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THE BALLAD OF MARY JANE

A Thesis

By

VICKY HAYES

Submitted to the Graduate School

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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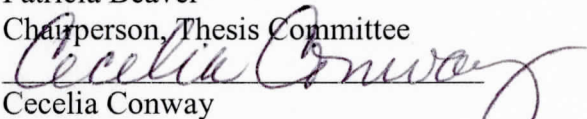
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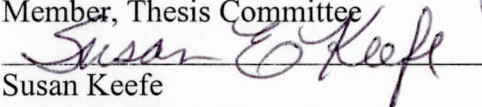
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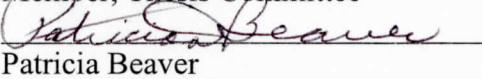
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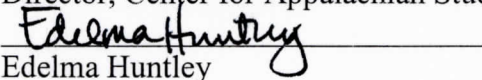
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ABSTRACT

THE BALLAD OF MARY JANE. (March 2005)

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This thesis presents the creative and academic writing of Mary Jane Brooks in the context of her history as a Pottertown resident and a 1983 graduate of the Appalachian Studies master's program. The unpublished collection of her work contained more than four hundred pages of long fiction, short story, poetry, essay, a graduate thesis, and a prison journal. As a collection, Brooks' writing shaped a vivid picture of a community only a few miles from Appalachian State University, which offers the definitive master's program in Appalachian Studies. Brooks was a native of the culture she was studying. Beginning with her adolescent writing and following her academic and fiction writing career, this literary biography provides a context for Brooks' work.

Analyzing Brooks' creative work provided insight into the community where she lived while she was a student. Pottertown, the home of her ancestors, provided Mary Jane with a profound sense of place. Brooks studied and wrote about her mountain heritage, identifying social issues and their root causes.

The thesis explores the relationship of cultural studies to the students it serves. It discusses the formative years of a young writer and demonstrates how a particularly

enriched and artistic environment can exist within an oral tradition. It discusses the role of identity formation in protecting Brooks from the harsh realities of her lifestyle: a childhood marked by abandonment and a young adulthood marred by drugs and alcohol. Despite all the impediments to her success, Brooks became an accomplished student, a writer, and an advocate for her culture. The goal of this thesis is to present her life and writing to the community.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis contains the selected writings and literary biography of my friend Mary Jane. She liked to reinvent herself. She married several times, changing names and identities often. She used the last names of Ellison, Butler, Woodard, Putzel, and Brooks. Mary Jane earned a master's degree in Appalachian Studies, receiving it at about the time she began to serve a ninety day jail sentence for robbery in Caldwell County, North Carolina. Mary Jane carried the thesis into the cell with her. I imagine her thesis resting beside the novels family members delivered to her cell in order to help her pass the time in the Caldwell Jail. A framed copy of her degree hung on a bathroom wall of her home, papered with arrest warrants and court documents. That wall represented the overlapping of two distinct worlds that Mary Jane inhabited.

Mary Jane died a tragic death at the age of 53. Following her funeral, Patricia Beaver, her teacher and mentor at Appalachian State University, acquired Mary Jane's writing from Mary Jane's son, Jake Woodard. Mary Jane's stories about Tamarack or Pottertown, as it came to be known because of two locally famous outlaws, are a doorway to a very particular kind of place.

Pottertown, home of Mary Jane's ancestors, is locally known as a community with a history of lawlessness. The elements of local color fiction, including moonshine,

murder, and dramatic love stories and feuds were prevalent themes in her work. Watauga County is rich in mountain culture and regional history. Appalachian State University folklorists studied, documented, and supported the local Beach Mountain ballad and Jack Tale traditions. Watauga County is the home of Arthel Doc Watson, an iconic American roots musician, and is a reservoir of old time mountain music. Mary Jane's family preserved a strong ballad and storytelling tradition as well.

Mary Jane added her own mountain myth-making to the history of Pottertown, a small community situated below the snake-back ridges of Long Hope Mountain. Her ancestors were thought to have owned a large tract of land on the Long Hope that was later acquired by Vicks Chemical Company for botanical research exploration. This mountain connected Pottertown and Meat Camp areas where several generations of Mary Jane's ancestors were documented in the Watauga County courthouse records.

Mary Jane and I were classmates in 1982 in the fledgling discipline of Appalachian Studies. We were poets struggling to live a life in art in spite of the difficulty of making a living at it. As blue collar intellectuals and the first generation to attend college in our families, we were taught that education is the savior of the Appalachian people. For Mary Jane, her time in college was a respite from drugs, alcoholism and violence, and an opportunity for the intellectual development she longed for as a reader and a writer.

This writing is in part about the relationship of Appalachian Studies to Mary Jane's life. She was the first woman in her family to choose an educational path that allowed her to explore her own cultural heritage while breaking the barriers of tradition.

As a project, it reflects my culture and interest in creative writing. This thesis builds upon a project begun in 2000 by Patricia Beaver and the graduate students of Anthropology 5120, a class focusing on a long-term cultural study of the North Fork of the New River. It relies upon Mary Jane's writing to tell her story and to develop the relationship between sense of place, myth-making, and identity.

CHAPTER ONE Moving to Town

Mary Jane Brooks was born in a small furniture manufacturing town in north western North Carolina, on the 22nd of June, 1946, to Ruby Ellison and Roy Butler. Mary Jane's father was a factory worker from Wheaton, Tennessee, and her mother was a waitress. Ruby Ellison divorced Mary Jane's father shortly after Mary Jane's birth and married a second husband, Colden Crump. Mary Jane was named after her great aunt Mary Kincaid, who was the keeper and transmitter of the Ellison family history and culture, and the woman who welcomed the infant Mary Jane into her home in Lenoir. Like her great aunt Mary Kincaid, Mary Jane became the keeper of her family's oral history, expanding and recording it in her short stories, poems and fiction. Her undergraduate and her graduate work in Appalachian Studies was informed by family narrative, and motivated by her desire to create stories as healing medicine for herself and her family.

Ruby Ellison, Mary Jane's mother, was one of seven children born to Jacob Ellison and Vivian Snyder. Jake died young of "labor pneumonia" (possibly of tuberculosis) as a result of working outdoors in the log woods. The Ellisons pressed Vivian Snyder into distributing Ruby and the other children to Ellison family members. Mary Kincaid, who lived down the mountain in Lenoir, took two of Vivian Snyder

Ellison's children, Ruby and Clyde, into her home during their father's wake. Eventually, Vivian's children were raised by the Ellisons (Woodard 2004), and family stories indicate that she became estranged from her children. (The Snyders and Ellisons were feuding, and the marriage between Vivian Snyder and Jacob Ellison took place in opposition to the wishes of Jacob Ellison's family.) This pattern of dispersing children was established by earlier generations and set the stage for future generations of children born to many members of the Snyder and Ellison families.

Manufacturing work was available in Lenoir for those who were willing to leave the harsh winters and seasonal employment in the log woods and mining enterprises of the Blue Ridge and settle less than an hour's drive down the mountain. Although Mary Jane never saw her maternal grandmother, Vivian Snyder Ellison, more than a few times in her entire life, she often visited the Ellison family members who remained in Pottertown (Woodard 2004). Mary Kincaid and her niece Ruby Ellison never really "left" the mountain. From Lenoir, the dramatic line of the Blue Ridge is visible to the west. Ruby Ellison, "Granny" Mary, and Ruby's children made frequent pilgrimages to Pottertown to attend family reunions and to visit the homeplace of Uncle William Ellison, the last family patriarch to give up homesteading on the Long Hope ("Tamarack Tales" 2).

Though many of the Ellisons lived and worked in Lenoir, they clung to their Watauga family heritage. They were mountain people. The migratory experience of Mary

Jane's ancestors represented the story of many Appalachian families who moved away from sporadic rural employment into towns where they provided labor for the textile and furniture manufacturing industries. The theme of traversing the plane from the traditional to the modern is primary in Mary Jane's thesis, and it is alluded to often in her poetry and fiction.

Ruby Ellison divorced her first husband Roy Butler when her daughter Mary Jane was only a "suckin baby," Mary Jane's brother attests. Ruby married Colden Crump with whom she had a lifelong passionate and volatile relationship. Ruby sent her daughter to Mary Kincaid's home where she remained until she was sixteen:

Mary Jane was just little bitty. She was breast feedin' and Mama would leave her all night with Mary and Mary would feed her them sugar tits. Walked the floor with her all night. Mary would tell me all this stuff. Mama didn't care nothin about her. Didn't care much about none of us but she shore didn't care a thang about poor little Mary Jane because she give her to Mary. Mary loved it; Mary spoiled her rotten. She [Mary Jane] always carried resentment because she wasn't included in the family, and she wasn't. She had to ask if she could come stay the night all night long and that was rare – ten times in sixteen years... (Crump 2001)

It became tradition for the childless Mary Kincaid to raise the oldest child in each of the families (Woodard 2004). Although children were very often not raised by their birth mothers, they were encircled by a tight network of kin and showered with love and attention. Mary Kincaid and Ruby Crump helped to raise Mary Jane's daughter, Caroline

Woodard; both of Caroline's daughters were raised by grandparents. The departure of children from their birth home became a theme of Mary Jane's life and her writing. Mary Kincaid loved raising children and reared four generations of Snyder-Ellison descendants. When she died, she was doing what she loved best according to Caroline Woodard— caring for Caroline's youngest daughter.

According to family members, Mary Jane was raised in a Christian home, grew up in the Church of Christ in Lenoir, and was sheltered and protected by Mary and Henry Kincaid (Crump 2001, Woodard 2004). Ruby Crump bore Colden a son and a daughter who remained in contact with Mary Jane and visited her often. The extended Ellison family was large, and though many of them had left the mountain for one reason or another, they stayed connected to their homeplace. Sometimes they got in trouble with the law and migrated down the mountain. Mary Jane's ancestor, Henry Ellison, moved into the east Tennessee town of Mountain City on the Tennessee side of the Long Hope to avoid serving time for making illegal whiskey. Many of the Snyders, "notorious moonshiners," (Crawford 171) crossed the state line into Tennessee, went down into Lenoir or up to West Jefferson. According to Watauga district attorney Jerry Wilson, crossing over in to Tennessee remains a common means of avoiding prosecution today (Wilson 2004).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Snyders and the Ellisons engaged in a variety of illegal activities. Prohibition turned many mountaineers into criminals. Previously, whiskey making was an important part of trade, providing cash and

stimulating the economy. Local potters were engaged in producing the famous whiskey jugs that appeared as the hillbilly icon in local color literature and in twentieth century film. Ruby Ellison posed for a tourist photo taken at Maggie Valley, North Carolina, by raising a demijohn to her lips. Women and men alike sold liquor on the mountain. Sometimes, a woman made her living through prostitution. Entries in the criminal dockets in the 1800s list several charges of "keeping a bad house." Whiskey making often led to violence and violence led to murder and displacement of families through out-migration or fleeing the law. This was Mary Jane's heritage as it was lived in Pottertown and remembered by Mary Kincaid and Mary's mother Lizzy, who lived to be a hundred and four.

The stories and ballads of the mountains in the Ellison family tradition, rich in detail of how Mary Jane's ancestors worked hard and survived the harsh winters on the Long Hope, kept the mountain alive in Lenoir and in Mary Jane's imagination:

For my stories I had to go to my Great Aunty Mary Kincaid, who is my 'granny' for all reasons and purposes. I am very grateful to her for teachin me the art of living on practically nothing and never being ashamed to be poor ...I want to thank her for just being there when I was a child and rocking me to sleep with the songs of Kings and Queens, tragedies and triumphs. ("Tamarack Tales" 4)

A dedicated student and a thoughtful student attending Valmead Grade School in Lenoir, Mary Jane absorbed the storytelling tradition, wrote her first poem at eleven, and began to write seriously when she was thirteen or fourteen. People in her family just

naturally wrote things down. Her mother, Ruby Crump, who wrote songs, poems, and letters, wrote on the walls of their family get-away cabin in the mountains. Her uncle Will Ellison was, like his father David Ellison, a story teller and ballad singer. Mary Jane's writing tradition grew out of the cadence of mountain ballads sung and stories told to transmit history and entertain children. This kind of intuitive knowledge of verse structures and fictive rhythms acquired in early childhood development was essential to helping Mary Jane become a skilled writer. Throughout her life, Mary Jane wrote songs, poems, short stories and long fiction about her ancestors and relatives living in Pottertown. By the time she left school to marry at the age of sixteen, the family bookworm was right on course to becoming a writer. She was a slightly overweight girl with a beautiful smile and peaches and cream skin. She was her "Granny" Mary's "baby" (Crump 2001).

The schoolgirl grew into adolescence and fell in love, an experience that would both inform and inhibit her writing. She developed a passionate crush on her handsome second cousin Roy Ellison, the son of Sam Ellison, and he became the love interest in many of her stories. Ruby Crump, Roy's first cousin, was outraged by Mary Jane's attachment to Roy; an outraged Ruby was a powerful adversary (Woodard 2002, Crump 2001, Kerce 2004). Ironically, although she did not raise her daughter, Ruby wielded the power of a matriarch by becoming Mary Jane's best friend as well as her most formidable opponent in life. She forbade Mary Jane and Roy to court, although second cousin marriage was not uncommon in the family. Along with the legacy of violence and moonshining, such familial marriage practices added to the negative Pottertown stereotyp

Mary Jane and Roy Ellison's love story was a Romeo and Juliet story. Descendants of feuding families, they saw each other on the sly whenever Mary Jane was visiting family in Watauga County. In a mountain voice, Jacob Crump told the story of Mary Jane and Roy's ill fated love:

He was crazy over her but Mama went all to hell. Me and her [Mary Jane] would sneak out to see Roy on the mountain of a night. That's her excuse for taggin' me along, was to meet Roy on the mountain. I'd go my separate way while they talked ... Charles told me she was crazy over Roy. Roy was a good lookin man too. Coal black hair and wavy. Mama absolutely went all to pieces. So she married Charles on the rebound. She really didn't love Charles. She wanted to get out of that. She wudn't but sixteen but she didn't want to stay down there [Lenoir] anymore. She wanted up here [Meat Camp and Long Hope area]. She'd love to marry Roy. God, she worshipped the ground he walked on. She loved him when she died." (Crump 2001)

Sixteen was a marriageable age and a romantic, naïve Mary Jane longed to be united with her first true love.

Charles Woodard, a logger from Three Top Mountain, met Mary Jane at her Uncle Will Ellison's and came courting. At the age of sixteen, Mary Jane married Charles Woodard whom she had not dated and barely knew (Crump 2001, Woodard 2004). "She was building a tree house when she married him. Cause Jake started crying wondering who's going to finish the tree house. But daddy [Charles] told her it was too far to drive, that he couldn't date her so she married and went to Three Top" (Woodard 2004).

Migrating back up the mountain from Lenoir was a movement Mary Jane was to repeat many times. It was not just a geographic movement, but a travel back in time, and back to the history she had learned at Mary Kincaid's knee.

Marriage to Charles cut short her education and her evolution as an artist, and it cut her off from her first love. Denied her mother's home as a child, and denied her first love, she entered a traditional mountain marriage. From the ages of sixteen to twenty-two, she gave birth to four children, David, Michael, Caroline and her youngest, Jake, named after the half brother she loved.

Like many of the men in his family, Charles Woodard was a logger. In good weather he went to work in the log woods in order to provide for his family, leaving Mary Jane at home with the babies. The work in the home was difficult without the luxury of convenience or disposable income. Mary Jane cared for the children, cleaned, cooked, and canned food, but she began to long for a very different life than the one she found as Charles Woodard's wife. Theirs was a traditional mountain marriage of the sixties, but Mary Jane would prove herself at odds with tradition. During those early years of marriage, Mary Jane had no money, no autonomy, and no social power to call her own.

I guess I wrote about every day but I burned it all up so Mike [fictional name for her husband] wouldn't see it ... Shoot, he wouldn't let me get a license or take birth control pills. Going back to school would have been a joke to him. I'd sent off to that school, not even knowin why, except if I could use my head to write

then maybe I could use writin to get out. Even then I knew I had to get out if I ever did anything, except have babies and make gardens. ("Four Women" 271)

I can only imagine that the stories featured her first love, the handsome and dark cousin Roy whom she often described; she was not eager for her husband to read them.

Mary Jane experienced a difficult transition from Granny Mary's darling child to Charles' cloistered wife. She passed out of Mary's sheltered home and into motherhood almost overnight. She was a young mother in the 1960s without a driver's license, cash, or birth control pills. The babies and the housework just kept coming. And on top of all of that, she lived an isolated life on Three Top far from town on back roads that were often impassable in the winter. Winter along the high ridges is often a lonely exercise in survival. The telephone was not a common link to the world. She treasured her trips to Boone for supplies, a visit to Smithy's Department Store, or the purchase of a book or magazine. She immortalized her childhood fondness for Smithy's in a story titled "The Great Bargain Giver."

As the story is told by her brother and her daughter, one day Mary Jane was browsing in a store when she picked up a Life magazine and read about a commune. As the story is retold by several family members, that magazine triggered her smoldering desire for freedom. The world was changing for so many women during the 1960s, and Mary Jane wanted to break from tradition and join them. She got to a telephone, called up the people living in the commune, spun her story, and asked them to come to her rescue. That event set her on a course that would alter her life permanently. Mary Jane would reverse the typical description of the mountain wife created in the first half of the

nineteenth century and described by Cratis Williams. "She loved, honored, and obeyed, innocent of any knowledge of the suffrage movement, and was deferential to her husband, whom she referred to as 'him,' as though it were his baptismal name" (Williams 333). Mary Jane was bent on becoming a liberated woman. She wanted to leave her marriage, as her brother Jake illustrated.

She called 'em and I talked to 'em too. A guy come in the middle of winter and he stays in the woods for days waitin for her husband to leave so he can get her ... Charlie finally goes to work. She calls Spud, that's his nickname, Charles' brother, cause he's got this Corvair cause the guy has come in on a plane, hitch hiked or something ... She loads all four younguns and takes the guy and lets Mike out at the bottom of the mountain and tells him, go up to his grandparents. He was just a little biddy fella... Charlie gets home and he goes to get the younguns. He sits down in the floor and just squalls so I fess up and tell him she's headin to Boston, Mass. And Mama and Mary mainly, says "we're gonna have to find her." So they talked Spud into takin out a warrant for her for stealin' the car. They get'em in Virginia somewhere and put em in jail. The younguns up there ain't exactly locked up. Me and Charlie take off to get her. We go up there but she don't want to come back. He says, "I'll just take the younguns and leave her" so we take the younguns and go to the car. I bust out bawling and squalling and I say, "you can't leave my sister up there" and go on. I'm crying like hell and I said "let me use the phone," so Mama gets them on the phone and she says "you better

bring Mary Jane back home with ya” so he goes back in there and talks her into coming on. She comes, but she’s not happy. (Crump 2001)

Mary Jane’s daughter Caroline observed that “Mama’s mind went too far for Three Top. There ain’t just so much you can absorb on Three Top and once you’ve absorbed it you gotta go somewhere else” (Woodard 2000). Mary Jane does not return to Charles, despite the fact that he moves down to Lenoir where she is living near her mother, swears he will give her more freedom, and begs her to come home. Mary Jane’s near escape with the mysterious stranger in the woods is the story of her realization that she could seek a kind of personal freedom she had never experienced. She doesn’t make it to the commune in Boston, but she does jump headlong into the sixties sex, drugs, and rock and roll scene, and forms her own “hippie” commune at the “Hill House” in Lenoir. There she participates in a national counterculture movement, practicing free love, interpreting platonic love, and “expanding” her consciousness with drugs (Douglass 2004).

Her traditional home on Three Top, juxtaposed with the events that took place in the Hill House, provided a surreal landscape. “Let freedom ring” was Mary Jane’s motto. The factory town of Lenoir rested at the foot of the Blue Ridge providing a kind of boom town culture as a backdrop to hillbilly party culture. Mary Jane and her close friend Fran Douglass remembered their years in the Hill House fondly. In Caldwell County it was possible to move between honky tonk music and sixties rock at the same time. Both Mary Jane and her mother inhabited the bar culture. Both like to sing and write songs. Ruby took the honky tonk with a bottle in her hand, while Mary Jane danced to rock and roll,

dropped acid, and shot up speed. The strands of the ballads and the early country classic love songs collided with the driving beat of Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones.

Mountain and sixties counterculture merged in an often peaceful scene at Hill House, according to Douglass. For both women, the period when they ruled Hill House, smoked pot, practiced free love, and walked around naked much to the entertainment of the business next door, comprised some of the best memories in their repertoire.

Ruby Ellison was at odds with the goings-on at Hill House, and in her typically flamboyant style, drove by from time to time to shake things up, shooting her pistol toward the trailer to roust “the hippies,” and providing Mary Jane with both a role model and her own personal protagonist. Ruby’s role as a mother, it seemed, was conflicting. Ruby drove away Mary Jane’s first love, shot up the Hill House, and ultimately “evicted” Mary Jane from her most stable home on Meat Camp. Despite their disagreements, Mary Jane expressed great love and affection for her mother, and memorialized that love in a poem entitled “The Kind Privilege of Death”:

For a time she knew
She knew when my son lifted her
Lifted her like a child
And held her in his arms
While we changed her bed

We bathed her and changed her

She was our child now

And we wept. We wept.

