd gotten mad then and jumped out and exclaimed,

"There ain't no snakes under there. They stay over in the flowerbed."

She'd pointed over towards the house and he'd looked over that way, yep, right over those hibiscus bushes, and nodded like she was the Lord's expert on snakes. She'd found herself telling him all about Grandma getting bit and how her thumb had been numb from that very day. He never did talk much, just nodded and sometimes would fix her with those dark brown eyes that always looked like they was shining with a joke or something. When he did smile at something she'd said it made her heart catch with the beauty of it. He had wonderful, white teeth and when he laughed she'd think of the beach and those pearly little cochina shells she and Molly'd pick up. He knew her Grandpa because one day Grandpa had been out trimming the bushes when he came by, and he'd said, "Mornin', Mr. Buck," and tipped his hat. Grandpa had straightened up with a smile and said, "Mornin', Abraham.

How goes things with your people?" Abraham had just said, "Mighty fine. Mighty fine," and gone on with emptying the cans. Lena had just stood there grinning back and forth at both of them until Abraham had tipped his hat at HER and said,

"Good day, Miss Lena."

She'd run over to Grandpa, full of questions about how did he know Abraham and Grandpa had just said he'd come down out of the hills about the same time they had. Said he knew him from back home and had met up with him at the 7-11 one day. This made Lena feel all warm inside because she'd heard a lot about the hills but couldn't remember much. She'd been too little when they'd moved, and often pondered about why they'd come down. She'd asked Mama once but all Mama had said was, "Gracious, child, them winters was enough to freeze your blood!" After that, Lena was glad they were here because Grandma even complained of being cold here sometimes and she could just imagine what she would be like if they were still in the hills.

She and Abraham had nearly daily conversations all through that Spring, if you could call them conversations. She did almost all of the talking. A couple of times she had caught him singing when he didn't know she was hiding in the bushes. She loved to jump out and say, "Morning, Abraham!!" at the top of her lungs. He'd always jump and say she'd nearly scared him to death. One day in July she'd hauled a cinder block out to the cans where she would sit to wait on him in the sun instead of under the bushes after

Grandma had told her she was looking really healthy with her tan. She'd imagined to herself getting as dark as Abraham, and wouldn't Grandma think she was healthy then! She'd told him about it when he'd asked her was she getting lazy needing a block to sit on, and he'd laughed so hard his shoulders shook and it looked like he had tears running down his cheeks. "Oh, Lawd, child, you is a sight!" She kind of wondered when he said that because Mama only said she was a sight when she got dirty or something or was in some kind of trouble. Mama didn't like her sitting out here with the cans, for example. Sometimes they got maggots in them, which was nothing but fly eggs, but lately she'd taken to sneaking out when she could get away from Molly to wait on Abraham just to keep Mama happy. Abraham was her best friend. And even though he'd said she was a sight, with him she never felt in trouble, just welcome, and happy, and a little bit snooty because he took time to talk to her when everyone else was so busy. She would risk maggots, even if they made your thumb numb, to see him. She spent the summer basking in the warmth of a Florida sun and an old black man's attention, eating hot oranges and helping her Grandma gather warm eggs from under the hens at the farm where she worked, and never dreamed in a child's world of sameness that things would ever be any different.

\* \* \*

"LEEENAAA!!!!"

The screen door slammed and she jumped, then settled back on the block.

"Lena!"

Her sister ran around the side of the house and stopped in front of her, hands on her hips, her feet planted like a soldier's. Lena thought she was trying to be like Mama.

"I'm tellin'!"

Molly stated this with a snap of her head, something that Mama never did. Mama never told either.

"You're not supposed to be sittin' out here with them trash cans. All them maggots are gonna get in your hair!"

Lena involuntarily looked behind her, just to be sure, and then scolded back.

"They will not, Molly Jean. Me and Grandpa cleaned these things Saturday."

Exasperated, she waved her sister away.

"Just get out of here."

Molly stood there a minute with her mouth set before turning to flounce off.

"I'm still tellin'!"

Lena sighed and squirmed on the cement cinder block. She leaned forward to peer down the alley. He was late again today. Usually, they'd had their visit and she was back to playing with Molly before Molly ever missed her. Lately though, he'd been coming at all different times, if he came at all, sometimes it was somebody else, and after missing the truck altogether for a

few days, Lena'd finally decided that today she was just going to sit here and wait, all morning if she had to, until he came. She was just bustin' to tell him about Saturday, when they'd cleaned the maggots out of the cans, and tell him that Daddy had said he was sorry it happened. Maggots were supposed to be really disgusting, but Lena didn't know why. What was disgusting was the way those cans smelled. Lordy, it could raise the dead. THAT was what Grandma said.

"Lena."

This time she almost fell off the block she jumped so hard. She looked up to see her mama squinting down at her.

"Honey, come on away from those cans and play with Molly. You don't know when that trash man's coming. You don't need to waste a whole day just sitting here."

When the truck finally came she was itching. Tired of watching ants, she didn't know how long she'd been out there, but she did know that he was late. She jumped up when she heard the truck at the end of the alley, and ran down to meet it, the soles of her feet tough and already black from a morning of pacing. She swung around to the back of the truck, her mouth opened in rebuke, and then stopped suddenly to stare at the man lifting the Johnson's can. The man wasn't Abraham. The man was young and had a lot of muscles, and he just looked at her funny and continued lifting the cans to the truck. She watched as he climbed on the back and yelled something to the driver. She walked slowly behind, followed the truck, about fifteen feet



back, stopping when it stopped, walking on when it moved, until the man dumped the cans at her house and the truck moved on down and away. She stood in the alley a while, there at her cans, until the truck took the left out onto 58th street and she couldn't see it anymore. She pondered at it a minute more, and then went on into the house and got her something to drink. She played with her little sister awhile until cartoons came on and then they watched, and the day went on into evening patterns and she went to sleep that night thinking about what she'd say to Abby the next day.

The next day the young man was there again, emptying Abby's cans, and the next day after that, and on the fourth day she stood up by her can with one hand on the lid, and one on her hip and looked up at this unwanted intruder,

"Where's Abby?"

