



GOD HAS MADE OF ONE BLOOD ALL PEOPLES OF THE EARTH

**BEREA
COLLEGE**

Loyal Jones
APPALACHIAN CENTER
Tradition. Diversity. Change.

Putting lips to the Spring

I have been studying and celebrating Appalachia for almost 25 years, but this year was the first time I attended Berea's Celebration of Traditional Music (CTM). As the new director of the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center (LJAC), I felt a little chagrined at that fact, so I just jumped right in and got an education in sound.

I learned about old-time women banjo players, went to fiddle workshops (not that I can play a lick), watched footage from the 1975 celebration, got to hear craftsmen and scholars gab about making dulcimers, saw musicians jamming in the green room, listened to stories, and got to dance.

At the Saturday-evening CTM concert, I felt like we had come before a waterfall that had gathered just for us. You know how each mountain spring has its own taste of the earth it gathers from? Well, just like those springs run to creeks which become rivers, so each song and note played by each musician had traveled from their own earth-flavored past and the people who

kept and keep those places alive. And we, the thirsty audience, gathered with our cups to drink just. Maybe that is how the larger sharing happens.

Maybe with each person or family at each spring, maybe all our sips together partake of a river that becomes song. And that way the earth flows into us and through us, and we are called on to taste and know and celebrate and protect and teach and remind each other what it means to bow down with the roots and touch our lips to water.

That's the way that my first five months have been at the LJAC: one amazing meeting and event after the next, with my own knowledge and experience being shown just how small they are, but then growing, and my head spinning, and my arm being taken by the next dance partner.

The articles in this issue will take you into a few measures of that dance. As you read and move onto the floor of these doings, I hope you can imagine yourself doing so hand-in-hand with our other 4,200 readers all over Appalachia and the world. ❖

—Chris Green, Director



Winter 2013
Volume 41 • Number 1

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Berea College and the Appalachian Center are
committed to the betterment of the peoples of
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Berea College.



Growing in Harlan

by **Maggie Ashmore**

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

What does your dream job look like? If someone would've asked me that question three years ago, I don't think that I could have imagined anything better than working for Grow Appalachia. Working as a site coordinator for the Grow Appalachia program is an absolute joy. Each day is an opportunity to work outside, learn more about sustainable agriculture, make new friends, cook and eat delicious and nutritious food, and work toward an abundant future for our community.

With the good food movement gaining substantial momentum across the country, Grow Appalachia provides local families with a simple way to participate and gain control of their own food supply. Grow Appalachia participants grow a significant amount of fresh produce, preserve unbelievable quantities for the winter, and are acutely aware of how important gardening is for economic, physical, and mental health. Here at Pine Mountain, we worked with 35 families during 2012 to produce over 835 bushels of food, weighing in at over 38,000 pounds! To top it all off, those amazing families preserved 2,122 quarts of food for the winter!

If you think that those numbers look good, just remember that there are 14 other Grow Appalachia sites throughout central Appalachia (with many more to come this year). What an impact. It is hard to visualize the amount of food being raised in home gardens and being eaten in cozy kitchens due to the support of Grow Appalachia.

My co-worker, Kathleen, and I spend considerable time sweating in the garden alongside participating families, plowing the earth, picking up rocks, harvesting potatoes, giving advice, learning new skills, praising gardens, cursing the weather, etc. But we have found it important to focus our energy into hosting quality events planned to foster the community feel of Grow Appalachia and share concrete skills.

Grow Appalachia at Pine Mountain Settlement School (PMMS) has been a driving force in developing a renewed sense of community, a community in which participants who are neighbors (albeit by several miles) gather to discuss gardening, the weather, family celebrations, food, health, and of course the requisite bad joke. At workshops, participants help one another to construct chicken pens and rain barrels, inoculate shiitake mushroom logs, offer advice on pest control, and learn new ways to prepare their vegetables. At local food potlucks, participants try new foods, compliment one another on their garden fresh dishes, and revel in the opportunity to get together with their community for an event that is solely for fun and fellowship.