(20-27)



CHAPTER TWO

The Adolescent Writer

As a young teenager, Mary Jane's writing was influenced by popular culture and media. She wrote adolescent love stories set in "typical" mountain scenes. They are reproductions of local color stories, a genre popularized in the late eighteen and early nineteen hundreds, which drew upon a pallet of early mountaineer stereotypes. These stereotypes included the illiterate, irreverent, oversexed, feuding, shooting, moonshiners and beautiful, sexually alluring, submissive women. But Mary Jane brought something personal to the genre that most "traveling" local color writers could not. She drew from a wealth of family narratives which included real life incidents of murder, suicide, moonshining and illicit love. Perhaps some of the stories were too close to home, because she left out any sketches of the Hill House, or explicit details of her mother's many violent escapades.

Before she was sixteen, Mary Jane penned a seventy-four page romance novelette entitled "The Love That Wouldn't Die." Craftily, she used the mechanism of a reporter doing an interview to create the set for the narrative.

I am a reporter. After I get the news, I like to follow up on my story. I did a story on a car accident. A young boy, Kelly Snyder was killed. After I did my job, I went to the boy's room. I got a key and went in. I looked

through his papers and found some letters. All from one woman. A married woman. Mrs. Rom Snyder. I decided to go and see Mrs. Snyder, take her his papers and personal things. I found she lived in a small mountain town in North Carolina. I went there and found a story I'm sure anyone would want to read. (1) "The Love That Wouldn't Die" was penned by "The Scarlet Angel," a pseudonym Mary Jane considered as she worked toward a complete manuscript and a career in publishing romance novels. She toyed with the titles "You'll Love Me Later" and "Though Love Has My Heart." This novella involves sexual passion within a foursome. Her primary love interest was patterned after her beloved cousin Roy, her first true love. The novelette is very readable, has good structure and plot, is effective at description, and is successful at keeping the reader's interest. Her understanding of form, plot movement, and keeping in voice is exceptional for such a young writer.

The subject matter is adult, involving spouse abuse and unwed pregnancy. Upon returning to the home of an old lover, the main character discovered that her former lover had married poorly. His house is a wreck and his two children are cared for by a negligent wife who is conveniently swept out of the way to make room for Rom's former lover to become the next Mrs. Rom Snyder. She cleans up the house, bathes the children, and makes love to Rom, whose main pastime is drinking. Love and peace ensue in the household where the two lovers are reunited, but not for long. The new Mrs. Rom Snyder becomes pregnant, and her husband suspects she has been sleeping with his brother Kelly.

Kelly tries to seduce Mrs. Snyder, and he also impregnates a young girl in the community named Hazel. In turn, the new Mrs. Snyder suspects Rom has been sleeping with the very young Hazel. It seems the characters glory in making one another jealous to the point of violence. This jealousy dominates the action of the romance genre, and turns love affairs into full throttle action. These characters express one of the mountaineer's most well known literary traits. As a part of his staunch individualism, the fictional mountaineer temper was quick to flare "reckless of consequence" (Williams 329) when he considered an injustice was done him. Emotional and violent, the mountaineer portrayed in "The Love that Wouldn't Die" carried these elements into his marital relationships. Rom accuses his pregnant wife of cheating. Whose baby is it, he wants to know?

Unable to stop myself, I slapped him full in the face. That was my first mistake. I hardly saw his fist he swung so fast. I come to lying on the floor. I slowly raised up and stood, propped up by the table. I saw the broom and grasp it and swung it as hard as I could. That was my second mistake. I saw his fist and turned to run. I got to the bedroom before he caught me. He shoved me on the bed and leaned over me. He began to slap me back and forth through the face. I screamed and screamed until he put his hand over my mouth. "Are you afraid of me, he asked? Are you going to hit me anymore?" "No, I sobbed. I won't hit you and I'm afraid of you. I am Rom. (15)

In Mary Jane's stories, romances are both fed and destroyed by jealousy and violence. In this romance, the setting is a poorly run home with neglected children. Mountain family values are included in this love free-for-all. It is important to the "heroine" that the children are clean and fed and that the pregnant Hazel has help during childbirth. In this romance, the main female character has been to school and done well, and she is appalled at the home life shared by Rom and his wife and children.

Mary Jane's romance novels were fueled by the examples of the mature women surrounding her, especially by Ruby. In a letter to Colden, Ruby sets the stage for desperate, wasted love. Following are some of the sixteen reasons why Ruby says she is through with Colden forever. The letter reveals the depths of Ruby's despair, her effective writing ability, and her grasp of drama.

What a shame to throw my life away on you and for nothing... only for you and your whores. But you see now I know I don't love you anymore. But I was stupid enough to live with you on your terms.

9. Not sleep together

10. Not go anywhere with me

11. Not buy me anything

12. Not give me any money

13. Not even keep the spring running

14. Not mow yard or do anything

15. Let you go off and stay as long as you wanted to at whore houses

16. Then come on back home when you get ready and me not ask any questions about where you'd been or what you'd done. You thought I should be happy...not mad and I've played your game all this time. But no more. You know I told you if you ever left again you could just stay. But you left you came back like nothing had happened. Good for you. I'm through...you can't believe it...and I don't blame you for if I could ever have been that mean which I could not...no way could I ever do anybody like that right in front of them...The thing for you to do is for you to stay where you can sleep. But if you have got a conscience or a heart you'll never sleep another night...I told you that you will cry and cry like I have done so many years. You said Hell no... never. You will...in fact you'll lose your mind when you wake up and find out its real and that you have lost me forever. Good Bye. The saddest word in history besides death and that's final too.

("Letters" 1)

Jake Crump, Ruby's son, noted that "When she'd [Ruby] get drunk, she'd write about daddy. ... He slept in the woods half the time. She'd run him off all the time. She always wrote mean stuff. Always accusing him of going out with her sister. He never did. Didn't have time. He was too busy keeping her up. She was out runnin the roads" (Crump 2001). Ruby's bravado, her sense of being desperately wronged by her Colden, informs Mary Jane's series of short stories often played out in settings populated by moonshine stills.

Patterning her relationships after Ruby's, Mary Jane's many passionate relationships turned dangerously violent. In Mary Jane's early fiction, she continued the tradition of the whiskey making and love triangles. In the introduction to her family history, "Tamarack Tales," Mary Jane wrote: "For over two hundred years, my people, my dear brave strong ancestors have been living in the mountains, and had to fight 'her' for a meager living from the rocky soil. These beautiful, educated, sometimes cruel people who are one with the land" ("Tamarack Tales" 1) Her first stories, written in her teen years, naturally glorify the culture and downplay the "savagery" which was at the controversy that characterized early local color fiction. "Beautiful, educated, and sometimes cruel" is a complete stock character. Were local color writers making all of this stuff up in order to sell books? Or did this phrase have the ring of truth?

In 1958, "Thunder Road" played in drive-in theatres across the country. Written and directed by Robert Mitchum and based on a North Carolina newspaper account, this story of a fearless moonshine runner was immensely popular in the South, as popular as the 1970's story of race car driver Junior Johnson in the film version of "Last American Hero." "Thunder Road" made the rounds at drive-ins for the next ten years. The movie was a comment on how the mountaineer was at odds with the law and mainstream culture. The story of moonshining was not new in the fifties. Mary Jane could write about something she knew intimately from family stories. She had uncles and grandparents on both sides of her family who were arrested for moonshining and she could choose from a

personal cast of stereotypical characters. Her ancestors were caught up in the “prohibition fever” that infused the Appalachian hills with federal agents:

These heavily armed teams of local and national peace officers traversed hill and mountain in a never-ending campaign to destroy the stills and to arrest their operators. Thousands of mountaineers were arrested, tried and convicted in the Federal courts, and hundreds of them were sent in chartered railroad cars to the Federal penitentiaries at Atlanta and Leavenworth. So great was the number that the United States District Judges were compelled to probate most of them....”

(Caudill 154)

In her short story “Sammy” written when she was fourteen, the crazy daredevil Sam Potter outwits the law and brings home the much needed cash by hauling whiskey. “Dark eyed and dark haired [descended from Cherokee] and Oh, to be Sam Potter’s girl.” Sam is modeled after Roy and influenced by Mitchum’s hero. Mary Jane’s infatuation with him is so complete that following her separation from her husband she ran to Roy’s arms; he may have been the reason she did not return to her husband.

Sammy is also the name of the heroine in Harold Bell Wright’s well known local color novel and movie, The Shepherd of the Hills. Starring John Wayne and his dark leading lady, Betty Field, the movie includes the theme of moonshining, blood feuds, star-crossed lovers, and fear and rejection of the “stranger.” Fear of the outsider is a main theme in much local color literature. This 1941 production was nationally popular and like “Thunder Road” would have been well known in the mountains.

Young as she was when she penned "Sammy," Mary Jane pulls off the complicated structures of plot and character development. When Sammy refuses to let Laurie go with him on a nighttime liquor run, Laurie suspects him of cheating on her, and sets out to seek the woman who "has left cheap perfume on his shirt." This obsessive jealousy became a theme of Mary Jane's writing and her relationships. The belief that love is worth fighting and dying for is a tried and true literary theme, and the men and women in Mary Jane's family internalized this belief. Shakespeare would play well in Pottertown where Ruby and Mary Jane infused love with the power over life and death. "Sammy" created a culture of moonshine runners and dashing heroes and memorialized the mythic or real outlaw youth who would become the focus of Mary Jane's love.

Sam pressed hard on the gas pedal and sent a glance over his shoulder. He laughed. The cops were nowhere in sight. He sped on through the night fairly flying over the crooked road. He felt good. He always did. When he played with death like this he always won. No headlights gave sign of his black '55 Chevy. He knew this road from Mountain City maybe good enough to drive it with his eyes closed. He felt in his shirt pocket. The money felt good in his hands. \$400.00.

"This had been a good run" he told himself. (1)

By the age of fourteen, Mary Jane's elevation of lawlessness, love and betrayal are established in her fiction and informed by the real life drama of her mother Ruby and a large cast of law breaking uncles and aunts. The character in this story is named after

her Uncle Sam, and his son Roy is the object of her love. Sam Ellison appears in the criminal record as having killed two men.

In "Sammy" the female character refuses the sexual advances of her lover and this sends him into the arms of another woman. The young girl wrecks her car driving home from the "other woman's" den. All works out well in the end but she will not make the mistake of withholding her love again.

You don't ever give up do you Sammy," she asked. "No," he whispered, starting to kiss her again. She placed her fingertips on his lips. "We have to go darling," she told him, standing up. "No," he said half-mad and half-tickled. He grabbed her hand and jerked her down on his lap. She pushed against his chest and opened her mouth to speak but his kiss put her off. He finally released her shakily. She trembled as she said "Sammy, I love you. Always." He gave the same response he always did, "Prove it." He never said I love you. (2)

Sammy's character reappears in "Scout by Scarlet Angel." Again, a mountaineer goes against the odds in this Civil War love story. The border between North Carolina and east Tennessee where Mary Jane's ancestors lived was the site of much contention, murder and displacement during the war. In this story when her lover says "prove it ... let me know what your love is really like" the female character does not hesitate. Like the whiskey making, the love triangles, and the shooting, the war informs plot and character development. The Civil War tore apart families on both sides of the mountain range.

“Making Whiskey” is written in dialect in the tradition of much local color fiction. Mary Jane refers to her family history in this brief factual essay:

Several years ago back in the Blue Ridge Mountains, there lived a family called by the name of Ellison. There are many funny and some less comical things that happened to them. The family headed by Dave and Victoria had children, Don, Will, Jake, Eaf, Pink, Mary, Tempy, Sam and Hazel, in that order. I don't know the small details but I'll try to fill them in as I think they were. The first of these incidents is called “Granny's Clothes”

It seemed that Dave Ellison wasn't satisfied with the good things he had. He wanted a little more so he decided to make a run or two of whiskey. He said it was for the flu epidemic going around, but that's still to be known for sure. Any way, Jake, one of Dave's boys being afraid of the law, came upon an idea to disguise himself. He finally decided to get his granny's clothes and wear them. A few days later, very late one night the Ellison bunch were making a run. Now a certain person, Steelie Snyder, was snooping around through the woods, coon hunting he said, and come upon the mountain men. Steelie, for no reason at all, swore out a warrant on my ancestors. He said Dave, one of his young boys, and Vicky were making whiskey. He was sure about Vick because he saw her in the firelight. Well, word got around and Granny found out. She went directly to Steelie, and boy did he get his. Granny, usually a quiet person, went all out. She used profanities hard and fast. She's quoted as saying, “If you go to Boone and

swear I was making liquor, I'll shoot you." Not wanting to get mixed up with the authorities, my folks moved directly to Mountain City Tennessee. ("Untitled Short Story 9")

"Making Whiskey" is written in dialect and patterned after a real life character mentioned in historical monographs. The Snyders were notorious for their involvement in intricate political and legal relationships surrounding the whiskey trade on the North Fork of the New River (Crawford 171).

"Birchie, and me and you, Lee is gonna shoot that old buzzard if he finds our still up there." When Leeland seems reluctant to go gunning, Jonnie calls him a coward. "She is not unlike women in the Snyder family known for their meanness. Jonnie has a gun and plenty of nerve, more than most men apparently (1).

In "Making Whiskey," her female character becomes fully empowered, a girl who "minded her folks out of old fashioned respect and love, but nobody told her what to do" (1). The passive female, who populates much local color fiction and who pines for an exotic stranger to save her, is transformed by Mary Jane into a powerful figure. In general, modern writers engaging in local color elements focus on transformation and empowerment. In this story, which Mary Jane planned to extend into long fiction, two men are in love with Jonnie and she must choose. (The three are united by the daily operation of the still to earn income.) Leeland saves money for a get-a-way to Maryland where "no one will look down on them or call them hicks or laugh because they were

poor” (3). This expresses Mary Jane’s feelings about her financial and her social position. She possessed none of the middle class advantages. She never hoped to.

At fourteen, Mary Jane was utilizing regional dialogue and interpreting and documenting her culture. While I was busy writing formal love poems and songs by mimicking the British tradition, Mary Jane had made a fast start out of the fiction writing gate. She was writing about domestic violence and betrayal, not wedding gowns. Her actual informal wedding at sixteen was followed by a visit at the local country store for a “pop and a cake” and then a drive up the mountain to Three Top. She had seen bitter and violent love in action in her mother’s marriage to Colden Crump, a “relationship that ended the saddest word in history besides death and that’s final too,” Ruby wrote (“Letters” 1).

Influences from family history and local color fiction combined with Mary Jane’s understanding of mass media and its hunger for the hillbilly motif to contribute to the subject matter and tone of her poems and short stories. She was writing what she knew and she was following a long standing tradition of local color writers who had paved the way before her. She was preserving the image of the mountaineer described by the fictive accounts documented in Cratis William’s dissertation, “The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction.” The historical image did not mesh totally with the reality of her life experience. She was a mountain woman in transition, and that transition shaped a dramatic and conflicting reality.

Cratis Williams describes the process whereby local color fiction writing transformed the image of the southern mountaineer:

From the point of view of the social observer, the mountaineer historically conceived has fallen ignominiously from the proud position he occupied as a type of intelligent and resourceful Scotch-Irish pioneer, disdainful of servitude, jealous of his freedom and individuality, generous and leisurely but thrifty down to about 1840 through a century marked by growing poverty, increasing ignorance, physical and moral degradation, and decay of self-respect until at about the time of World War II he is hardly identifiable as the mountaineer of old but is, in the main, undifferentiated from such socio-economic groups as the poor whites and the Oakies... At least "hillbilly," which was originally the name given to poor whites from the sand hills of Alabama, is applicable to him too. (Williams 177)

Local color fiction traveled from the late seventeen hundreds to the twenty first century and influenced contemporary fiction writers like Lee Smith, Sharon McCrumb, Robert Morgan, and many others, all of whom, like Mary Jane, were early participants in the Hindman Settlement School Appalachian Writer's Conference ("Four Women" 271). Mary Jane participated in a movement that may be one of the largest and most critically ignored by other writing movements in the western literary canon in the history of American fiction, according to regional scholars like Cratis Williams who meticulously documented this movement in The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction. Jim Wayne Miller, poet and regional literary critic, further developed this concept in his essay

“People Waking Up” used to introduce chapters of Williams’ thesis reprinted by the Appalachian Journal (Miller 1989).

Mary Jane was exploring her own skill as a writer within a genre popularized in the mass media. Many modern day southern mountain writers work in an updated and informed version of the local color genre. Lee Smith, a nationally popular regional writer, studied the local color romance and used it to set subject matter, tone, plot formation and character in Oral History. These early local color characters born in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds were identified, analyzed, and intricately compared and contrasted in Williams’ The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

Emerging from an Oral Tradition

Mary Jane's first literary experiences were the ballads and the stories she heard at Mary Kincaid's knee. The oral tradition is strong in the early Ellison family history. On Beech Mountain, the Jack Tales and the old ballads were being collected. Ballads were sung and stories were told in Pottertown as well. Due to the outstanding nature of the stories of murders in Pottertown, the murder ballads prevailed. Mary Jane passed on this oral tradition to daughter Caroline who is now the keeper of many of the stories. Mary Jane's recounted the tales of violence as well as family stories of life on the mountain. Bessie Eldreth, a ghost teller from Meat Camp, mixed song and story in performance, choosing murder ballads and tales of men who approached young girls. Mary Jane experienced the rich ballad tradition cherished in the Ellison family and incorporated it into her storytelling, making sure that her children and grandchildren would inherit the narratives.

The singing of the ballads imparted an innate sense of narrative construction to the young Mary Jane. Both she and her mother used this skill in poems, songs, and fiction. "The Ballad of Frankie Silvers" stands out in her memory because her Granny Mary Kincaid would sing the ballad to Mary Jane, her sister Rebecca, and her little brother Jake. In 1831, Francis Stewart Silver reportedly murdered her sleeping husband

and was the only woman hung after North Carolina gained statehood. Mary Jane recalled the part of the performance that she and her siblings always keenly anticipate: “the best part, where Granny Kincaid had seen Frankie’s feet hanging down below the crude boards covering the gallows; then how she had kicked about, struggling and dying” (“Ballad Tradition” 9).

As a child I heard many ballad songs at my granny’s knee. Some of my favorites and certainly best remembered were the gory murder ballads of mountain folk in North Carolina. Many of these songs were sung by my great grandparents around the fire at night to entertain and give a person a lesson in morality. People could sit in the security of their homes and feel the absolutely delicious chill of horror at the singing of songs and the discussions about the events the songs were based on. Quite often a family member would know someone related to the murderous event or have been to the trial or hanging. A grandmother of my great uncle Henry Kincaid was present at the hanging of Frankie Silvers.

Grandma Sanders on my Mama’s side of the family attended the trial of Tom Dula. The daughter of Lillie Shaw’s murderer did my grandfather Ellison’s laundry for some time and would sing the ballad for her. This was during the twenties when they lived in Mountain City Tennessee. My grandma Ellison talks about how her mother would go about her housework singing the “Pearly Bryan” ballad. As a child I had no idea who poor Ellen Smith was but I enjoyed the sound of the first two lines of one version of the song and would go about singing “Poor

Ellen Smith, where was she found? Shot through the heart lying cold on the ground”

These murder ballads appealed to that part of me that wanted to be scared out of my wits, and the real mournful tunes reminded me of hidden coves and hollows where the wind moaned and cried and innocent, trusting girls lost their lives. I was always saddened that there was no one to weep and just little birds to mourn Pretty Polly’s death.

The songs were always somewhat alike probably all being based on the typical murder ballad “The Windford Girl.” The ballad formula usually followed a pattern and they were made up by some local singer during the highly emotional times just after the murder or during the trial. The girls were usually beautiful, innocent and trusting as was “Omi Wise...” (2-3)

These ballads acquire an even greater significance in a retrospective of Mary Jane’s life. They provided themes for her writing, literary models, and warnings of trials to come, and they were pertinent to her own experiences with love. There may be a point in which the mythology the ballads transmitted contributed to her idea of tragic love. The question of tradition’s dual role, how it harms or heals, is central to our understanding of Mary Jane’s death. Her culture was the source of both her strength and her weakness.

Mary Jane recalled that when “Granny” Mary had finished singing her the ballad she would say “See, no one wants a bad girl.” Mary Jane was well aware of murder ballads that specified particular crimes where young pregnant girls were killed and their

deaths not avenged. She noted that murder victim Stella Kenney was living with an uncle when she was impregnated and a bloody hatchet was found in the uncle's buggy. Frazier, the convicted man, was pardoned by the governor (6). Murder is still a major killer of pregnant women today; the ballads must have taken on a serious tone in areas where murderers were known. In Pottertown, there was danger for naïve young girls who did not heed the warnings offered by the ballads. The setting for Mary Kincaid's ballads was the natural context for the mountain ballad; she sang them to teach and to entertain. Often in the ballads, the burden for remaining "pure" was placed on the shoulders of the young girls. Don't be seduced, they warned. One of her own songs, "Two Lane Woman on a Four Lane Road," is the story of a woman who settles for love with a married man and turns to the bottle for comfort.

In one of her most poignant short stories, Mary Jane describes the setting for the singing of "The Three Babes," a ballad that has particular significance in Mary Jane's family history. This story tells how Mary Jane's mother Ruby was given away to a childless aunt upon the early death of her father, Jake Ellison. The "Song Giver" introduces us to the context of the ballads sung within her family tradition. No song could address the loss suffered by Ruby and Mary Jane more effectively than "The Three Babes," (Song Giver 3) the tale of three small children sent away from their mother only to wind up meeting an unhappy fate.