The man looked at her angrily for a second. Then he hoisted the can and dumped it, and set it back down with a clatter. He started to yell to the driver, but hesitated and turned to answer her question.

"He's sick. Had to go to baid."

Then he slapped on the truck before he jumped up, and looked back at her a couple of times as they rolled down the alley. She sat there awhile, on her block, hugging her knees, waiting until Mama yelled at her to come in.

\* \* \*

She heard her grandpa's car driving down the road. Her mama met Grandpa in the driveway. Lena sat there in reprieve, watching them talk.

Grandpa got out and she saw him shake his head. Mama just stood there a minute looking at the ground before she followed him into the house. Lena eased herself more comfortably on the block and started watching an ant struggling with a crumb of something. The crumb was about a hundred times the size of the ant it seemed like. He'd drag it and then pick it up and stumble. She considered getting a twig and trying to help him, but knew it wouldn't work. He'd just run off and there she'd be with just a twig and a crumb. Her mind vaguely registered the screen door closing, and then she heard her grandpa's footsteps coming around the house. Nobody else walked like Grandpa - kind of cushy and quiet and full, like he brought a whole bunch of air with him that settled around you when he got there like a holiday or something. He squatted down in front of her and winced when his knees popped like they always did. Usually he said, "Hear them weasels poppin' in my legs?" or would say he'd broken them or something. One time she'd said, "Snap! Crackle! Pop!" and he'd laughed and slapped his leg like that was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. Today though, he didn't say anything when they popped, just settled down and looked at her a minute. She smiled up at him and his face relaxed a little to smile back.

"What you doin' out here, girl – waitin' on Abraham?"

He put his hands out behind him and caught his balance as he maneuvered to sit on the grass. The he propped his arms up on his bent knees and looked at her. She wrapped her arms around her own knees and appeared to be studying her toes.

"Mama yells at me."

Grandpa studied the toes. They were such little toes, black dirt under the nails, a mosquito bite just above the middle one on her right foot.

"Honey,"

He sighed and slumped.

"She just don't want you to get maggots in your hair..."

He looks away to the house. Mama is on the screened porch, with Molly hanging onto the side of her dress. He stares until they walk back into the house.

He feels tired and old.

He is lonely and sick of this city.

An ant crawls over Lena's toes, and stops.

"Baby, there's somethin' I need to tell you..."

\* \* \*

They were noticed, of course, an old white man and a young girl with hair the color of yellow apples. She wore her cornflower blue dress because Abby had said it was the prettiest dress he'd ever seen. When they sang up, "Amen," the girl's chin rose as she echoed, a breath behind, her grandfather nodding beside her, his eyes shut tight, his Adam's apple quivering. The preacher talked about Abby—Abraham Benjamin Easley, her Abby—for a while and then offered up to everyone to sing again, saying that Abby loved to sing that song, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

Lena looked at her grandfather and whispered hoarsely,

"Abby liked 'Sweet Like a Honeybee' best, Grandpa. He told me so!  
This ain't his favorite song!"

A woman in front of them turned around, her old round face wet with tears, but smiling, and she looked right straight into Grandpa's eyes. They all filed outside to the graveyard, Lena and her grandpa shuffling along with the rest, kind of swaying like, in a dance, everybody gentle. The preacher said a few more words before people started tossing flowers on the grave.

"We forgot flowers, Grandpa!"

Anguish and shame colored her words and her eyes blazed up at him in accusation. The still crowd went even quieter as they pondered this child. A man in a stiff black suit finally walked over to them. Rich brown eyes met watery old blue ones as he looked at her grandpa, and then he looked down at Lena. He put his hands on her shoulders and straightened his own.

"Child."

His voice was deep and she heard Abby in his tone. Her face wrinkled up and she started to cry.

"You can see I has some flowers here."

She looked at the blossoms while she sniffled and then looked back up. He looked a tiny bit like Abby. She frowned. Then she brushed her hair back from her face and swiped her arm across her nose and then wiped it on the side of her dress. He frowned and then smiled slightly. She put her hands on his, and looked up at him again.

"I imagine that I could help you with those. It's awful hot out here and they're gonna wilt if we don't get 'em on to Abby. They been cut and cut flowers don't last too long. I can throw really far. I never could help Abby lift those cans when they was full. But I helped clean them for him. I really did! And I wasn't never afraid of no maggots!"

The man's face went blank and then he looked away and his eyes were glistening bright when he did look back.

"Good for you, child."

She takes a share of the flowers and together they tossed them to Abraham.

*There are, and don't let anyone convince you otherwise, moments in your life that you will look back upon and realize they were turning points. You will somewhat suspect what's happening when it occurs, but as things play out and years and lifetimes go by, you will gain the affirmation and an understanding of destinies and how God's in charge no matter what we do or how much we like to think we are in control.*

## Chapter 15: Conclusion

We understand why they called it "King Coal." When a resource feeds hundreds of thousands of people from states and nations across the world, the signifier fits: The extraction of coal in West Virginia kept people *alive*. The fierce fight to maintain the industry, the refusal to allow anyone to demean that which brought about the actual existence of one's parents, children, grandchildren, and those to be is natural and human. In the face of a starving child, to *not dig* something out of the ground which the Lord made to provide is the most grievous sin. We know this and bear this in mind.

The 1940 United States Federal Census was released by the National Archives and Records Administration on April 2, 2012. The pages from McDowell County, West Virginia read like a recipe for the melting pot the United States claimed itself to be. Along with Mama's family are listed families from Italy, Russia, Yugoslavia, Austria, and Poland. Elbert, in the Adkin District of McDowell County, is a national and international snapshot of survival after the Great Depression. States represented by these families include Virginia and West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Iowa, Michigan, Georgia, and New Jersey—on two pages of census listings alone.

