



THE MILDRED HAUN REVIEW

*A Journal of
Appalachian Literature, Culture, and
Scholarship*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

President, Dr. Wade McCamey
Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Lori Campbell
Dean of Humanities, Carla Todaro
Secretary to the Dean of Humanities, Debbie Wilson
Secretary to the Humanities, Glenda Nolen
English Department Chair, Chippy McLain

All rights reserved by individual contributors. No work herein may be reproduced, copied, or transmitted by any means, mechanical, electronic, or otherwise without the permission of the copyright owner.

Mildred Haun Conference
Humanities Division
Walters State Community College
500 S. Davy Crockett Parkway
Morristown, TN 37813-6899
<http://www.ws.edu/special-events/mildred-haun/default.shtm>



THE MILDRED HAUN REVIEW

*A Journal of
Appalachian Literature, Culture, and Scholarship*

2014

In this issue:

**Religious Liberty and
Snake-handling Churches**
by Gregory L. Bock, Ph.D.

**The Resilient Appalachian
Woman: Lesson from
Life and Fiction** by
Jamie Branam Kridler, Ph.D.
Linda M. Daugherty, M.S.,
ABD, and
Terry L. Holley, B.A.

**Exploring Affrilachian
Identity: 'A Beautiful Sort
of Bridge'** by Forrest Gray
Yerman

**Tater Eyes and 'Possum
Houses': A New Role for
Storytelling in Place-based
Pedagogy** by Rosann Kent,
Mary Lipold, Avery
Alexander, Elizabeth
Guzman, and Kaitlyn
Brackett

The Wall
by Kris Lester

Editor's Note

The Mildred Haun Conference Committee members are proud to offer this selection of some of the best presentations from this past year's conference. The Mildred Haun Conference is dedicated to advancing literary and scholarly excellence; this journal represents just a sampling of the conference offerings. The Mildred Haun Review provides a juried selection of papers on Appalachian literature, culture, and scholarship.

Dr. Viki Rouse, our committee chair, has worked tirelessly to provide a quality conference for our region, and without her dedication none of this would be possible.

Special thanks to all those who have helped make this conference and this journal a reality. Also, thanks to the Office of Communications and Marketing for all of their help and advice.

For more information about the Mildred Haun Conference and how to submit or attend, please visit our website by going to www.ws.edu/mildredhaunconference.

Thank You,

Craig Bradley Owens
Assistant Professor of English
Walters State Community College
Craig.owens@ws.edu



Religious Liberty and Snake-Handling Churches

Gregory L. Bock, Ph.D.

The Journal of the Mildred Haun Conference, 2014

© Gregory L. Bock 2014

Abstract

Handling poisonous snakes in religious services is illegal in some states, but should it be? In this paper, I will examine the meaning of religious liberty by exploring Martha Nussbaum's work on religious tolerance and applying the theories of John Locke and Roger Williams to the issue of snake-handling churches. Using the recent National Geographic television series, *Snake Salvation* (2013), as a point of departure, I will argue on the basis of the ideas espoused by Locke and Williams that snake-handling churches should be allowed to use venomous snakes under certain conditions.

Introduction

On November 15, 2013, Andrew Hamblin, pastor of the Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, Tennessee, stood on the steps of the Campbell County courthouse and declared: "This is about standing for freedom... If God moves on me, and I feel led through and by the Holy Ghost to reach my arm into a box of rattlesnakes, I should have my religious right to do that."¹ Handling snakes in religious services has been illegal in Tennessee since 1947, and in November 2013 Pastor Hamblin had around fifty venomous snakes confiscated from his church and was charged with the possession of Class I wildlife. In this paper, I will *not* explore whether religious snake handling is wise or moral (in fact, I think it is neither), but I will examine the meaning of religious freedom and argue that churches like Hamblin's Tabernacle Church of God should be allowed to handle snakes during services with certain restrictions.

Pastor Andrew Hamblin, the aspiring "Billy Graham of snake-handling,"² became famous through the National Geographic series, *Snake Salvation* (2013). He was one of two pastors featured on the show, the other being Pastor Jamie Coots of the Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name³ in Middlesboro, Kentucky, who was charged with illegally possessing and transporting venomous snakes in Tennessee in November 2012. Incidentally, Pastor Coots died from a snake bite he received in a church service in February 2014. The show brought renewed attention to the practice of religious snake handling by documenting the lives of these believers and their charismatic worship services. They believe that handling snakes is a biblical command, one that is a sign of the presence and anointment of God. As Mark 16:17-18 says, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." As Pastor Jamie Coots says on the season finale of

the show, “I believe if I didn’t take up serpents, I’d die and go to hell. Most of my people believe this just as strongly as I do, so, you know, it’s really important that we have them.”

Freedom of Religion

The U.S. Constitution upholds the freedom of religion in the First Amendment, which says, “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The Tennessee State Constitution contains a much stronger statement of religious freedom:

That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience; that no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any minister against his consent; that no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and that no preference shall ever be given by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship.⁴

This means that the state cannot establish an official religion or interfere with the practices of religion. This does not mean, however, that religious practices cannot be restricted at all. For example, no one is allowed to sacrifice a human being in the name of religion, and this is how it should be.

In *Liberty of Conscience*, Martha Nussbaum explores six normative principles that are expressed by the First Amendment.⁵ The first is the Equality Principle, which states that everyone should have equal rights and respect under the law. The second is the Respect-Conscience Principle, which recognizes the special value and vulnerability of the human conscience. The third is the Liberty Principle, which explains that citizens need ample space in which to follow the dictates of conscience. The fourth is the Accommodation Principle, which declares that sometimes religious followers need exemptions from otherwise applicable laws. The fifth is the Nonestablishment Principle, which prevents the state from endorsing one religion over another. The sixth is the Separation Principle, which requires a separation of church and state to uphold the previous five principles.

Nussbaum describes two ways of interpreting these principles, the philosophical traditions of John Locke and Roger Williams.⁶ Locke argues for a doctrine of neutrality that holds that the state should be neutral as to whether a practice is religious or not. As Locke says, “Whatsoever is lawful in the commonwealth, cannot be prohibited by the magistrate in the church.”⁷ In other



The U.S. Constitution upholds the freedom of religion in the First Amendment, which says, “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

words, if nonreligious citizens can dunk themselves in water for fun, then church baptisms should be allowed. If citizens can cover their faces in cold weather, then Muslim *burqas* should be allowed. If citizens are allowed to kill animals for food, then animal sacrifices should be allowed. And if citizens are not allowed to use certain drugs, then religious followers should not be allowed to either.⁸

Roger Williams argues for accommodation, a liberty more generous than Lockean neutrality. Accommodationism is the view that not only should the state not interfere with religious practices, but it should also allow religions more space than it allows the general public. In other words, religious followers should sometimes be exempt from generally-applicable laws. The reason for this is that in a democratic society, laws often favor the majority, so minority religions will need extra freedoms in order to thrive. Nussbaum gives the example of George Washington's letter to the Quakers, exempting them from military service. As Washington writes, "I assure you very explicitly, that in my opinion the conscientious scruples of all men should be treated with great delicacy and tenderness; and it is my wish and desire, that the laws may always be as extensively accommodated to them, as regard for the protection and essential interests of the nation may justify and permit."⁹ Other examples include not requiring Catholic priests to disclose at a trial what is said in a confessional and allowing Amish parents to pull their children from the last two years of compulsory state education to teach them traditional skills at home.

Both Lockean neutrality and Williams' accommodationism have influenced American jurisprudence, but in recent decades the courts have favored a Lockean interpretation.¹⁰ For my purposes here, it will suffice to show that even under the less generous Lockean approach, snake-handling churches should be allowed to operate. To make this case, I will show that state laws are not being applied consistently.

Lockean Neutrality and Snakes

Is it legal to handle dangerous reptiles in *nonreligious* settings? In some states, it is. For example, Sweetwater, Texas holds an annual rattlesnake convention where participants can milk the venom from live rattlesnakes and even stand in a snake pit. In Florida, live alligator wrestling is a popular tourist attraction. However, neither of these states violates Lockean neutrality because neither has laws outlawing snakes in religious services (but these examples will be useful below). National reptile shows, like Repticon, exhibit venomous snakes, but often with strict guidelines, such as requiring special permits and sealed containers. When Repticon comes to Tennessee, however, venomous reptiles are excluded because nobody in the state is allowed to possess these kinds of animals *except* zoos, nature centers, and wildlife rehabilitation centers.

Do these exceptions in Tennessee constitute a violation of Lockean neutrality? Some would argue that these places are not similar to snake-handling churches in the relevant sense, for public safety is not an issue and these institutions are certified. Nevertheless, zoos and the like are, in fact, dangerous places. For example, in 2011 an elephant trainer was killed at the Knoxville Zoo.¹¹ A worker at the Kentucky Reptile Zoo has been bitten by snakes nineteen times over

thirty years.¹² Lest one think that zoos are only dangerous places for workers, in 2012 a two-year-old boy fell into an African dog exhibit at a Pennsylvania zoo and was mauled to death.¹³ While these incidents may be rare, injuries and deaths at snake-handling churches are also rare, and usually the victims are the adults who are “anointed” and have chosen to participate, not children or visitors, who are kept away from the snakes. Further research would be helpful in providing an accurate comparison of the levels of risk at zoos and snake-handling churches.

Even if zoos tended to be safer than snake-handling churches, it is doubtful that this would justify an absolute prohibition of snake handling on Lockean grounds. At most, it would justify strict regulations such as licensing requirements and prominently displayed signage. States require zoos to have a permit to operate, and it seems reasonable to require snake-handling churches to do the same.



Further research would be helpful in providing an accurate comparison of the levels of risk at zoos and snake-handling churches.

Accommodationism and Compelling State Interests

Ironically, of the two philosophical traditions mentioned above, the State of Tennessee endorses the more generous accommodationism of Roger Williams. In 2009 Governor Bredesen signed into law Tennessee’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which includes the following language:

No government entity shall substantially burden a person’s free exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability. No government entity shall substantially burden a person’s free exercise of religion unless it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person is (1) essential to further a compelling governmental interest and (2) the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.¹⁴

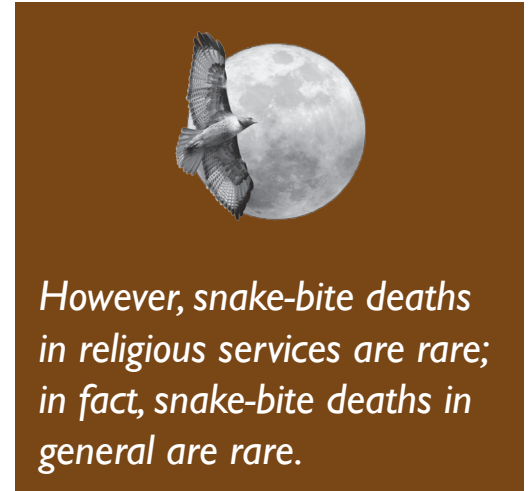
This legislation endorses the practice of giving exemptions from laws of “general applicability,” which goes much further than simple neutrality with regards to religion. Under these terms, religious liberty can only be restricted if there is a compelling state interest. Is there a compelling state interest in the case of picking up serpents?

The Tennessee Supreme Court thought so in *Swann v. Pack* (1975). In the opinion of the Court, snake handling constitutes a “public nuisance”:

The handling of snakes in a crowded sanctuary, with virtually no safeguards, with children roaming about unattended, with the handlers so enraptured and entranced that they are in a virtual state of hysteria and acting under the compulsion of ‘anointment,’ we would be derelict in our duty if we did not hold that respondents and their confederates have combined and conspired to commit a public nuisance and plan to continue to do so.¹⁵

A “nuisance” is defined by the Court as anything “that endangers the life or health, gives offense to the senses, violates laws of decency, or obstructs the reasonable or comfortable use of property.”¹⁶ In the opinion of the Court, snake handling is considered a public nuisance because it is a risk to everyone, not only to the public, but also to the snake handlers themselves. The Court states, “Tennessee has the right to guard against the unnecessary creation of widows and orphans. Our state and nation have an interest in having a strong, healthy, robust, taxpaying citizenry capable of self-support and of bearing arms and adding to the resources and reserves of manpower.”¹⁷ It says such reasoning also justifies compulsory immunizations, water fluoridation, and required chest x-rays. The Court states, “Yes, the state has a right to protect a person from himself and to demand that he protect his own life.”¹⁸

However, snake-bite deaths in religious services are rare; in fact, snake-bite deaths in general are rare. According to the CDC, from 1999 to 2004, there was an average of six deaths per year for the whole country, from *any* kind of snake bite, not just those received in religious services. Prior to Jamie Coots’ death in 2014, the last recorded snake-bite death in a religious service was Mack Wolford in West Virginia in 2012. According to one source, there have been 92 deaths in the roughly one-hundred year history of the tradition.¹⁹ In recent years, with an estimated population of 2,500 snake handlers in 125 churches, there has been roughly one death every two years, an annual rate of .5 deaths per 2,500 followers. As Ralph Hood describes, “All I know is that these people do handle [snakes], and most of the time they are not bit, and they can do what scientists think is not likely. Nobody has a good explanation.”²⁰



Moreover, there are dangerous nonreligious practices that remain legal. For example, according to the CDC, smoking causes over 480,000 deaths annually.²¹ Secondhand smoke alone causes almost 42,000 deaths annually. Smoking is more dangerous than snake handling and should, on the basis of *Swann v. Pack*, qualify as a “public nuisance.” In fact, Tennessee has outlawed smoking in public places because it views it as just such a nuisance, but it makes exceptions for bars and places that cater to adults over 21. If Tennessee can make exceptions for this nonreligious public nuisance, why not for religious snake handling? Religious practices are supposed to be accommodated whenever possible; however, there are no such legislative or constitutional protections of nonreligious practices.