Little Ruby not only lost her father early to lung disease, she was taken from her mother and carried down the mountain to live in Lenoir. Mary Jane made a notation in

the margin of "The Song Giver." She penned: "She [Ruby] never got over her mama giving her away. If your own mama don't love you who can?" (1). Abandonment is a theme in Mary Jane's collection. The story of "The Song Giver" is set on the Long Hope Mountain in the hours after Jake Ellison's death. This story is of primary value in Mary Jane's work because it introduces the theme of abandonment and details how families were often broken up by the death of a spouse. Faced with the decision to let one of the girls go, either little Fern or Ruby, Ruby's mother decides to send Ruby to Ma Mary. Ruby has so little to pack that she travels lightly and immediately through the woods with only her two little dresses wrapped in a paper bag. This scene details the economic situation in Vivian and Jake Ellison's household. "Ruby's two dresses were put in a paper bag and her hair combed and her face washed. She had neither shoes nor other clothes to pack." Her sister Fern objects saying that Ruby can't go because "she ain't got no drawers" (8).

The ballad becomes representative of the story of the three babies given away at birth; three generations of Ellison children who were sent away from their mothers. This tradition of separation gives greater meaning and purpose to the ballad used to comfort little Ruby as she is taken away weeping from her home, not even given time to grieve with her sister Fern and brother Clyde.

Little Ruby is not allowed in to see her father or mother in this powerful scene told from a child's viewpoint:

They'd kept her out of the house, her and Clyde and the little younguns. She'd heard mom screamin' and cryin' and wanted to go inside to see what was wrong but old hateful Sairy Snyder has blocked her way. Sairy, with Glen and the baby on her hip got Clyde, the oldest boy by the shoulder and pushed him out the door ahead of her with him pushin to get back in. "Let me in there, Aunt Sairy," he hollered, "somethins' wrong with dad. You let me in there." (1)

Clyde finds out that his father has died and runs out to the woods where Sairy has taken Ruby. He tells her "dad's dead." Ruby is not old enough to fully understand what that means. The children meet members of the Ellison family coming up the hill. Lizzie, the daughter of Uncle Will, comes to take Ruby to their home on Ole Lonesome. Lizzie Ellison sings "The Three Babes," which she has learned from her grandfather, David Ellison:

"Dad's dead" she [Ruby] whispered. "Oh, Lordy," thought Lizzie. "I can't stand to see the poor little thing cry. I'll carry you on my back if you let me." Lizzie offered, but still Ruby shook her bowed head and more tears fell on her hand and rolled on the ground. "Oh, Lordy, Honey, don't cry," Lizzie begged. "Uncle Jake's gone to heaven and lots of people die, all the time. Remember the Three Little Babes? I'll sing that for you if you'll hush crying." Ruby nodded yes and relieved, Lizzie began to sing the old song she learned from Grandpa David, a song about a lady bride sending her three little babes to the North Country where

they died. The song was sad but it was Ruby's favorite and she stood up after Lizzie finished and together they climbed Ole Lonesome. (7)

"The Song Giver" conveys a family history of the death of Jake Ellison. It delivers the emotional impact this death imposed on Jake and Vivian's children. The ill feelings between the Snyders and Ellison are manifest in this death. The Ellisons insisted that Vivian was unfit to raise her children. The Ellisons also believed that Vivian worked her husband to death.

In the powerful Child ballad, the children's departure from their mother ended in their death. Even as ghosts they could not forgive their mother for slighting them.

Three Little Babes

There was a knight and a lady bride

And children she had three

She sent them off to the North Country

For to learn their grammery

For to learn their grammery

They hadn't been gone but a very short while

Scarce three months and one day

When death swept over that whole land

And swept those babes away

And swept those babes away

She placed a table before them

Spread over with bread and wine
Said come and eat my three little babes
Come eat and drink of wine
Come eat and drink of wine
I will not eat your bread mama
Nor will I drink your wine
For in the morning at the break of day
Our savior we must jine
Our savior we must jine.
She made them a bed in the back most room
Spread over with clean sheets
And over that spread a linen cloth
For to give them better sleep
For to give them better sleep
Take it off, take it off, said the oldest one
Take if off I said again
For woe, woe be to this wicked world
So long since pride began
So long since pride began
("Tamarack Tales" 23)

Mary Kincaid and Uncle Will Ellison were the primary transmitters of the family ballad tradition. Mary Jane wrote that Will's daughter Lizzie "gave" this version of the ballad to her, that she wrote the words down in order to learn it accurately and sang it repeatedly to get the tune right.

Living in Granny Mary's household planted the seed of creativity in Mary Jane. Visiting the mountains and hearing the stories and ballads gave her inspiration. Mary Jane could attend school, grow up in a sheltering home, and have time to be a playful and creative child. She wrote that one of her earliest memories was dictating letters for Granny Mary to write down.

Before I could write myself, when I was just four or five years old, I'd have granny write down things I'd say. I'd tell her what to put in letters and I'd write to Tarzan and Margaret Truman. I thought she mailed them too. I used to ask Margaret Truman for her clothes and I wanted Tarzan to come and see me. Granny and Grandpa helped raise me and I was a good quiet child. I guess I did all my living through my writin' ("untitled short story 5" 1).

Mary Jane did not spend her childhood on the mountain immersed in the violent generational turmoil of the Snyders and Ellisons, or in Lenoir caught up in her mother Ruby's dramatic existence with Colden, but she witnessed both first hand. This distance allowed her an enriched environment. A tradition of oral song and narrative combined with the nurturing of Mary and Henry Kincaid to produce an artist child. Mary Jane was a natural writer.

Bobby McMillan, local balladeer and storyteller and author of The Ballad of Frankie Silver, knew Mary Jane and observed that the strong writing and storytelling traditions in the mountains grew out of “a little romanticism and a Celtic heritage that was half in this world and half in the next” (McMillan 2004). Mary Jane’s coming to art was typical of the experience of many regional writers. Children who spent a great deal of time in the natural world and being entertained by oral tradition came to possess the tools of literature, music, or art learned through observation. Naturally, Mary Jane gravitated toward reading novels, poetry, and short stories for entertainment, and trying her hand at creation. Television had not taken over the entertainment in the home while Mary Jane was a young child in Mary and Henry Kincaid’s household.

CHAPTER FOUR Academic Writing

“The Divided Life”

I guess I'd never had gone any further in school if Mrs. Bishop hadn't sent that paper I did on mountain folks up to the University. Boy, I just broke down and cried when I got the letter from the Special Assistant to the Dean. He encouraged me to go on to school, and then when I found out there was a field of study all about mountain folks; well, that just put the icing on the cake. I was ready and rarin' to go. (14)

Mary Jane came into a very specialized academic curriculum in 1979 when she transferred to Appalachian State University's Appalachian Studies Program as an undergraduate. She spent two years at Caldwell Community College in Lenoir, four years at ASU completing her undergraduate degree, and another four earning her masters – a total of ten years. She studied the history, culture, folklore, politics, sociology, and anthropology of mountain people in the eastern United States. Alongside her fieldwork in partnership with Patricia Beaver, Director of the masters program in Appalachian Studies, Mary Jane produced a body of academic writing centered on her family history and folklore, and discussed the importance of family in the development of the individual

struggling to survive transition into modern life. This theme was the subject of her poetry as well, as it was for so many mountain poets springing up in the hills during the seventies and eighties.

Mary Jane was seeking ethnic redemption through academic community. She was the first woman in eight generations of women in her family to attend college (Wrye 20). Other cultural studies, including Black studies, Cherokee studies, and women's and gender studies, reveal social injustices and provide a redemptive process. The founding and evolution of the Appalachian Studies program exemplifies a unique form of academic truth seeking. The story of the Appalachian Studies Center at Appalachian State University can be viewed in an intimate way through the lens of Mary Jane's life.

When prospective student Mary Jane Brooks came to the Center's cofounder and director, Patricia Beaver, in the early 80s, she came bearing " 'Tamarack Tales' " and a confession" (Beaver 2003). Mary Jane had heard that ASU was offering a curriculum in local culture. She saw a chance to advance the cause of mountain people and embraced it. "I am not a student like other students," she told Beaver. It was true that Mary Jane came to community college through unusual circumstances as a court referral, but she was a willing candidate for the program. Mary Jane completed her two years at Caldwell Community College, and then transferred to Appalachian.

It never occurred to Beaver not to accept her as a student. She was in fact, the very kind of student who needed to come (Beaver 2003). Beaver's acceptance of Mary Jane demonstrated her signature open door pedagogy: accepting every student's individual gifts and goals and allowing those gifts to guide curriculum directions. Mary

Jane naturally emerged as a leader in her program. Mary Jane spoke with authority about being raised female and poor in a rich cultural milieu. "Women are often denigrated by cultural providers," Mary Jane observed. Beaver noted that Mary Jane was good at understanding the social and education programs that mountain women needed. Together, she and Mary Jane rallied for women's health issues, focused on women's literature, and explored the economic and spiritual needs of women in the community.

While completing her undergraduate degree and her masters, Mary Jane was moving back and forth between her own intimate world at Pottertown and the academic world at ASU, according to her professor and mentor Patricia Beaver. She was living the kind of divided life that Cratis Williams, dean of the graduate school at ASU, and father of Appalachian Studies, wrote about in his memoirs published in 2003 by Beaver and David Williams and talked about in the film which documents his life growing up in Louisa, Kentucky (Johnson 1999).

Cratis Williams created a successful career based on a childhood experience, the murder of a local school teacher and the reaction it caused in the community. As a small boy, he overheard his father lamenting the death of the one-room school teacher, saying that his children were not meant to have an education, and that he would spend the rest of his life working to see that his own children could go to school (Williams 2003, 242). Little Cratis Williams decided he would fulfill his father's dream. He went to school and he did well. He even skipped grades to get to high school in Louisa, Kentucky, where he first began his "divided life" (Johnson 1999).

Cratis Williams' speech, typical of the community he had grown up in, was ridiculed by his teacher and his classmates in the county seat town of Louisa. In a classroom exercise, he was made to repeat himself several times in order to recognize a reading error and was finally told "it's 'it' not 'hit'" when he kept saying "hit" (Johnson 1999). This experience was a common problem for students throughout the Appalachian region. It was a part of my own educational experience, and is still common in today's school systems and community colleges where students are told to lose their mountain speech if they want to succeed. In Creeker, Linda Scott Derosier noted that "Outsiders use our dialect to peg or recognize us, while we use it to figure out and establish who we are" (Derosier 1999, 3). As an older man, Cratis Williams' memory of that experience of being humiliated by recognition and ridicule of his Appalachian "otherness" was just as vivid as it had been all those years earlier. After he left his home community to attend high school, he recognized that "from there on I lived a divided life. I had a cultural existence in the jazz age with my high school friends in the county seat, and when I returned home for the summer ... I couldn't mix the two" (Johnson 1999). Williams noted a great disparity between life in school in a county seat town and life "on the creek." It necessitated a divided life. You couldn't take the sophisticated talk home with you, he believed.

Mary Jane was living the divided life that Williams described, forming a persona appropriate to her role as a nontraditional college student. Williams had reached out to Mary Jane, inviting her to come into the Appalachian Studies program. Mary Jane was building an alternate identity from the costumes in her private "closet," and there were

several identities to choose from. Her folklore professor Tom McGowan noted the granny dresses she wore under sweaters were a part of her costume. Mary Jane's clothes during the year we were both in the program, like mine, were handed down by friends or bought second hand. Her daughter Caroline related a humorous story of the time she picked Mary Jane up at the Green Park Inn, and found her wearing a red evening gown, tennis shoes, and Mickey Mouse sunglasses. Mary Jane dyed her hair red, and was good at making up her face. She was conscious of keeping her weight low; probably not hard to do considering her habit of taking speed in her college years.

Mary Jane was a very sexual person concealing that identity behind the granny dresses she wore to class. She was sexually aggressive, (Woodard 2004, Douglass 2004, Smith 2004, Kerce 2004) but when she returned to the university in 1999 she capitalized on an identity that folklorist Tom McGowan referred to as the Widder Brooks. Her husband Ronnie, a Lumbee Indian from Lumberton, had been shot and killed in a drunken altercation. I asked her former professor, ASU anthropologist Greg Reck, to talk about the identity Mary Jane projected.

I always felt like there was some dramatization of herself and her background and she certainly, whether it was a completely accurate presentation or whether it was somewhat constructed, reveled in her role as someone radically different. Being in a university environment, which is in some ways an elitist environment, although here at ASU that is diminished somewhat, I think, she relished that view of herself as different from and distinct from average students. In some ways, of course, she was. Her background was very unusual given the norm of what an ASU student is

all about. I think she relished that somewhat although it was also a kind of tragic relishing at the same time. She presented herself as a tragic figure.

She talked a lot about her hard times, which again, were real. I'm not saying they were constructed. When you look at research on self-concept and self-presentation, we all construct ourselves publicly. There is a certain amount of truth and fact in that construction, and there is a certain amount of mythology and fantasy depending upon who we are interacting with, and how we want to present ourselves at that point in time...Her presentation of herself was as a local person who in some ways had made good because of where she was. She definitely relished that kind of outlaw view of herself ...it served a purpose for her here when she got into Appalachian Studies. Because of her background, constructed out of truth, out of mythology, she fit in really well with that, and she was seen by a lot of people here as an authentic Appalachian person in some way. She was a very capable student and a very good writer, but I think that [persona] played to her advantage. What she got from people here may have actually reinforced that mythology in her. (Reck 2004)

Mary Jane also suffered because of her designation as an outlaw hillbilly, according to her friend Terry Moretz. This kind of otherness looked down upon by main stream culture caused Mary Jane to feel humiliated at times (Moretz 2004). Any review of the program's history needs to contain the question, does Appalachian Studies perpetuate and reinforce mountain myth? What role did ASU play, if any, in keeping Pottertown isolated during the early years?

It is common for students entering the program to emphasize their level of “Appalachianness.” Graduate student Paul Robertson, whose thesis also explored Appalachian cultural identity, discussed his entrance into the program. It is ironic that we embrace and fiercely defend mountain culture while identifying with mountain stereotypes. How stereotypes are born, extended, and embraced or denied is revealed through student behavior in the Appalachian Studies program. Here’s another little vignette, and I don’t know if your cohort went through this. I was talking to Fred Hay, [librarian for the Appalachian Collection] one day about it. There was this posturing when my cohort came in. We still didn’t know each other, were getting to know each other, and Fred agreed with me that it seemed like every cohort did this, where you struggle, posture to see who’s the most Appalachian, and throw your credentials out as in “I’m the trashiest.” We had this – we got Alice [pseudonym], she’s throwin out all of her stuff. She was a sharecropper’s daughter and had this abusive alcoholic father. My grandfather from what I can understand – I am probably integrating the stories from my own mythology, and it’s horrible for me to use this – but the thing that I used to establish my credentials was that my grandfather who passed away goes to the house [his girlfriend’s] one night and he says, “I’ve come to get your daughter. Basically her father’s like “the hell you say,” and my grandfather proceeds to beat his ass in front of his whole family. He beats him down, and takes his daughter, and drives to South Carolina where the marriage age was low enough to marry my grandmother. (Robertson 2004)

Mary Jane exemplified this kind of posturing. The poor Widder Brooks was a fantasy image, but it served Mary Jane's purposes when she returned to seek a second masters in English in 1999. She and husband Ronnie Brooks fought bitterly, and had Ronnie Brooks survived being shot, one of them would have wound up shooting the other (Woodard 2004). This persona as a grieving widow gave Mary Jane respectability and sympathy. She was a survivor. She could run with the outlaws in Pottertown and Lenoir, or with the students in the classroom. In the Appalachian Studies community, she brought her own viewpoint to bear on the history and the culture of mountain people. At ASU, Mary Jane transcended her addiction to drugs and alcohol and seriously toned down most of her risky behavior. Her academic years allowed her the security to read and write, and nurtured her academic side. She produced most of her writing while she was either a high school or college student. Her best and strongest self emerged from the classroom. Each time she returned to academics, she engaged in a lifelong relationship with the art of writing.

Tamarack Tales

An introduction to Mary Jane Brooks' family genealogy and her life in Pottertown, "Tamarack Tales," presented her family history to her readers and her teachers. Prefaced by a map, her stories are set in real as well as mythic time. Mary Jane lists the names of the families living in thirty homes, notes important buildings including churches and stores, and maps geographic features including creeks, paved roads, and gravel roads. In her introduction, she writes "I will try to share some of my heritage with you. These beautiful, uneducated, sometimes cruel people who are one with the land, the old people

who came before me to make a place in the life scheme” (1) Mary Jane was aware, as was Beaver and most of Mary Jane’s other professors, that Pottertown was known as a violent and lawless place. Greg Reck noted that when he first arrived in Boone, he was regaled with tales of violence in Pottertown. “Tamarack Tales” countered the stereotypes by giving life histories of its residents.

How much of Pottertown’s reputation was deserved? Pottertown, where Mary Jane’s family had lived for generations, grew in reputation for its lawlessness due to the elaborate and “creative” state press given to two men, Clarence and Boone Potter. When Boone and Clarence Potter were indicted for murdering a “deputy,” it was a shooting event that shaped the history of Pottertown as a place of lawlessness and violence, and overshadowed the Snyder and Ellison family contribution to the notoriety of the community. Perhaps Clarence and Boone Potter were linked to more murders, but for diversity and consistency of violence and vice, the Snyders and Ellisons reigned; they were very much the type of outlaw heroes who reached mythic proportions in the early west, as several Appalachian scholars have observed.

Tom Rusher’s book, Until He Is Dead, has been the first attempt to explain the legal backdrop for the media frenzy surrounding the famous murder trial that took place in Pottertown in the early nineteen hundreds. Rusher points out that at the time the shootings took place, Pottertown had a reputation as a place where peace officers did not relish delivering warrants. The early killings, described by James Marvin Potter, as “nine killings within 500 yards of space,” set the tone for the next hundred years. Note that Ellisons and Snyders are key players in this shooting history:

Within a span of about 500 yards there have been nine killings. This is the place where Sam Ellison killed Howard Hockaday, and over there Glen Brown killed Birchie Potter, and at this place Boone Potter killed his father, and over there the Snyder brothers killed their father, Wib. This is where Campbell was killed and Broom killed there. Boone and Clarence Potter killed the deputy, Howell, at this spot and shortly up the road is where the posse killed Boone. I think the reason for all these killings is because the people here were suspicious of outsiders. (179)

Local sympathies lay with Clarence Potter, Rusher stated. The Potters were victimized in the state press. Not even the major papers were able to get the story right. The case was complicated, but it was presented as a cut and dried account of the act of a killer, disregarding the circumstances of the arrest that prompted the killing, or the ill will that circulated between the players. As in the stories of the old west, the Potter legacy was created and disseminated by the journalists' fictionalizing of real events. Boone and Clarence Potter became legendary, and Pottertown proceeded to build upon its identity as the land of lawlessness.

Rusher discusses several murders and a host of crimes punished by the death penalty. Among them are the shooting of Ephraim Ellison, Mary Jane's uncle, by Doc Main who also killed his wife and daughter then committed suicide, and the Snyder sons who shot their womanizing father, Wib, at their mother's bequest. The reputation that Pottertown won was much deserved due to the Ellisons and the Snyders as well as the Potters. Clearly, the fantastic accounts of lawlessness portrayed in local color fiction were grounded in the reality of an evolving justice system in isolated rural neighborhoods.

Pottertown was stigmatized locally. Rusher spoke to the stereotype in an interview:

I think things perhaps were different. We were so isolated and people were so self-reliant and necessarily so. They had to depend on their own resources and it would be difficult for a person living in Pottertown to have any kind of expectancy that the sheriff would come out and be of assistance to him. So what you had, I think, was what I refer to as self help where people did things for themselves ... I guess if you're looking at it during the period I looked at it in the book. The sheriff was afraid to go there. The traditional law enforcement officers were afraid to go there. And I think it continued up until the decade of the 1970s. I recall instances when I first came here when the sheriff would go out there, and he would generally have several deputies with him. He was physically big, a strong World War I vet. In my early days I was told that law enforcement generally did not go out there anymore. (2004)

Rusher explained the pattern of criminal activity illustrated by the family history of the Ellisons and the Snyders. He believes that nurture overruled nature where the history of Pottertown was concerned:

Crime is environmental. As a prosecutor for thirty-four years, it was easy to notice that people you prosecuted thirty-four years ago have children now who are being prosecuted. There are a lot of Potters I know who are really superb people. I won't say a lot. I know some. If you look at criminal court dockets, you will see repeat offenders over and over, and it's generational. People who were not taught

to have respect for the law, people who were taught to be offenders, typically grow up that way. (2004)

During her academic career, Mary Jane began to fully explore her Pottertown heritage by compiling Tamarack Tales. She interviewed her "Granny Mary" to glean details of her family history. Mary Kincaid was raised in a large two story house with "bullet holes in the wall where Boone Potter and Bill Hamby had fought until Boone was dead" (4). The subject of Boone Potter is entwined with Mary Jane's own family culture of violence. Her Snyder ancestors feuded with the Potters and were joined in marriage when Sam Ellison, one of her ancestors, married Nancy Potter.