Appalachia County

The immediate impact of Grow Appalachia at PMSS can be seen through the story of one of our 2012 participants who is a first time gardener. At age 52, Tevis decided to grow a garden after tending the abandoned garden at a local elementary school and enjoying the fresh produce. After years of physical and mental hardships, she currently battles diabetes. Once joining Grow Appalachia, she and her adult son cleared off the families' old garden plot which had not been used in at least 40 years. The area was so overrun with brambles and saplings that the only clue of what the area was previously used for was an old barn sitting among the trees.

Tevis tended her garden meticulously throughout the summer and harvested beans, tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, potatoes, eggplant, peppers, and more. She learned to preserve her food and cook it fresh in new and healthy ways. As the season went on, she began to crave healthy produce and continually cut back on the processed and sugar laden foods that she previously ate. One of our most memorable moments of the season was when Tevis called, absolutely elated, and related the news that she had been to the doctor and learned that she could reduce her daily insulin intake by half! Tevis and her doctor attribute her improved physical and mental health to working in and eating out of her garden.

As the season went on, Tevis's son also began to take more interest in tending the garden and seemed to gain a real sense of pride in growing his own garden and having produce to put on the table and give away to family and friends. Tevis has also had an impact on her adult daughter who gave up soda and

started cooking more vegetables this summer. Tevis constantly preaches the benefits of growing a garden and encourages her friends and family to create healthier lives for themselves. Tevis never imagined that she could be a recovering diabetic, and she strives to show others that they too can make a difference with diet and exercise.

Maybe we can't give Grow Appalachia all the credit for the changes in the life of this one family, but we believe that we are changing lives for the better, and to be out working in the garden with Tevis is a joyful and beautiful thing here in Appalachia.

Participants continuously tell us that they not only appreciate Grow Appalachia for the financial and physical assistance, but that they delight in sharing ideas with other families, the educational components of the program, the encouragement, and the fact that other people care about their garden as much as they do. Families have told us that they find their garden to be more convenient than going to the store, that they have learned to cook differently, and that they eat much better due to having an abundance of fresh food.

Grow Appalachia has shown us that gardening is not only about producing high quality food, but it's also about pride, cooperation, companionship, beauty, history, storytelling, and continuous learning. The hard work and conversations had while working down the long rows of a garden can form deep and resilient bonds.

As Grow Appalachia coordinators, we aim to have a good time growing great food. I mean, who said gardening isn't fun? ❖

Kathleen Powers also contributed to this article.

Maggie Ashmore and Kathleen Powers work at Pine Mountain Settlement School where Maggie serves as Sustainability Projects Coordinator and Kathleen is the AmeriCorps VISTA Community Agriculture Coordinator.

Maggie Ashmore



Time to think

A former coal miner begins his journey to Berea

Editor's Note: the following is the first installment of a two-part article.

A coal miner doesn't have much time to think. The job of mining coal in and of itself requires one to focus intently on their surroundings and the equipment they are operating. On rare occasion, however, I would get caught up enough in my work to have a few minutes for lunch and would begin taking in more of my surroundings. I would sit against the coal rib reflecting upon how I came to be in a place so remote—so alien as compared to the natural world.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

**Nick
Mullins**

During those times of reflection, I would contemplate what it meant to be an Appalachian, with all of the history, the pride, and the oppression of a people who seem hopelessly tied to a life of coal and poverty.

Having grown up in Dickenson County, Virginia, as the son, grandson, and great grandson of coal miners, I knew all too well the risks and rewards which came

with such an occupation. After high school, I tried desperately to avoid the coal mine: I moved away from my mountain home on occasion and even tried the armed services as my brother had. Things never quite seemed to work out however, and I always ended up back home on Georges Fork. With a bit of luck I landed a job performing over-the-phone tech support for one of the "technology jobs" brought to our region as economic development.

Though my wife and I lived paycheck to paycheck, we were stable enough to start a family. In the years to come, we moved out of our single wide trailer in a trailer court in Wise, Virginia, and moved into the old home place built by my great grandparents. Over the years, and with a great deal of penny pinching, we were able to replace the roof, get a heat pump, and even replace the 50-year-old plumbing. It was a home with many problems, but it was built on a foundation of love and hard work.