I am not arguing for the prohibition of tobacco, but I am arguing on the basis of neutrality that the state should not discriminate against risk-taking behavior in religion, especially when those risks are small. The law restricts smoking and requires proper warning labels in order to lower the risk to the public. Why not do the same with signage for snake-handling churches? In addition, barriers could be used to separate the snakes from the parishioners. At the rattlesnake convention in Texas, there are barriers around the kill floor and the snake pit to keep the snakes contained. In Florida, alligator-wrestling shows also have barriers to keep the alligators from at-

tacking tourists or vice versa. Barriers at snake-handling churches would make these churches even safer; in fact, Tennessee already has a barrier policy for exhibiting dangerous wildlife at licensed facilities, which would work for churches as well:

Exhibits of Class I animals shall be in a manner that provides for the protection of the animals and the public at all times. Such exhibits shall have exclusionary barriers and trained uniformed guards or caretakers in a position to deter unauthorized public access to the animals; to prevent any escape of animals; and to prevent any direct physical contact of the animals with the public. A barrier system of moats and/or deterrent fencing of a design sufficient to prevent the escape of the animals, deter any unauthorized entry, and prevent any direct physical contact with the public shall be required for all exhibits that do not have trained uniformed guards or caretakers on duty in view of the exhibit area when open to the public. Such deterrent fencing shall be [at] least eight feet in height to deter the throwing of foreign objects into the cage area and prevent the entry of any unauthorized person.²²

From the perspective of snake handlers, such restrictions might be an inconvenience, but they might welcome such a compromise if it means having their freedoms recognized.

In *Swann v. Pack*, the Court considered alternatives to an absolute prohibition, but rejected them for the following reasons:

We gave consideration to limiting the prohibition to handling snakes in the presence of children, but rejected this approach because it conflicts with the parental right and duty to direct the religious training of his children. We considered the adoption of a “consenting adult” standard but, again, this practice is too fraught with danger to permit its pursuit in the frenzied atmosphere of an emotional church service, regardless of age or consent. We considered restricting attendance to members only, but this would destroy the evangelical mission of the church. We considered permitting only the handlers themselves to be present, but this frustrates the purpose of confirming the faith to non-believers and separates the pastor and leaders from the congregation. We could find no rational basis for limiting or restricting the practice, and could conceive of no alternative plan or procedure which would be palatable to the membership or permissible from a standpoint of compelling state interest.²³

Apparently, the Court did not consider a barrier policy. A barrier might seem intrusive, but it would be effective. I suggest something like a church baptismal. Many American Protestant churches have baptismals built into the stage or the wall behind the stage. The same design could be used



We could find no rational basis for limiting or restricting the practice, and could conceive of no alternative plan or procedure which would be palatable to the membership or permissible from a standpoint of compelling state interest.

to create an aesthetically pleasing and safe snake cage, into which practitioners enter when they feel anointed. A uniformed deacon could sit in front of the snake cage door to make sure that only signees are allowed to enter. To the Court's concern about the presence of children, children are not presently allowed to handle snakes in these services, so the Court's concern is puzzling. However, the snake cage would settle the safety issue for children by not allowing anyone to wander unsuspectingly into the vicinity of the snakes. To the Court's concern about applying the consenting adult standard, consent could be given in advance of the "frenzied atmosphere," and, if needed, a signature could be obtained and kept on file. Of course, participants do not know when they will be anointed by God to handle snakes, but if they have signed a form in advance saying they understand the risks and that they release the church from liability if they ever are anointed, then this should settle the Court's concerns.

In conclusion, I am not saying that picking up serpents is wise; in fact, I would say just the opposite. There are also real ethical issues that need to be addressed like the ethical treatment of animals, the place of children, and responsible hermeneutics; however, I believe that these issues are separate from the question of whether snake handling should be legal. In this paper, I have argued on the basis of neutrality and accommodationism that snake-handling religion should be permitted under certain conditions.

Notes

¹ "LaFollette Pastor Andrew Hamblin: Case about Freedom, not Snakes," YouTube, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYBcfJpAfk>.

² "The Devil Fights Your Mind Facts," National Geographic, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/snake-salvation/articles/the-devil-fights-your-mind-facts/>.

³ [sic]

⁴ As quoted in the TN Supreme Court opinion: *Swann v. Pack* (1975)

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality* (New York, Basic Books, 2008), 22-25.

⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 68-77.

⁷ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Buffalo: New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), 48.

⁸ These examples and more can be found in Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance*, 71-73, 102-111.

⁹ Martha Nussbaum, *New Religious Intolerance*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹¹ “Elephant that Crushed Woman Handler Gets Reprieve,” ABC News, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/elephant-crushes-animal-handler-stephanie-james-death-knoxville/story?id=12630510>.

¹² Jim Harrison’s hands – Mangled by 30 Years Worth of Snake Bites – Tells One-Of-A-Kind Story,” KYForward, accessed March 18, 2014, www.kyforward.com/2013/08/jim-harrisons-hands-mangled-by-30-years-worth-of-snake-bites-tell-one-of-a-kind-story/.

¹³ “Autopsy Suggests Boy Mauled at Pennsylvania Zoo Killed by Dogs, not Fall,” Fox News, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/11/04/toddler-dies-after-fall-mauling-at-pennsylvania-zoo/>.

¹⁴ “House Bill No. 1598,” accessed on March 18, 2014, <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/106/Chapter/PC0573.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Swann v. Pack* (1975).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ralph Hood and W. Paul Williamson, *Them That Believe: The Power and Meaning of the Christian Serpent-Handling Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 239-245.

²⁰ Ralph Hood, a researcher from the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, quoted in, “Snake-Handling Preachers Open Up about ‘Takin’ Up Serpents,” NPR, accessed on March 18, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2013/10/04/226838383/snake-handling-preachers-open-up-about-takin-up-serpents>.

²¹ “Tobacco Related Mortality,” CDC, accessed on March 18, 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality/.

²² “Rules of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Wildlife Resources,” accessed March 18, 2014, <http://tn.gov/sos/rules/1660/1660-01/1660-01-18.pdf>.

²³ *Swann v. Pack* (1975).



The Resilient Appalachian Woman: Lesson from Life and Fiction

Jamie Branam Kridler, Ph.D. East Tennessee State University

Linda M. Daughtery, M.S.,ABD University of Tennessee

Terry L. Holley, B.A. Holley Consultants

Appalachian women face barriers to self-sufficiency in many aspects of their lives. A review of the relevant literature provides evidence of both barriers to self-sufficiency and examples of personal resiliency. Faced with limited resources and high need for themselves and their children, mountain women have persevered and even thrived throughout history.

The concept of self-sufficiency has been a topic of much discussion among policy makers and stakeholders of programs that have been designed to assist women and their families in their journey toward economic independence. The assumptions underlying differing approaches will have a direct impact on how programs and support systems are designed and how desired outcomes are defined. On one end of the spectrum is a norm based approach which views self-sufficiency in terms of the Protestant rugged individualism and work ethic based upon the assumption that it only takes hard work and determination to be successful. Within this approach, “people are viewed as independent beings who are becoming economically self-sufficient and empowered without social supports” (Freeman, p. 524). In other words, programs designed to address the lack of self-sufficiency will simply focus on finding employment for the individual. The expectation is the individual is able and willing to work hard which will ultimately result in a high-wage job and economic independence.

Much of the early literature on welfare reform and reform’s ultimate goal of ending clients’ need for welfare by attaining self-sufficiency focused on the pervasive obstacles that prevented some women from being consistently and fully engaged in the workforce. This research was dedicated to improving the understanding of these barriers so that more effective programs could be created to assist women in their efforts to overcome these obstacles. Findings from this research suggest that barriers stem from numerous sources and may best be discussed using a framework that categorizes these sources into subgroups. The classifications of barriers that will be utilized for this literature review are identified as (a) intrapersonal barriers; (b) human capital; (c) interpersonal barriers; and (d) environmental barriers (Stevenson, 2005).

Listen and Learn Research in 25 East Tennessee Counties

Low-income women and girls were interviewed using a list of questions designed to determine what were the most effective strategic actions to take in order to transform their lives and others in similar situations. The researchers developed a Listen and Learn protocol for the interviews and trained the interviewers and scribes in technique. Interviews were conducted in teams with one interviewer, a scribe and the girl/woman interviewee. Interviewers were trained to focus on

the interviewee and leave the documentation of the interview and the responses as the responsibility of the scribe. This allowed a conversational approach and the opportunity to build trust. The interviewer and scribe were encouraged to develop the demeanor of a neutral and to be open to the opportunity to learn and change their attitudes as a result of the interview process. This technique is an opportunity to engage with women that might feel disempowered due to their life circumstances.

The girls and women were asked the following questions:

- What strengths do you have that may need supported in order for you to live a better life?
- What strengths does your community have that may need supported in order for you to live a better life?
- What in your life makes it difficult to increase your family income and become financially secure?
- What in your life makes it difficult to live a healthy life and have fewer medical problems (physical and mental)?
- What in your life makes it difficult to secure safe, affordable housing?
- What in your life makes it difficult to live a safe, violence-free life?

Categories Identified as Challenges to Resiliency

Content Analysis of the transcribed interviews was completed and 5 categories were identified as issues faced by Appalachian women living in 25 East Tennessee counties:

Domestic Violence

Definition: A pattern of behavior that inflicts physical and/or emotional pain on the victim and is used to gain and maintain control over the victim. Domestic violence can take the form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse or control.

Domestic Violence can result in:

- Homelessness
- Permanent physical disability
- Feelings of low self-worth and helplessness

Physical or Mental Illness

Definition: The presence of a physical or mental condition, including alcohol and drug abuse or addiction, that interferes with a woman's ability to find and maintain employment. A woman may personally suffer from these conditions or she may be impacted by a child or other family member who suffer from these conditions.



Physical or mental illness may be exacerbated by:

- Lack of physical or mental health providers
- Lack of health insurance
- Lack of dental care

Education and Work-Related Skills

Definition: The lack of skills or tool kit needed for successful and long-term employment. The missing tools might include formal education or technical skills; employment history required for securing a position; or work readiness skills and knowledge regarding workplace norms.

Examples of missing tools are:

- High school diploma
- Technical or vocational skills
- Basic employment skills such as punctuality and how to appropriately interact with co-workers
- Reliable child care arrangements

Lack of Life Skills

Definition: The lack or underdevelopment of knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in today's world.

These missing skills or lack of knowledge may include:

- Financial literacy or basic financial management skills and knowledge
- Awareness of or ability to navigate system of available services to improve food or housing security
- Parenting skills to promote security and foster the well-being of their children and to provide a positive role-model
- Lack of basic social skills and knowledge about healthy social interactions or basic hygiene

Transportation

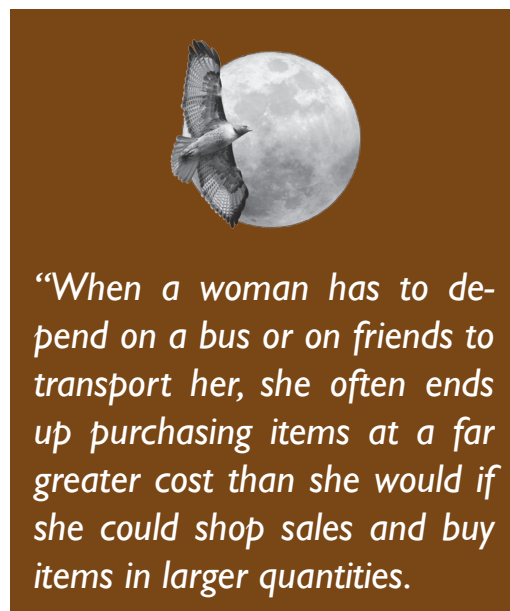
Definition: The lack of ownership or access to a reliable vehicle or the lack of access to public transportation.

Lack of transportation can limit a woman's ability to:

- Be independent
- Search for employment
- Attend work or school
- Secure reliable child care

Quotes from the interview:

“When a woman has to depend on a bus or on friends to transport her, she often ends up purchasing items at far greater cost than she would if she could shop sales and buy items in larger quantities. This also goes back to the fact many of the women have no experience in



“When a woman has to depend on a bus or on friends to transport her, she often ends up purchasing items at a far greater cost than she would if she could shop sales and buy items in larger quantities.”

budgeting what little money they receive. We had one woman that asked us if someone would please go with her to the store and show her how to shop for food.”

“Most disadvantaged women are not even aware of everyday skills missing in their lives. If we had the time and resources, the most important thing we could add to our agency’s programs would be intense parenting training and financial literacy classes with opportunities to practice what they learn.”