My grandfather, Buck Spriggs, is listed as earning an annual income in 1939 of \$603, the lowest of any head of household on the page. He is noted to be a laborer, and as having worked thirty-five hours during the previous week. The miners—all with incomes at least twice that of Grandpa Buck—worked fewer than thirty hours. As a laborer,

Grandpa Buck's jobs varied from loading coal to delivering the mail to taking care of the shower facility. He also helped Grandma Maggie maintain two of their three gardens, one of them across the tracks in front of their house, and the other on top of the mountain behind the house. All eight children are listed as living in the house at that time, Preston the oldest at age nineteen, Chester at age seventeen, Lawrence at age fifteen, Jane at age thirteen, Peggy at age eleven, and listed on the following page are Mama, Eva at age four, Buddy at age five, and Walter at the age of one year.

The Tolleys, Daddy's side of the family, are listed in English, part of the Big Creek District. There are Howard, Pauline, Douglas, Freda, Mina Jean, and Marvin Ross (Daddy). Mina Jean, age five at the time, would only live another year, dying of complications from a tonsillectomy. Our last name is spelled incorrectly, as Tolly. Pappy's (Howard's) income for 1939 was \$1500, and he is listed as a miner. His health later in life reflected his choice: he suffered from black lung, although eventually dying from stomach cancer in 1981 at the age of seventy-three years and five months.

Grandpa (George "Buck"), as a laborer, spent some time in the mines, but his work required him to be outside to the greatest degree, so he was not exposed to quite as much dust as other miners were. He was never diagnosed with black lung, but he died six months after retiring, six months after moving into his first "owned" home in St. Petersburg, Florida. In June of 1961, he had to travel by bus to Virginia for his sister Catherine's funeral, no less than twenty hours both ways. Buddy, who worked for Greyhound, got him free passage. The night he got home, he walked into the house, sat down on the bed, and fell back, and died. He had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage caused by a blood clot. We were devastated. He was four months shy of his sixty-fifth birthday.

Putting together this thesis—an autoethnography of an Appalachian woman—has taken years, beginning with a joy in returning back to school, me adding to our family's first generation of college graduates. It is finished after shedding the tears of burying Mama, Eva, the last surviving member of those eight children born to Maggie and Buck. Mama's last will and testament was a few notes written in a notepad. Her last weeks were spent drugged, in a nursing facility, this woman who took nothing stronger than a Tylenol for pain, and whose greatest joy was her home and family. She was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome in 2009, and then with lung cancer in early 2012. She was seventy-five years old and had smoked since she was in her mid-twenties. But the Myelodysplastic Syndrome is what killed her and took her mind. The syndrome is proving to be the result of working or living in the coalfields, although there are other causes.

There are articles online for those scholars interested in researching the syndrome further, it is all very new to medical scrutiny. Basically, the blood stem cells created by bone marrow stop maturing into healthy cells: red, white, or platelets. The treatment for Mama was two years of weekly or biweekly injections of Procrit, a human growth hormone, until the lung cancer halted the effectiveness of the Procrit.

Mama had gone back and forth with whether or not she wanted to be cremated, the final decision she told to me was that she did not. She had told my sisters otherwise. I struggled. I wanted to hold onto the "old ways," but I finally realized that it did not matter. When we found out that her ashes could be buried on the same plots as her parents, Grandma Maggie and Grandpa Buck, in the cemetery at Meadowview, Virginia, I finally found some peace in the matter. At least there is a place I can go to remember.



I wonder if I have done enough with this thesis to explain Mama's worldview, Daddy's, my family's, and my own. I wonder if I have done enough to call this work an autoethnography—a personal, cultural, and ethnographic work of explanation. "Hold your shoulders back! Hold your stomach in! Keep your legs together! Act like a lady!" I can hear Mama and my grandmothers, Maggie and Polly, guiding me forward with the instructions for feminine physical behavior. The instructions for the more important behaviors—how to treat people, how to love, how to worship—were communicated through whispers I cannot articulate.

Steve Fisher, writing for a special edition of the *Appalachian Journal* that focuses on Appalachian identity, enlists and promotes autoethnography, although perhaps unaware he is doing so. Fisher writes:

Being Appalachian means something different depending on who you are and where you are in the region. We've got to come to understand and accept the reality of multiple Appalachian experiences, taking into account the specificity and diversity of who we are. One way of doing this is by telling our stories, because in doing so we not only take power over our own images and reinvent ourselves, but we also have the opportunity to understand our connections to others both in and out of the region. (59)

I want you, reader, to pause and know that this story and these families are probably much like your own. The surnames on the rolls of the 1940 census in West Virginia are incredibly diverse, those of first generation Americans, and those here since the early 1700s. To eat, you planted or worked. For shelter, you made do with the space available, as crowded as it may have been, as impossible to be kept clean as it was.

Without begrudging one iota of income, technology owned, or space you now have, I challenge you to thoughtfully consider where we began and how peoples have survived since time began. It was not by name-calling or finger-pointing or divisive laws and amendments, it was by helping each other out.

Dear Johnny Depp: Will you please buy the state of West Virginia? Will you set the people who are living there safely aside, perhaps on a hillside in Kentucky, pick up West Virginia by its southern fringe, and shake it until the seeds of the trees are scattered and the waters are filtered clean? And then put the people back.

*Johnny, I Did Not Forget You!*

Dear Johnny Depp,

Will you please buy the state of West Virginia? I wish I was kidding. But someone needs to take charge of our country's energy provision, someone who has the attention of people across economic and political arenas and you are the first person I thought of. Steve Jobs would have helped you, Bill Gates may, but try to keep it outside politics—this is a business transaction, pure and not so simple.

A word of advice: Prepare to be muddled in mind and spirit. Steel yourself against those who will tell you destruction is the path to preservation. Educate yourself about geology and water tables, fracking and physics. Dinner parties are good ways to get to know people, so have them often in places like War, Elbert, and maybe picnic-style somewhere near Blair Mountain. I hate to put so much pressure on you, but you were born close enough to Appalachia to either give a damn or understand that this should have *nothing* to do with Appalachia, and everything to do with people. As do most people, I

hope to have great-grandchildren some day. And you, sir, have the time, energy and resources to think about the earth they will live on. Most people do not have that luxury because just getting through the day-to-days of living exhausts to a point of resignation and acceptance and simple gratitude for food on the table. "Big money" counts on that. The energy industry as it is now counts on that.