In that old house by the warmth of the old cook stove, I rediscovered my Appalachian roots. Through my research into genealogy, I came to understand my family's history in the mountains, from my 6th great grandfather who joined the Over Mountain Men to

NEWS IN BRIEF

Appalachian Heritage featured an issue dedicated to Nikki Giovanni (who was widely held by Chris Green's students to be the best speaker of Berea College's fall convocation series) and another to Breece D'J Pancake. The Winter 2013 issue will collect together the best publications from the magazine's 40 years, a celebration of which will take place on Friday, April 5, an event to which you are invited. See their website for details: www.berea.edu/ah.

Brushy Fork 2012 Annual Institute by the numbers: 244 attendees; 18 individual workshop sessions offered; 468 years of collective experience among our session leaders; 3,659 accumulated hours of professional development; 26 distressed Kentucky counties represented; 2,492 hours of skills-based training returning to these distressed

communities; 98% of attendees said they gained new skills or perspectives in their session and agreed that these would increase the capacity of their home community or organization. From *The Brushy Fork Watershed* (Issue 1), an e-news publication of the Brushy Fork Institute. To subscribe, visit tinyurl.com/brushyforkenews.

Brushy Fork Institute also undertakes a program in partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the Kentucky Department for Local Government to provide training for community leaders and administer \$380,000 in Flex-E-Grants for Kentucky's distressed Appalachian counties. The Flex-E-Grant program was designed by the ARC to provide small investments in short-term projects that will build community capacity to mobilize



Nick Mullins looks out into Dickenson County. In 2011, 22,522,000 tons of coal were mined in Virginia.

fight Colonel Ferguson at the Battle of Kings Mountain, to his son who settled Holly Creek which is now Clintwood. My family branched out all over eastern Dickenson County taking in 200 years of history. I finally felt the pride of what it was to be Appalachian and to raise the tenth generation down the same hollows my family had settled two centuries before. Despite this pride, I knew we'd need to overcome economic hurdles.

The technology job I worked gave no promise of a retirement. After more than seven years and reaching the height of promotional opportunities at our call center, my 401k had only accrued \$7,000. The only jobs capable of

providing a good retirement in our area involved working for the railroads, electric companies, or phone companies. After years of failing to get my foot in the door of such highly competitive jobs, I began to consider the occupation I had avoided for 10 years—coal mining.

I was at first apprehensive, recalling the many union struggles my family went through, including the 1989 strike against Pittston Coal. I remembered the South Mountain mine explosion that claimed the lives of eight men just down the road from the mine my father was

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local resources, gain leadership experience and strengthen community institutions and networks. Flex-E-Grants are small (up to \$10,000) awards provided to communities for these capacity building projects. For details see www.berea.edu/brushy-fork-institute/arc-flex-e-grants-for-kentucky-distressed-counties.

Entrepreneurship for the Public Good (EPG) by the numbers: 10 years of history and 10 cohorts of students; 105 EPG alumni; 42 Appalachian Community Partners; 43 EPG students on Campus in Fall 2012; 5 years of working with Hal Rogers high school scholars; 1,214 social media reviews made by Cohort 9 members in summer 2012; 6 Appalachian IDEASS Social Venture Award Winners; \$60,000 received by Berea College students from the Kentucky Enterprise Fund for early

stage "Proof of Concept" proposals. You can visit EPG on the web at www.berea.edu/epg.

Grow Appalachia: Through funding and technical assistance, Grow Appalachia supports more than 500 gardens through 15 community partnerships in four states; from backyard gardens to community gardens to school and summer camp gardens to greenhouses to mini-farms; producing more than 134,000 pounds of healthy, organic food for nearly 3,500 people in 2011. The program seeks both to educate communities and to learn from communities. It works to preserve the past, build hope for the future, and empower Appalachians to live healthy, productive lives. See growappalachia.org for additional information.