“Someday I may get a job, just not sure where to start.”

“I hope my daughter can get a job and maybe get married one day. I want her to have a good life-it’s too late for me.”

Evidence of Resilience in Quotes form Appalachian Women Authors

Sharyn McCrumb, Mildred Haun and Amy Greene give excellent examples of domestic violence in their works and how their female characters deal with their abuse.

Sharyn McCrumb in her novel, *The Devil Amongst the Lawyers*, gives her reader the perspective of a local talemonger:

“A younger sister, nothing but a kid. Now there was the mother, of course. They say there was no love lost between them, but after thirty years and six young’uns, I can’t see her smiting her man in a fight. Folks around liked him well enough, and even if she didn’t, she came from a family with lawyers and sheriff’s among ‘em. Besides, she had stood them all those years with Christian fortitude. (18)

Another example of domestic violence and the perspective of the community is given in the voice of her character Ritter :

It’s often the way, Ritter told him. “When a brow beaten woman finally shoots the brute, she’ll empty every chamber of the gun into her victim, and, as she fires, every single shoot will be punctuated by a scream. BANG. Scream. BANG. Scream. Until the gun is empty. Of course. The poor devil has snuffed it long before she runs out of bullets.” (25)

Mildred Haun in *The Hawk’s Done Gone*, deals with domestic violence in the voice of the narrator as an observer:

I heard Enzor say hurtful thinkgs to Amy too. Sometimes I could. He told her she was ugly as a mud fence dabbed in tadpoles – throwed that up to her one time when he was mad. That hurt because Amy wanted to be pretty and she never was. Big and rough. But that wasn’t her fault. That comes from too hard working. And she is looking old now. Too much thinking. I guess. If she thinks. And I reckon all folks do –all that can. But no matter how spiteful Enzor was , it looked like he just sort of charmed Amy like some folks charm bees and flies. (62)

Amy Greene’s heart wrenching account of Myra’s ability to transport herself to another time and place as she is raped in *Bloodroot* is told in Myra’s voice:

When we arrived at home I sat in the car and waited for him to pull me out by my hair, my knees scraping in the dirt. Grunting and puffing, he dragged me across the yard, my scalp screaming. He yanked up my dress and wrestled my legs open. There was no use begging him to stop. I fought hard but I was tired and he was strong. He forced himself on me as I looked up at the stars. I tried to send my soul floating out of my body again, back up to Bloodroot Mountain. Tears ran from the corner of my eyes toward my ears. Whatever I'd done wrong in swallowing that heart, surely this settled the score. (258)

Mildred Haun in *The Hawks Done Gone* and Amy Greene in *Bloodroot* also deal with issues of mental and physical illness.

Through the voice of the narrator Mildred Haun gives us insight into the misunderstanding around mental illness and the fact people suffering are often viewed as demonic or witches:

I wish Dona had told me sooner. For a long while after I married Ad I thought Barshia mighty queer. Right from the first I took note of it. For a long time I wanted to ask somebody about it. But I never could bring myself to name it to Teelie. For Teelie was counted queer too. But one day Dona Fawver came and spent the day with us. She helped me get dinner. And I named something about Teelie a-coming to see Barshia and cutting his hair for him. Dona asked me if I ever feared Teelie. Some folks talked, she said, about what Teelie did – things a witch would do. (44)

Haun gives us another example as a family struggles to understand:

Linus stayed over three nights and then he come home. He said Effena was plumb hog-wild, didn't know what she was doing, didn't sleep in the house at night. That made me think some more but I didn't say anything. He said she laid out in the fields and slept. It was getting fall. (82)

Amy Greene in *Bloodroot* using the voice of Birdie expresses how women in the community try to help other women in the special challenges they face in the physical health and well-being:

In 1969, the summer Myra turned twelve, me and her left Macon working in the yard one day and walked up to Cotters. Oleta Cotter had had female surgery and was laid up for several weeks, so me and Margaret Barnett took turns going up yonder to see about her. The Cotters live the furthest up the mountain and keep the most to themselves. They don't poke their nose in nobody's business, but they'd give you the shirt off their back if they knowed you was in trouble. I learnt that after Clio got killed. Oleta came down the mountain every day to cook for Macon and take care of Myra until I could get out of the bed. That' why I didn't care a bit to see to her worshipping and make sure them boys was fed when she was laid up. It was hot that day and I had sweat dripping in my eyes by the time me and Myra got halfway up to the house. Them two youngest Cotter boys. Douglas and Mark, ran out of the woods to meet us like wild Indians. They stopped in the middle of the road plumb out of breath. (64)

Wilma Dykeman gives a great deal of attention to education in her novels, *The Tall Woman* and *The*

Far Family. Her focus is not only on the women's concern for their own families but also for the education for their community children.

In *The Far Family*, a conversation between Preacher Grey and Brither Shook demonstrates the concern and barriers:

"Have you ever been up there to the Bludsoe's, Brother Shook?" Preacher Grey asked.

"Never had any business with them."

"Well, I went up. And it's my belief, Brother Shook that this valley will never prosper as it ought until the Bludsoe's are raised up, too."

There was a silence. Ivy watched Preacher Grey's face and the eye that seemed to look inward and the eye that focused ever more intently on squirming Lazarus Shook.

"The way we can raise them – all of us – is through our school here---" (208-209)

Dykeman addresses the concern of a father whose daughter is bright and might be denied an education due to circumstances in the voice of the father, Homer Bludsoe:

For the first time they saw a reaction from Homer Bludsoe. We'd be much obliged for that. She's really a good girl. Her grades in school, they was always the best of any of our kids. This – this trouble, it was like a sickness. Talking with somebody like you might help her get over it." (338)

Dykeman also addresses the need for education for all children in a conversation between Lydia and Dr. Hornsby in *The Tall Woman*:

"I want them to be fine, too, have a chance in life. Dr. Hornsby, you reckon we'll ever get a school worthy of the name in Thickety Creek?"

"I hope so Mrs. McQueen."

"My father had schooling," Lydia said thoughtfully. "He learned all of us children what reading and writing we know. And a little ciphering, too. But I want my children to go to a school-house and have a proper teacher. I long for them to amount to something. You know, my brother Robert has gone off to school. He's been away better than a year now. He wants to follow after the law." (95-96)

Sharyn McCrumb

Education Carl

Sharyn McCrumb gives the reader of *The Devil Amongst the Lawyers* insight into the attitude of a rural community regarding a young woman seeking higher education:

Carl hesitated, "Well, I suppose it means they are not typical rural family. Not many people from little mountain hamlets go to college. Or at least it suggests that Miss Erma Morton is not a typical mountain girl. I think I read that she paid her own way to East Radford Teacher College." (85)

Amy Greene addresses the fact many mountain women are lacking in basic life skills in the voice of Birdie in *Bloodroot*:

Willis wasn't no good from the time he was little. He'd bite my nipple hard as he could soon as his teeth came in, and would fight me with his fists anytime he didn't get his way. Willis broke my heart everyday he was alive. I don't know what went wrong with that boy. I reckon it had to be something me and Macon done. Someway or another, we wasn't cut out to raise younguns. That might be why the Lord took them from us. All I could figure out was that we spoiled them too much. I believe we runit Willis and Clio by smothering them, and I reckon we did the same thing to Myra when she came along. I treated Willis like a little king, made him sugar cookies everyday until every tooth in his head rotted out, and he still hated me and Macon both. (46)

Amy Greene gives the reader insight into the importance and scarcity of transportation in *Bloodroot* through Birdie's voice:

I will never forget the first time Macon took me up Bloodroot Mountain. It was the spring of 1913, not long after that day we hid Easter eggs. He lived up here and took care of his pap that had a stroke and his two sisters after his mammy died. We had to take a mule and a cart, because there wasn't no road then. There was just a dirt track that you could ride a horse or mule on. It was getting to be afternoon and the sun glared in our eyes all the way up the mountain. Shadows fell across the road and I was nervous. Mammy hadn't wanted to let me go but I had begged Pap. Now I was having second thoughts. It seemed like Macon was taking me off to some haunted place. I pictured all kinds of creatures hiding in them woods, but they was pretty even though they was thick. The creek was pretty, too, rushing down off the mountain alongside the track. I tried to sit back and enjoy the ride but every time I looked down my belly sank. It was a long way to the valley below. By the time we got up here I was about half sick. Then we rounded the curve and glimpsed the house up on the hill with a little barn off to the side, the sky bright blue over top of its red tin roof. The sun was shining down on it through the trees, the edges of the leaves tinged with gold. It looked so nice my heart fluttered. (32-33)

Greene again gives the reader a different yet similar perspective two generations later in *Bloodroot* through the voice of Laura:

Clint understood how bad I missed the mountains. He said, "Soon as I get me a car, I driving you there." I knowed he was saving up money from his job. Going home seem like something way off in the future that might never happen. Then one day Clint came to me grinning after school. It was spring already, close to the end of my freshman year. He led me out to the parking lot and there it was, along green car with a busted plate on the windshield. First thing clint sais was, "Now, I can take you home." I knowed he was not talking about Larry and Pauline's house. I hugged Clint tight and felt like crying, but not with happy tears. My heart was beating loud in my ears. (128)

Dykeman presents an interesting and perhaps prophetic passage in *The Far Family* in a conversation

after Phil and Clay visited a family after the death of one of their members:

With a sudden shift in mood, Clay turned on him. “Yeh, yeh, I know how you’d handle everything, you and your ‘advanced’ city folks: Mama would go to a ‘nursing home’; I’d be put away in a sanitarium; we’d get Hank’s widow and kids on relief right away—and then everything would be all neat and cozy, no problems around to clutter up the view everyday, to sweat over and cuss at.” (169)

Works Cited

Dykeman, Wilma. *The Far Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

Dykeman, Wilma. *The Tall Woman*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962.

Greene, Amy. *Bloodroot*. New York: Alfred A Knope, 2010.

Haun, Mildred. *The Hawk’s Done Gone*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press , 1940/1968.

Freeman, E. “Welfare Reforms and Services for Children and Families: Setting a New Practice, Research, and Policy Agenda.” *Social Work*, 41.5 (1996) 521-532. Print.

McCrumb, Sharyn. *The Devil Amongst the Lawyers*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books / St. Maartin’s Press, 2010.

Stevenson, A. P. “Barriers Affecting Women’s Ability to Make the Transition from Welfare to Work in a Rural Community.” Diss. U of Pittsburgh, 2005. Print.



Exploring Affrilachian Identity: 'A Beautiful Sort of Bridge'

Forrest Gray Yerman

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank you all for being here. It's truly an honor for me. And I'd like to thank the Mildred Haun Conference, and all those responsible, for bringing me here.

Today I am going to talk about a research paper I wrote on Affrilachian identity, and by virtue Appalachian identity and the relationships between them, from interviews I conducted with seven members of the Affrilachian Poets: Crystal Good, in Charleston, West Virginia; Makalani Bandele, in Louisville, Kentucky; Bianca Spriggs, Crystal Wilkinson, and Joy Priest, in Lexington, Kentucky; Ricardo Nazario y Colòn, in Morehead, Kentucky; and Gerald Coleman, in Atlanta, Georgia. Unfortunately one of my eight interviews was cancelled, but the seven I conducted are amazing, and are running over 200 pages in typed transcripts.

I will start by reading a quote from my interview with Nazario y Colòn. It's something he said to me in discussing the meaning of Affrilachia and the Affrilachian Poets, of how they came about to represent everyone not commonly perceived as Appalachian, and how Affrilachia is more than a space for just African Americans in Appalachia. He says, "Maybe the future is just Affrilachia to represent that we are all one people...that Appalachia disappears and Affrilachia becomes the term that defines all people, including white people, everybody from the region. Yes! Quote me on that." Keep that in mind, as we'll revisit this idea in the conclusion of this talk.

This project works to explore the components of an Affrilachian identity and with identifying the Appalachian characteristics involved in the identity. In examining Affrilachian identity through the literature used in this study, in talking with my professor, and as explained and defined by seven Affrilachian Poets, I began to see a clear relationship between ethnic identity and Affrilachian identity, and Appalachian identity.

In designing my research paper two areas are looked to in a review of literature on the Appalachian region—diversity and migrations into and out of the region. Then I briefly discuss ethnicity and ethnic identity to clarify the terms.

I achieve my first objective with works found in *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, the *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, Rhonda Jenkins Armstrong's, "Affrilachian Poetry and the Evolution of a Regional Identity," and Susan Keefe's, "Appalachian Americans: The Formation of 'Reluctant Ethnic.'" I also use an article from Pluck! *The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*, written by Paul C. Taylor titled, "Call Me Out My Name: Inventing Affrilachia." Taylor, a member of the Affrilachian Poets, explores the idea of ethnic invisibility in the region, writing, "To be invisible in this sense is a matter not of physics or physiology...It is a matter of psychology and morals...of being regarded as a person...worth attending to." Indeed, this idea of invisibility is important to Affrilachia, and the Affrilachian Poets, whose motto reads, "making the invisible visible."