*The Semantics of a Conclusion*

How to negotiate within place is the most important knowledge a global citizen must possess. The individual who never leaves his or her hometown will eventually, whether through face-to-face or technologically supported contact, awaken to global economics, social responsibility, environmental issues, and the globality of existence itself. Learned helplessness is not an option. But there is a resistance to change, sometimes passive and gently expressed, but resistance nonetheless.

*Something*

Something came in on the late September wind,  
 A sickness that sought to turn us from our task  
 Out back there are still a few leaves left on the trees.  
 It's amazing how one log house can be a temperamental  
 divide.  
 There's a road out front that maybe calls down the cold

There is a lion in the room. He stands quietly, calmly waiting, only watching.  
 I read the oldest book.



Fig. 16. Donna, Sandy and Grandma Maggie, Florida, circa 1963 (Yes, we still know how to catch a fish); "Donna, Sandy and Grandma Maggie"; *Corriher Collection*, n. p.; 1963; JPEG.

*A Place to be Buried*

Pulled down the mountain in protest, she left the land she'd

Bought with whiskey money.

It will always be there, a piece of family cemetery,

Where Iris have grown wild.

She was once a mobster's woman.

Courted with furs and diamonds, the healthiest of the

family

Because she ate well,

She shared her clothes and her smile even after he left.

She bought a bottle of whiskey, cut it, sold it, and bought

two

More,

And Billie Brown the Bootleg Queen was born.

The old building still stands. It's almost gone, but it still

Stands.

She had no choice if she didn't want to die alone,

Southern nights and lights had called the clan,

And sand instead of coal dust filled their shoes.

You can compare and contrast a river and an ocean,

A diamond and a lump of coal.

But you can't dare claim one better than another,

Because to do that you're forgetting to factor in the people,

And they're the only ones that matter, anyway.

So she sold off the bar, and packed up her things, and went.

Instead of selling liquor and offering up free smiles, she

Gathered eggs and oranges.

They're both warm when first you touch them.

### Works Cited

- "About Pearl S. Buck International." *Pearl Buck International*. n.p., 2000-2010. Web. 10 Aug. 2011.
- Albanese, Catherine L. *America, Religions and Religion*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1992. Print.
- Anderson, Katherine, and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen." *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991: 11-26. Print.
- "Appalachia." *The North Carolina Visitor Center*. The High Cotton Company, 2009-2012. Web. 7 Jan. 2012.
- Ayers, Edward. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- Bailey, Michael D. "The Disenchantment of Magic: Spells, Charms, and Superstition in Early European Witchcraft Literature." *American Historical Review* 111.2 (2006): 383-404. Print.
- Beaver, Patricia D. *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1986. Print.
- . "The New River: A View from the North Fork Headwaters." Aug. 2011. Lecture.

Beaver, Patricia D., and Judith Jenkins, Eds. *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2012. Print.

"Blankenship's First Comments on Tragedy." *Metro News: The Voice of West Virginia*. West Virginia Metro News Network, 6 Apr. 2009. Web. 17 Jul. 2010.

Bontrager, Eric. "Is Mountaintop Removal Mining a Threat to Watersheds?" *Scientific American*. Scientific American, Inc., 11 Sep. 2009. Web. 20 Jul. 2010.

Boone, Rebecca Myra. *Native Medicinal Plants of the Shenandoah Valley*. Blacksburg: Pocahontas, 2000. Print.

Boyd, C. Clifford Jr. "Native Americans." *High Mountains Rising*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2004. 7-16. Print.

Bragg, Patricia. Personal interview. Jun. 2010.

*Brown Mountain Lights*. L.E.M.U.R. Paranormal Investigations. Shadowbox Enterprises, LLC, 2001-2011. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998. Print.

Bryant, Annie, Phil Jamison, Carl Jenkins, Susan Pepper, Leila Weinstein, Patricia D. Beaver. "Interview with Jack Spadaro: On Being a Whistleblower for Mine Safety and Health." *Appalachian Journal* 34.3/4 (2007): 326-50. Print.

Burns, Adam. "The Powhatan Arrow, Norfolk & Western's Railway's Flagship Passenger Train." AmericanRails.com. n.p., 2007-2011. Web. 6 Jan. 2012.

Caudill, Harry M. *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962. Print.

- Cavender, Anthony. *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003. Print.
- "Cementing." *Halliburton*. Halliburton, 2012. Web. 15 Jul. 2012.
- Clapp, Rodney. "Superstitious Prayers." *Christian Century* (2011): 45. Print.
- Clark, Stuart. *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.
- Conway, Eugenia Cecelia. "English 5710." Boone, North Carolina. 11 Jan. 2011. Lecture. —. Personal interview. 2010.
- "Decision to Suspend Nationwide Permit 21." *U. S. Army Corps of Engineers*
- Dunaway, Wilma. "The Southern Fur Trade and the Incorporation of Southern Appalachia into the World-Economy, 1690-1793." *Review: Fernand Braudel Center*. 17.2 (Spring 1994): 215-42. Web. 3 Nov. 2012.
- Dunnes, Alan. "Black Lightning Online." Anthropology C160.1 Lecture Notes. U of California, Berkeley, 4 Nov. 2003. Web. 9 Sep. 2012.
- Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.
- Eley, Tom. "Superintendent Charged in Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster." *Wsws.org*. World Socialist Web Site. 2 Mar. 2012. Web. 27 Nov. 2012.
- Eller, Edgar. "Voices from the Headwaters." *Center for Appalachian Studies*. Patricia Beaver. Ed. and Sandra Ballard Patricia Beaver. In press.
- Eller, Ronald D. *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1982. Print.
- "EPA to Review Mountaintop Mining Projects." *Environment on NBC News.com*. NBCNews.com, 24 Mar. 2009. Web. 10 Jul. 2010.