Mary Jane tells how her Uncle Sam Ellison (whose son was her first love, Roy) who "loved to drink, and laugh a lot," killed his first enemy:

One day in 1951 a man came to Sam's house and called him out. The neighbor had been cussing Sam's children as they passed his yard and the men had words over this... Never one to beat a man to death with words, Sam drew his gun and shot the man twice in the chest. The man turned to run, and caught the third bullet in his back. Because of this, the shooting was not termed self defense. "Peck" Holshouser, his attorney, and father to Jim Holshouser, got Sam off with one year's time and several year's parole. (14)

Sam shot a second man who came to his door, a distant cousin, and the shooting was termed self defense according to Mary Jane's account. Sam's story is typical behavior where his brothers are concerned. Mary Jane tells the story of Sam's brother, Eaf, who was shot to death by Doc Main. Main then went home, shot his own wife and

daughter to keep them from leaving him, and turned the gun on himself. Eaf Ellison had apparently befriended Doc Main's wife and daughter. While Main was dying in the hospital, Eaf's brother Pink Ellison, (whose daughter Hazel committed suicide) snuck into the hospital with a knife, but was prevented from taking his revenge on Main. In "Tamarack Tales," Mary Jane recounts the well known story of Boone and Clarence Potter, outlaws who became local legends, and then she turns to the Snyder side of the family to recount the Snyder-Ellison feud in "Feuds: Inheritance of Death." She uses the names Smith and Jones to represent the Snyders and the Ellisons:

Around 1915 Wilburn was in his fifties. He was my great-great-grandfather on the "Smith" side. David Jones was my great-grandfather on my other side. Wib was, according to conversations I had with his grandchildren, a mean person. One of the grandsons told me he wouldn't discuss family history with me but that "Wib was the meanest son-of-a-bitch that ever lived." Wib would, according to witnesses, shake his fist at heaven and dare God to strike him down. The hard feelings began when Wib tried to run away with a young girl in the community. She had been my grandmother's Sunday school teacher and was a good girl. The girl didn't want to go with him, and he was literally forcing her to walk with him up the road out of the community to cross Long Hope Mountain. He planned to go down to Todd to the small railroad station and leave on the train. Someone in the community saw what was happening and went to tell his wife. She sent two of her sons, one of them my great-grandfather, to catch up with Wib and shoot him. This woman was known to be pretty mean herself. The boys,

grown men, did as she told them. They caught up with Wib and the girl and they both shot him [at the same time] and he died.

On the other side of the family, David [Ellison] was the Justice of Peace in the community. He went up on the mountain with some other men and carried the dead man home. He then sent for the Sheriff in Boone and told him what had happened. The sons didn't run away, saying they didn't know who killed their father since they had both shot him. The fact that Wib was kidnapping the girl satisfied authorities and Wib's sons got off with short prison sentences. The Smith side felt justified in what they did, and had hard feelings for David because he brought the law into the situation. Over a period of some forty years the Smith men and the Jones men had hard feelings toward each other and shot at each other but no one was killed until fifteen years ago.

In 1918 the families were joined by marriage when Grandpa Jacob married Vivian. David begged his son not to marry into the Smith family, but he did anyhow. It wasn't a happy union and Grandpa Jacob died in his early thirties. My mama was six at the time and went to live with her aunt Mary, Jacob's sister. This is the woman I called Granny. I saw my biological grandmother only a half a dozen times in my life. My Mama was raised by Mary and Henry off the mountain." (12)

Mary Jane ends her account of the violence here, but the genealogy she provides expands into a series of shootings and suicides on both sides of the Snyder and Ellison families. Mary Jane begins "Tamarack Tales" with a description of her independent, hard living,

sharp shooting ancestors. Cratis Williams noted that the mountaineers' "extreme individualism coupled at once with his disregard for law and his self-reliance was the soil out of which feuds grew" (320). Williams understood first hand the symbol of the gun. Williams family photographs show men posing with pistols pointed at each other. Harry Caudill likewise noted that "Winchester rifles and large-caliber pistols were favorite weapons of the moonshiners and were never far from their hands" (Caudill 155).

In her description of her Uncle Will Ellison, Mary Jane embodies the gun culture and records the difficult transition her ancestors made from their home on the Long Hope to the community at the foot of the mountain.

After Vick's Chemical Company bought the mountain they put up a big gate. They gave Uncle Will a key, but later took it back under the pretense of making a new one. The caretaker didn't give Uncle Will the new key, so he simply got in the old truck, drove up the mountain, and shot the lock off...

Uncle Will wore a huge "45" on his hip at all times. He had a small antique shop after he grew older, and the pistol on his hip helped keep would-be thieves away. As he grew older his health declined and he could no longer travel his beloved mountain. He would talk for hours about the old days when he lived on Long Hope. He died in 1970 from heart trouble, and I believe, grief, because he could no longer travel Longhope With this old mountain man's passion, a way of life has gone. Modern day civilization was crowding him and he dwelt completely in his past in his last years...His fierce love and complete oneness with the mountain lives on in a few members of our family. I for one am trying,

and if love is enough, then someday I will achieve the communication he had with Long Hope. (13)

Mary Jane had been writing since she learned to read, had written her way through several romance stories and novellas, and had moved on to write academic essays and poems. Family narrative remained her favorite form. She published stories and poems in regional journals. She did not sensationalize her family's violent history. She presented the history in her treatment of feuding and she defended it:

Again, I want to say that I don't advocate murder, but loyalty to family and fighting was a culture I grew up in. Guns were always in our homes. My mother, sister and brother all carried guns. My children carry pistols at all times. I never allowed anything other than a hunting rifle in my home and have never carried a gun. [In later years she packed a gun and a knife]. I was raised very aware of what could happen when people have guns and know there is a part of me that at certain times could have shot someone. (15)

Four Appalachian Women

In contrast to her academic treatment of family history, in "Four Appalachian Women" Mary Jane assumed the emotional voices of the most influential women in her life. Written for a women's studies class taught by Margaret McFadden, these stories are biographical and contain the most intimate information about both Mary Jane, her mother Ruby, and Mary Kincaid. The letter hidden away in a drawer, closet, or box serves as a messenger from the past. The act of finding the treasured letter, opening it in the "present" created in the story, and providing it with a context is an effective literary

device. The stories open with the character Corrie waiting for a letter from a relative in prison, indicating the prevalence of the prison letter in the lives of these women. Jail is as much a certainty for many of these women. (I interviewed Caroline Woodard in the Watauga County jail where her mother was often held. Two of her cousins were also there at the same time.) Corrie Allison is the voice of Betty Jean Hopkin's (Mary Jane's cousin) mother who mourns her daughter's imprisonment for a double homicide. "She shivered even though the day was warm remembering that two women were shot off the wall down there where Betty Jean" was unjustly imprisoned (1).

Mary Faye is the Mary Jane who, unlike her cousin in prison, existed in a parallel universe in which a husband named Bob treats her like a queen. Mary Faye has attended a junior college. The world in this story is well ordered. Her house is elegant and has a third new bathroom. This detail is significant because bathrooms were sometimes absent from some of the houses where Mary Jane lived. Member of her family, and of mine, grew up without indoor plumbing. The story opens as Bob has completed the third bathroom. When she talks about a third new bathroom, Mary Jane is describing the height of luxury.

The fictional Mary Jane has expensive clothes. Each embodiment of her success is accompanied by a reflection on the desperate economic situation from her own childhood. Mary Faye gets dressed in her suit in preparation for meeting her cousin. Her own daughter, Sherry, attends a private school, takes lessons in art and music, and will get a new car for a birthday gift. Mary Faye's mother is involved in the church, and is a pillar of the community. It would not be too harsh to say that Mary Faye and Sherry are

pure fantasy in contrast to the real economic and social realities of Mary Jane and her daughter and three sons.

Suicide is the real subject of this story. In the margin of the page Mary Jane wrote, "True, my great aunt, [Tempy Ellison, Mrs. Ranzy Howard Woodring] committed suicide. Then later, so did two of her sons." Mary Faye is debating whether or not to show the suicide letter to a family member but decides against it. "She died not showing the terrible horror that she kept inside. The people who loved her could not bear it." In Mary Jane's story, the letter introduces a secret. The reader is dying to know what it is, but Mary Jane does not reveal the secret in this story or any other.

Like the suicide in this story, Mary Jane hid the intimate details of her own pain. This story is a foreshadowing of the difficulties she will face later near the end of her life. It is hopeful because it envisions a successful life of a woman who has educated herself and has married well. By fictionalizing, Mary Jane can deal with the subject of her own death wish while protecting her identity. A letter written in poetic lines to Granny Mary Kincaid by Tempy "a year before she jumped off a bridge" gives the reader a sense of the love shared between the women in this family and the despair they felt after each loss.

Dear Darling Sis,

You're such a dear. I'd always love to have you near. You're so sweet and good, and oh, so nice, I pray you'll have a happy life. The fun you and I have had together will always live in my heart forever. I love you sis, you wonderful one. When I'm with you I always have fun. I love your smile, your dear, sweet face. No one on earth can take your place. The many sweet things you have done for

me will always remain in my memory. I think of you sis, each night and day. I remember you dear sis, when I kneel. I know there's a mansion for you above for in your heart there is so much love ...so trust Him sis, in what befalls, and be ready to go when the master calls. (17)

Ruby wrote a song in honor of Tempy in order to document the emotion that accompanied Tempy's recovery from the river. "I set on the river bank day and night/ I prayed they'd bring her into sight. / But when they brought her to the shore/ I bowed my head and cried some more" (7).

Ruth (My Little Mama Ruby)

As in "Annamae" and "Mary Faye" letters are objects of reverence in this story written from Ruby's point of view. Ruth (Ruby) is looking through old letters, poems and songs she has written. The story of "The Song Giver" is retold here, as is the death of her Aunt "Vicky" who drowned herself in the river. Ruby remembers how her aunt used to hug her and hold her on her lap. She hums to herself, singing the words to the old song she has found in the drawer. It is a ballad she has written in honor of the aunt who drowned herself in the river.

This story is a retrospective of Ruby's life. Mary Jane mentions the man Ruby shot at the Dinner Bell Grill for "talking ugly to me." She writes about Ruby's former lover who died playing Russian roulette.

She had dated Johnny for over a year and her husband had known... I guess Garland just didn't care if I run around our not. Johnny loved me though, and next to my younguns' I loved him more than anybody on earth. I'll never for sure

know why but I'll go to my grave believing he killed himself playing Russian roulette one night over at the beer joint because I broke up with him. (9)

This story documents the significance of the cabin at Meat Camp. The walls there were covered with songs, poems, and journal entries.

We'd run off to that cabin and have us a good time fishin' and getting' drunk and bein' together. Boy, if Uncle Will had known I brought men up there, he would never have given me that place. I went up there lots of other times too; when I was real hurt about something or sometimes we'd all go up and have cookouts and birthday parties for the younguns' I'd write on the wall who all had come or how I felt if I was sad. (10)

The story mentions that her son Jake Crump went AWOL, and brought his child bride to the cabin on August 28, 1970. Those cabin walls, constructed by Colden and his son Jake Crump, were witness to the history of Ruby's life and one of her break-ups with Colden on June 5, 1965. Ruby Ellison Crump was a survivor in this story, making it back to the world "where people lived and memories died."

This story structure was successful, using the event of opening the letters in the dresser drawer as a plot device. The dresser drawer holds her most personal objects, favorite clothing, and the precious letters. It becomes a writer's treasure chest. Mary Jane uses this model in a story that surveys her own writing. Mary Faye is the character who represents her and was introduced in the story "Annamae." "Mary Faye" is a retrospective of her life and her writing, and it describes many significant moments she has documented in her poetry. Mary Jane answers the question found on an application to

a writers workshop, “what do you hope to achieve as a writer?” “Release from despair at marrying too young, loving too much, and to be able to give a part of myself. Fame more than money, because rich people aren’t happy. To write and affect people’s minds so they never forget. To make believe I’m something I’m not (1).

This is my favorite piece of Mary Jane’s writing because it is so honest and reveals so clearly how her career as a writer was shaped by her past. She tells how Cratis Williams sent a letter inviting her to come to school to study mountain culture. She writes that “After a while, the anger and the frustration at how mountain folks were seen by people outside the region died down a little. I realized I’d never get anywhere on emotions alone so I decided to become a one woman committee to educate the rest of the world about mountain people. I knew I’d need to be pretty well educated myself, so I majored in Appalachian Studies” (7). As well as being autobiographical, this story serves as a wonderful introduction to her poetry. Ruth begins with Ruby’s voice; Mary Faye begins in Mary Jane’s voice and segues into analysis of her poems. Mary Jane instinctively began to speak in the voices of the characters she created from the women in her life.

Mary Jane wrote a note to her professor Zohara Boyd in the margins of the original version of “Four Women” saying that Ruth’s voice was written in 1981. The note is dated February 1999. She noted that her mother was:

Very strong in her faith and love for the Lord but she was a bit rowdy at times. I loved her more than life. I watched Mama die with cancer two and a half years ago. We kept her at home the way she wanted. I know, like Poe, how it feels to

look death and insanity (my own) straight in the face. I will exorcise my demons on paper one day soon. Signed MJB. (1)

“A bit rowdy” was an understatement. Ruby was a hell raiser, and a mother who tried to rule her daughter’s life. Mary Jane reached out to her professors in a personal way, and they encouraged her to explore her writing and her heritage through the characters presented in “Four Women.” Clearly, Mary Jane’s academic experience is redemptive. When she writes that she will face her demons on paper, she is recognizing the power of writing to heal. “Four Women” provides the context for a deeper understanding of Mary Jane’s poems.

Poetry

Mary Jane wrote the poem “Wonder” when she was eleven. “Wonder” represents a philosophy that will remain with her throughout her life, despite every bad thing that happens. In the poem, the little girl wonders how the world came about and determines that God created it out of love. Many of her poems are an expression of love for her children or family members. The poems take on the voices of neighbors like Howard, a “retarded” man in her community. “I don’t like my damned ol’ mammy/She cut me/See here on my belly; cut me right/here. I don’t cut wood for her no more.” She writes about her Granny Mary’s loss of her husband in “Mary, Now That Henry’s Gone,” and she writes “The Kind Privilege of Death” as a memorial to her mother, Ruby Crump, who died of cancer. Whether she writes to document an injustice done to mountain people, to record a life like Howard’s, or salve the pain of her mother’s death, Mary Jane is a constant advocate for her culture. Had she been able to remain sober, Mary Jane would

have reached the high social status of community treasure, storyteller, elder, and defender. She would have joined the ranks of the Hicks, Harmon, and Watson families in cultural importance.

Poetry and Politics

The subjects of Mary Jane's poems and stories often express resistance to the reductionist identity placed on mountain people by history and by media. Mary Jane writes "Don't stick the pins of poverty through me" and "don't make me the reason for your mission season." She tells me "gravy is the glue of the south." Like other poets inspired to express "hillybilly pride" by poet/guru Jim Wayne Miller, Mary Jane is introducing the folk imagery of place into her work. In many of the anthologies, regional poets send the same message. In the defensive mode, they overturn stereotypes of poverty, ignorance, and apathy.

Appalachian poets write politically, and we write about relationships, about lovers, relatives, and friends, but we are not writing alone. Writers are connected by a series of two lane roads shooting from the iron belt of Ohio to the blue grass of Kentucky, deep into the heart of the coal fields; to West Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. We are riding the poetry and resistance highways over the humped backs of mountains, navigating steep roads to get to Hindman Writer's Conference where for the first time we are led to believe that poetry could be situated in the subject matter of our experience. Poetry is not just somewhere else up north, or in California, or in the Britain – the first literary tradition so many Appalachian grade school students encountered. A few of the key players we come to know in the Appalachian Poetry Project are Jim Wayne Miller,

Gurney Norman, George Ella Lyon, Barbara Smith, Richard Hague, Mike Mullins, and Bob Henry Baber. They were our mentors as we gathered along the rock wall at the Hindman Settlement School talking about poetry and culture, or in our rooms making music or drinking bourbon with Cratis Williams

The Southern Appalachian Writers Conference meets yearly at places like the Highlander Folk School in New Market Tennessee, the epicenter for political movement in the Appalachian South. Mary Jane was a part of that larger movement, influenced by the writing modeled for us there by North Carolina turned Kentucky poet Jim Wayne Miller and by Greensboro, NC, poet Fred Chappell. They gave us permission to write of all things mountain and we ran with it. Miller noted that writers like James Still and Hariette Arnow led a vital grassroots literary movement. "In the quarter of a century since Cratis William's study was completed, younger writers from the Appalachian region have contributed to an increasingly lively literary scene" (Miller 50).

Appalachian poets needed venues for publishing. Small magazines, chapbooks, and collections were springing up everywhere in the seventies. One of my first published poems appeared in Old Wounds, New Words, a project funded by the Witter Byner Foundation of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and geared toward promoting regional writers.

Mary Jane's poetry is absent from many of the anthologies that contain the poems of Southern Appalachia Writers Cooperative members because from time to time, with earthquake precision, her progress was cut short by drug and alcohol addiction, and forays into lawlessness. "Then she got to thinking she wanted to be Bonnie and Clyde, too," Crump noted (Crump 2001). Although she collected poetry from writers in the

Boone area for publication in the Appalachian Poetry Project, the poems were not anthologized. The credits list Mary Jane Putzel as a workshop leader for this project; she was mentoring other Watauga poets. Her name should have appeared between Lee Pennington's name and Rita Quillen's in the contents of Old Wounds, New Words.

Gurney Norman, author of Divine Right's Trip, returned from California where he had been involved in the sixties counterculture writing movement in order to assume the position of writer-in-residence at the University of Kentucky. He became director of the Appalachian Poetry Project, which was administered from the University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center. Norman was joined by George Ella Lyon who became the project's Executive Director, and Bob Henry Baber, Field Organizer and Coordinator. In 1980, using as their initial contacts members of SAWC, "Norman, Lyon, and Baber held nineteen exciting and highly successful poetry workshops in the Appalachian area of six states ... The result was an anthology of work by ninety-one poets from the southern Appalachian region with a graceful introduction by Lyon" (Baber, Lyon and Norman, preface).

The sheaf of poems that Mary Jane collected for the AWP is filled with poignant nature images and discussions of the conflict these writers felt toward the region. McKinney details her attachment to the land, and later bemoans the necessity to leave it to look for work. The closeness to place detailed by McKinney echoes Mary Jane's elevation of nature to spiritual status: "they (the mountains) have stood for eons of time and listened and learned and they will dispense freely with love this knowledge to the daughter who will listen and learn" ("Tamarack Tales" 1).

Once when I was younger
I climbed up that mountain
And stood there in a rain
And I felt the wind blowing
In my face and all around me
And I felt like I belonged
Like there was just me
And the mountain there
And I felt good and loved
I felt like I had earth underneath
And saw the dark, boiling clouds

(9-12)

The clouds are a premonition. Images of fog, clouds, death, and insanity thread through the poems. Poets commune with the earth and ask questions of God. Nature is elevated to a sacred level: McKinney repeats the mythic theme that Mary Jane expresses in her children's stories – the sense of being lost and alone in the wilderness:

An even greater sense of the passing of a generation is recorded here in a poem by Walker, who describes the "south side of the mountain" where a hermit lived and died. Nature takes up a similar role in "The Lonely Old Man." The wind is personified, the animals talk, and the modern world is kept at a distance.

He never knew the world of man,

He never drove a car,

He never watched a TV set,

Or went inside a bar.

(25-28)

The poets are struggling with their attachment to place and with the outside world's attempts to destroy it through environmental exploitation and cultural destruction. A second struggle, the struggle of the mountaineer to reconcile himself as a new generation growing beyond the boundaries of traditional culture is documented in this poem about mountain religion by Mary Jane's half brother, Jake Crump (she uses her father's name as a pseudonym for Jake). This is Crump's recognition that the old religion is giving way to change as his own consciousness is being born.

The Reverend

He preached of hell and burning fire,

And spoke of love, but damned desire.

And all the people cried "Amen!"

And praised his words and shook his hand.

He'd preach to each and drive it home,

His words like a knife cuts to the bone.

And folks would come from miles around,

To feel their guilt and be put down.

They called him a good and Godly man,
And guided by the Lord's own hand.
And they knew that he could never stray,
You could tell it when you heard him pray.

So shocked they were, beyond compare,
When Sunday morn they found him there;
In the church without his clothes,
And stone cold dead from and overdose!

(1-16)

This poem written by her brother sheds light on their shared religious experiences, giving insight to sin and the personal conflict between the spirit and the flesh. It details a second major problem the family is dealing with – death by drinking and overdose. These poems are related to many of themes introduced by the Poetry Project, and published in numerous regional anthologies.

Old Wounds, New Words was not published until 1994, more than ten years after its original impetus and that story has become a part of the folklore of this movement:

Although the manuscript had circulated as a kind of Appalachian samizdat or underground writing in poetry workshops, and although its introduction had been used in Appalachian Literature courses, Old Wounds, New Words, something of a mystery anthology, remained unpublished more than a decade after the search for a publisher had begun. (Baber, Henry, and Lyon Preface)

Mary Jane and I knew many of the poets involved in the workshops. We had supped at the table together on poetry and corn bread. Friendships and relationships and more publications grew out of this grassroots group. Mountain people were counterculture before counterculture was cool, is the observation of more than one cultural student. The poems shared a commonality of subjects, description, and revelation about this place called Appalachia. These poems were also shaped by social activist movements taking place in the mountains during the sixties and seventies. The goal of the movement was not only to revise the history of the region that had been warped by a hundred years of fictionalizing and myth making, but to speak out in opposition to the environmental and cultural devastation that was taking place everywhere. Mary Jane's family lost its claim to hundreds of acres of ancestral land on the Long Hope, acreages that was later saved from second home and ski slope development by the Nature Conservancy.

In the coalfields, environmental issues included strip mining, and in the mountains around Boone the issues were second home development and tourism development swallowing up native land. In her MA thesis, Mary Jane documented the economic hardship and the cultural resistance that she felt prevented her people from enjoying the benefits of the rising middle class.

Askins and Morris identified this movement as being fascinated with the adjustment of the mountaineer as "progress created change." They note in their introduction to New Ground, a 1977 poetry anthology, that the public schools denied regional culture. "A sense of intrinsic self worth was replaced by a search for eternal

approval by the educated.” This, they note, involves “the psychology of colonialism, of powerlessness in the face of change” (11). Mary Jane declared that although she knew she was somebody, she was running around looking for approval from the academic community. This went hand-in-hand with her role as cultural ambassador. “Don’t stick your pins of poverty and the past through me” Mary Jane wrote.