In discussing the diverse nature of the Appalachian region, I first turn to Native Americans; the first Appalachians, living here for thousands of years, guided by a culture with deep roots in the land, something important to many Appalachians. I then turn to show how Africans arrived as early as the 1500s as slaves of Spanish conquistadors, long before the mythical Anglo-Saxon Appalachian had even arrived on the Eastern seaboard. I further illuminate the diversity in Appalachia by showing various other groups of ethnic peoples in the region, from Syrians, Italians, Hungarians, Russians, Czechoslovakians, to English, Scottish, Irish, and Germans.

Jim Wayne Miller, a prominent Appalachian poet and scholar, offers the opinion in the Kentucky Encyclopedia that Appalachia “has been difficult to describe and interpret because the region is an American borderland characterized by diversity, complexity, and contradiction.” Yet Miller gives no mention to this diversity other than to quote an unnamed traveler speaking of, he writes, a “motley set of Germans, Irish, Scots and Anglo-Americans.” That Miller only mentions these northern and western European groups belies his attitude towards Appalachian “diversity,” though not the nature of “complexity and contradiction.”

I shift here to demonstrate how the region’s borders are more elastic than they are defined or perceived to be. Due to the many migrants into and out of the region throughout Appalachia’s history, especially out migrants in the past century, Appalachians can be found in many areas outside of the region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (or ARC), especially in, as Marvin Pippert writes in the Encyclopedia of Appalachia, “urban areas close to the region such as Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, and Atlanta”—Louisville and Atlanta both destinations of mine in this research. In short, this demonstrates that Appalachians are not stereotypical, white hillbillies living in the mountains. Instead we see that Appalachians constitute a range of people in a range of places, in and out of the official ARC region. Here we turn to Paul Taylor again, and the statement “that Appalachia is more than the lily-white, seamlessly rural home of Lil’ Abner and Jed Clampett” (1). This quote broadens the idea of Appalachian diversity. Also, in choosing the word, “rural,” Taylor broadens the where of Appalachia in relation to Appalachian urban and rural areas, stating that not all Appalachian live in “the sticks.”

Lastly in my review of literature ethnicity and ethnic identity are defined from entries in the Encyclopedia of Identity, The Encyclopedia of Appalachia, another of Keefe’s works, “Ethnic Identity: The Domain of Perceptions of and Attachment to Ethnic Groups and Cultures,” and Anya Peterson Royces’, Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity. These works first set up the difficulty in studying ethnicity by discussing the confusion people have between ethnicity and race, and with ethnic identity. Royce makes an interesting comment that “‘Ethnic identity,’ ‘ethnic group,’ and ‘ethnicity’ are concepts that take their form and content from the give and take of human behavior, from shaping actions and from being acted upon.” In the end, these authors show how ethnic identity is about the shared experiences, historical and present-day, of a group of people. Dwight Billings’ entry, “Identity, Central and Southern Appalachia,” in the Encyclopedia



Appalachia “has been difficult to describe and interpret because the region is an American borderland characterized by diversity, complexity, and contradiction.”

of Appalachia claims, “[A]ny group consciousness that Appalachians may have is forged from such factors as their shared understandings of kinship, religious beliefs, dialects, music, geography, sense of place, heritage, and historical experience.”

In looking to my interviews, this research shifts to show how the Affrilachian Poets in their own words define an Affrilachian identity as an ethnic identity based on their experiences as non-whites in the Appalachian region. In order to let them explain, I use lengthy quotes throughout, and here will briefly touch on some of what these seven Affrilachian Poets have to say.

The first subject I look to in this section of my paper is my participants’ ethnicities. Five answered African American, with slight deviation in responses. Crystal Good said, “I’m an Affrilachian, which is what I claim.” Ricardo Nazario y Colòn answered, “Puerto Rican,” though earlier in our interview he had discussed identifying as African American. He explained to me, saying, “as someone who comes from a multiracial background, [where] part of my heritage is people of African descent, I have no problem saying that I am black...it is not a literal color, it is a consciousness, it is a connection to our heritage.”

I examine the idea of ethnicity vs race, in looking at a story told by Nazario y Colòn about, as he called it, “One of my fondest memories with racism.” He recalled an evening he crossed a street in Lexington when someone in a passing car shouted a violent, racial slur at him. He said he had to look around to see who the brunt of the attack was, and as he only saw, as he says, “a white girl and a white guy, it must have been me.” The shouter did not know Nazario y Colòn identified as African American, or even that he was Puerto Rican with African heritage. The shouter merely saw a “non-white” man, who they took to be “black,” and called him perhaps the worst thing you can call an African American.

This is important to my study because it demonstrates, as I have said, the problems we still face with ethnicity and race, and the misunderstandings so many have of these concepts and realities. This is something that the Affrilachian Poets work with, and indeed were formed out of. Through their writings and their stories, they are helping Appalachian people better understand all of their Appalachian neighbors. With Nazario y Colòn’s story, we gain an example of the invisibility of African Americans, and through his experience, so many, if not all, people of non-white ethnic descent in the Appalachian region, as Paul Taylor says, not “being regarded as a person...worth attending to.”

In asking my participants to define an Affrilachian identity, I found their answers to be similar across the board. However, Gerald Coleman discussed Affrilachian identity as regional and existential. By this, it is meant to say that an Affrilachian identity has a connection to the Appalachian region. There’s the regional part. And then there is the part of the Affrilachian identity that must be chosen, that comes into existence when the individual says, “I am Affrilachian.” I find this interesting, as this is how I feel about my own Appalachian identity, an identity I have chosen from my connection to the region. Here we see an example of what Royce means in saying, “‘Ethnic identity,’ ‘ethnic group,’ and ‘ethnicity’ are concepts that take their form and content from the give and take of human behavior, from shaping actions and from being acted upon.”

Crystal Wilkinson spoke about her early days as a writer and then coming into the Affrilachian

Poets. She told me, “there were black writers, and there were Appalachian writers, and then there were women writers. But there wasn’t anything until I met this circle of people where I felt like I could put forward my whole self, and express my complete self.” Here we also see the power of this existential, ethnic identity when Wilkinson says, “and express my complete self.” Crystal Good speaks to this sentiment, saying, “the beautiful thing about finding this word and this identity, is that now I’m much more comfortable in my skin...it’s a beautiful sort of bridge.”

Wilkinson’s statement brings up a second interesting notion of Affrilachian identity, which is the idea that it encompasses multiple identities. In claiming African American ethnicity, all of my participants but Gerald Coleman added something to their ethnic make-up. Crystal Wilkinson states, “African American, I guess, with some Cherokee floating around.” And when Crystal Good answered “Affrilachian,” she also said, “But my mother is white and my father is black.” It was Joy Priest who described a refrain in her writing that put me onto this track of multiple identities. Priest told me, “I have this theme about my life, it’s called ‘in the in-between.’” She elaborates while discussing her childhood, saying, “my grandfather and my mother... They lied to me, and they told me I wasn’t a person of color...” She continues in speaking about her writing, “So I write a lot about the in-between of this spectrum, and how these two... separate identities come together, and this girl being stuck in the middle of it.”

Bianca Spriggs speaks to this notion, saying, “I don’t think there’s a singular Affrilachian identity, per say... But I think what it does is it... opens the door for a spectrum of identities to be welcome.” In opening this door, Spriggs also talked to me about the growth of Affrilachia, saying, “I think of Affrilachia now as sort of amoeba-ish, kind of like taking over the world a little bit.” We harken back to Ricardo Nazario y Colòn’s statement on the future of Affrilachia.



From here I delve into some of the many responses where my interviewees discussed certain Appalachian characteristics to their identity. To begin, only two of my participants were born in the Appalachian region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission: Crystal Wilkinson, who is from Indian Creek, Kentucky; and Crystal Good, from Charleston, West Virginia. The other five participants either have connections to the region from fringe areas discussed in my paper, from a family history in the Appalachian region, or in moving to the region and beginning to identify as Appalachian. I found one of the most interesting responses from this area of my research when Nazario y Colòn discussed how he came to identify as Appalachian. He teaches at Morehead State University. So, he told me that one day in class he asked his students if he (born in New York, raised in Puerto Rico, but having spent the longest period of his life in one place, in Kentucky) could he identify as Appalachian, could he be an Appalachian? He explains what his students told him, saying, “And they were like, it’s not really about can I knight you. No, it’s like, do you feel that you belong here? Do you feel that that’s all it takes? It was a lot simpler than I thought it would be,” he says. Here, again, we see the existentialism in claiming these identities.

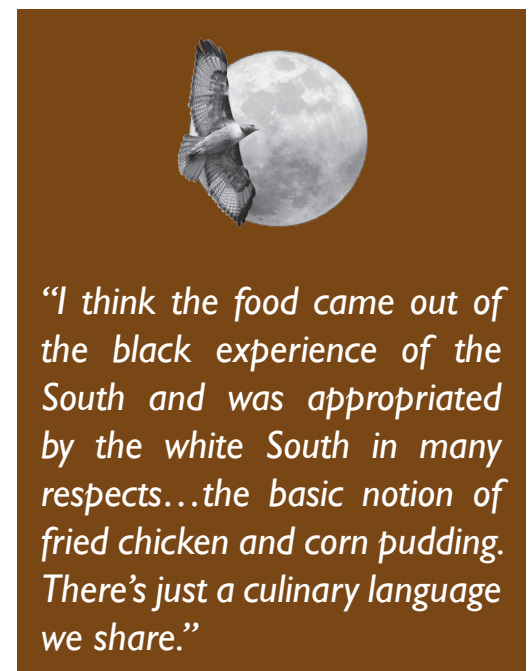
Crystal Good discussed her grandfather’s pride as an Appalachian and how it was passed on to her. She says, “my grandfather’s such a proud West Virginian, that’s how I was raised. He taught

me to say, 'I'm from West-by-God-Virginia.'" Crystal Wilkinson also speaks about Appalachian language in discussing her dialect, saying, "me and two cousins were the only black people...from kindergarten all through high school. So everybody spoke like me, but everybody didn't look like me. And then when I got to college there were other black people there. So, a lot of people looked like me, but nobody spoke like me." She later says, in speaking about her accent, "Language was big. I remember when I went to college...my speech at the time was much thicker than it is now, and so everybody just thought that was the strangest thing to meet a black person who said 'night' and 'white.' So that sort of thing about the identity." Here all sorts of Appalachians can relate to Good's and Wilkinson's experiences concerning our regional colloquialisms and dialects.

Makalani Bandele discussed his family's past in Appalachia as slaves, saying, "my grandfather on my mom's side grew up on the plantation where his parents were enslaved." Then Bandele discusses more common traits in the region. He talks about "spending summers" in the country with his grandfather who "was a fiddle player." He elaborates here stating, "In a hip hop generation... I'm listening to...banjo and fiddle music...it's from my up-bringing. I guess that's my identity." So, not only is Bandele connected to the Appalachian region through his family's past in slavery, but he has that deeper, more universal connection in the region to music, and of family in general. Whether his grandfather is African American or Anglo American, he is a fiddle player and that is what counts in seeing how many Appalachian cultural traits are just as much African American as they are Anglo-Saxon.

Gerald Coleman, who grew up in Lexington, Kentucky, talks about a trend in the out migrant, and urban, population of Appalachians, saying, "for homecoming when I was growing up, my mother took us back to the country...going back to that rural church in Flatwoods." In discussing such rural churches, and African American churches, Coleman relates these institutions as a part of his Appalachian identity. He also talked about the influence of food on an Appalachian and Affrilachian identity, saying of its history, "I think the food came out of the black experience of the South and was appropriated by the white South in many respects... the basic notion of fried chicken and corn pudding. There's just a culinary language we share."

We will finish on a final word from Gerald Coleman discussing what Affrilachian writing looks like, which can be directly related to the Appalachian region. He says, "if you look at our writing...there's always an element of home, where we came from, who we are...a mention of food we grew up eating...there's always a kind of genealogical connection... There's a sense of smell, and a sense of taste, and a sense of family that's interwoven into what we write. You know, that reverberates through who and what we are."



"I think the food came out of the black experience of the South and was appropriated by the white South in many respects...the basic notion of fried chicken and corn pudding. There's just a culinary language we share."

In closing on this quote I perhaps not only leave the door open, but remove its hinges. For the actual writing by the Affrilachian Poets is but delicately skimmed in this research project. My objectives, however, were never to study the literature of the Affrilachian Poets.

Instead this research studies Affrilachia and the Affrilachian Poets under the lens of certain Appalachian traits and characteristics. In doing so it has shown how an Affrilachian identity can be looked at as an ethnic identity of a larger, Appalachian ethnic identity. Indeed, we saw a host of connections from these interviews ranging from food; to regional dialect; to historical connections based on family, land, and slavery; and even the connections Ricardo Nazario y Colòn brought to the discussion about his Puerto Rican identity and its connections to his Appalachian, and Affrilachian, identity. In seeing an Affrilachian identity as an ethnic identity, and even an Appalachian identity as an ethnic identity, we are looking at an identity that centers around many things: as Billings writes in *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, “shared understandings of kinship, religious beliefs, dialects, music, geography, sense of place, heritage, and historical experience” (Billings 263); add to that Keefe’s definition of ethnic identity as, “the perceptions of differences among ethnic groups; the feelings of attachment and pride in one ethnic group and cultural heritage...; and...prejudice and discrimination against one’s ethnic group” (Keefe 35). This in turn displays to us the connection between Appalachia’s diverse people, where African American Appalachians and Anglo-Saxon Appalachians are both connected to the region, or identify as Appalachian, based on certain ethnic traits described by the interviews in this research, and by the literature I have discussed. We also glimpse certain areas of an Affrilachian identity that are not as identifiable by other ethnic Appalachians; namely the connection to slavery, but also in the exclusion, the invisibility, of African Americans and other non-Anglo-Saxon Appalachians as evidenced by Nazario y Colòn’s story; and as seen through the mainstream representations of Appalachians as white hillbillies living in the mountains.