"Events that Correspond with the Cherokee Moon." *AAA Native Arts Celebrating Native American Indian Tribes of the US and Canada*. AAANativeArts.com. 1999-2008.

Web. 18 Apr. 2010.

"Feds Sue Kentucky Mines Over Inspection Alerts." *WVGazette.com*. The Charleston Gazette, 28 Apr. 2010. Web. 27 Nov. 2012.

Fisher, Steve. "Claiming Appalachia and the Questions that Go with It." *Appalachian Journal* 38.1 (2010): 58-61. Print.

*Fishing and Hunting: The Art and Cunning of Hunting the Hart, Stag, Hare, Fox, Otter, Wid Goat, &c. the Management of a Horse, Riding, &c. the Method of Hawking and How to Take All Manner of Game Fowls, Birds, &c. of Cock-Fighting. to Play on Bowling Greens, Tennis, &c. the Art of Fishing and Sundry Curious Baits, Viz. Worms, Flies, Pastes, &c. and How to Procure and Keep Them for Fishing ; How to Bring the Fish to Any Part of the Pond: to Make Worms for Baits Come Out of the Ground ; the Artificial Cad-Fly: How to Take the Fish in the Night ; the Best Time to Angle In, &c. Price 6d.* London: Thomas Bailey, printer, 1720. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2012.

Foreman, Richard. *The Cherokee Physician: Or, Indian Guide to Health Comprising a Brief View of Anatomy*. 1857. New York: J. M. Edney, 1975. Print.

Garrett, James T. *The Cherokee Herbal: Native Plant Medicine from the Four Directions*.

Rochester, Vermont: Bear and Company, 2003. Print.

Gossard. Gossard, 2011. Web. 26 May 2011.

Hardesty, Reverend Lisa. Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2010.

Hardy, Michael C. *Avery County, North Carolina: Images of America*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005.

"History of Fly Fishing." *Fly Fishing Holidays*. n.p., 2009. Web. 20 Dec. 2010.

*Holy Bible*. Thomas Nelson P, 1990. Print. King James Version.

"How Much of Our Electricity is Generated from Renewable Energy." *U. S. Energy Information Administration*. U. S. Department of Energy, 27 Jun. 2012. Web. 7 Jul. 2012.

Idol, Evelina. "Voices from the Headwaters." *Center for Appalachian Studies*. Patricia Beaver. Ed. and Sandra Ballard Patricia Beaver. In press.

"James Mooney Among the Cherokee." *Great Smokey Mountains Colloquy* Fall 2006: 1-2. Print.

Jones, Loyal. *Appalachian Values*. Ashland: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1994. Print.

—. *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1999. Print.

Kamm, Grayson. "Spill: Obama Drops Borderline Curse Word, Saying 'Whose Ass to Kick' While Promising Oil Spill Action." *NBC "TODAY"*. Pacific and Southern Company, 8 Jun. 2010. Web. 22 Jul. 2010.

Kindy, Kimberly. "Mine Safety Often a Battle Between Regulators and Companies." *The Washington Post*. 1 Jun. 2010. Web. 2 June 2010.

Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. 1995. London: Verso, 2002. Print.

"Legacies of the New Deal in Virginia." *Library of Virginia*. Library of Virginia, 2012. Web. 28 Nov. 2012.

- Lewis, Ronald L. "Americanizing Immigrant Coal Miners in Northern West Virginia." *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*. Eds. Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis. Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2002. 261-98. Print.
- . "From Peasant to Proletarian: The Migration of Southern Blacks to the Central Appalachian Coalfields." *Journal of Southern History* 55.1 (Feb. 1989): 77-102. Print.
- . "Historic Ties between Appalachia and Wales." Appalachian State University. Boone, NC. 14 Oct. 2010. Lecture.
- . "Industrialization." *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*. Eds. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2004. 29-75. Print.
- . "Letter from John A. Williams of Algoma Mine to Mr. and Mrs. William Thomas of Brynwel, Aberdare, Wales, 18951." *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies, New Series* 1.2 (2007): 69-89. Print.
- . "The Role of Mine Operators in Creating Welsh Communities in the Appalachian Coalfields." *Appalachia and Wales: Before and After Coal*. Boone, 2010. 1-19. Print.
- . *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008. Print.
- Loeb, Penny. *Moving Mountains: How One Woman and Her Community Won Justice from Big Coal*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2007. Print.

- Maher, Kris. "Mine Regulator Sued by Massey." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones and Company, 23 Jun. 2010. Web. 17 Jul. 2010.
- McCauley, Deborah Vansau. *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1995. Print.
- Miller, Margaret. Personal interview. Meat Camp, North Carolina, n.p., 2009.
- Montrie, Chad. *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003.
- "MSHA Calls Massey Ventilation Lawsuit Curious." *Charleston Gazette*. wvgazette.com, 23 Jun. 2010. Web. 20 Jul. 2010.
- "New Energy for America." *Organizing for America*. Obama for America, n.d. Web. 17 Jul. 2010
- Norris, Mary. Personal interview. Meat Camp, North Carolina, 2009.
- Oakes, Anna. "A Long, Cold December: Despite Winter Blast, Russell Says Milder Days Are Ahead." *High Country Press*. High Country News, 16 Dec. Web. 19 Jun. 2011.
- Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill." *The White House*. USA.gov, 15 Jun. 2010. Web. 7 Jul. 2010.
- . "Obama Fires up Crowd in Lexington." *Lexington Herald-Leader*. 27 Aug. 2007. Web. 17 Jul. 2010.
- Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, 2001-2012. Web. 17 Oct. 2012.
- "Overcoming Challenges." *The Sequoyah Birthplace Museum*. n.p., 2007-2009. Web. 30 Sep. 2012.