The Appalachian Poetry Project came “away from a rooted, traditional body of work to a more volatile, politically active and varied offering” (Lyon 8). The poets had two goals: to “retain the more humanistic elements of the old culture and at the same time to adapt to the pressures and demands of a technological society” (Lyon 7). Mary Jane observed that there was something timeless and undefeatable about her mountains; that power could feed the movement of poets struggling to form a cultural identity in the face of main stream pressures to conform.

Mary Jane and I joked together about the idea that social change always came ten years late to the mountains but continued long after many of the issues faded from mainstream culture. In 1971, I was a member of a student group at Johnson Central High School that protested the Vietnam War. Mary Jane was writing antiwar poetry; her brother was AWOL. The ideas and political unrest of the sixties were fed by the environmental devastation and the media’s proselytizing of the war on poverty in Appalachia. Poets were inspired by the great literary philosophers. The world might have thought that great literature grew only from the institutions of the north, but southern writers were coming into their own in the fifties and sixties flowing from a great

repository of a diverse cultural history, a love of oral narrative, and a meandering and circular sense of time. Mary Jane had been born into a family with a strong oral tradition.

In numerous anthologies representing the stepchildren of contemporary American poetry, the Appalachian poets set out to set the record straight: "I am not the deprived child of an orphan state (Askins and Morris 183). "I don't want to be your cause/You're not my savior Santy Claus/...I don't want to be your reason/while you're in your mission season," Mary Jane chanted. Mary Jane, like so many of us, was pushing away the stereotypical images long generated by early sociologists and local color writers. The fact that she had adamantly rejected outside definition deflected inquiry into her own history.

As poet, novelist, and critic George Ella Lyon noted, these poets were caught up in a transition from what was perceived to be a backward culture moving into the modern age. Women were exposing layers of issues by writing about men, marriage and children, about domestic violence and economic deprivation, sex, motherhood and the paradox of love. In one of her most revealing poems, Mary Jane documented her own struggle to move away from the traditional life of the mountain woman and adapt to modern culture.

Two Lane Woman

I'm a two lane woman

On a four lane road

And I'm travelin too fast

With too heavy a load.

I left home for the city

A new cause to find
'cause I wanted something different
than this old life of mine.

I was tired of being country
I was tired of being poor
I was going up to Elkton
Get a job and maybe more.

Well, I didn't find a job
But I met a married man
Now I'm alone and I take comfort
In the bottle when I can

In a two room apartment
In a mean and dirty town
While at night in my mind
I'm happy homeward bound

I'm a two lane woman
On a four lane road
And I'm goin too fast

With too heavy a load

Oh the pain is at hand

And my spirit is broke

I'm a two lane woman

On a four lane road.

(1-28)

“Two Lane Woman” emphasizes the necessity of leaving home to find a job, traversing between what poets perceived to be two entirely different worlds, the traditional and the modern. They feel that the modern world allows no place to nurture ancestral spirits. These anthologies contain poems ripe with a series of images that establish correspondences between the land and the ancestry of the people. The landscape itself contained the souls of the ancestors and became a shrine to family. Blood literally coming out of the earth is a theme of so many of these poems that I must conclude that something in the consciousness of these poets, something archetypal, prophetic, intrinsic to Native American religion permeates in these poems. Blood becomes the vehicle for transmission of culture. Mary Jane identified it as “Blood cries out to us from the ground.” In many of these poems, old homeplaces or the ruins of abandoned farms are inscribed with human forms. Something has imploded there, not bombs, but people are alienated and displaced by economic and political factors as is indicated in this poem by Rudy Thomas:

Encounter

The big stones of the chimney behind the house
soaked up my grandmother
her face is smooth, young again
within the polished stone
she used to whet her blades.
Her hair is no longer grey.

I crawl in and out of the mortar
like an insect under a door
recall my youth
my grandmother's face wrinkles again
her hair turns gray
I cannot stay

I take my knife
whet the wrinkles smooth with rapid strokes
across the polished stone.

(1-15)

Thomas finds his grandmother inside the ruin, joins her through the mortar that holds the ruin together, and makes her young again. The new generation resurrects the old. In so many of these poems, the writers define their search for

identity through their ancestors. This was largely the purpose of Mary Jane's work. She established her identity there, life among the continuity of death, life inseparable from the land as in her poem "Forever Alive":

I am wounded with strip mining

And tourism gone mad in a natural

World

But I am not dead

I am alive in the everlasting

Beauty and hope of mountain children

I am alive in the young farmer

On a few rocky acres of ground

I am alive in the young woman

Gone outside to become educated

And come home to live and work

I am alive in the old woman

Teaching her grandchild to make

Hickory brush brooms.

I am alive in the white hell

Of winter

In the new life softness of spring

(11-27)

Mary Jane belonged to two poetry movements at once, one a regional heritage movement, and the other, a group of confessional women poets exploring sexual and marital issues during the 1960s and 1970s. Part of her duality was her ability to stretch the borders of her own culture into cutting edge definitions of femininity along with other women of her generation.

...contemporary women struggling in their poetry with a history of oppression and silence: internally conflicted by a literary legacy and culture that defines the thinking, speaking, writing sexual woman as monstrous. These poets seek autonomous selves free to express anger, represent the female body and female eroticism, and explore the possibilities of female language and genres.”

(Kirkpatrick 184)

“Forty Forth Birthday of a Prostitute” was written for a close friend of Mary Jane’s who “grew up, hit on hard times and so became a lady of the night. She had her fight with drugs and lost. There, but for the grace of God, go you or I”

I’ve been laid

And paid

With no contact made

I’ve been used

Abused

So that you’re amused

I've been sought
and bought
with no second thought

I've been scorned;
Adorned
with roses and thorns

I've been lied
and tried
and sometimes denied
but I don't think I've ever
been loved

(1-16)

In "Bubble Bath for the Soul," she continues the theme of emotionally unresponsive men. She writes, "I'm a good time girl from the word say go/and there ain't much that I don't know/but knowing you gave me a throw/you made me feel pure again" Most of her poems about love reach the same conclusion: love is leverage, a power struggle she can't win. "Why is it that men get horny/And women get lonely? And they usually trade even." Mary Jane has experienced the feelings she lines up in "Forty Fourth Birthday." Abused, bought, scorned, lied to, and paid were used to sum up her relationships with men.

Through the psychic door of poetry, Mary Jane enters a healing space and begins to identify and explore her feelings of sexuality. Brutal experiences that were part of her reality were not addressed openly, but introduced in these poems. Kirkpatrick explains how the poetic images obliquely carry the weight of remembrance:

Traumatic memories are encoded not narratively, but in images and feelings, both emotional and physical. Thus, the traumatic experience cannot be directly referred to but must be remembered, reconstructed and worked through indirectly in an address with another. That is why poetry allows us to witness as survivors to having survived and to witness others' survival... (Kirkpatrick 3).

Mary Jane expresses her own need for love and those of her friend's in the "Prostitute" birthday poem. Shared experiences with men have been largely absent of love and nurturing. The image of the two lane road juxtaposed with the coming of the interstate highway and all the modern problems it carries with it, allows her to experience and know her own feelings. In a poignant black and white photograph, a young Mary Jane leans against the hood of a car along side her stepfather Colden Crump. Her face is exposed, anxious and sad. Although as a woman she has shed the good Christian image of the self-sacrificing wife and mother, Mary Jane does not travel far enough to escape self-destructive family patterns. She does not leave home. Ideologically, she can't leave sexual guilt behind her. Defining herself as a "black sinner," Mary Jane understood how the town society of Boone viewed Pottertown as an enclave of degenerative mountain culture. Within the community, residents expressed that throughout their school years, they were burdened by their perception of the Pottertown stigma.

Leaving Home

A member of the original groundswell of regional poets, Rita Quillen is a poet of place from Stone Gap, Virginia. In her insightful treatment of four poets in Native Ground: Contemporary Appalachian Poetry, Quillen deals not only with the writer's struggle to identify his or her role in place, but extends the discussion to the poet's paradoxical reluctance and desire to leave his mountain past. Quillen's discussion is pertinent to Mary Jane's life, in part, because of Mary Jane's failed attempts to leave home. Astutely, Quillen shows us how poet Fred Chappell explodes the myth of a perfect past that Mary Jane employs in her writing, the "enviable" lifestyle of the pioneer free to make his living from nature and husbandry, to make and use everything he needed. Chappell provides counterpoint to Mary Jane's romanticizing.

Quillen notes that "Chappell brings the past forward without denying its difficult hold on his life" (33). "Christ, three generations of a house alive, still strangling one another" (24). Her discussion sheds light on Mary Jane's difficulty in distancing herself from her mother. Mary Jane's relationship with Ruby was volatile and often detrimental. Mary Jane's half sister Rebecca Crump kept her mother at a distance (Douglass 2004), but Mary Jane could not break away from Ruby's influence.

Quillen is interested in the common themes she sees at play in the poems of Robert Morgan, P.J. Laska, Jim Wayne Miller, and Fred Chappell. She notes that "They have been to town and are trying to make sense of what they see" (3). She observes that each is a native of the Appalachian region who leaves an agrarian community behind in order to enter the academic world (3). She quotes Miller in her discussion of how the new

Appalachian poet is rebuilding an identity from the images of the past, the “rebirth” that Miller calls for in his brier poems. “A coming shape, a new room and view/Rose from old flooring/Two times mingled, Fresh sawdust/spumed yellow as sunlight from old timber” (16). Quillen writes that Miller “sees not only the spiritual danger [of losing connection with ones past] but also the physical danger [of remaining in], the violence born of poverty and frustration” (31).

Quillen observes that Chappell’s poetry is dealing with establishing selfhood and breaking away from family. (25) In Rural Communities in the Appalachian South, where Patricia Beaver began a lifetime study of mountain culture, she concludes that family serves both to help and to hold back individuals deeply involved in the kinship networks. This difficult balance is the subject of much Appalachian poetry and fiction. The mythic past, the loving family that Mary Jane embraced in her writing appears one dimensional. It is romanticized both in subject matter and its presentation. Unlike Miller and Chappell, Mary Jane does not recognize the danger to the individual trying to transcend the borders of family in order to break free from an unhealthy past. As Quillen notes, Chappell’s work is valuable in understanding the Appalachian experience of emerging from rural areas to cleave to town and college:

“Chappell’s persona continues telling us about the hardship of Appalachian life – the floods, the poor land, the lack of work and hope – through different voices he hears as he stands there on a hill. And again on his 35th birthday, as on every birthday of his life, he has to turn his back on it. He must move [“away from the poor land”] onto the life he has chosen for himself.” (31)

Mary Jane's birthdays came and went and she could not leave home. She refused to trade her waitress uniform for a suit and follow Miller, Williams, and Chappell into the white collar academic setting. Had she lived, June 22nd, 2004, would have been her 57th birthday. Twice in her life she attempted to leave the region, once in her twenties when she was brought back by her husband Charles Woodard and her mother, and once after she finished serving her jail time in 1983. Her daughter, Caroline Woodard, traveled with her to the University of Kentucky in Lexington to explore the campus where, encouraged by writer Gurney Norman, Mary Jane planned to work on a Ph.D. at the university. This discussion prompts the question: had Mary Jane had removed herself from the family culture of alcoholism would she be alive today?

In a sweeping statement, Mary Jane declared what a shame it would be if mountain people were to leave the area to marry outside and lose their bloodlines. As a graduate student, she was deeply engaged in embracing her own cultural heritage. While she was studying at ASU, she was mostly sober and drugging only moderately. At the same time she was getting her degree, she was playing Bonnie to her lover's Clyde. Poet George Ella Lyon stated that "poetry is rooted in paradox" ... "this recognition of paradox, its mission work among the unrecognizable forces in our lives is a form of healing" (14). Mary Jane writes that there is a saving grace in her poetry, that "without her writing she would have shot someone like poor old mama did." Her divided life remained divided.

Mary Jane was not able to wrap herself in the robe of academia. Caroline said that her mother did not want the obligation that came with a serious job. And while this may

be true, it is more likely that lack of self esteem or self confidence prevented her from seeking a teaching position. In addition, her growing alcoholism was an impediment to work. Her death certificate lists "waitress" as her occupation. That fact is a testimony to the idea that she did not "get above her raisin."

Mary Jane worked a number of jobs including telephone operator, furniture factory worker, and waitress to finance her education. She departed from the workplace only when she realized that selling drugs "could make her more money than a wage labor job (Wrye 19). "Mary Jane found herself conflicted by the struggle to climb out of a working class position and experience a life not filled with work. However, "the cycle of these past generations nurtured Mary Jane's soul resulting in a perpetual working class position" (6). As Wrye, who knew and interviewed Mary Jane deftly observed, Mary Jane was a member of an embattled and fierce sisterhood. Mary Jane's decision to choose a reality that departed from raising children, keeping house, and serving God and man "separated Mary Jane from other rural women of her generation," and that was "the scariest thing I had ever done" Mary Jane confirmed (Wrye 17). Would her success be viewed as betrayal by her family?

She looked up the dirt road to the cabin where her second cousin, Mary Faye, lived now. Mary Faye is Ruth's girl and she's a good un, too. She's goin to school, that big college in town, and for all that education she still lives poor like we do and ain't changed a bit. She ain't got the big head like lots of folks would have if they had a college degree and was workin' on another. She still loves these mountains just like she did when Dad give Ruth the land to build the cabin on.

She believes in spirits, too, and said sometimes the old Allison's who died way
back yonder talked to her when the wind blowed." ("Four Women" 1)

CHAPTER FIVE

Jail Journal

Mary Jane's time in jail resulted in a cast of characters being introduced into her writing – an assortment of women who embodied a number of personal, familial, social, and psychological elements served time in the Caldwell County jail while Mary Jane did ninety days for common law robbery in the Caldwell County Jail in Lenoir. These women and their problems interfaced with her dysfunctional nature. Basically, Mary Jane continued researching women's issues as she had in her thesis. Appropriately, she finished her master's degree while waiting for her trial date and carried her thesis into jail with her. In her thesis, Changes in Traditional Appalachian Family Patterns Brought On by Socioeconomic Change, Mary Jane identified a key theme in the lives of "re-entry" women who must span the transition into modern society. Although women's roles were expanded beyond the care for home and children and into the labor market during the 1960s and 1970s, many Appalachian men failed to respond by helping out in the home. Women were becoming economically independent and were asking why "along with the burden of public work, household responsibility is still primarily theirs" ("Jail Journal" 51, 52). Being with these disenfranchised women focused her thoughts on modernism.

Mary Jane observed that in her lifetime she saw the demise of the small farm in Meat Camp as she became one of the many women who went off to work in low wage industries. Mary Jane's thesis focused on the stereotyping of Appalachian youth, and on

religion and the family as it was impacted by changing sex roles. The women she encountered in jail extended and enhanced the life histories contained in her thesis. Mary Jane's jail conviction went counter to almost everyone's thinking that higher education could allow lower classes to ascend to professional careers. Early in the journal she wrote about meeting with her probation officer who expressed surprise that she was so well educated. Flippantly, Mary Jane wrote: "See mom, education does not keep one from going astray, blowing away, or having a day in court" (6).

Why did she do it? Why did she drive the get-away car for her lover Joey Hull when he robbed the home of an elderly lady in Lenoir? Mary Jane addresses that in her journal, but only in a joking manner:

Mull (probation officer) wanted to know why a person like me did what I did. Drunk, I explained.... Alas, poor Mull, you may never know the joys, charms, and pure ecstasy J. could show a woman (not to mention his beautiful equipment that was bigger around than my wrist; yes, my wrist and 8 in. when standing at attention.) All this, plus on my third day of drinking gin and Triple Peach which does strange things to my logic. (6)

"I finally realized why I am here and it has nothing to do with the robbery. It's pure karma and an awesome opportunity to write if I just work on it." Using the language of sociology she declared, "As one reads this paper, she/he should keep in mind the deteriorating effect incarceration has on one's brain" (1).

Despite the fact that Mary Jane viewed jail as an opportunity for reflection, her flippant attitude soon gave way to the reality of the situation. On the first day she created a journal

entry that expressed her fear of being imprisoned in such a small space, of being strip searched, and being in a cell with other “criminals:”

Day 1, September 21, 1983, sentenced. Moved into a 7 by 15 cell (not counting bed cells) w/2 women. One (age 37) awaiting trial for M [assuming this means murder] of husband, the other, (age 43) for forging prescriptions. One woman had been here for 40 days, second woman, 35 days. They seemed to be holding up well. (draw a floor plan.) I was strip-searched downstairs before coming up.

(Why? Fill in) We are on second floor, men below and above us.

(Communications system, funny to see). They gave me one sheet and one blanket (no pillow) 1 wash cloth, 1 small towel (very small) I can't explain my feelings. I was numb and relieved and afraid I'd go crazy in such a small space for 90 days.

No pillow. We might smother one another. (1)

During her first thirty days in jail, Mary Jane devises several strategies to help her adjust to life in confinement. She remains as calm as possible. She wants to stay in good health and notes that if you get sick in jail you may not get the help you need. A woman in the cell is suffering from bleeding hemorrhoids, and the woman's cellmates have to beg the jailers to get her to a surgeon. “My uncle died here in this very jail seventeen years ago. He went into D.T.s and died hollering for his mama while the jailer yelled over the intercom, shut up” (35). Her uncle, Glen Ellison, was an alcoholic whose death certificate shows that he died on October 8, 1969, from drinking isopropyl and ethanol alcohol.

Mary Jane was determined to stay in control. To keep from “getting fat” and to safeguard against going crazy from the boredom, she finds a way to jog in jail using one of the corridors. When the food makes her ill, she limits her calories and gets some fresh fruit from one of the jailers. She gets a prescription for her “nerves” from her doctor, and she networks her kinfolk on the outside to get the books, paper, jigsaw puzzles, letters to read, clothes, and sundries delivered on family visits. She recognizes that she should be out helping Granny Mary who has been ill, and her heart goes out to Caroline, who has to assume responsibility beyond her sixteen years. She mentions Caroline frequently in the journal, and notes that Caroline is breaking up with her boyfriend who is not good enough for her, but is someone to lean on while her mama is in jail.

I just got a letter from Caroline and she is still sick and feeling down. She has so much to cope with, running the house and managing what little money we have. I hurt so much knowing she’s feeling so alone. It’s all my fault for making such a stupid mistake, and being here. The real pain is not what happens to me but how my children suffer. She needs me to hold her and pet her. I still do that though she’s as big as I am. Kids always need their Mama’s love. This is the worst I’ve felt since I’ve been here, knowing I can’t help her.” (28)

But Mary Jane does not give in to her emotions even though she wants to. In jail, she honestly describes her illness. “Remember, no one sees the inside cracks but you” (21).

I feel as though my body and soul are fashioned from some thin, exquisite glass (perhaps I was blown by a master glass blower) and before they put my head on

they filled me to the top with feelings and emotions. After my head was attached I was told by some mighty power (perhaps my own sensitive soul) that if I wanted these emotions out, then the glass that I'm surrounded with would have to be broken. I'm carrying these emotions well, there are a few cracks in my glass but I'm not broken yet. I think I see tiny cracks on the inside, almost everywhere but folks on the outside see only the outside cracks, and say, "My, isn't that a strong piece of glass?" ... I don't cry; don't intend to cry ever again. (9)

She notes that she is doing well compared to some of the women who pass through the Caldwell County jail. Domestic abuse victims, alcoholics, and just some plain simple minded women pass through her cell, and she observes them all. But as always, Mary Jane is assessing her own situation very differently. She does not apply analysis of other inmates to her own problems. She gives "gin and Triple Peach" the credit for her irrational behavior. "Crazy, drunk" people are viewed differently by law enforcement officials who become their zoo keepers, as Mary Jane referred to them. The crazy drunks wind up in cells next to Mary Jane's.

In the last ten years of her life, a series of drunken episodes sent her repeatedly to the Boone jail, where generations of Ellisons, Snyders, and Potters are known to long-time members the staff. Real "outlaws" don't go to the health care system for help. They clog the judicial system, which is weary with dealing constantly with drunks and drug addicts. Outlaws get drunk, get sick, they throw up, they scream, they destroy jail cells and police cars, (Woodard 2002) and generally are "lost causes," doomed by their nature. Mountaineer fatalism is a primary subject for Harry Caudill, the controversial author of

Night Comes to the Cumberlands. “The mountaineer has become depressingly defeatist in attitude. Company domination and paternalism and two decades of uninspired Welfarism have induced belief that control of his destiny is in other hands” (Caudill 392).

Mary Jane expressed resignation by writing that she was never going to cry again. She viewed jail as the inevitable result of her drugging and alcohol addiction. Drunks did wrong and they suffered for it, caused suffering, and went uncorrected as long as possible. Drunks felt they deserved what had happened to them in some way because they lacked self esteem. No one told them any different, that it might be illness and not evil doing. Keefe suggests that how Mary Jane perceived her illness as coming from her own failings, or as Mary Jane put it “black sin,” is an important reason why she failed to seek mental health care early on. Keefe identified “will of God or supernatural causes such as sin” (126) as impediments to accessing mental health providers.

Social services were not widely available in Watauga County when Mary Jane married at the age of sixteen and climbed the mountain with Charles Woodard. Her family was her only support group. Her emotional illness went untreated for many years. Later in life, she researched mental health services for low-income women.

What is said about sickness in general is the true for mental illness; the mountaineer cannot accept it. ‘Poor nerves’ or ‘worn-out’ nerves are blamed for such disturbances. The psychiatrists care can be accepted only if he is called a ‘nerve doctor.’ The whole subject of mental illness is simply foreign to mountain people. (Caudill 119)

Although Mary Jane possessed an understanding of mental health services through her experience in graduate school, she did not seek out those services.