All of these connections and differences inform us on the need for Affrilachia. For this, we can turn back to the very beginning of this paper and the prefacing quote by Ricardo Nazario y Colòn where he told me, “Maybe the future is just Affrilachia to represent that we are all one people... that Appalachia disappears and Affrilachia becomes the term that defines all people, including white people, everybody from the region.” Some may criticize Nazario y Colòn here, questioning why we should exchange one term for another, specifically in using a term with a direct connection to Africa. But what Nazario y Colòn says speaks clearly to Miller’s notion of Appalachia as a “borderland characterized by diversity, complexity, and contradiction” (24). Where Miller failed to see the actual diversity in the region, Nazario y Colòn, and the Affrilachian Poets, are working to illuminate a diverse Appalachia in “making the invisible visible,” as he says, “to represent that we are all one people.”

Thank you all very much.



Tater Eyes and ‘Possum Houses: A New Role for Storytelling in Place-based Pedagogy

Rosann Kent, Mary Lipold, Avery Alexander,
Elizabeth Guzman, and Kaitlyn Brackett
University of North Georgia

Author’s Notes

Rosann Kent, Director, Appalachian Studies Center, University of North Georgia

Mary Lipold, Avery Alexander, Elizabeth Guzman, and Kaitlyn Brackett are undergraduates enrolled in the Minor in Appalachian Studies.

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Appalachian Teaching Project, sponsored by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rosann Kent, Director, Appalachian Studies Center, Vickery House, 82 College Circle, Dahlonega, GA 30597.

Contact rkent@ung.edu

Abstract

The storytelling tradition is as ancient as these mountains. Whether it’s folktales about trickster animals, ghost stories, or personal narratives, tellers and listeners mutually create a story space, a shared internal world that exists only in the memory of the teller and mind of the listener. This reader’s theater was co-created with faculty and undergraduate researchers in the Saving Appalachian Seeds and Stories, (SAGAS), an initiative that preserves and promotes agro-biodiversity in the Southern Appalachians in which students collect, grow, bank, and share heirloom seeds and related ethnocultural knowledge, or memory banking. By documenting traditional foodways practices, listening deeply and intentionally, students bridged the gap between old and young, academia and wisdom. Such is the power of story.

Keywords: storytelling studies, foodways, heirloom seeds

Tater Eyes and ‘Possum Houses: A New Role for Storytelling in Place-based Pedagogy

All: We’re building bridges in the North Georgia Mountains.

Avery: They are not made of structured steel or compressed concrete, felled timber or river stones, wrought iron or hemp rope.

All: NO.

Mary: They cannot be named beam or truss, cantilever or suspension, covered or cable stayed.

All: NO.

Kaitlin: These bridges are forged with hearty heirloom seeds and powerful recounted stories.

Elizabeth: We, the students of the Appalachian Studies Center at the University of North Georgia, build these bridges with the help and guidance of our professors, community volunteers, and seed keepers.

Kaitlin: With the seeds donated by our community elders, we save the germplasm in our university’s seed bank and multiply the seeds through our own tended garden. We record the seed keepers’ stories with keen ears and patient listening, recorder and phone, computer and pen.

Mary: Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I will remember. Involve me, and I will understand.

Elizabeth: Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories invites such involvement from students in disparate disciplines ranging from art to biology. Students collect, bank, grow, and share heirloom seeds of Southern Appalachia as well as the associated memories (Winskie and Murray, 2013). Then, using arts based research, we identify visual and narrative metaphors that not only reflect but direct the gathering of data and the drawing of conclusions. Our scholarly understanding is rooted in the creation of an art piece (Dockery, 2014). As we explore Appalachian foodways, we collect the stories contained in seeds. We believe these stories have the power to captivate --- to convince --- to convert.

Rosann: Yes, we believe in stories. Stories in the community. Stories in the classroom. When we listen to each other -- to those like and unlike ourselves -- we learn valuable lessons not just in a subject area but about life. To illustrate how foodways change over time, I created this story from a memory about my own father’s story.

Rosann: My grandma had a ‘possum house. Yes, she did. I know because I helped her build it. Every fall, when the leaves began to turn, it was my job to dig back into that old bank of red clay. We would scrounge around for pieces of wood to make a little house with a roof and sides and a floor. It had to be just right. I would ask, “Mama, why are we going to so much trouble?” She



*Tell me, and I will forget. Show
me, and I will remember.
Involve me, and I will under-
stand.*

would answer, “Because ‘possums are special.”

Then, after we had built the ‘possum house, we had to catch the ‘possum. Now, ‘possums are not the happiest of creatures on a good day and they are even unhappier when being caught. I’d bait the trap with a half-rotten squash or apple...whatever I could find...but getting a ‘possum in the trap is considerably easier than getting him out of it. And that’s how I discovered that ‘possums secrete a smelly green slime from their, uh, anal glands.

And I would say, “Mawmaw! This is so gross. Why do I have to do this?”

And she would say, “Because ‘possums are special.”

Then, after we built the ‘possum house, and caught the ‘possum, we had to do what my grandma called “feeding the ‘possum out.” This meant I had to pick up pecans and walnuts, shell them, pick out the hulls, and feed the nuts to the ‘possum. Day after day. The ‘possum did not get any happier. I would ask again, “Mawmaw. This sure is a lot of work. Are you sure it’s worth it?”

“Yes,” she would answer, “because ‘possums are special.”

Then, the weather turned cold and the last of the leaves had fallen. I got up to go feed the ‘possum and I saw my grandma already out there....a fire built under her old wash pot...she was sharpening my grandfather’s skinning knife. Well, I knew what happened to deer when there that was happening, so I ran outside and screamed, “Mawmaw! What are you doing? We built the ‘possum house, ‘caught the possum, fed the ‘possum and now you are going to kill and EAT the ‘possum! Why?”

“Because,” my grandma said, “I am special too.”

Mary: The people in Appalachia are a very natural people, surrounded by a land so rich in resources, it’s nearly impossible to find a story from a native Appalachian that isn’t deeply rooted to the land.

Elizabeth: For example, Sharon Mauney is a fifth-generation Appalachian who owns Loganberry Heritage Farm and focuses on growing Southern Appalachian foods from heirloom seeds. Sharon expresses a deep spiritual connection to her seeds and believes in the spirits of the plants themselves. Avery wrote this story to mirror Sharon’s philosophy on planting by the signs.

Avery: The elephant garlic isn’t really a garlic; he’s a leek. But, he is still fat and round with many pungent bulbs. A little more mild tasting than garlic, elephant garlic has been a part of the Cain family’s heirloom collection for at least a century.

Like many other underground growing crops, Garlic loves the descending moon. You wouldn’t know it given Moon’s public affection for the tides, but Moon loves Garlic too. She has watched Garlic for many years. She pulled his elephant roots down- down -down and grew his bulbs full of water while she was in Taurus, Cancer, and Scorpio.



Last fall this lunar body watched as Garlic's aged and elephantine bulbs were passed from the Cain family's hands into the unsteady, young student fingers.

Garlic was nervous. Would descending Moon find him in his new home?

Garlic needed his Lune, so he was planted in the sandy soil on October 23, 2013 just as Moon was traversing, south-bound, around the world and into her watery star sign of Cancer. She laid her moon beams on Garlic that night with the promise that she would always find him. Garlic felt safe in this new, unfamiliar student garden, and he grew with the support of water, minerals, sun, and his Moon.

You should see him now.

Mary: Bonelle Davis is another seedkeeper from north Georgia who gave us the first heirloom potatoes as well as explicit planting instructions. Bonelle's friendly persona made This hour of conversation truly captivates the wisdom that can be lost through modern technology and industrialized agriculture.

Kaitlin: Everybody needs an almanac. This right here will give you an idea about all the signs. Now right here it says: "full moon to last quarter moon: during the 3rd quarter of the moon, plant the following: artichokes, beets, carrots, and potatoes." Y'all know how to plant potatoes?

Elizabeth: No Ma'am, can you teach us?

Kaitlin: Yeah, that's what I'm going to do right here. When you get your seed potatoes, you look for the eye. A lot of them won't be out this much. But you got to cut 'em. Like that. Every piece.... see there's an eye.....there's an eye... There will be four pieces of potatoes and you plant them. If you have one that don't have an eye on it, it won't come up. Ain't nothing to come up with.

I'll tell you a little joke too. Some people tell you when you're planting potatoes, you wrap them in paper. And then you say, "Why you wrap them in paper?" To keep the dirt out of their eyes!

But you want to put about three of them to a hill. Skip about 8 to 10 inches apart, and start another hill. When they come up, you want to side dress them. Put some fertilizer on it, and rake up the dirt with a hoe, and make a mound on top. If you plant them whole, it they probably won't even come up because they have to rot.

See this one right here, I'll give it to you. You've got a lot of eyes. If you go by that, you'll have good luck.

Avery: For Archie Gilreath, old timey seeds provided a sense of security in a world of few constants. After surviving the horrors of Vietnam, he made his own luck when he farmed, saved heirloom seeds, and ran a seed co-op. However, as he comes to realize, luck can be a little tricky.

Mary: I bet you're wondering where I got these scars? In 1952, Dahlonega, Georgia got its first couple ambulances



For Archie Gilreath, old timey seeds provided a sense of security in a world of few constants.

but forgot to get someone to drive them. So they just sat there. Me and my cousin, we were prepping a corn order over by the Ranger Camp and decided to pack the truck by hand, as to not damage the corn. Soon as I approached the corn.....Out of nowhere a big ol' mountain viper popped out and bit me right on my hand!

So I slung, beat and eventually slung my hand free from the snake. As you can imagine, I was a little shocked so my cousin said, "Come on, I'll drive you down to the doctor's office."

Let me tell you, I thought that I was going to die -- more so from the car ride down the mountain than from the actual snake bite. He was slinging me every which way around the road, and he even ran a couple of stop signs.

Now one of my good buddies was a deputy at the time and caught him when he ran one of those stop signs. So he pulled us over and my cousin got real angry and started cursing and cussing at the deputy. And I had to calm him down and explain that I just got bitten and we were going to the doctor.

My deputy friend kind of laughed and then said, "You ain't going to make it to the doctor with him driving; come on get in the car with me."

So we started down the mountain and got to the little doctor's office right by the drugstore. They didn't have any anti-venom. They got the bright idea to go across the street and go get a Boy Scout snakebite kit. So they give me a shot right in my bite and it started swelling even faster. Now my hand is about this big.

We finally we got hold of one of the men who kind of knew how to drive the ambulance. This is four or five hours after the bite, and so my arm is turning black, and I can't hardly move it. Finally, we get to the hospital over in Hall County. By then, the swelling had spread up my arm across my shoulders and down my other arm.

They were waiting for me over there, dressed all in their white -- a surgeon and his nurse -- and they just started cutting my arm with a scalpel. Over and over again! Look you can see the marks now! They kept telling me that I may lose my arm -- but I didn't. With all that venom in me, I felt intoxicated, and I wasn't. But, anyway, they kept me in the hospital for six days, and it took a little longer for me to be able to use my arm again.

But, as you can see, I still have my arm! And I still use it to process corn every season. But, since that snakebite, I now use a shovel.

Elizabeth: Mr. Archie, who is going to process the seeds after you're gone?

Kaitlin and **Avery:** I reckon we will.

Kaitlin: We found Estelle Jarrard through a follow-up interview with a relative, Lorreta Grizzle, and what a find she was. This 98 year old woman keeps "old timey" seeds in Tums bottles because they are "better for her than any medicine." She works hard -- works her large farm by herself -- to protect her crops and seeds, and nothing is going to get in her way.

Elizabeth: I've had animal problems lately; y'all may not know about these things but I've been having a bunch of bears, deer, raccoons, and groundhogs eating up my broccoli and cabbage. They're trying to destroy my farm!

Last year, I had a cub up in my apple tree and the mama bear down on the ground and they were just eating up all my apples. So I called up the game warden that I've been using for years and told him about these bears who were eating up all my food and he sent out his boss. He brought what looked like a little pistol and rolled up shot gun shells... do you know what a shotgun shell looks like?

Elizabeth: You put it in this pistol and pull the trigger, and I reckon there's enough force it stuns the bear. Imagine that -- a 98 year old woman trying to go up against this big old bear and the game warden expected me to just stun it!

He told me he can't bring the trap and catch the bear because the little baby bear wouldn't know where to go. I can't understand why I own the land and pay taxes on it but I can't take care of what's destroying my crops. Let them eat up my vegetables and let me starve, but feed the bears!

Not even a week later those bears came out and tore up all my chicken pellets and ate them up. The bear had pulled it 30 feet out front of the chicken coop, tore it up, and then dragged the remaining part of it out to the edge of the woods.