- Patai, Daphne. "Is Ethical Research Possible?" *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Eds. Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai. London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. 137-53. Print.
- Perdue, Theda. *Cherokee Women*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. Print.
- Phillips, Wade H. Interview by Deborah Vansau McCauley. May/Jun. 1993.
- Plott, Bob. *The History of the Plott Hound: Strike and Stay*. Charleston, SC: History P, 2007. Print.
- Potter, Alice Snyder. "Voices from the Headwaters." *Center for Appalachian Studies*. Patricia Beaver. Ed. and Sandra Ballard Patricia Beaver. In press.
- Putzel, Mary Jane. "Changes in Traditional Appalachian Family Patterns Brought About by Socioeconomic Change." Boone: Cratis D. Williams Graduate School, 1983. Thesis. Print.
- "Q & A: Golden Rainbow Trout." *Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2012. Web. 24 May 2012.
- Reece, Erik. *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness. Radical Strip Mining and the Devastation of Appalachia*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2006. Print.
- Ross, Thomas E. *American Indians in North Carolina: Geographic Interpretations*. Southern Pines, North Carolina: Caro Hollow P, 1999. Print.
- Russell, Ray. "2010: A Year of Weather Extremes." *High Country Press*. High Country News, Inc., 13 Jan. 2011. Web. 1 Jun. 2011.
- Shapiro, Henry D. *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986. Print.

- Sharpe, J. Edward. *The Cherokee Past and Present: An Authentic Guide to the Cherokee People*. Cherokee: Cherokee Publications, 1970. Print.
- Olson, Karen, and Linda Shopes. "Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Doing Oral History among Working-Class Women and Men." *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. 189-204. Print.
- Silver Threads*. III:VIII. Roots Web, Jul.-Aug. 2005. Web. 13 May 2010.
- Skidmore, Hubert. *Hawk's Nest*. 1941. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2004. Print.
- Source, Anonymous Native Local. Personal interview. Banner Elk, NC. 9 Apr. 2010.
- Sparkes, Andrew C. "'Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More?'" *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira P, 2002. 209-32. Print.
- Spurling, Richard G. *The Lost Link*. Turtletown: Privately published, 1920. Print.
- Stanley, Liz. *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992. Print.
- Stephens, Walter. *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. Print.
- Tolley, Eva Katherine Spriggs. Personal interview. Mooresville, NC. Feb. 2009.
- Tolley, Marvin R. Personal interview. Beckley, WV, 2010.
- Tolley, Marvin R. Personal memoir. n.p., 2011.
- Tomaselli, Keyan G. *Writing in the Sand: Autoethnography Among Indigenous Southern Africans*. Lanham: Alt Mira P, 2007. Print.

"Transocean's Deepwater Horizon Drills: World's Deepest O&G Well." *Transocean Ltd.*  
Rigzone, 2 Sep. 2009. Web. 15 Jul. 2010.

"Underground and Surface Mining Facts - 2008." *Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention.* Department of Health and Human Safety, n.d. Web. 11 Sep. 2012.

United States. Cong. House. Committee on Labor. *An Investigation Relating to Health  
Conditions of Workers Employed in the Construction and Maintenance of Public  
Utilities: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Labor, House of  
Representatives, Seventy-Fourth Congress, Second Session, on H. J. Res. 449.  
January 16-17, 20-22, 27 29, and February 4, 1936.* 74<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess.  
Washington: GPO, 1936. Print.

Walsham, Alexandra. "The Religion of Fools?" *Past & Present* Supplement 3 (2008): 178-  
206. Print.

Ward, Jean. Personal interview. Boone, NC. Feb. 2011.

Ward, Rick. Personal interview. Boone, NC. 5 Oct. 2011.

"West Virginia Mine Widows Bring Fight to Supreme Court." *5News.* WDTV. 18 Oct.  
2012. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

Williams, Cratis D. *Tales from Sacred Wind: Coming of Age in Appalachia.* Jefferson, NC:  
McFarland & Company, 2003. Print.

Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History.* Chapel Hill: U Chapel Hill P, 2002.  
Print.

Willis, Bob. "Golden Rainbow are a Special Hybrid." *North America Trout.* n.p., n.d. Web.  
6 Jan. 2012.

Young, William A. *Quest for Harmony: Native American Spiritual Traditions*. New York:  
Seven Bridges P, 2002. Print.



### **Appendix A: List of Family Members and a Family Tree**

- Donna Elizabeth Tolley Corriher: Me
- Travis Jason Corriher: My son
- Sandra Lynn (Sandy) Verley: My middle sister
- Kathy Ann Paschal: My youngest sister
- Marvin Ross Tolley: Daddy
- Hazel Pauline (Polly) Gaultney and Howard Nelson (Pappy) Tolley: Daddy's parents
- Mary Jane Woody and Handy Sebastian Tolley: Pappy's parents. She was almost full-blooded Cherokee, but there are no official records of that. She was born in Yancey County, North Carolina and died at Grace Hospital in Welch, West Virginia at the age of seventy-eight years. Handy was born in Yancey County, North Carolina and died in McDowell County, West Virginia at the age of seventy-five years.
- Milton Samuel Woody and Sophia (Sopha) Davis: Mary Jane's parents. Both were born in Yancey County, North Carolina and both died in West Virginia.
- Greenberry (or Green Berry) Woody and Kezziah (Catherine, Kezzie) Phillips: Milton's parents. Greenberry was born in Burnsville, Yancey County, North Carolina and Kezzie was born in Buncombe County, North Carolina.