Mary Jane was actively engaged in perpetuating mountain myth and lore. Her illness, like that of many of her ancestors, was not suppressed. Sober and in school Mary Jane assisted Pat Beaver in conducting mental health workshops on a local and national level. This was in keeping with her personality as a Good Samaritan. She took people into her home, fed them, and would stop along the roadside to offer help to stranded motorists (Woodard, Jake 2005).

When Mary Jane was drunk, the full extent of her suffering was visible. “They were the best women,” son Jacob Woodard testified, “but when they were drunk the devil took over” (Woodard 2005). Crying, screaming, violently attacking men, walking to the highway to flag down rides in the middle of the night, and in general being flagrantly careless with her own life, were typical manifestations of her illness. Hadn’t her mother dealt with problems in a like manner? Hadn’t her aunts and cousins done the same, some opting for suicide, some for murder? She wove her illness into her art articulating it in the journal. She likened herself to glass, fragile, ready to splinter. For years, Mary Jane refused any kind of psychological treatment that would have interrupted historical patterns of dealing with emotional illness?

Jack Weller, author of Yesterday’s People noted that in contrast to the cowboy, the mountain individualist suffered from an image of hopelessness and laziness:

Who has not been confronted by a picture of the bare-footed man in ill-fitting homemade clothes with a jug over one shoulder and his rifle in his hand? His

supposedly affinity for 'corn in the bottle,' his shiftlessness and his outmoded speech are staples of this drink which he makes illegally. Drinking was his downfall (28).

On a family outing with her children, a young Ruby Crump and her lover pose before the backdrop of a covered wagon with demijohns in their hands tipped naturally to their lips. Ruby Ellison fully embraced the hillbilly stereotype.

Mary Jane's jail journal explores why women, especially poor or alcoholic women, find themselves in county jails. A few of the women she meets are arrested for passing bad checks. She knows about two women, one in her cell, arrested for murdering their husbands. She has great sympathy for a sixty-year-old woman who comes into jail bruised, with a broken hand because her husband "used her for a punching bag. She ought to wait till he's asleep and bash his brains out or at least break his leg" (25). She notes that if the elderly woman was left on her own, the woman would draw only \$200.00 in social security, and probably stays with an abusive man in order to have food and shelter. Experiencing these inmates has a profound impact on Mary Jane. She sees the injustice of their situation and she sees a kind of "ghost of Christmas future" in this particular inmate. "Lord, please don't let me wind up that way" (25). When they bring in another drunk woman who screams during the night she wonders, "Could this be me several years down the road? No way. But it gives me more reason not to drink" (38). Prophetic, her fears were realized during the last ten years of her life. Mary Jane was institutionalized in a Morganton mental hospital on several occasions during her longest episodes of alcoholism. Though Mary Jane had transcended her history, she never really

believed that she could escape it through her education (Moretz 2004). The jail reverberated with voices like hers, the voices of shattered women.

We got a new girl tonight. The poor old thing is in for shoplifting a tube of lipstick... She is not bright at all and her story is incredible to say the least. Social services has her children in a foster home; the four year old was sexually assaulted supposedly by her brother-in-law. He fled the country along with her husband. Pricilla seems harmless, not cruel at all, and just very simple. (36)

A second inmate was brought in for writing bad checks. She shot her husband earlier, but was not charged for it since "he'd been shooting at her car ... trying to set her house on fire." The women in the Caldwell Jail are engaged in an insurgency to defeat male terrorism. It's a war that Mary Jane is ultimately going to lose.

Mary Jane touches on her own situation, but does not write in depth about her experience or the experiences of women in Pottertown. The situations of other inmates outlined in this journal reflect real life situations for her family members. The issues include multiple forms of abuse, abandonment, life threatening assaults, and sexual violence. Mary Jane spent a lifetime creating and presenting an alternative identity in response to abusive relationships with men. She carried that identity forward like a shield against the forces of confinement.

She focuses on documenting the many family visits and letters. She is in contact with her sister Becky, her step-father Colden, Ruby, her birth father who travels from Ohio to visit her and bring cash, Granny Mary, her friend Fran Douglass, who has been in jail and knows the drill, and long-time lover Doug Kerce. Ruby is drinking and causing

trouble while Mary Jane is in jail. Mary Jane writes that the real problem with her mother Ruby is that she was given away by her mother at the age of six and “never felt loved enough” (23). Although she has dealt with her mother’s feelings of abandonment, not once does Mary Jane write her own response to being given to Mary. Clearly, Mary Jane regrets failing her daughter Caroline and her sons, David, Michael, and Jacob. The state of her motherhood is a concern throughout the journal. The journal introduces a number of issues that affect the women in Mary Jane’s family, reflecting the mental health, economic, and social issues that many women in Pottertown confronted daily.

Prison Letter to her Children

In the journal, Mary Jane describes her surroundings and profiles the jail staff. She is adept at fast character sketches. She quickly settles on heroes and villains. “Third shift jailer. No one likes Spears because he’s on an incredible power trip. He has no authority at all; he’s just a jailer. He is a big tattle-tale. He made so many entries in the log book that they told him to stop writing down every tiny thing. He bathes in Mennen Skin Bracer” (4). Mary Jane is a careful researcher, documenting the “zoo keepers” and the inmates well.

She carries on the family tradition of writing and valuing prison letters. Mary Jane’s papers contained the prison letters written to Betty Jean by her jailed lover, while Betty Jean is serving time for double murder. Mary Jane combines her observations with her own periods of introspection, because in jail she at last has time to reflect on her life, and she considers her flaws as a mother. “For the first time in 21 years I am not in charge of anything; not kids; keeping house; pampering some jerk of a manGoing to school,

working and scrounging like hell for a living (31). Jail is a cathartic time for contemplation and making plans for an improved future. The journal provides insight into her life and writing that cannot be found elsewhere in such detail in her short fiction.

In a letter she penned to her children and attached to the front of her journal, Mary Jane expresses gratitude that the judge gave her just a long enough sentence to reflect on her life and to get another chance at being a good mother. The letter seeks closeness and forgiveness, heals loss, and puts past hurts behind her. Her writing is a part of her own prescription for healing. She finds redemption in jail, one more chance to be born again. Mary Jane was planning to leave jail, having remade herself as she had done many times. Writing had helped her to shed an old skin before. Each time she put words to a page she transformed a part of her old self, often a negative aspect. This letter reflects her desire to begin life with renewed vigor and hope. How odd, I had thought as I watched Mary Jane preparing to serve her sentence by putting her business affairs in order and collecting writing supplies to use in jail, that she seemed almost relieved to be going. She was already prewriting in her mind. Following her release, Mary Jane made plans to continue her education at the University of Kentucky, becoming involved in the Appalachian Studies center.

November 11, 1983

My Dearest Children,

Tonight is Thanksgiving eve and I've been thinking a lot about what I have to be thankful for. I have my children and Doug and my family and my little home in the mountains. Do you know, Babies, what else I have to be thankful for? As I sit

her, on the eve of my 64th day in jail, I am so very thankful to God that I am here. Now don't think I am crazy because at this moment I am more sane than I have been in a long time and here is the reason I am so thankful to be in jail. For the first time in my life, I have had to slow down, and I have had time to think, really think about my life and the mistakes I've made, I don't feel too bad about the mistakes because they are in the past and over and done with. I have done some good things in my life too. The Lord, or this is how it seems to me anyway, has stepped in and stopped me at this little mistake and let the judge put me here for ninety days so I could figure out who I really am and what I should be doing with my life. It was only through the Lord's intervention and mercy that the judge didn't give me three years in Raleigh. [When in court, Mary Jane's determination and motivation to thrive in society – whichever world she chose – was noticeable to the court and especially to the judge deciding her fate (Wrye 20)]

Maybe the Lord thought I was smart enough to figure out in ninety days what was wrong with my life and didn't need three years. Whatever the reason I have thought and thought about my life and just how lucky I am to have done all the crazy things I've done and not be dead or in prison ... I feel as though the Lord is giving me a second chance, a chance to make up for the hurt I have caused all of you and my family and a chance to live a better life and to be the best Mama in the world.

Now, this is what I want to do. When I get out, I'm not going to start preaching to anyone [meaning her children and Doug] to stop drinking or doing

crazy stuff. I am going to start back to church, with God's help I'll never be drunk again, and I intend to get a divorce so me and Doug can get married if he wants me so I won't be living in sin. As I said, I am not going to preach at anyone. I'm not ready to give my life to the Lord yet. I know there are going to be many temptations out there and it is real easy to set up here and talk about not sinning cause up here there's not much to do but sin and cuss Sarge...Like I said, I needed time to figure myself out. It won't be easy living with a bunch of drunks, ha-ha! And not drinking myself but I think I can do it. From now on, I'll help Mary pour it out. No, I was just kidding... You can figure out who you are you side. I love you four people with all my heart and I do know, whether you do or not, that the Lord is taking care of you as he does all of us.

Love,
Mama

Here's a little thing I wrote for you all:

Because You're Mine

Because you're mine

I look at you and sometimes have to hold

Back tears of pride and happiness

Not because you're the smartest kind in

The World,

Not because you've done something famous

And not because you never make mistakes

But just because you're mine

Because a miracle happened when you were

Born and

When they placed you in my arms

I felt like the queen of the world

And as I watched you grow,

And you returned my love in so many ways

I always felt so proud of you

When I look at you

I see the handsomest sons and the prettiest

Daughter any woman could have

And I know that indeed I am blessed

Because you're mine

I love you sweet babies

Love, Mama

November 1983

The jail journal is a more honest assessment of her life and her situation. It becomes a daily account of her experiences and feelings, not often the medium for mythologizing. Mary Jane closes the journal with the thought that she can leave without “fear of losing identity” (47). In 1983 Mary Jane was thirty-seven-years-old. She had changed identities numerous times, shedding an old skin for a new. She saw a new life ahead of her, a life free of alcohol addiction. She has a realization that “I thought I had the upper-hand and was very independent but I was so bound to my surroundings that I

had no freedom inside ...I was never free..." (46). The world of hopefulness that she embraced in the eighties gave way to intense periods of alcoholism during the nineties. On October 10, 1998, she wrote another important letter; another "Dear John" letter to an intimate friend. Once again in the safety of the classrooms of Sanford Hall, she found her center.

Dear Fellas, Jack, Jim, Mr. Vodka and Bud,

It's about 4:30 in the afternoon and I'm going out later so I thought I'd write a few lines to let you know how I've been. You haven't seen me in a few weeks now and I figured you'd be wondering where I was.

One thing for sure, I've been staying away from old friends like you. I guess this is a good-bye letter; in fact, I'm sure it is. I don't intend to see you all anymore. I just plain don't like you all anymore. Oh, in the beginning we had some good times, some high old times. I'd invite you over for a weekend for a few days now and again, then send you packing after a time. I really didn't want you to leave and you sure were agreeable to move right in. Don't get me wrong; it's not your fault. You couldn't have stayed had I not come to pick you up, but you sure wanted control once you got here. Slowly but surely, that's what happened. You gained control of my life and it took me about fifteen years to realize that. At first, we worked OK together. I still functioned: kept a job, a place to live, and a car. I took as good a care of my kids as I could. They were teenagers then and didn't need me as much or so I fooled myself into thinking. I was wrong. For the past seven years you've been almost a constant companion, going to work

with me in my pocket book, or always hidden in the car somewhere. Since I stopped work four years ago, you've really stuck by my side, taking the place of almost everything that mattered to me. You cost me lots and lots of money, social interaction, friends and relationships with family. You helped me to worry my mama and granny and awful lot. You were always around in times of crisis. You were there full force when a drunk in a blackout killed my last husband. You helped the one who died before him along with crisis and diabetes, and after each death, the husbands, Granny and Mama, I turned to you even more. I slept with you under the pillow in case a family member tried to take you away in the night. By then, you were a constant in my life and definitely there for the domestic violence. I have wonderful grandchildren and before things got too bad, they'd come visit on the weekends. I'd sneak a couple in the morning, and then one at lunch and at 2:00 or 3:00 after they were in. This is all there was... (Letters 3)

Young Women in Pottertown

The experience of women in Pottertown seems inseparable from the issues that inmates contribute to the subject matter of Mary Jane's "terms of imprisonment." As late as the 1970s, law enforcement had no presence there. Alcoholism and violence were prevalent among the Snyder, Ellison, and Potter families. The area was extremely isolated, so isolated that cousin marriage was common, and it came to the attention of mainstream medical professionals. Conditions were ripe in the community for the exploitation of young girls. The practice of cousin marriage brought this isolated

community to the attention of the medical community. The “Watauga Study” was conducted by the Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Doctors conducted genealogical and medical surveys of three quarters of the Watauga County population in order to search for genetic defects like hemophilia or skeletal defects associated with inbreeding. They interviewed people in their homes and administered intelligence tests, compiling extensive genealogies of Watauga families. Interviewers were only interested in genetic flaws; they had no intention of addressing real social or medical issues. With callous abandon, one doctor answered a note sent back to Bowman Gray by saying if you think she is a bleeder, then “shoot her down here and we’ll give her the works.”

Young girls who were abused by older males may not have reported the abuse for fear of being blamed. Rape victims did not seek mental health counseling or expose their violators, because this would involve betraying family members. In addition, the culture of cousin marriage limits exposure not just to sexual partners, but to outside points of view. The high rate of alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide in Mary Jane’s family, and her own “passive” suicide could be linked to victimization. Some women in her family exhibit signs of post traumatic stress syndrome. The murder ballads that Mary Kincaid sang to Mary Jane were filled with stories of young, sexually compromised and murdered women.

Mary Jane, who was in constant fear of men during the last few years of her life, carried both a gun and a knife (Burkett 2004). Her mother Ruby may have killed a man she shot in a crowded honky tonk. (Douglass 2004). One of Mary Jane’s female cousins

was convicted of double murder, and others turned the violence against themselves. And finally, the sexual culture played out by Ruby Crump and Mary Jane set up a culture based on sexual prowess. Women became empowered through their ability to seduce and gain control of their men, as Mary Jane indicated in her romance novels.

Pastor Tim Smith noted that Mary Jane been an abuse victim. She was in a domestic violence situation while she was a member of his church. "Throughout her life there were situations of personal abuse. That and part of what I don't know if Mary Jane understood was that's not the way it's supposed to be. I think maybe part of the reason she didn't write about it is that she might have assumed that this is what happens to people. There was definitely some physical abuse, sexual abuse ...the neighborhood she grew up in that reality is rampant and the norm and certainly where she grew up women and children in that community when she was a child in part were pretty much just knocked around and used fairly regularly, and I recall Mary Jane sort of alluding to that but not as a part of her brokenness" (Smith 2004). Smith's observation was collaborated by Betty Burkett who grew up in the community.

Mary Jane may have felt that she deserved what happened to her because of her bad behavior. "I could go to her, [the mountain] a black sinner in my heart and her sweet and gentle breath, the wind that played about my face and body, would cleanse me surely as a blessing from above" ("Tamarack Tales" 1). Ironically, she turned to the Lutheran Church for comfort in the last years of her life. The Biblical shame associated with sexuality, or perceptions of promiscuity as identity, as in Mary Jane's case, may have prevented her from seeking help outside her family and community sphere. As

Appalachian women, it was their role to be caretakers. One of Mary Jane's primary identities was sexual, and this was in direct opposition to her role as a religious mountain mother, or "Mary of the Mountain." Truly divided, Mary Jane saw the devil perched on one shoulder and an angel on the other. Guilt could be the only end result.

Mary Jane's best friend and companion from "Hill House" stated that the men in the family preyed on young girls who remained silent. One of her uncles "pulled a gun on me and told me he would have a piece of my ass" (Douglass 2004). In response to such violence, Mary Jane and her mother in turn became predatory, looking for relationships with young men, the younger the better, according to Douglass. Ruby had a long running love affair with a young man, and Mary Jane liked them young (Douglass 2004). Ruby met her young lover in secret at the Meat Camp cabin ("Four Appalachian Women 9).

Mary Jane was hostile toward men and she partially explained why. "Ninety percent of the men I know are dumb, even the ones who are supposed to be smart. Men run the system, the schools, the businesses; the entire world is run by men" (11). She adds that she doesn't think that all men are idiots, but that "she could never count on them...bar none I am stronger than any man I know when it comes to perseverance, patience, and getting the job done, going to school, working, and scrounging like hell for a living" (11).

Why were several women in Mary Jane's family, including her mother, so violent toward men? Why did Mary Jane almost beat her uncle Pink Ellison's son Don to death with a hammer while he was passed out when they were on the mountain? (Woodard 2000) Why did her aunt Tempy and her cousin Hazel commit suicide? These extreme

examples of emotional imbalance were countered by Granny Mary Kincaid who became Mary Jane's moral compass, the opposite of the wild and unpredictable Ruby Crump. Granny Mary was Mary Jane's example of a "good" mountain mother, balancing the other end of the scales. The women in Mary Jane's family provided exceptional models of virtue and violence, a tightrope which Mary Jane wanted to walk, but fell from over and over again. The women were strong, as son Jacob Woodard noted. "They stood for something" (Woodard 2005).

Mary Jane lived in two worlds, one immersed in feelings of receiving God's love and sharing in his gifts, and the other filled with guilt that radiated from a fundamentalist religious experience. In the center of these extremes, she often chose community as a moderating force. Engaged in academic or local community, she could model genuine Christ-like love and compassion, expand her intellect, and continue to seek her mother's love and Granny Mary's approval.

Mary Jane's friend and Pottertown resident, Betty Burkett, noted that each time Mary Jane pulled away from men and alcohol her situation improved, but she kept going back (Burkett 2004) and that habit, coupled with her history, may have landed her in a final, abusive relationship with Marshall Coffee.

Predatory relationships with women, beginning with Wib Snyder who was murdered by his sons for abducting a young girl, may well have been a patriarchal privilege carried by Pottertown men into the twentieth century. Borderland towns like Pottertown, the "backyard" sections of east coast and southern states, were considered to be ungovernable on both sides of the law. As a result, former district attorney Tom

Rusher noted as so many scholars of the region had done, that residents contrived their own rules of conduct. Residents considered themselves as outlaws, and local police officials considered Pottertown residents largely outside their jurisdiction as long as they were only killing or ruling over each other. Boone law enforcement structures contributed to the Pottertown reality. The community operated outside of the rule of law, and they could only have done so with the blessing of the county court system.

In the absence of the law as a balancing system, women embraced ideas of fierce mountain independence. “The old ways, the ballads that were brought from England and handed down by word of mouth, the ability to make it on my own if I need be, the awesome sense of knowing I am part of all this. I belong to this place” (Brooks 1976). Beaver observed that Pottertown “represented a mythic past, a safe and secure place where families remained intact, and where poverty could be managed. With a reputation for violence, drama, and eccentricity which characterized both Ruby’s and Mary Jane’s decisions as they managed their children – abandoning them, holding them close, relying on multiple care givers – and managed poverty” (Beaver 2000).

CHAPTER SIX
Christian Myth: The Mature Writer

In her children's narratives, Mary Jane created a mythic place where Christian tradition merged with nature on a magical mountain in a children's story entitled "Rainbow Reuben." Her lifestyle of alcohol, drugs, and men had aged her body and mind and had resulted in homelessness, but she continued to write. Raised in the Church of Christ, and in need of medical help, help with her addiction, comfort and support, she turned to the church. It was at Grace Lutheran Church where she found unconditional love (Smith 2004). One morning she came to church and sat in the back corner, according to Smith. She had connected with the church through the Hospitality House where she was staying, and through her participation in Alcoholics Anonymous.

She sort of shared a little bit about her wanting to be more spiritually centered and that's a big part of the AA recovery, is the whole spiritual reality of God and the higher power ... I think at that particular time in her life she continued to grow in God's sense of grace for her and love for her not contingent on her achievements. You mention the red balloon about God's divine love [Mary Jane's illustrated story] and so forth and I really think that whole concept was such a critical piece of Mary Jane's life." (Smith 2004)

An active church member, Mary Jane spoke to college students, taught Sunday school, and brought her granddaughters to church. In one last change of identity, she joined the Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Boone, and embraced her role as grandmother to Caroline Woodard's two daughters. She began to create oral narratives for her granddaughters (Woodard 2002). As a mature writer, she merged the elements of oral tradition, the cadence of the ballad voice, the imagery of the mountain story telling tradition, and her own need for solace and comfort in a story she designed for children and was planning to publish. Along with "The Song Giver," the story of "Rainbow Reuben" is a landmark story in the evolution of Mary Jane's writing and her life. Rainbow Reuben was originally an oral story that she created to entertain her youngest granddaughter (Woodard 2002).

Rainbow Reuben had a little girl and her name was Sarah Jane. Sometimes Sarah Jane went with Rainbow Reuben on his adventures, and sometimes she stayed at home so that she could go to school. All little girls go to school, even in the land of Make Do or Do Without, where rainbows are tacked in the sky with sugar tacks.

One day Rainbow Reuben said, "Come with me today, Sarah Jane, and help me tack up a rainbow over in dewdrop valley. Those folks over there are pretty sad and I thing we could make them smile, don't you?"

"Why are they sad?" she asked. "Are they hungry or cold or lonely?"

Rainbow Reuben put several handfuls of sugar tacks into the silver and gold bag, then he answered, "No honey. They're not cold or hungry on lonely.

There's been a lot of rain and foggy weather over there lately, and I think the folks would like to see a rainbow. They live in the Valley with high lovely mountains so the fog is heavy when it's rainy."

He went into a very special room in his house, and Sarah Jane followed him. "Be careful Sara Jane" he told her. "This is the rainbow room and there are rainbows all over the place. Please don't step on them."

And truly there were rainbows everywhere in the room. They were rolled up and stacked against the walls; there were rainbows folded and lying on the floor and even rainbows hanging from the ceiling.