I said to the game warden, "Now had that been a man that I caught stealing, I could have prosecuted him, have him put in jail and made him pay for it, but with ya'll, I can't do anything. Are ya'll going to pay me for my sack?"

He just shook his head no.

One of these days -- one day soon -- these bears are going to get hungry and attack someone because all the land is gone. The game warden needs to do something about this problem because I'm too old to go running around my property with a gun trying to scare these bears away all on my own!

Kaitlin: Through this project, we learned about heirloom seeds.

Avery: And through these stories we have developed as people, our minds filled with the best of stories.

Mary: about snakes.

Elizabeth: bears,

Kaitlin: potatoes,

Avery: and the true love of Garlic and Moon.

Mary: These stories give us wisdom that we can carry on for the rest of our life.



Elizabeth: I learned independence from a 98 year old woman.

Kaitlin: I learned that the latest and greatest doesn't always compare to the tried and true.

Avery: I learned that the natural energy that grows from the earth contributes to the energy of humanity.

Mary: I learned that seeds are worth saving, even in life-threatening situations.

All: And we all learned that we are special.

Bio: Rosann Kent is the Director of the Appalachian Studies Center at the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega, Georgia. She has a Masters in storytelling from East Tennessee State University. Mary Lipold, Avery Alexander, Elizabeth Guzman, and Kaitlyn Brackett are students minoring in Appalachian Studies and team leaders for its Appalachian Teaching Project.

References

- Appalachian Teaching Project. Participants. *Heirloom Seedkeepers and their stories: Growing community and sustainability through arts based research*. Retrieved from <https://www.etsu.edu/cass/projects/ngcsu/default.aspx>
- Dockery, C. (2013). *Heirloom seed and story keepers: Arts based research as community discourse in southern Appalachia*. Manuscript submitted for publication, Department of Visual Arts, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia.
- Winskie, J., & Murray, J. (2013). Heirloom seed & story keepers: Growing community & sustainability through arts-based research. *Papers and Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 2(1). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papers-andpubs/vol2/iss1/10>



The Wall

By Kris Lester

“Tina, lean back! If I wreck, you’ll go through the windshield!” Mama slaps my fingers, best as she can reaching backwards with her right hand and driving too, so I lean back a little... wait for her eyes to go back to the road: then I sneak back up there and hang my fingertips over the seat again and watch Grandma’s knuckles get whiter and whiter as she grips that old war picture that’s been hanging on the wall over her rocker forever. Mama wants Grandma to take Tom and Henry up to the courthouse, to hang ‘em with the other men that died in wars, but Grandma don’t want to, I can tell.

When Grandma unhooked the rusty wire from the rusty nail this morning, spider webs reached out to get the picture back, and a rusty spider trickled down the wall and jumped into the curtain ruffle. Mama cussed and chased him with a flyswatter over the ruffles and folds for a good five minutes, but never did get him. I sat in the floor cross-legged and watched Mama dance until I noticed the dust. I held out my hands to catch it when Mama went over beside Grandma to look at her brothers in that picture. She stretched her arm across Grandma’s back and squeezed her shoulder, leaned her head against Grandma’s, and I closed my eyes and lay back on the floor. The dust was snow, and I swept it off the lin-o-le-um with my arms and watched it fly around again. Then Henry and Tom were with me in the mountains, a long time ago, before I was even born, in their black and white picture making snow angels too, until Mama slapped my legs with the flyswatter and yelled, “Tina! Get your ass up out of that dust and go get in the damn car!”

And now, we’re in the Dart, and Grandma’s white wispies fly out of her bun, underneath her pink chiffon headscarf, and tickle my hands and face. I want to reach over Grandma’s shoulder and touch the leftover spider webs hanging from the back of her picture, thread the strands through a needle, and sew the picture back onto her wall. Then I count the grays in Mama’s coarse black horse hair that she got from her Daddy, Grandma said, his Cherokee coming out in Janine, my Mama. Grandma said her own hair was brown, before it was white. It’s always been white to me.

I rest my chin in the crack between the square, aqua vinyl seats. I’m up to 37. I think Grandma and Mama are a little disappointed that I came out blonde-haired and blue-eyed and white-white, German-looking like Daddy’s people, Mama says. “But that don’t mean that’s who you are on the inside,” Mama says to me all the time.

That wouldn’t bother me none either ‘cause I love my Daddy more than anybody, even God. But don’t tell Grandma that. She thinks God has to come first over everybody.

Grandma has lots of wrinkles on the back of her neck underneath her bun, like yard cracks

going all ways when it don't rain for a long time, the ones you trip over when you're running somewhere fast, after something, or something after you, and don't have time to look down. When Grandma twists my hair into a bun, Mama says I look Chinese 'cause Grandma pulls it so tight that my eyes get narrow. I don't think Germans can look Chinese, I said to Mama, and Grandma laughed, and Mama called me a smartass, and Grandma laughed some more.

Some of Grandma's wrinkles on the back of her neck are longer than others, and I like to follow 'em with my fingers from beginning to end. Sometimes I can, and sometimes I can't. Sometimes they go on and on to somewhere I can't go. Mama has wrinkles on the back of her neck too, but they aren't as long as Grandma's. Mama's neck is dark red, like one of Uncle John's deer hides, from where she mows the yard, ours and Grandma's next door too, with a push mower every Tuesday, one of Mama's days off from work, like today, but Grandma's neck is like her biscuit dough, soft and white and lumpy.

I can't see the back of my neck, so I don't know what color it is. Grandma says it's brown in the summertime and pale the rest of the year, and Mama says it looks like the neck of a Mexican in the summer, that I'd look like I belonged down there and not here if it wasn't for my blonde hair and blue eyes. She's always trying to make me into something I'm not, trying to send me off somewhere other than where I am. As I am, she says, I'm in demand 'cause they kidnap blonde kids and sell them to couples who can't have children, all over the world, and I better not ever go away some place far off or I'll get snatched up.

I think about that every time we go to Panama City Beach the third week of July during Daddy's vacation when I see people with brown skin, des-per-ate people from Cuba, Mama says, that sneak over the ocean on rafts and in little boats the police can't see from heli-cop-ters and bigger boats, but when we're all tired after loafing in the sun for a week, sometimes I think it'd be more fun to be snatched up by a stranger and toted off in boat rather than sit in the backseat of the Dart without any air condition for the long drive home. I asked Daddy why he didn't get air condition in the Dart like they have in my classroom at school, and he said some cars didn't come that way, and I said why didn't he just set an air condition in the back window of the Dart like Miss Cox did in the window at school, and he said they didn't make air condition like that for cars, that would fit in their windows, but he wished they did. I said, why don't you just make one, and he said he wasn't smart enough to do that but probably would've been if he hadn't dropped out of high school at 16, and that I'd better stay in school so I can build an air condition for my car one day. Daddy has a way of explaining everything so it makes sense. Like with my spelling words. He just says, sound 'em out, piece at a time, but sometimes a word has a letter sound but the letter isn't there, and sometimes a word don't have a sound but there's a letter there anyway. That means it's silent, Miss Cox said. I don't see why a letter has to be there if it don't make any racket, but Daddy said sometimes things are what they are, and we just have to keep going.



Some of Grandma's wrinkles on the back of her neck are longer than others, and I like to follow 'em with my fingers from beginning to end.

Daddy checks my words in the back of my spelling book from his green chair when I spell ‘em out loud ‘cause he can’t spell good. Sometimes he makes a mistake on my birthday cards and on those little notes he leaves Mama on the backs of en-ve-lobes when he lights out for his home place, mostly when Mama’s over at Grandma’s, but Mama said it’s not good manners to correct your elders, not respectful, not to say anything. Besides, she said, Daddy’s done good for himself at his service station running his own business and won’t ever have to work at the shirt factory again. She said he works hard, pays the bills, and don’t mess around, and that’s the best you can hope for from any man.

Sometimes I wonder where they’d take me and who I’d end up with, if those brown people snatched me up in Florida. I like adventures. But then I wouldn’t get to see Mama or Daddy or Grandma, and that would make me sad after a while, I think, and I’d want to come back home and pet kittens in the tater house and read to Daddy in his green chair at night and listen to Mama and Grandma when they fight, like today, over that old picture.

Mama slaps my fingers hard, and it stings this time, like it’s supposed to. “SIT BACK!” she barks, and I know she means business, so I throw myself against the back seat, cross my arms and pout, but I won’t cry. I grit my teeth. I won’t. Grandma looks back at me and grins. “Let her be, Janie. She’s all right,” Grandma says. Just then we go real slow into Deadman’s Curve, and I know Mama made me sit back because a lot of people have wrecked here from coming around the curve too fast. I slide across the seat and look out the open window at all the little white crosses with names on them on the side of the road where people died, and if I lean my head out the window a little bit, I can see the tiny tops of tombstones in Deadman’s Cemetery a piece up ahead, where Tom and Henry are buried. Mama asks Grandma, “You want to stop for a minute, or go on?”

“Better stop,” Grandma says. “Tell why I’m putting ‘em up at the courthouse.” Mama props her elbow in her open window and runs her hand through her hair and shakes her fingers through it, like she does when she’s aggravated, but I lost count at 58 when she made me sit back, so it don’t matter anyway.

We slow down and turn into the U drive at the cemetery, so I scoot back to the middle and come forward to hang my hands over the square seats again. The graves start to stand up on both sides of the U drive, get taller right before we pass ‘em, and I can read some of the names nobody calls people anymore: Mamie, Effie, Willard, and one, Mabel Reed, with a flying angel carved on it. Grandma hangs on tighter than ever to that old picture she had to pull away from the spider this morning and squeezes it closer to her breasts, which hang really low, almost down to the tie on her dress, because she’s never worn a bra and nursed six babies until they were two years old apiece, Mama said. If I lean closer to Grandma’s shoulder, I can see a little triangle of her eyelet pet-ti-coat between the collars of her dress that look like dog ears. Grandma doesn’t wear panties either, even if there’s a dinner on the grounds at church where her dress might fly up in the wind and everybody see all her glory, but Mama said we shouldn’t tell anybody that. Mama’s bought panties for Grandma, and she has a drawer full that Aunt Beulah alone has brought on Sundays, when she comes after church to eat dinner, usually boiled chicken and dumplings with peas, and the trailer gets real hot, especially in the summer. But Grandma

still won't wear panties, no matter how much Mama wants her to. I've gotten along without 'em all my days, Grandma says, and won't be corrupted by the world now. Mama says Grandma still thinks she lives back in the hollow, where people didn't see her very much for a long time, even though she's lived in the trailer next door to us since just before I was born, when Uncle John went all the way crazy and drowned himself, Mama said.

Grandma kept me all the years I was a baby up until I started school, the last baby she kept, Mama said, because Grandma had to get me to climb up on the brown couch to change my diaper, and now that I'm in school, I stay with her after the bus drops me off, even on Mama's days off, because we don't want Grandma to get lonely. Mama said I've been Grandma's balm in grief since she moved out of the hollow near us so we could take care of her, and I said, what's balm, and Mama said, it's something like that shiny lip gloss your Aunt Beulah brings you to keep your lips from getting dry, and I said, what's grief, and she said, it's a feeling people get when they can't figure out what to do with themselves, and I said, I never run out of things to do, so I probably won't ever get grief, and Mama said, Tina, sometimes girl, you just wear me out.

When I stayed with Grandma before Mama made me go to school, we'd crochet, and she'd read the King James to me, and then I'd tell her back what she'd read except I changed the stories a little, like that time I told her Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus and found him up in a tree, and Jesus said, "Zacchaeus, if you don't come down from that tree right now, I'm gonna climb up there and bust your ass." After we had our nap and I peeled my legs off Grandma's brown couch, we watched The Dukes of Hazard in the afternoon reruns and then the news. I miss the radio news now because it comes on at eight in the morning, so I'm already at my desk up front, last row, because that's where my last name makes me sit. I'm the only S—Schoen, and the T's and U's and W's are behind me. There aren't any V's or Y's, X's or Z's. Sometimes I still get to hear one song of Gospel Hour before I catch the bus, if I get dressed quick and run to grab a bacon biscuit from Grandma's trailer. I try to listen to one whole song and then run to the end of Grandma's driveway to make the bus, but most mornings Mama has to drive me to school in the Dart. I can't get down the driveway in time to catch the bus because I forget everything else when I'm listening to the songs on Grandma's radio. Daddy says I might turn out musical and write songs with all them words I'm learning, and then he can back me up on his guitar, but I said, you can only play "Wildwood Flower," and he said, well, if you learn more words and write me some songs, then I'll have to learn to play some more.



Some days I just want to stay home with Grandma, not go to school. She said Mama did that a lot when she was little. She'd jump in a mud puddle hard as she could to get dirty enough so she could go back home and run around the hills with her Daddy, catching minks to skin and fetching twine for the tomato plants and cracking black walnuts with a hammer on a flat rock, always something new to learn, or something that had to be done, and she was glad Mama stayed home all those days 'cause Granddaddy died in the blackberry patch when Mama was even younger than me. And Grandma looked out the window for a minute like she was trying to find

something, and then said it don't matter if I go to school either, I'm smart enough like my Mama, sometimes too smart for my own good, and not to get too much smarter or no man will ever have me.