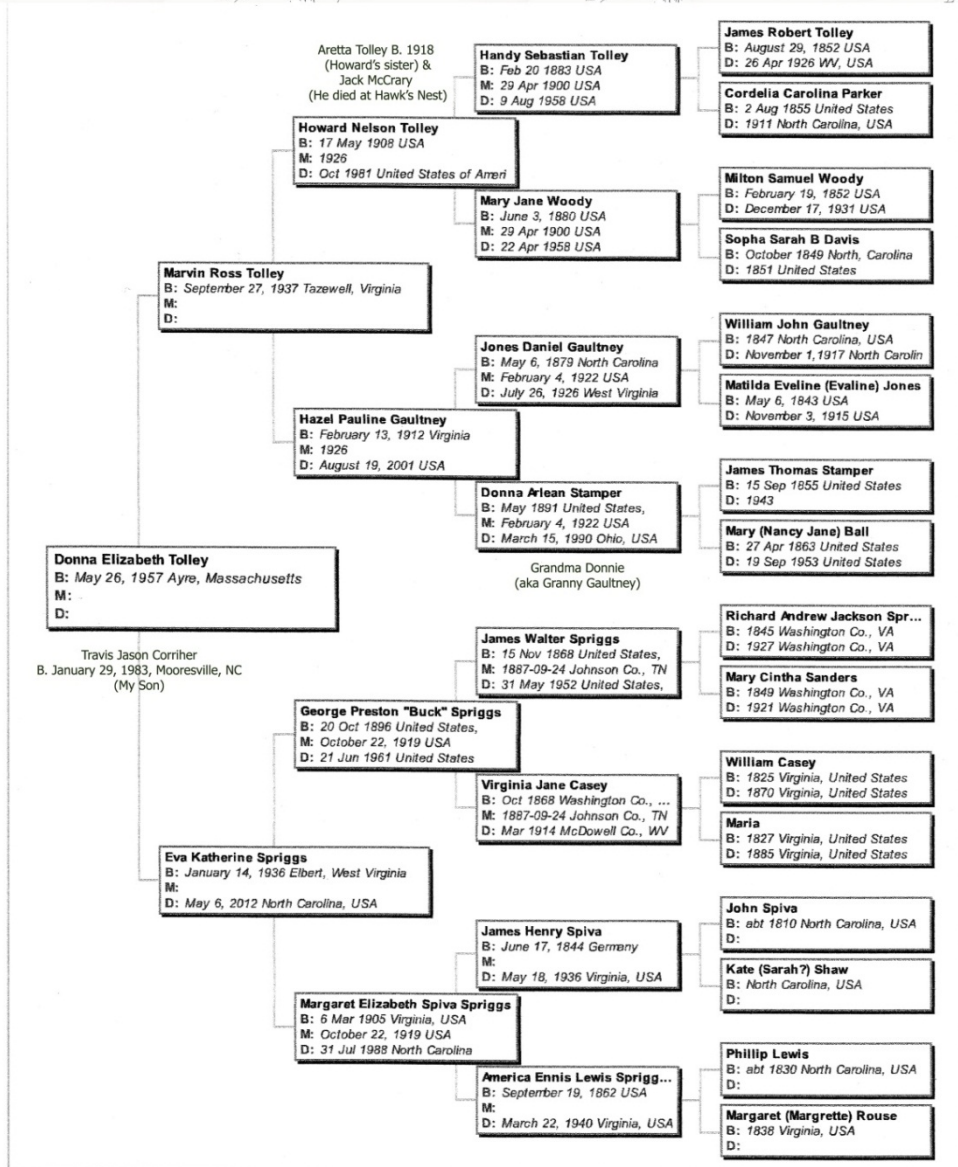
- Greenberry (Green Berry) Silver and Sarah Woody: Greenberry Woody's parents. It is speculated that Sarah and Greenberry Silver were not married and this is why their son had her last name.
- James Robert (J. R.) Tolley: Pappy's grandfather. He died in Superior, West Virginia when he was eighty-three years old. He was married to Cordelia (Della) Parker who is buried in Cranberry, North Carolina.
- Aretta Tolley & Jack McCrary: Pappy's sister and her husband. Jack died at Hawk's Nest.
- Jackie McCrary: Aretta and Jack's son. He disappeared.
- James Gaultney: Polly's brother. He disappeared, but his grave was found in Texas.
- Donna Stamper Gaultney: Polly's mother. She was also known as Granny Gaultney and Grandma Donnie. She is buried at Troutdale, Virginia.
- Jones Daniel Gaultney: Polly's father. He died of cancer in Welch, West Virginia at the age of forty-seven.
- Parks Gaultney: Polly's brother. He is buried at Troutdale, Virginia with his wife, Emma.
- Geraldine Tolley: Polly and Pappy's first child. She died at the age of seven months of cholera infantum.
- Mina Jean Tolley: Daddy's sister, and Polly and Pappy's second child. She died at the age of six years of complications after a tonsillectomy.
- Doug Tolley: Daddy's brother, and Polly and Pappy's third child. Doug went on to work in management at several mines in West Virginia.

- Freda Muriel Tolley and Clarence Parks: Daddy's sister, and Polly and Pappy's fourth child, and her husband. They moved to Deerfield Beach, Florida in the late 1950's. Polly's brother, Parks, owned a gas station down there and offered Clarence work.
- Eva Katherine Spriggs: Mama
- Margaret Elizabeth (Maggie) Spiva and George Preston (Buck) Spriggs: Mama's parents. They were both born in Virginia, moved to West Virginia, and retired to St. Petersburg, Florida.
- James Henry Spiva (Spivey) and America Lewis: Maggie's parents. Both are buried at Meadowview Baptist Church in Virginia.
- James Walter Spriggs and Virginia Jane Casey: Buck's parents. Virginia died and James remarried, to Nellie, who was nearly thirty years younger than him. They moved to McDowell County, West Virginia around 1920.
- Preston: Mama's brother and Maggie and Buck's first child. Preston lived in Welch, West Virginia with his wife, Helen until their retirement. They then moved to Ocala, Florida.
- Chester: Mama's brother, who moved to St. Petersburg, Florida with his wife, Pat, and their son, Joe
- Peggy and Bill Rudder: Mama's sister and her husband who lived in Bluefield, West Virginia
- Buddy and Ruth Spriggs: Mama's brother and his wife. They moved to St. Petersburg, Florida around the same time me, Sandy, and Mama and Daddy did.
- Bud and Phillip: Ruth and Buddy's oldest sons, and my first cousins