Sara Jane had never been in the Rainbow Room before. Not many people had. In fact, Rainbow Reuben only allowed his helpers, Mary of the Mountain, and Sara Jane to go into the special room. "Oh, it's so beautiful in here. All the colors in the world, all the colors I've ever seen are here in this room" cried Sarah Jane. Indeed, the room was a sight to behold. The wonderful, warm rainbows glowed with all the colors we see in a rainbow in the sky, after the sunshine chases the rain away. The Rainbows were made of some stuff only the Master Rainbow Maker knew how to make. They were very thin, and Sarah Jane could see right through the flowing, glimmering colors. "May I touch one please?" she asked, reaching toward a folded rainbow on the floor.

"Yes, but be careful" said Rainbow Reuben as he gently placed several rolled up rainbows in his gold and silver bag. He usually took a couple of extra rainbows along just in case of an emergency. Once, while on his way to tack up a

rainbow on Long Hope Mountain, he met an old, old woman who was lost and almost frozen to death, and he wrapped her in a rainbow on Long Hope Mountain. He led her out of the wild woods and down the mountain to her home, but surely she would have frozen if he had not placed a sweet rainbow around her bony old shoulders. That's another story though, and I'll tell you all about it some other day. We still don't know what happened to Sarah Jane and Rainbow Reuben.

(1-2)

In only a few pages of this Christian myth Mary Jane has related God to nature and expressed God's love for Sarah Jane and for all the people of the "Valley." Amazingly, Mary Jane introduces a feminine deity, Mary of the Mountain, the powerful female principal inseparable from nature. (In "Reuben" she included members of her family, including Lizzy, in her aside of her aged grandmother who nearly froze in the wild woods as a small child carrying flour from the mill.) God comes from the mountain, from the manifestation of nature, and he comes to every little girl like Sarah Jane. Rainbow Reuben enlists Sarah Jane's help. He tells her that if we are selfish the other people in the valley will suffer and "forget how to smile" (2). This idea of giving to others is primary in Mary Jane's world view. She gives freely of her time and few resources to people within her view. "We must always share rainbows with other folks because they don't have enough. If we share, then we are making other folks smile... (2)

Together, Reuben and Sarah Jane take the long trail through "the laurel thicket and cranberry bog," a small trail that leads them down into Dew Drop Valley. They find themselves immersed in fog and they hear a little boy hiding under a huckleberry bush.

The child asks for their help in bringing back the sun to his family. He is crying he says, because "I haven't seen the sun in so long that I'm sure it's gone away forever. The crops will die, and my dad will be sad" (3). Reuben has his rainbows but he cannot bring back the sun alone. He enlists the help of the "fog Furies" who suck the fog the way we suck milk through a straw (4). Mary Jane uses this common children's image to bring her grandchildren into the story and ground them in the tale. The "fog-furry" bodies get bigger and bigger until they float away revealing the sunlight.

A beautiful image of Reuben climbing a Tamarack pine to nail up his rainbow follows the clearing of the sky. The happy children shout directions to Reuben like "higher" or "it needs another tack." Reuben includes the children in his plan to save the valley folk. He lets them carry his hammer and his bag on the way home, and he gives them "a bite of rainbow to warm your tummy and make you smile with the inside part of yourself" (6). God is real and he supplies your needs, was her message to her young granddaughters as she taught them self worth.

In "Rainbow Reuben," Sarah Jane is united with the dark haired boy child. This symbolizes Mary Jane's reunion with her brother Jake. They were reunited when they visited the Long Hope together on family outings. I believe they are together in this story as children engaged with the master rainbow maker in lifting the fog from the world.

Suddenly she stopped. "Someone's crying," she said. "I hear someone crying there beside the huckleberry bush." She ran to the bush and looked behind it.

There sat a little black-haired boy, his head bent over. "What's wrong, little boy" she asked, and patted him on the arm. "Please don't cry." (3)

Mary Jane is interpreting Christianity through the lens of her own religious and emotional experience on The Long Hope Mountain.

In the children's stories, Mary Jane is free to explore her own separation from her mother, brother, and sister as she did in "Butterfly Cow." Her personal story can be disguised in symbols and animals from nature. These stories demonstrate her mastery of mythological narrative and her understanding of the purpose of literature in healing and instructing children.

Mary Jane wrote children's stories when she was in her fifties. She possessed a family literary tradition and a master's level education in Appalachian Studies, a discipline that explores the history, sociology, culture, literary and oral tradition of the Appalachian people. She was able to combine these skills with her own oral tradition in the children's stories, healing narratives at work across generations. Her grandchildren were her redemption as a mother (Woodard J. 2005) and the stories she created for them in such innovative forms addressed their particular needs. Mary Jane acted as a spiritual healer, using story as medicine:

In an ideal world, upsetting experiences are transformed into stories that are shared with others. This process helps us to understand the events and, at the same time alerts our friends to our emotional and psychological state. Such storytelling ultimately helps us maintain a stable social and emotional life. In our less-than-ideal existence, however, we often keep important personal experiences to ourselves. Holding these secrets can be biologically taxing, can block the natural work of coming to terms with the secrets, and can distance the secret keeper from

friends and family. Translating personal upsetting experiences into language in a story format, even when the story is written rather than spoken, may accomplish for us what oral story telling must have accomplished for our ancestors -- improvements in physical and mental health as well as the development of closer social bonds.” (Pennebaker 8)

The Red Balloon

Nearing the end of her life, Mary Jane wrote and illustrated the story of “The Red Balloon” in order to express and evaluate her own illness. The story bears the same title as the 1956 film by Albert Lamorisse, an experimental film about a young boy who is befriended by a red balloon. “‘I am lost in the dark woods’, said the red balloon. I can’t find my way home.” Mary Jane uses “found” objects from the woods to build this metaphor for her struggle with addiction. The balloon learns to move rocks and bricks. Quite a feat! The “balloon” has scary dreams about something “very dark and frightening” in the upstairs and “she was afraid to confront it. For a while, the balloon and the dark thing live together in the house, but the red balloon is in charge” (2).

“God made balloons. He gave them the ultimate gift. He gave them love. The soul of the balloon is love.” How is Mary Jane able to transcend her “dark side of self” and embrace this perfect gift? “She got in so much trouble that she felt a great curtain of darkness settle all around her. She thought the dark night [addiction] would last forever. It did, indeed, last for years” (7). Mary Jane likened the phases of her life to the changing seasons. Spring was her childhood, summer her motherhood, fall a time of contemplation and spiritual harvest, and at last winter, and eternal sleep.

The balloon floats out of the woods and away out to sea where the sky was dark and she is alone “in a tiny boat.” Eventually the sun comes out and she takes the form of a crystal, a personality with seven sides like the crystal, absorbing and channeling light. The balloon carries bricks to construct a wall between her and the world and then tears it down again. The story is filled with opposite images of joy and sorrow. At times she has full access to God and to his powerful love. Sometimes she exists solely in darkness alone with her struggle. Her life is a constant awareness of both the light and dark side of God. Like the balloon she floats, circling the many faceted God and tries to keep from being “blown away.”

Mary Jane passed into winter in September of 2000. She was just too tired and too ill to go on any longer (Smith 2004). The red balloon is the offering she left for her family. The balloon tells of her struggle, and of her times of peace and love, and it shares her hope. “The soul of the balloon is love.” Like the eleven-year old who wrote about God’s love, the mature Mary Jane remained steadfast in her belief that love ruled the universe.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Unraveling

The 1970s marked a period of exploration and freedom-seeking in Mary Jane's life. In the 1980s, she submerged herself in the world of academics. Scholarship moderated her addictions and brought her into contact with nurturing academics. But her academic journey was relatively short in the scheme of her life. By the 1990s, Mary Jane's health was declining and alcoholism was destroying her strength and independence. Her periods of drunkenness were longer and they were stealing her normalcy. She no longer maintained her home base in the little cabin at Meat Camp that her brother Jake Crump and his father Colden built. She was increasingly running into the law, increasingly unable to work, and was frequently homeless.

Mary Jane burned the cabin in Meat Camp. She had lived there fifteen years. Her mother used to come and give her hell. One day her mama pushed her too far. She had a right to that place because she inherited it along with her mother. Ruby told her she'd have to get out. She couldn't live there. Mary Jane lived her life doing her own thing. Her older sister was upstanding living her life. She had a very ambitious husband, had a business and worked hard. Fairly wealthy. Did not tolerate her mother.

Only Mary Jane was vulnerable and would not call the police on her. Ruby came one time too many and said get the hell out. Mary Jane snapped. "If I can't live in this cabin nobody will." She threw a match on the bed, carried her books outside and watched it burn. (Douglass 2004)

The loss of the Meat Camp cabin was devastating. The fire triggered a long series of moves and temporary living conditions that sent her all over town and up on Three Top before it resulted in homelessness, but even then Mary Jane continued to work as a women's advocate. She addressed other homeless women:

Good Evening. My name is Mary Jane Brooks. I'm widowed, I'm fifty-two years old, and I live at the Hospitality House. At this stage of my life I find myself living in a homeless situation. I worked for twenty-four years until as a result of declining health, I couldn't work any longer. I have a minimal fixed income but no savings. I left the situation I was in because of domestic violence and so here I am a homeless person.

A lot of stereotypes exist about homeless people. Much of the public sees a homeless person as lazy, ignorant, drunks or drug addicts, shiftless and not caring about much of anything except the next meal. I'm here this evening to tell you anyone can become a homeless person. Three of the women at the house now are there because of domestic violence situations. ("Letters" 3)

As ill as she was, Mary Jane continued her role as a social activist, turning once more to ASU and to the refuge of learning. In 1999, she enrolled in the Masters program in English. Her professors witnessed Mary Jane's premature aging. Susan Keefe, a

member of her thesis committee and of mine, recalled that Mary Jane visited Sanford Hall preparing to venture back into education, and that she appeared dramatically transformed by her illness. Mary Jane had aged far beyond her years. During her last ten years, between 1990 and 2000, her name appeared in the criminal record numerous times, with changing addresses and a long list of alcohol related charges. She lived on Perkinsville Drive in a trailer park, on Gloria Drive, on Three Top with her son Michael, on the Long Hope and at Meat Camp, and lived in a trailer painted in rainbow colors and declaring “we’re not in Kansas anymore” (Woodard 2000, Douglass 2004). She wound up at Hospitality House in the months before her death. Her Granny Mary had died recently, and with her went the true mother figure, support and love that Mary Jane relied upon during her lifetime. Having lost both her mother and Mary, she was alone as she had never been before.

The story of “The Red Balloon,” Pastor Smith noted, as the story of God’s unconditional love was a “critical piece of her life.” For the last two years of her life she was plagued with – you can call it illness or demons ... She went to Broughton several times and a couple of times checked herself in” (Smith 2004). She shook uncontrollably and could not read or write, her respite in the world, Smith observed.

I think realizing God’s unconditional love she was not able to bear after a time, the burden of life without the hopefulness of her reading and writing. That was such an escape or maybe even it wasn’t an escape for her – maybe the alcohol was an escape and the writing was her true self. (Smith 2004)

Mary Jane came to Smith on the day preceding her death to thank him for everything he had done for her. He entreated her not to harm herself. "I knew she was not going to live and I sent people looking for her and she was not at the house... I was not at all surprised that she was dead, because I knew personally that the demons had gotten the best of her and that really she was not frightened the last night I saw her" (Smith 2004).

Mary Jane was much loved by Smith and by her friend Betty Burkett at the Grace Lutheran Church. Smith explained why her story was so poignant. She was very honest about "that brokenness and somehow reconciling those two sides of us. She is so much in my heart because she represents kind of everybody but it's only that she is kind of obvious because she lived in extremes" (Smith 2004). Help came to her from the church, from her grandchildren and her children. She may have been homeless and out of control in her alcoholism and her illness, but she was not forsaken by her community.

Her fellow church members, her care providers, and her children and grandchildren worried about her constantly. Mary Jane had the capacity to remake herself many times over, but she had spent all her physical and mental capital. She was out of control. Pastor Tim Smith's children rode the school bus with one of Mary Jane's granddaughters, and she would send him messages through the children. "Granny needs help." Smith said Mary Jane took care of them and they took care of her (Smith 2004).

Help came to Mary Jane when she was out of control. Tim Smith and other members of the Boone Police force arranged Mary Jane's trips to psychiatric hospitals. All the issues that had driven her over time seemed to be boiled down to getting her body under control. The question of what was wrong with Mary Jane had never been answered.

For Mary Jane's daughter Caroline Woodard, who is now a keeper of the family's oral tradition, there are no satisfying explanations for her mother's illness and tragic death.

Woodard characterizes her mother as hard working. She was a drug addict who would get on drugs but wouldn't stay on them. Toward the end of Mary Jane's life, Woodard spoke with Mary Jane's mental health professionals. Mary Jane spent several periods of time in Broughton Psychiatric Hospital. She needed to go, according to Woodard (Woodard 2000). Thinking back on her mother's behavior over the years, her manic housekeeping, and her taking speed when she was studying, Woodard noted that her mother was intensely manic. "There was just no other explanation for it" (Woodard 2000). Mary Jane had told her daughter that after her children were born she used to sit up all night shining shoes. Woodard recalled that while Mary Jane was in school she would use up a broom a month sweeping the house.

Woodard observed, as had Pastor Tim Smith, that during the last year of her life Mary Jane was simply not herself. She was not drugging at the time of her death; she was taking Clonnapin for a bipolar disorder. The phrase Woodard used was "something just snapped."

Woodard saw her mother often, and spoke with her daily. Over the years she said she often acted as her mother's care taker, and does not understand why on the night of her death that Mary Jane's boyfriend did not pick up the phone and give her a call. Mary Jane had been drinking for about two weeks and had been hospitalized earlier for severe dehydration. She had been sober but hallucinating. "She told me about the flowers singing to her...She said it's a real trip Caroline and I'm not on drugs." Woodard said

that when her mother hallucinated that the flies looked like they had big mouths or she believed that someone was actually moving her house she would call 911 repeatedly (Woodard 2000).

To Woodard it was ironic that in August right before her mother's death Mary Jane seemed the happiest she had seen her. Mary Jane returned to school in the spring of 1999 to complete four undergraduate and one graduate course in English, and was enrolled for classes in the fall. She came often to visit her granddaughters. For Mary Jane, education was an escape, an opportunity to get away from her problems and reinvent herself into the person she wanted to be, not the person she was afraid that she was. The little voice inside her head, the one that must have said "you're worthless" became silent. In the English program, Mary Jane was once again a person of merit.

That was the happiest I had seen her in years when she finally went back to school – then whatever happened to her. She was never the same after that. She didn't want to read anymore. She stopped watching Jeopardy. My mother's whole life, if she was not consuming some kind of knowledge she was dissatisfied. The only one [explanation] that ever made sense to me was a nurse said that she was still dehydrated and dehydration could have caused brain damage (Woodard 2000).

For many years, Mary Jane's mental health care consisted of being picked up by the Boone police and driven into jail or to a hospital. When she was out of control and charges were made against her, the police often contacted her daughter. Once they called Woodard after they went to arrest Mary Jane in her rainbow trailer on Ridge Road and

Mary Jane held them off with a gun. Woodard advised the police to let her bring in Mary Jane after she had sobered up. She reported that she had been getting calls to pick her mother up since she was sixteen years of age.

But the night that Mary Jane lay in the mud and the rain half clothed under a tarp just outside Marshall Coffee's door where he kept a warm fire inside, no call came in. By morning, Mary Jane was dead from exposure and an extremely high alcohol level. Although it was only late September, the night turned rainy and temperatures dipped into the thirties. Her last entry into the public record was the autopsy report citing the cause of her death as hypothermia. Smith's observation that Mary Jane was a "passive suicide" was not commented on by local law enforcement. The autopsy photographs and the photos taken at Coffee's home testified to the desperate living circumstances which contributed to her death. The building was little more than a shack. Woodard said there are unanswered questions about the events leading up to her mother's death. Mary Jane took her place on the violent, wind blown branches of her family tree where murder victims and suicides ripened and fell. Caroline Woodard described the night of Mary Jane's death:

Marshall told me that she went for pills, but she didn't need pills other than what the doctors had her on. She stayed out David's [son David Woodard] for a little while. He couldn't handle her so he took her to the Hospitality House. That's when she got that red car because I was living in Mountain City. Then she started doing a bunch of volunteer work. She got that apartment right at the top of the mountain. That's where she was when she got sick. Then she moved back to

Three Top and her and Marshall started back dating. He came back while she was still at Hospitality House. When she was going to school {and when she was at Hospitality House} she didn't see him. Wouldn't sleep with him no more. She was going to church and school. He came over there and started staying all the time and they'd left to go to his house the night she died. That's where she was at, up behind Lumbarger's Mill. Marshall goes by Marshall Coffee. But he told me he was a Crump. Somewhere they messed up. That's where she was when she died. She died outside beside her car. The medical examiner said he was going to turn the papers over to the law. Because Marshall had her keys in his pocket when I got there that morning and mama had got in the back seat of her car. I'm thirty-three- years-old and I've never seen my mama barefooted in the house. She might get up to get a cup of coffee but she usually put on her little house slippers. And she was barefooted and didn't have her shirt on... I don't know what she was doing outside like that because she still had that army coat that she wore all the time for school. She didn't have her coat on. So at 12:00, somewhere between 12:00 and 2:00, I don't know what I think happened. It [drug levels in her blood] was all at therapeutic levels. None of it was elevated. Not even the Adavan... her alcohol levels were real high. I asked Marshall but he told everybody she eat a bunch of pills. That he's see her. I asked him. There'd been two or three different stories told. I asked him what the bedspread and tar paper were doing outside. He said he covered Mama up with that. So if mom passed out, why didn't he bring her in the house? But that was 12:00. She was already passed out and he should

have called. All he had to do was pick up the phone because I've hunted her all my life since I was sixteen. (Woodard 2000)

Detective Cook, investigator at the scene, said there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against Coffee who was also intoxicated. Coffee did not intervene to save Mary Jane's life by bringing her inside the shack that night. She died near his door, and only a short distance from another residence.

Mary Jane died on September 26, 2000, and services were held two days later at Grace Lutheran Church where Mary Jane and her granddaughters were members of the congregation. Friend, counselor, and pastor, Tim Smith bore the duty of Mary Jane's passage, a passage he knew was both eminent and inevitable. The funeral was attended by a diverse group including Mary Jane's family, academic comrades, friends from the Hospitality House, and many others. Pat Beaver helped to arrange the service and provide a marker for her grave. Beaver read from "Tamarack Tales" to an audience that was largely unaware Mary Jane was ever a writer. Her granddaughter, Brandi Page, wrote a poem in her grandmother's memory noting that Mary Jane was the "grandma everyone should have had." Consistently, individuals who knew Mary Jane talked about her compassion for other people and the outpouring of love that emanated from her. Even her children, who suffered incredible upheaval during their childhood, spoke lovingly of their mother. Mary Jane's ashes were scattered on the Long Hope. Her son Jake said, "She's where she wanted to be, on the mountain" (Woodard, Jacob. 2005).

Her friend and mentor, Beaver sent the memo that announced Mary Jane's death including a brief biography.

Mary Jane completed her BA here at Appalachian, and was in the first cohort to complete the MA in Appalachian Studies, writing a thesis entitled Changes in Traditional Appalachian Family Patterns Brought About by Socioeconomic Change (1983) which integrated ethnography and narrative. She was active in the Council on Appalachian Women and the American Cancer Society, and wrote poetry, fiction, and essay, much of which focused on her life growing up in Watauga County. ("In Reply" and "Local Color" published in Mountain Review. "The Song Giver," "The Great Bargain Giver," "First Car in Pottertown," "Mountain Medicine," "Easy Money," published in Forever Alive; and "Trailers: The Owners" in Southern Exposure.)

CHAPTER EIGHT
Poetic License: My Memory of Mary Jane

January, 1982

It's cold on the mountain. The moon bears down on the parking lot and glances off the chips of mica that wind up in the pavement around here. The gravel is granite and it lends a deep steely gray to the pavement. The surface looks brittle and unforgiving like the sharp metal edges of the sleeping cars. The moon reflects in the chrome around the headlights, the door handles, and the windshields. "The moon was a drip on a dark hood / 'N they were drivin' around 'n around / Vital Willie tol' Weepin' Milly / I'm gonna' booglarize you baby." The lyrics to Captain Beefheart keep playing in my head. The light details the feathery ice crystals on the windows. There are only a few cars remaining in the desolate lot where I am standing just outside a country bar somewhere off the parkway. I'm not sure where I am, or if I could find my way back, even if I had Mary Jane's keys so I go back inside before my breath freezes.

Obviously, I don't have good sense because when I look around me I don't see a world of promise. I am in a bar at 1:00 in the morning without a ride home. When Mary Jane is around it's OK to drink a beer and a shot and think about having the kind of romantic adventure she finds so readily when we are out. I'm getting cold feet now, so I

pop a dime in the phone, and call a friend to bum a ride. Mary Jane is loose on the night. She doesn't have a steady that I know of. She's between marriages. This guy she is leaving with can't hold a candle to the last one she picked up at Clyde's.

Clyde's is a bar in Blowing Rock where we read poetry on Wednesday night. Drinks are free to the poets. It's January. You can't properly heat a place in the high country with this many windows. It's good the wine is free because I am not doing all that well in tips these days. Mary Jane makes steady at the Waffle Express serving breakfast, but I wind up as usual at what appears to be a more sophisticated joint serving tourists and skiers. It's on its way out. Before we left her home, we searched our pockets and counted up quarters for gas and food. Mary Jane is wearing her knee length sweater and black shirt and jeans. Me, I have layered on every piece of wool I own. The clothes on my back came from a wealthy family of stripminers back in Kentucky where my mother works as a full time housekeeper. Over the tailored wool sweater and A-line skirt, I am wearing a full length leather coat that I lucked out on at the thrift store.