Mama slits her eyes over at me, and I jump back quick, before I get slapped again, then she turns her eyes back to the U so she don't run over any tombstones. "You stay back, or I'm gonna cut a switch when we stop at the graves."

I scoot back against the seat and put my hands on my legs, bare as sunshine, Mama says. She made me bring my flip-flops, but they're in the floorboard on top of Daddy's tools, and my grass-stained feet are just hanging over 'em. Mama made me put on shorts and a shirt too, but at home I mostly run around in my panties. Mama said I have to look re-spec-ta-ble when we go to town, and that means I have to wear lots of clothes. Sometimes I wish I had on pants when the blue vinyl on the back seat sticks to the backs of my legs 'cause I'll have to peel it off in a minute when we stop, just like from Grandma's brown couch.

Deadman's Cemetery is where all of the soldiers are buried that don't come back home alive after war. They all have little flags on their graves to set them apart from people who die at home in normal ways, and there's a flag on a tall pole that flaps above them all like our flag in front of school that I haven't gotten to pull to the top of the pole yet. Mama says I'll be able to do that when I'm an eighth grader, but that seems like a long way off, and I know if I can pull a sled up the Dolly Partons when it snows, I can pull a flag up a pole. The grass is greener over the soldiers' graves than it is on the other, ordinary people's graves, and Mama said it's because the jailbirds water it more, out of respect. The normal grave grass looks like the thin stuff in our yard that has dry patches and clover that bees like in some spots and yellow dandelion flowers when they're not fuzzy anymore and those wild violets I like to pluck and smell before they wilt in the shade under the cedar trees where the ticks live and where we have our family reunions, but some spots won't grow grass at all because there's too much limestone rock mixed in with the dirt, Daddy says, which keeps the roots from taking holt. You can always tell when Mama hits a rock when she's mowing because she hollers out, "Whoo-ee!", like she's getting out of the way, and she has lots of places on her tan legs where she couldn't get out of the way fast enough, just like that dark purple line on Grandma's leg where I slammed the Dart door too soon, before she got all the way in, and she hollered, "Uhn!" so Mama told me not to close the car door from now on until she tells me it's O.K.

We finally stop, Mama gets out on her side, and I scoot over and get out of the back on Grandma's side. We both slam our doors and then go over to help Grandma out, even though she didn't want to come here very much, I can tell, but Mama does what she wants, that's the way it is, Daddy says. First, Grandma puts her right foot out of the car and settles it steady in the blue gravel. Then she scoots her body toward the edge of her seat, turns toward us, and swings her other foot out, and steadies it too. Then she holds out her right hand to Mama, her left hand still holding that picture tight, and ducks her head to keep from hitting it on the door frame when Mama pulls her out and up. Then Grandma holds my hand while we walk s-l-o-w-l-y over the uneven brown grass to the even green grass and then over to Henry and Tom's graves.

"Well boys," Grandma says, when we finally make it to the graves, "I guess I'm gonna have to

take you to the courthouse, but I'll still be able to come and see you here."

"Mama, you can go up to the courthouse every day but Sunday," Mama says. She leans in to lift up the metal picture cover on Uncle Tom's grave and then leans in more and squints at him like she don't remember what he looks like. Tom's wearing a black hat with a tassel on it and a black robe. He's holding a rolled-up piece of paper in his hand. Mama leans back from Tom and crosses her arms. "We can go up there every Tuesday when we come to get groceries, just like we're doing today."

"Won't be the same then," Grandma says, and steps closer to see Tom. I step with her. "They'll be with them."

"Mama, he's with them here now."

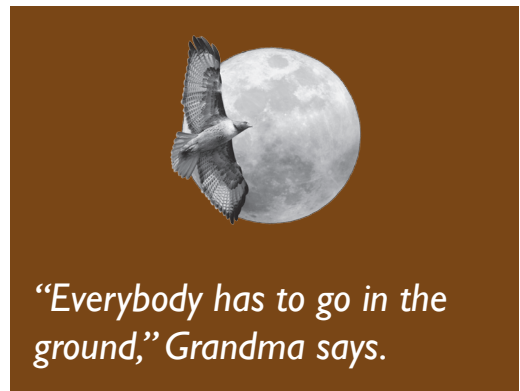
"Everybody has to go in the ground," Grandma says. "That's different. Not everybody has to be put up on that wall." Grandma lets go of my hand and wraps her hand that was holding mine back around that old picture. I see a little thread of spider web blow off the back and land on the green grass near Mama's big toe with the crack in it, the one I rub for her at night with lotion while we watch Carol Burnett, on the green couch, when we're not tired enough to sleep. Mama has as many cracks on her feet as she does wrinkles on the back of her neck 'cause she don't like to wear shoes either, when we're home.

"Mama, I don't understand you. I thought you'd be proud to have Tom and Henry go up on the wall the courthouse and be honored like the rest that died over there." Mama puts her fists on her hips, and huffs. "Don't you think they deserve to be up there like everybody else?"

"They ain't like everybody else," Grandma says. "They're mine." She reaches over and pats Tom's grave, then straightens back up.

Mama leans in and slaps Tom's metal lid shut. "They'll still be yours. They'll just be with the other men, too." Mama takes a few steps backward to Henry's grave, opens his metal flap, and peers at him like she did Tom.

Grandma don't say anything but just walks up to the other grave, Henry's, and pats it like she did Tom's. Then she wraps her hand real quick back around the picture frame and leans in to get a closer look at Tom who's in regular clothes. His picture says School Days: Sophomore (Sop-ho-more?) Class of 1942 at the bottom. When Grandma stands back up again, I can't get hold of her hand 'cause it's still wrapped around her picture, so I pinch the hem of her checked day dress. It's soft from being washed a lot, and a few threads hang from the hem. Grandma tells Mama all the time that she'll wash her dresses to death with that bleach in the machine, to just let her wash them in the sink like she always has, but Mama says that's too much work. A little breeze comes across the graves and smells like Grandma's talcum powder she wears beneath her dress and petticoat.



“Mama, we can go back home right now if you want to. We don’t have to take them up there. Let’s go home. Come on.”

We all turn and head toward the Dart, blinding white in the sunlight, and Grandma lets me hold her hand again over the even green grass, then the uneven brown grass where we see a mole moving—and Mama says she wishes she had her hatchet with her—then the blue gravel that we parked the Dart on. We have to put our hands across our eyes, the Dart’s so bright in the sun. Daddy knows how to keep a car shining, Mama says, has ever since he courted her in that Chevy convertible that she ran into a ditch when he tried to teach her how to drive a stick.

We take Grandma to her side first, as usual, and Mama opens the heavy door, then Grandma steps inside the V the open door makes with the frame. First, Grandma turns around backwards, plants her feet side by side in the blue gravel, and grabs the door with her left hand just beside the lock since she’s left the window down. Then she hunches like a cat about to pounce but leans backward instead, and slouches back into the passenger seat, careful to duck her head as she goes, and finally lands on the vinyl, making it swoosh. She holds the picture with her right hand as her left hand moves from the door to the dash. Then she scoots her butt against the seat and places first her left foot onto the floorboard, turns toward the windshield, then brings her right foot in. Finally she takes her hand off the dash and wraps it back around the picture and says, “Whew!” like she’s run a thousand miles.

“Alright, Tina. Slam the door good and shut,” Mama says. That’s my job too, and I haul back and slam the heavy metal door before swinging open the back door, hopping onto the back seat, and slamming it from the inside before Mama can even make it around to her side of the car and open her own driver’s side door. I beat her again, like I do every time. Mama slams her door, turns the Dart over, and eases forward around the back of Deadman’s Cemetery through the U drive. Grandma’s head turns to see Tom and Henry as we drive past, then behind, then around the other side and finally in front of them again when she can’t crane her neck any further, and she looks straight ahead, out the windshield. It has streaks of sun across it that fan from the clouds and look like what Grandma calls God-light. Mama looks left then right at the highway and Grandma—“Go on,” Grandma says—then Mama turns left onto the highway toward town.



Mama straightens up on the highway, and then says, “You don’t have to take it up there if you don’t want to. I just thought they’d want to be up there with the other ones they fought beside.”

Grandma sighs and holds the picture tight and looks right, out her window. I’m hanging back over the seat again, and the wisps from Grandma’s hair touch my face like mosquito legs when they first land, just before they bite.

“Mama? You hear me? You want to go back home?”

“No, you’re right Janie. They belong with the others, I guess. It’s just the last picture I had of ‘em living, so I kindly wanted to hang onto it.”

“I know it Mama, but you can go up the courthouse and see it any time. It’s not going anywhere but there.”

“Not the same as having ‘em at home.”

“No, it’s not. But then people can see what they did for us. That they died for us. People might not know if you keep it at home.”

“Won’t matter to nobody but us anyway, what they did.”

“Now Mama, it does matter. It’s just as important what they did as anybody else on that wall. They fought just as hard as anybody else over there, I reckon.”

“Don’t nobody care but us,” Grandma says.

“Well, maybe they’ll get to care if they see the picture enough,” Mama says. Then she notices me.

“Dammit Tina, if I have to tell you one more time to lean back in that seat, I’m gonna pull this car over and wear you out.”

I lean back and cross my arms, and Grandma looks over her left shoulder at me, pouting, and grins.

“Aw, she ain’t hurting nothing, Janie. You’re a good driver.” Grandma’s never called Mama Janine, her name, and Granddaddy called her Jaybird, my Daddy said. Granddaddy died when Mama was five. Me and Grandma change with the year, Mama says, since I was born in ‘70 and her in 1900, so our ages are easy to remember. I don’t know why anybody gets named if nobody ever calls ‘em by it, I told Daddy the other day. Seems like a waste to think one up. Everybody should just call people whatever they want to. Well, something has to go on your birth certificate and your tombstone, to prove you was here, Daddy says. But if everybody calls you all these different names all the time, how’s anybody gonna know that name on the tombstone is you, after you’re dead and they can’t ask you, I said. I guess people that care enough to find your plot know what all you’re called, and them’s the only people counts anyhow, Daddy said, and I couldn’t think of any other questions to ask, about that.

“Who’s in the funeral home?” Mama says in a pe-cu-liar voice as we pass the funeral home on the right. I count seven cars and three trucks parked in the blue gravel. “There aren’t many people there.”

“I don’t know. I forgot to turn on the radio this morning,” Grandma says, like she remem-



“They belong with the others, I guess. It’s just the last picture I had of ‘em living, so I kindly wanted to hang onto it.”

bered it just now. "I thought it was awful quiet while I was eating my second piece of bacon."

"We'll get a paper at the grocery store," Mama says. She drives past Smith Funeral Home in that old Victorian house that a family used to live in, but now that people don't have so many kids anymore since birth control—thank Jesus Mama said—they turned all of those bedrooms into viewing rooms for dead people, so we can go and have a last look before they put 'em in the ground and shovel dirt on top, then stomp it down. Grandma and Daddy and Mama always say they look so pretty or handsome, so peaceful, the coffin people, but I don't think so. I think they look like somebody washed 'em in bleach with the whites and let 'em soak too long, and kind of puffy and stiff too, which don't make good sense, like white sheets flapping on the line before they dry all the way and get crispy and brittle.

Mama drives on into town past Hancocks' Flower Stand and over the bridge that straddles Duck River and on into downtown past old clothes stores, the sewing shop, pool hall, doctor's office and drug store in tall brick buildings and passes the front of the courthouse, then turns left onto the one-way street that runs beside the courthouse. "The jailbirds planted some more flowers and bushes," Mama says. "The square looks good, but they're gonna have to cut down some of these old trees too." Grandma holds the picture frame next to her chest, not letting it go even around the curves, but Mama don't jerk people around in their seats, so Grandma's safe. I stay put against the back seat. Mama pulls into a slanted spot, and then we get Grandma out again like at the cemetery, but on pavement this time, so it don't take so long for Grandma to get her feet settled before Mama pulls her up, and then I slam Grandma's door, and we head to the side stairs of the courthouse down the cracked sidewalk that Mama says the jailbirds need to get hold of too, but there are new holly bushes and crape myrtle, and Mama says, don't it look nice, this place where her brothers will be, but Grandma doesn't say anything as we climb the stacked stone steps with their low places in the middle that Daddy told me got worn that way from over a hundred years of feet walking up and down the same steps in the same way we do.

When we peer through the window in the courthouse door, there's a woman who's just come out of a room, straightening up the front of her red jacket, but then in a little bit, we see her reach under her red skirt and tug at her girdle 'cause she thinks nobody's around. She looks like we surprise her when we come through the door, first Mama, then Grandma stepping one foot at a time over the threshold, squeezing my hand, then me, staying close beside Grandma, both of us behind Mama.

"Can I help you?" the woman says, coming toward us. Her shoes clack on the shiny floor.

"Yes, thank you," Mama says, in that voice she uses when she's talking to someone she don't know too good. "My mother has a war picture of her sons for the Memorial Wall. They were killed in World War II."

The woman stops walking and sighs and raises her hand toward the wall closest to her, toward the rows and rows of war men framed there, and says, "I'm sorry, but we've run out of room, as you can see." We all follow her hand down the room and look at both walls, on both sides of the hallway, covered from handrail to ceiling with war men, squished side-by-side in gold frames.