1. Gerichtsschultheiss Alberts (1625 - 1687), born in Baumholder, Birkenfeld, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany, was my 8th great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.
2. Symon Alderson (1620 - 1688), born in Yorkshire England, was my 11th great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
3. Lydia Atkinson (1660-1739), born in Armagh, Ireland, was my 8th great grandmother on my mother's father's side.
4. Little Carpenter White Owl Raven Attakullakulla (1708 - 1777), born at Sevelers Island, Tennessee, United States, was my 7th great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.
5. Joshua "John" Cox (1694-1747), born in Ulster, Monaghan, Ireland, was my 7th great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
6. William Gowen (1634 - 1686), born in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland, was my 9th great grandfather on my father's father's side.
7. Ursula Hepp (1652 - ), Gachlingen, Canton, Schaffhausen, Switzerland, was my 8th great grandfather on my mother's mother's side.
8. Isaac Jones (1708 + 1755), born in Wales, was my 5th great grandfather on my father's mother's side.
9. Agnes Maria Keller (1702-), born in Gy, Loir-et-Cher, Centre, France, was my 7th great grandmother on my father's father's side
10. Jean LeGrand (1694 - 1731), born in Amsterdam, Noord-Holland, Netherlands, was my 8th great grandfather on my father's father's side.

Green Berry Woody  
 B. July 28, 1800, Burnsville, NC  
 D. October 23, 1903, Brush Creek, NC  
 & Kizziah Cathern Phillips  
 B. Nov. 14, 1798, Mitchellville, NC  
 D. August 8, 1902, Brush Creek, NC  
 (Milton's Parents)

Jacob Davis  
 B. 1825, Three Mile, NC  
 D. 1873, Mitchell County, NC  
 & Susan (Susa) Miller  
 B. September 30, 1833, NC  
 D. September 30, 1923, Ashe  
 County, NC  
 Sopha Sarah B. Davis's Parents



### **Appendix B: List of Poetry and Fiction**

Black Walnuts.....	5
August 1965.....	38
Taffy.....	61
Some Folks.....	68
Blossoming Bosoms.....	73
War Babies and Long Pauses.....	100
Go On, Daughter! .....	108
Am I a Gypsy or Not? .....	155
Panther.....	159
Turtle’s Reason.....	161
Of Abraham and a Different Kind of Sixties.....	171
Something.....	186
A Place to be Buried.....	187

## Appendix C: IRB Approval and Renewals 2010-2012



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
 Research and Graduate Studies  
 ASU Box 32068  
 Boone, NC 28608  
 828.262.2130  
 Web site: <http://www.orsp.appstate.edu/compliance/irb/index.php>  
 Email: [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)  
 Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #1076  
 IRB #00001458

**To:** Donna Corriher

CAMPUS MAIL

**From:**  
 Dr. Timothy Ludwig, Institutional Review Board

**Date:** 2/19/2010

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Study #:** 10-0154

**Study Title:** Appalachian Family Histories from Avery, Watauga and Ashe Counties: Foci on Cherokee Ancestry, Hunting and Fishing, Employment, Religion, and Migration

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Expedited Category:** (6) Collection of Data from Recordings made for Research Purposes,(7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.

**Approval Date:** 2/19/2010

**Expiration Date of Approval:** 2/18/2011

This submission has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

### **Investigator's Responsibilities:**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

**CC:**  
 Patricia Beaver, Center For Appalachian Studies

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Office of Research Protections  
ASU Box 32068  
Boone, NC 28608  
828.262.2130  
Web site: <http://www.orsp.appstate.edu/protections/irb>  
Email: [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00001076  
IRB Reg. #0001458

**To:** Donna Corriher

CAMPUS MAIL

**From:** Dr. Timothy Ludwig, Institutional Review Board

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Date:** 2/15/2011

**Study #:** 10-0154

**Study Title:** Appalachian Family Histories from Avery, Watauga and Ashe Counties: Foci on Cherokee Ancestry, Hunting and Fishing, Employment, Religion, and Migration

**Submission Type:** Renewal

**Expedited Category:** (6) Collection of Data from Recordings made for Research Purposes,(7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.

**Renewal Date:** 2/15/2011

**Expiration Date of Approval:** 2/14/2012

This request for renewal has been approved by the above Institutional Review Board for the period indicated.

**Investigator's Responsibilities:**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

CC:

Patricia Beaver, Center For Appalachian Studies

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Office of Research Protections  
ASU Box 32068  
Boone, NC 28608  
828.262.2130  
Web site: <http://www.orsp.appstate.edu/protections/irb>  
Email: [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00001076  
IRB Reg. #0001458

**To:** Donna Corriher

CAMPUS MAIL

**From:** Dr. Stan Aeschleman, Institutional Review Board Chairperson  
**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)  
**Date:** 2/16/2012  
**Study #:** 10-0154

**Study Title:** Appalachian Family Histories from Avery, Watauga and Ashe Counties: Foci on Cherokee Ancestry, Hunting and Fishing, Employment, Religion, and Migration  
**Submission Type:** Renewal  
**Expedited Category:** (7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.,(5) Research Involving Pre-existing Data, or Materials To Be Collected Solely for Nonresearch Purposes  
**Renewal Date:** 2/16/2012  
**Expiration Date of Approval:** 2/14/2013

This request for renewal has been approved by the above Institutional Review Board for the period indicated.

**Investigator's Responsibilities:**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

CC:  
Patricia Beaver, Center For Appalachian Studies



### **Vita**

Donna Elizabeth Tolley Corriher is the daughter of Eva Katherine Spriggs and Marvin Ross Tolley. She was born in Massachusetts when her father was in the military, and she and her mother flew home to West Virginia when Donna was six days old. The family migrated to Saint Petersburg, Florida where Donna spent eight years of what she describes as an "idyllic childhood," before the family moved again, to North Carolina.

Donna worked in the non-profit sector for fourteen years before returning to school in January of 2009 to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree in English at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She entered the Cratis D. Williams Graduate School at Appalachian in the Fall of 2009. She holds the Master of Arts in English Literature, the Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies, and a Certificate in Rhetoric and Composition. Donna also holds the Apps Cares Network Certification in student suicide prevention. Donna's professional goals are to continue to teach at the college level, and to continue to write primarily poetry and short stories.