Mountain-Keeper: Larry

Editor's Note: this article was first published in The Berea College Pinnacle on September 20, 2012.

by Willie Dodson

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

On Sunday, September 9, 2012, Larry Gibson died of a heart attack while working on his land in West Virginia. Most readers will have no idea who this man is, though many will and that is a great testament to the impact Larry has had on this world. Larry lived on Kayford Mountain in southern West Virginia. He clung to 54 acres of land that had been in his family for over 200 years. Larry spent the last three decades of his life resisting the advance of the coal industry which absolutely decimated the mountains all around his home place. When the companies couldn't buy him out, they tried to run him out. He was frequently slandered and characterized as a radical agitator—which he most definitely was in the best sense of those words. He was shot at. He was run off the road. One of his dogs got shot and another one hanged, all because he was outspoken in opposition to the coal industry's utter disregard for the Appalachian land and people, but Larry never backed down. He sought justice and he built his life on the principle that with a little solidarity, people could achieve it.

Larry was a hero to many, myself included, and I feel so very blessed to have been able to count him as a personal friend as well. I first met Larry in 2004. He came to Blacksburg, Virginia where I lived at the time to give a talk one Thursday evening. After hearing him speak, I arranged to come visit him at his home the following Saturday. Less than a week after first meeting Larry, along with a half-dozen or so activists from my hometown, we started a little group called Mountain Justice with the primary goal of siphoning money and resources from Virginia Tech which we would funnel towards Larry and other coalfield residents who were fighting mountaintop removal.

Less than a year after that, Mountain Justice had become the banner under which a regional coalition was launching a campaign of civil disobedience and non-violent direct interference to escalate awareness of and resistance to mountaintop removal coal mining. I had moved to West Virginia where I lived in the Coal River Valley, just beyond the foot of Kayford Mountain. I used to joke that Larry Gibson ruined my life. Before I met him I was in school; I was employed; I had a girlfriend

and I'd never seen the inside of a jail cell. But after meeting Larry Gibson, I moved to West Virginia and all those things changed.

Larry traveled the country endlessly speaking about mountaintop removal and soliciting support for and active engagement in the movement. He made audiences cry with his account of how the industry has affected his people. He had a profound and enduring sense of humor, which he often credited as being the well of hope and joy that carried him through each new day, and he could make folks buckle with laughter. Most of all, his passion and unflinching commitment to the land and people moved legions to action—many in the movement to stop mountaintop removal and many others to take whatever stand was important to them in their own lives.

One of the last conversations I ever had with Larry took place as the two of us drove from Charleston, West Virginia to Washington D.C. this past July. We spoke of our friendship and our activism. He asked about my family and how school was going. He told me that our new President had come to visit him and that he'd asked him what he's gonna do to stop mountaintop removal.

"What's his name? Lyle? Lenny? You're over there and I'm not Willie, so you make sure Lenny takes a stand with us, will you?" (By the way President Roelofs, I think you and I should talk).

Throughout the days since Larry's death, I've struggled to articulate my thoughts about the man and his impact on my life personally as well as on the world generally. He's one of those figures who carries such weight that his absence in this world is so surreal that I can hardly wade through the weirdness of it all to find and really feel the sadness of his death and the joy of his life—at least at this early stage in the grieving process. I still can't seem to find the words to describe the man, so I'll let him speak for himself:

"My family's owned this land for about 235 years now. Before the industry came in, this land fed over 60 some families. There was a school, general store, church. Now there's just me. ... [T]he threats became too violent. I've had 123 acts of violence from shootings to burning the cabins. Last dog I had, they shot it.



y Gibson remembered

"They've managed to destroy 2.5 million acres. I've managed to hold onto 50. There's 3,000 miles of streams destroyed now, coal waste being injected into the groundwater. The people I was visiting last night had black water coming out their faucet. They're scared. So I said use your anger to get over your fear and get up and change it, 'cause you the only one that can.

"Someone tell me why? Why are we being sacrificed? Why are we collateral damage? If you comin' for me, plant your feet 'cause I ain't goin' nowhere. I can't set an example for other people if I give up. I can't set an example for my own daughter if I give up. After all the beauty I've seen in this state and in the mountains, the most precious thing I've ever seen in my life is my daughter being born.