“What do you mean, you don’t have room?” Mama says, using her regular voice. “We read about it in the paper, to bring all war son pictures up to the courthouse, and you’d frame them at no cost for the family, and hang them up on the wall with all the others that died, for the Memorial.”

“Yes, we did put an advertisement in the newspaper, but we’ve since run out of a place to put them all. I guess we didn’t realize there would be so many,” the woman says, holding her palms up like she wants us to put something in them. “Who would have thought there had been so many from such a small place?” She shakes her head. “But we have this album that we’re collecting the pictures in until we can find another place to hang the rest...” She wants us to follow her, so we walk with her over to a table at the other end of the hall and peer into the pages that she turns in the album. There are lots of men in green and brown uniforms, and some in uniforms that are black and white in the picture, like Tom and Henry’s.

Mama stops looking at the pictures and looks at Grandma. She lets go of my hand to wrap her hand back around the picture. Her knuckles are getting white again, like they did in the car on the way here. I hold on to the hem of Grandma’s dress. Mama looks at the woman again and crosses her arms.

“Where are they thinking of hanging the rest of them?” she says.

“Well, we’re not certain yet...” The woman closes the album with pictures of the dead men and looks back toward the wall. “We’re thinking about hanging some of them up at the high school, maybe more at the pool hall, but we haven’t decided.”

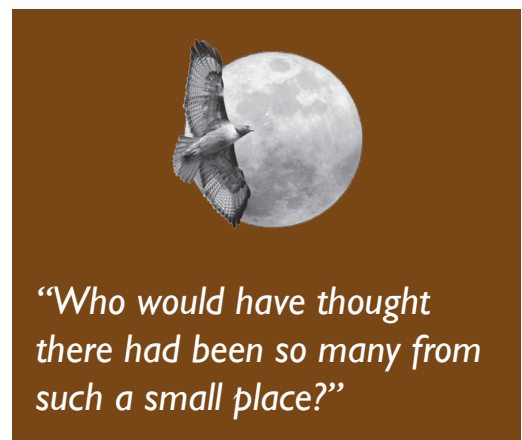
“So there’s no more room here—anywhere?” Mama says. She’s using the voice she uses with me when I don’t understand what she wants me to do.

The woman steps back a little from us. “I’m afraid not,” she says. “There were just too many.” She runs her hand through her hair like Mama does when she’s mad at Grandma. “We’ve hung them everywhere—these walls, the offices, the courtroom, the stairwell, even in the bathrooms,” she says. “Come look at this.”

I take Grandma’s hand again, and we walk along the wall, the dead war men watching us from above as we go, to the bathroom at the end of the hall, and the woman holds the door open for us to go inside. War men are between and above the sinks, about six of them on the tiny wall between the sinks and the stalls, and when Mama opens a door to a stall, there are four of them there, hung above the toilet.

“I don’t want my boys hanging in a bathroom,” Grandma says, squeezing my hand. Mama looks at Grandma squeezing my hand, and then looks at the woman, standing in the bathroom doorway.

Mama runs her hand through her hair and holds out her other palm like the woman did in the hallway. “Why did you advertise something you couldn’t give? You should have figured how



many you'd have to hang up before you put it in the paper. Look what you've put my mother through." Mama and the woman look at Grandma holding her picture, and then look at Grandma's other hand holding mine.

"We simply didn't realize," the woman says, and looks at the floor. She sounds sad. "I'm sorry, ma'am. I'm really sorry."

"Me too," Mama says, leaning forward a little and spitting out the word "too," which makes the woman jump. "Come on girls, let's go home," and Mama walks past the woman in the doorway, and me and Grandma try to follow her out quick as we can and walk past the wall, with all those dead war men watching us again, but Mama still has to wait for us. She stands there holding the door open at the end of the hall, and her face looks like she's holding her breath, like she looks right before she goes underwater in the deep part of our swimming hole at the creek back at Grandma's old house in the hollow.

When we're outside walking toward the Dart, Mama's real quiet, and Daddy says people are most angry when they're quiet, so I don't talk but just think about how our yard's mostly full of dogwood and redbud and cedar trees. It don't look anything like the courthouse yard, but we live in the country, Mama says, and that's the way it's supposed to look. The courthouse looks funny without the stage they set up for the Good Ole Days. When I square-danced last year, Mama sewed me a lavender checked dress with lots of skirts and lace on all of the layers, and I had lace on my socks too, and panties with ruffles on the butt, and a pinafore, and she sewed lots of bells into my petticoat ruffles so I'd jingle. I forgot some of the steps when I was up there in the spotlight, but Mama said it was cute, it made people laugh when we ran into each other, and everybody forgot something the first time they got up there and often forgot something after they'd been up there a dozen times to do the same thing they'd always done, year after year, and she put her arm around me and squeezed me tight to her leg. She remembered the bank president forgetting part of his routine one year, and falling right off the stage, even though he'd been square dancing since he was a boy and practiced every day for a month before the Good Ole Days. She said I wouldn't forget that part next year 'cause I'd forgotten it this year, that was the part you always remembered, like when she took the driver's test when she was twenty, after she'd married Daddy, and missed the question about when the road was slickest. It's just after the rain starts, she said. I thought it took a while to get slick, so I would've missed it too, but I won't miss my steps on stage next year.

We get into the Dart and turn out of the square and back on the highway that goes down Main Street, where we pass the flower shop and the post office and the dime store and the laundry mat, and then we turn right at the light and pass the park up on the hill where I hunt Easter eggs in my church dress and shiny shoes, and then we turn right into the Pig. Mama parks the car in a slanted spot and says, in the shaky voice she uses just before she starts to cry, "I'll run in and get everything. Ya'll just set here." She gets out of the car and slams her door and goes inside, and we watch her through the windshield and the glass windows of the Pig wave at Mr. Parker up in his glass manager box, and then we watch her get a cart and roll it to the edge of the store window and her face start to crunch up until we can't see her anymore. Then Grandma leans her head back on her headrest and lets the picture rest on her lap. Her knuckles aren't white anymore.

Grandma acts like she wants to rest, so I stay quiet. Daddy has some of his tools in the bottom of the floorboard, oily and rusty, and I'm trying to not put my bare feet on 'em 'cause that's hard to wash off. When Daddy works on cars in our driveway, sometimes he spills oil and stuff, and I step in it, and I have to scrub and scrub. Daddy likes to work on cars and get dirty, and he gets dirty in the garden too. Mama has to bleach his socks every time she washes 'em, and some of 'em still don't turn white again. She separates his work and garden socks from the ones he wears to church. She likes for us all to be as clean as possible on Sundays, and I can't do anything after I'm in my dress and doo-dads Grandma made for me except sit on the green couch and watch the Stooges, although I never get to see the end because if I did, we'd be late for Sunday school. I wish I could wear shorts and a T-shirt to church, but Mama says that's disrespectful, and we have to dress up for Jesus. I've never seen Jesus in person, just in pictures. He has long hair, and Mama usually don't like that—says she's always liked a clean-cut man—but she doesn't seem to mind it on Jesus.

Suddenly Mama's back at the car with her cart and reaches through my open window to set the groceries on the back seat next to me. I look into the paper bags and see the corners on the boxes of my favorite cereal are crunched in. I can just see her looking down the rows and rows of cereal boxes that make a wall like the pictures of the dead men up at the courthouse. I can see her looking and looking for my favorite cereal and finally finding it on the bottom row, the last place she would look because she's grown up, and grown-up people look at the top row first. She usually won't buy anything in a box with crunched corners, but I don't say anything 'cause Mama's eyes are red like when we watch Carol Burnett late at night and we laugh 'til we cry. I think tonight's gonna be one of those foot lotion nights when we're not tired enough to sleep.

Grandma leaves the picture in her lap and keeps her head leaned back against the headrest all while Mama's putting the groceries in the car and backing out of the parking space, pulling out of the parking lot, and driving back to town, turning left on the highway that will take us home again. Mama holds the steering wheel with one hand and props her elbow in the open frame of the driver's window and lays her head in her other hand.

We pass the same things we passed before but saw from the other side: the funeral home with 16 cars in it now (I count four through the front windshield, and seven through the side window, and get on my knees and count five through the back windshield) instead of ten, and then I sit down fast before Mama can get onto me, but Mama doesn't even look my way; she just takes her hand from the steering wheel, swipes her palm across her cheek then down her britches leg, then puts her hand back on top of the steering wheel. I thought Grandma was asleep, but through the crack between the seats, I see her hand reach across the seat and I scoot forward and peek over the seat and see Grandma pat Mama on her leg, and that's when I know everything is back to the way it's supposed to be. I scoot back against the seat before Mama sees



He has long hair, and Mama usually don't like that—says she's always liked a clean-cut man—but she doesn't seem to mind it on Jesus.

me and look at my hands that Daddy says will look like Mama's when I have babies one day, and like Grandma's when I have grandbabies. Daddy says you can look to your people older than you to see what you'll become, but my hands still have a lot of growing to do before they can catch up with Mama and Grandma.

I look out the Dart window and see that the flag over my uncles' graves blows toward, not away from us, like it did on the way to town; next is Deadman's Curve, which we curved into on the way down, not up; a cow eats on the other side of his hill, but we see his tail swishing this time, not his jaws working grass; my school comes at the Dart from the side where they let us out for recess and not the other side where the drink and snack machine trucks park to roll their carts up the ramp; and finally, Grandma's powder blue trailer runs at us from the end of the driveway instead of stepping away from us like it does when we back up.

Mama parks the Dart, opens her door and comes around the other side while I'm getting out and slamming my door too. Then we help Grandma out, and I slam her door and hold her hand until she gets up the stacked stone steps that are worn in the middle a lot deeper than the steps at the courthouse 'cause they came from Grandma's house in the hollow when she moved here next to us, and they'd been there for a long time, a lot longer than the stone steps have been at the courthouse, Daddy said.

When we get to Grandma's door, Mama says, "Mama, I'm sorry. I didn't know they were gonna turn us away, or I wouldn't have put you through that."

"That's all right, Janie. I didn't want my boys to leave home anyway." Grandma grabs Mama's hand and squeezes it and then lets it go and turns the loose knob on the door she never bothers locking, even at night when she's asleep, when Mama says somebody could come in and knock Grandma over her head. Grandma always says when the good Lord's ready for her, she's ready to go.

She walks inside and goes straight toward her rocker, but her eyes are on that empty spot on the wall. She doesn't clean the webs off the wall or anything but just feels for the rusty hook on the back of the frame and matches it to the rusty nail where it's hung for all these years, and lots of years before that on another wall above another rocker, in her old, falling down house in the hollow, then sinks into her chair and goes "unh!" like she wishes she never had to leave that chair again.

Mama puts up Grandma's groceries, and I sit in the floor cross-legged and take off Grandma's shoes and hosiery, unlatching the garter belts and sliding off the knee-highs, and put 'em in Grandma's shoes next to her chair. She has little red rings on her legs where the garters have been.

Mama forgets about her groceries for a minute. She sits down on the brown couch and puts her head in her hands and then runs her hands through her hair and cries some more. "I thought we were doing right by them. I never thought they wouldn't take them," she says to the floor, but



*Grandma always says when
the good Lord's ready for her,
she's ready to go.*

Grandma just leans her head back and rocks and looks peaceful.

“They’re home now Janie, where they belong. It’s alright. Not your fault,” Grandma says in a fading voice that has sleep in it. “It’s alright.”

I sit in the floor cross-legged and look at the picture on the wall. Grandma put it back up there a little crooked, but it’s back where it started. Directly I see that rusty spider from this morning creep out from behind the curtain and head toward the picture. Mama looks up with her red eyes and sees me watching him, and I think, oh no, she’s gonna get him this time, and she starts to get up but then just sets there, like she’s too tired to move, and watches him, like me. He sees that Mama isn’t after him anymore, so he crawls back under the crooked picture frame to start fixing what’s left of his web.

Walters State is one of 46 institutions in the Tennessee Board of Regents system, the sixth largest system of higher education in the nation. The Tennessee Board of Regents is the governing board for this system which is comprised of six universities, 13 community colleges, and 27 colleges of applied technology, providing programs in 90 of Tennessee's 95 counties to more than 200,000 students.

Walters State Community College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097; telephone number 404-679-4500) to award the associate degree. SACSCOC should be contacted regarding only questions about the accreditation status of the institution, to file a third-party comment at the time of the institution's formal, scheduled review, or to file a complaint against the institution for alleged non-compliance with a standard or requirement. Normal inquiries about Walters State such as admission requirements, financial aid, educational programs, etc. should be addressed directly to the institution and not to SACSCOC.

Walters State Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, color, religion, national origin, age, disability or veteran status in provision of educational programs and services or employment opportunities and benefits pursuant to the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA). Inquiries and charges of violations of any of the above referenced policies should be directed to the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources/Affirmative Action Officer, 500 S. Davy Crockett Pkwy., Morristown, TN 37813-6899, 423-585-6845 or email: tammy.goode@ws.edu. Requests for accommodation of a disability should be directed to Office of Disability Services at Walters State, 500 S. Davy Crockett Pkwy., Morristown, TN 37813-6899.