In Mary Jane's pocket there is a napkin with the day's poem inked across it. We write on anything, the guest ticket books that ride home in our pockets, or white napkins. Each poem is a vessel that contains us, like the soul jars that protect the sick person from harm. Each one is both talisman and medicine. Each one is proof of our art and our existence. Poetry is part of the identity we wear out in the open. We share so much in common including families marked by alcoholism, a great love of music and narrative, a deep lack of true self-confidence due to society's belief that mountain people are lazy and socially inferior, and an unshakeable sense of failure, both as women and as

unpublished writers. We cover our sense of insecurity with bravado. Art is our refuge, a salve for shame.

We come in and get our drinks and wait to see who will brave the bitter wind to come and read. And just as we are ready to go on, just as the last of the meek winter light fades, a biker comes in dragging a plume of cold air with him. He pulls off the helmet and shakes out his hair revealing his angular face and blue eyed blondness. Hair straight and fine as corn silk, he is excessively tall, his tallness accentuated by the sleek black leather biker gear. He is broad shouldered, narrow waist and hips. He looks cold. He has come down from the icy breath of Grandfather Mountain carrying a small ivory chapbook in his back pocket.

The wind presses against the glass. We sip wine and take our turns reading. We see no disparity in the trail we follow from class room to classy watering hole to windowless dive on the "wrong side of the tracks." We see no conflict in our desire for independence while we long to be possessed by strangers. We can be as intent as whores or reflective as school girls. We read the Paris Review and dime store novels. The important thing is whatever you mean to do, come out innocent and clean.

The stranger's poetry is compelling and he knows how to read it.

Some women like you

Are of other worlds, fleet and fine,

Rare, like the moon

For an instant through clouds.

(Dowdle 7)

Mary Jane has a glint in her eye. After Mary Jane and I read she presses the car keys into my hand on her way out and she whispers, see you tomorrow in class. If I were stranded maybe the problem would take the sting out of the wind as the door closes behind them. She's brought nothing but an old, worn wool coat and no scarf to cover her face or gloves for her hands. I watch her get on that bike with a man maybe fifteen years younger, escorting him out under the noses of the interested exquisite college girls in their snug jeans, smelling of expensive musk. Mary Jane's hair comes out of a bottle. Red, it hangs down her shoulders in long layers. Her face is lined by hard living, but she accentuates it with mascara and lipstick. She looks much older than her age. I wonder if she will freeze as they straddle the bike, rev it up and pull out of the parking lot, her hair flying out behind her.

A blast of cold air lingers in the room. I try to warm my hands as I hold the small chapbook he has sold me for two dollars. I know that in my hands I possess magic. Was Mary Jane ever even here? Was the stranger who took her away real or did he create himself out of some kind of fantasy world? I open the wafer thin book and begin to read.

During that year I am trying on identities of my own, separated from my husband who I have known since I was eighteen years old. I am twenty-nine. I dress dramatically. I am slight in weight and always cold. The wind can pass through almost any garment, anything but my long leather coat with the fur collar.

Mary Jane takes her freedom in large measure. Though I do not know this at the time for the Mary Jane I see is not drunk, not unkind, her involvement with outlaw men is consistent and her involvement with drugs is extensive. She is awaiting trial for her role

in a robbery which I understand she attributed to just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. From small offerings of her story I heard in her little cabin in Meat Camp, I construct a short story about the day after the robbery when she wakes up in jail coming down from shooting up MDA. I put everyone in the story, her children, her brother Jake, and her Granny Mary.

Her daughter Caroline is fourteen and living with an older man in a little one room cabin just below Mary Jane's. Her sons are teenagers who have been involved in drugs and alcohol from their early teens (Kerce 2004). On the surface, the tidy little household with woodstove and bookshelves is a lot less calm, I later am to learn. The image of that night in Blowing Rock, the fierce cold clarity of the climate near the summit of the parkway comes to bear whenever I think of Mary Jane. Her granddaughter, Brandy Page, said she shivers even on warm days thinking of how Mary Jane died. The image of her exposed body lying on the cold, wet ground is haunting. I remember a dream Mary Jane once told me, a foretelling of her own death.

She and her son Michael are riding his motorcycle along a winding narrow mountain ridge. The night is very clear and cold and the sky is full of stars. The view below is an expansive distance, stars overhead and lights sparkling in the distant valley below. Then suddenly Michael turns the bike deliberately toward the edge. She feels no fear as they soar out into the stars.

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TABLE 1 SNYDER FAMILY

Wilburn and Mary's children, born during the first quarter of 1900's

Wilburn (Web) Snyder m. Mary

"Selling liquor to a minor," reported to be "mean"

Conley Sherman (and his brother kill father for abducting young girl) m. Daisy Dancy

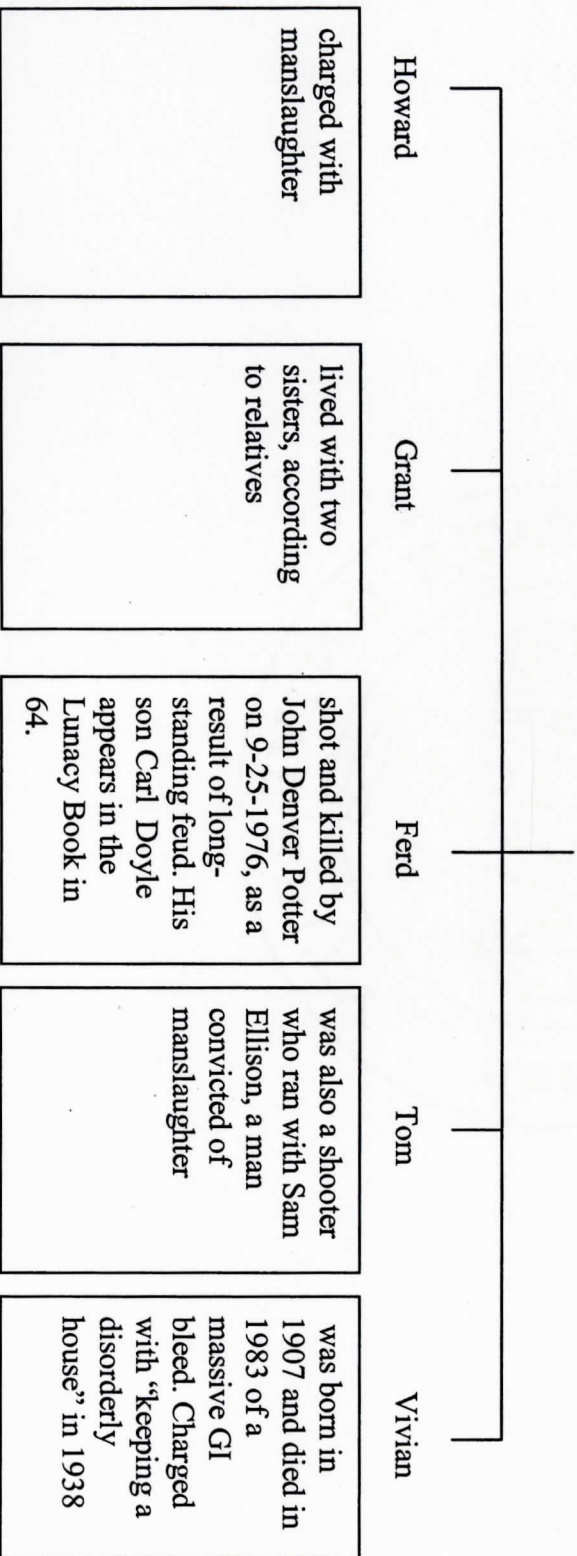


TABLE 2 ELLISSON FAMILY
 First to Settle the Long Hope Mountain

Jerry Ellison m. Elizabeth Berryford ("keeping a bad house")

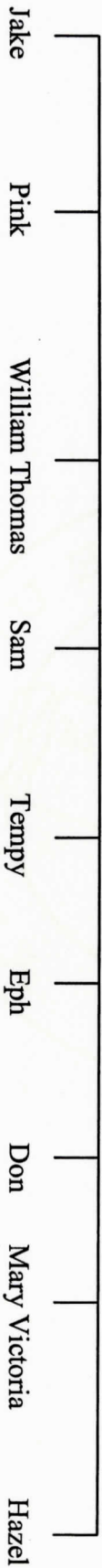
Ephraim Ellison m. Victoria (Tattie)

David Henry Ellison m. Victoria Sanders

(Cherokee blood)

Justice of the Peace involved with arresting Conley for shooting his father, sparking the Snyder Ellison Feud

Steelie Snyder comes upon Dave and Vicky's still, David and Victoria move to Mountain City Tennessee to avoid the revenuers.



Violent deaths include Eph, killed by Doc Main, who shot his wife and daughter; Tempy, who drowns herself in the river. Sam, married to Nancy Potter, was twice convicted of manslaughter. Their son Roy was Mary Jane's first love.

TABLE 3 THE SNYDER/ELLISON LINE MERGES

Jake Ellison

Vivian Snyder

Jake, reported to be a kind man, marries Conley's daughter, Vivian, against the wishes of his family. When Jake dies young, Vivian gives her children to the Ellison family and becomes estranged.

Ruby Louise	Pauline Texan	Roy Glen	Clyde	Fern Mae	Ruth

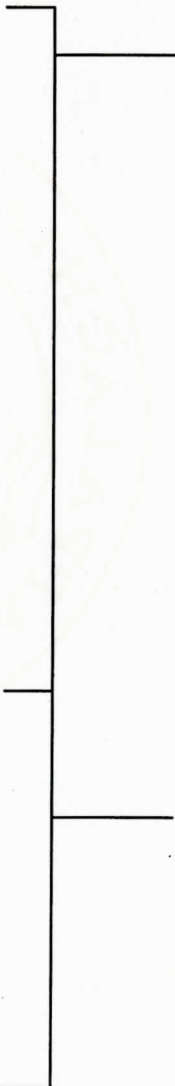
The brothers of this family appear in the criminal record for possession and transport of non tax paid liquor. Alcoholism is prevalent in this family. Roy Glen dies of drinking isopropyl alcohol on the floor of the Caldwell County Jail in 1969. Ruby, Mary Jane's mother, born in 1928, was raised by her Aunt Mary. She was known to be a violent alcoholic who liked to shoot. Sober during the last years of her life, Ruby worried about Mary Jane's drinking.

TABLE 4

MARY JANE'S PARENTS

Ruby Ellison m. Roy Butler

Ruby Ellison m. Colden Crump



Mary Jane Butler

Rebecca Louise

Jacob Henry

Shortly after Ruby divorced Roy Butler, she gave the infant Mary Jane to be raised by Mary Kincaid, despite the ill treatment she wrote that she received in Mary Kincaid's home. Mary Jane continued her mother's history of alcohol abuse and violent relationships with men. Although Mary Jane was not raised by Ruby, Mary Jane was heavily influenced by her mother, and they shared a bitter sweet love. Everyone who knew Mary Jane commented on her extreme intelligence. Both she and her mother were artistic, eloquent speakers and story tellers, and were gregarious.

Rebecca distances herself from Ruby. Jake's drunken episodes, like Mary Jane's and Ruby's, ended in disaster. He was convicted of shooting Terry Lee Coffee twice in the stomach with a .22 caliber pistol, paid Coffee's hospital bill, and was released from jail. A brilliant conversationalist and story teller like his mother and sister, Jake is a poet and song writer.

TABLE 5 ROMANCE AND MARRIAGE FOR MARY JANE

Roy Ellison (1 st love)	Charles Woodard (1 st husband)	Jimmy Putzel (2 nd husband)	Ronnie Brooks (3 rd husband)	Doug Kerce (major lover)
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David Charles Michael Ernest Lisa Caroline Jacob McDee

Prevented from marrying Roy Ellison, Mary Jane wed Charles Woodard and they created four children. She divorced Charles in 1973, and married Putzel in 1974. Putzel, a Vietnam vet, died of possible Agent Orange complications and drug and alcohol related illness. Her third husband, a Lumbee Indian, died from a gunshot wound received in a drunken dispute. Doug Kerce, long time family friend, spent many years with Mary Jane. He began drinking as a teen, and he and Mary Jane were drinking partners, friends, and lovers. Woodard remarried and created a new family.

David Charles Woodard died in 2004. At the time of his death, he and his sister Caroline were scheduled to appear in Watauga County criminal court for methamphetamine production. Woodard had a long history of addiction and violent episodes and appears in the court records numerous times. Watauga County, once known for its moonshine production, is now one of the leading meth producing counties in the state of North Carolina. Jacob is the only one of Mary Jane's children to escape addictive substances.

Table 6

INCIDENCE OF VIOLENT DEATH
(in a sample of 44 individuals from the Snyder/Ellison line)

Manslaughter	Murder Victims	Suicides	Total
8	4	5	17

Appendix B

Criminal Archive Research

Archives

Watauga County Courthouse, Clerk of Court and Registrar of Deeds
Caldwell County Courthouse, Clerk of Court and Registrar of Deeds
Watauga Study, Coy Carpenter Medical Archives of the Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston Salem, North Carolina. [I requested that this collection be copied. Beaver and Librarian Fred Hay reviewed the collection, and it is currently being copied for availability in the W.E. Eury Appalachian Collection of the ASU library.]

Watauga County Courthouse
Boone, North Carolina

Mary Jane Butler Putzel Brooks Ellison

90CR1512 Att Robert Speed PO Box 33655
90CR4496 1612 Perkinsville Drive Lot 29
99CR4475 1612 Perkinsville Drive
92CR2416 1612 Perkinsville Drive Jam Lamm attorney
94CR2821 2608 Huntington Road Fayetteville Robert Speed
94CR3951 PO Box 3655 Meat Camp Rd Robert Speed Att, also David's Att

94CR3952 PO Box 3655 Meat Camp Rd
95CR5262, 63, 64, 65, 66
97CR0169 Long Hope Rd Amanda Winebarger drops charges threatening
99CR4459 5012 Gloria Drive Eric Eller
82CR8115 common law robbery
82CR8301 inspection violation
83CRS3693 kidnapping
84CR3741 NOL
84CR IM D
77CR3592 Left of Center
79CR1031 prayer for judgment
80CR2715 no operators license
81CR1764 no operators, allows unlicensed driver to drive
81CR2194 speeding
81CR3060 stop sign violation
84CR05297 resisting arrest
84CR2470 NOL
84CR05298 hit and run
83CR2389 DUI
83CR2388 CCW
78CR5198 worthless check
74CR2316 trespassing
73CR3474 shoplifting
74CR1271 one way street
74CR2257 allowing unlicensed to drive
All of Mary Jane's charges are dismissed or fines with the exception of common law robbery.

David Woodard

03CR051192 manufacturing
62502 check to Boone Drug
12704 assault with a deadly weapon
111303 check to Lowes Foods
12903 check to Boone Drug
012704 communicating threats
032389 no operators license
062189 fict cncl rev alt reg card
092889 fail stop sign, flashing red light
092889 carrying concealed weapon
082691 maintain veh/dwell/place
041796 poss F-wrn/L2/mxbv
042600 speeding
043003 assault with deadly
111302 check to Lowes
012903 check to Boone Drug
011503 check to Boone Drug
012784 communicating threats
032389 no op lic

Related Entries in Criminal Dockets

Minute Docket # 5, p 148
State vs Hazel Snow Ellison
B&E dwelling house of Mike Gearhardt
Aug 30 1967

Minute Docket # 3

State vs Pink Ellison

Pleads guilty to forcible trespass

4 months term roadwork

and pay 75.00 to Paul Greene

3 25 57

Minute Docket N p 528

State vs David Ellison

Judgment NISI

April term 52

June called and failed

April continued

Assault with a deadly

Sept 19 1950

Minute Docket N p 540, 531, 483, 484, 61,2

Clyde Ellison

Possessing and transporting non

tax paid liquor

12 months state highway public works

April 1952 called and failed

Minute Docket N p 61

State vs Tom Snyder, Sam Ellison

Assault with a deadly weapon

Snyder pleads guilty simple assault

Two years suspended

Minute Docket N p 66

State vs: Coolidge Potter, Roy Reece, Paul Ellison,

Guilty auto larceny

6 month state highway

Suspended, pay 40.00 to H.B Perry

Sept 17 1946

Minute Docket N p 438, 424, 114, 106, 29, 16

Ellison, Sam

Manslaughter 2nd degree

Sept 15 1947

Minute Docket K

Will Ellison, liquor NOL

Mar, 24, 1930

Also Jake Ellison

Illegal liquor manufacturing

March 26, 1930

Minute Docket K, 436, 506

Bill Ellison

RS Potter, Lafayette Potter

A true bill, affray

April 13, 1932

Minute Docket K 290, 252, 246, 185

Forgery, pay cost, go to school

May 23 1931

Minute Docket L, 258

A. E. Ellison

Murder

April 27, 1938

Minute Docket L, 264

Mrs. Viva Ellison

Keeping disorderly house

April 29, 1938

Clarence Potter mentioned

Lunacy Book, 298

Carl Doyle Snyder age 26

Declared emergency insane, of Tamarack, transport to Morganton

Nearest relative, Ferd and Josephine Snyder

Criminal Docket A included the late 1800's. Entries are not in alpha order. Charges are not explained and are often abbreviated.

Criminal Docket, 36

Lindsey Ellison, bastardy, bond of indemnity filed
1876

Wilborn Snyder mentioned, 63

Criminal Docket A, 149

Elizabeth Ellison

Keeping a bad house

May 12, 1880

Criminal Docket A, 208
R Snyder
Criminal trespass

Criminal Docket A, 272
Camilla Miller
Keeping disorderly house

Minute Docket M, 87, 15
Mrs. Viva Snyder
Keeping disorderly house
Sept 21 1938

Criminal Docket A, 280, 348, 315
Mary Ann Snyder
Retailing or selling liquor to a minor
Also F&A ?

Criminal Docket A, 360
Morgan Stearn
Disorderly House
1894

Criminal Docket A, 280
Lydia Shelton and Mollie
Keeping a disorderly house
1895

Criminal Docket A, 385, 391
Stella and Roy Snyder

Assault
Ephraim and Pink mentioned

Criminal Docket A, 412
Evoline Potter
Retailing

Criminal Docket A, 436
Rom Church
Retailing

Criminal Docket A, 514
Clarence Potter for the murder of Howard Hockaday

Witnesses called, 33 of 1900's docket
In the state vs Sam Ellison
Pink Ellison, Glen Ellison, David Ellison
Fall of 1956
Josephine, and J, S, or a G Snyder in Sept, 1943

Felony class documents from 1920-1968

One Cress Snyder
For the rape of Hazel Hody, January 1962

Caldwell County Criminal Records

Jacob Henry Crump 89CR08609

Oct 14 1989

Rt 1 Box 466 B

Lenoir

Assault Terry Coffey with a 25 caliber, shot twice in the chest area

Feb 12 1992 committed and released on March 4 1992

Terry Lee Coffee RT 1 Box 560 Lenoir.

Paid 14,143.00 in restitution

Birth, Death, Marriage Certificates

David Don Ellison 10 17 1950

Book 37-188

Rural Lenoir

Merchant

Father Dave Ellison and Vick Sanders

WWI vet

Nephritis, alcohol indulgence

John Henry Ellison Sr.

Book 86-290

David Henry Ellison father

Sudden cardiac death

July 20, 1999

Restaurant owner

Informant Geraldine Ellison 2337 Lakeside Terrace Circle

Martha Dale Ellison

Book 83-107

Parents David Ellison and Esther Trivette

Sept 6 96 3 20 1940

Cook, food industry

Lung cancer

Palma Pierce Ellison 22 Lake Street Granite Falls

John Henry Ellison

Book 77-130

Died 3 31 90 and born 5 22 58

Body shop owner

Gunshot to chest

John H. Ellison Sr. and Edna Mathis, Informant Revonda Ellison RT 7, Box 290 Lenoir

Dr. Lanny C Hadley

Rolf Benjamin Ellison

Book 82-107

Feb 4 1998 Born Aug 23 1929

Small cell lung cancer

Informant Jerry L Ellison PO Box 2845 Lenoir 28648

Ruth Taylor Ellison

Book 88-341

Died 7 16 2001 Born March 15, 1924

Informant Obie Pitts 4124 Hill Place, Hudson North Carolina 28638

Homemaker

Caldwell Marriage Records

Book 82-387

James Hill Ramsey Putzel Jr., 1st marriage
Mary Jane Butler Woodard age 27
Father Roy Butler of Milford Ohio
Mother Ruby Ellison of Happy Valley
Married Feb 15, 1974
1st marriage ended 6-73

Book 33-258

Mary Jane Putzel
June 22, 1946

Rebecca Louise Crump to Colden Crump on 9 28 48 Ruby
born in Lenoir at Blackwelder Hospital

Birth Book 38-261

Jacob Henry Crump
4 8 51

Vita

Vicky Hayes was born in Paintsville, Kentucky, in June of 1953, in a small town perched at the edge of the eastern Kentucky coal fields. Hayes attended a two room school at Hager Hill through the eighth grade. An English teacher at the newly consolidated Johnson Central High was instrumental in guiding Hayes toward Berea College where she received a B.A. in English. Coupled with encouragement from parents, a love of reading, and a high school education rich in literary philosophy, she began writing songs and poems at the age of eleven and continues to write poetry, fiction and essay. Hayes completed her MA in Appalachian Studies in 2005.

Hayes is currently program assistant for the Center for Learning at Berea College where she trains and supervises student labor in the peer tutoring program.