"What do you have so precious to your own circle of life that you don't have a price on it? What would it be for you and what would you do to protect it? How far would you go? For me, it's a way of life. For me, it's walking through the woods. For me, it's listening to the critters when you're out there. For me, it's Appalachia."

Larry Gibson, you are a mountain. You are a mother oak, dropping acorns all around. Some nourish the wildlife, some decay into the good earth that feeds us all. Many take root and become mighty oaks too.

I believe in standing up for justice. I believe in sticking my neck out. I believe in fighting the odds to do the right thing. And even if we never stop the destruction of this earth; if we never win justice for immigrants, fairness for LGBT folks, compassion and dignity for prisoners and peace for the people of a war-ravaged world—even if we never win a single battle for all our days, if we keep fighting, we won't ever be licked for wherever we stand is liberated territory! Larry Gibson taught me all about that. ❧

Willie Dodson, a co-founder of Blue Ridge Earth First! and Mountain Justice, hails from rural southern Virginia where he learned to play bluegrass and old-time music. Since 2002 he has traversed the south playing music and organizing students and youth to work for environmental justice, by developing solidarity-based relationships between young people and communities directly-impacted by Mountaintop Removal.

Berea College president Lyle Roelofs, left, and Chad Berry, right, during a 2012 visit with the late Larry Gibson.

photo: David Cooke

Promises coming

It was two years ago when a short email presented a fork in the road of my life's journey. The fork I chose brought me back to Berea, back to working in the Appalachian mountains that I love and on issues of social justice important to me. It brought me back home.

The email was from Dreama Gentry, and it was about a new federal grant program called Promise Neighborhood. Dreama thought I would be interested

because it was similar to the work that occupied most of my professional life's journey.

That life's journey had brought me to The Nest—Center for Women, Children & Families. I was approaching my first anniversary there and had changed jobs twice in the five years prior. During those five years I traveled

out of the mountains, although only to Lexington with many other expatriated Appalachians and just a short drive from the mountains, but still out of the mountains.

The mountains had always been the scenery of my life journey that started in Harlan County at the foot of Black Mountain in a small town called Benham. The

early travels were guided by my father's work in the coal mines and took us to Estill and Letcher Counties, back again to Harlan before settling in Berea where I stayed for many years.

After college, I accidently discovered the world of nonprofits when I accepted a job with the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED). I then traveled on a long journey through the nonprofit sector in Appalachia.

By the mid-1980s, MACED helped create Forward in the Fifth to bring homes and schools together to break the cycle of low educational attainment. This part of my journey enabled me to learn a great deal about nonprofit management and social justice.

My professional journey merged with my personal journey as Forward in the Fifth was created the same year my daughter entered kindergarten. My interest in education, especially in Appalachia, was at an all-time high. When another fork in the road was presented, the opportunity to work full-time for Forward in the Fifth, I eagerly put on my turn signal.

I traveled that highway for more than 20 years, making many turns and twisting my way through the changing landscape of educational reform and working for educational equity.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

**Ginny
Blackson**

LOOKING FORWARD

January 23: Mass Incarceration Central Appalachia Prisoner Support Network. A Dinner on the Grounds from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Co-sponsored with the Willis D. Weatherford Jr. Campus Christian Center, the Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education, and Women's and Gender Studies.

February 5: A Community Writers Workshop on Poetry with Lynell Edwards, LJAC, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Co-sponsored with the English Program.

February 27: Saro Lynch-Thomason on the Blair Pathways Music Project and the fight to save Blair Mountain from mountaintop removal. LJAC Dinner on the Grounds, 11:45 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

February 28: Community Connections with the Frontier

Nursing University. Light lunch provided. Co-sponsored with Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELT5), Nursing, and the Center for Transformative Learning (CTL). 11:45 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

February 28: A Community Writers Workshop on Fiction with Silas House, LJAC, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Co-sponsored with the English Program.

March 6–9: Cormac McCarthy Society, All the Pretty Horses 20th Anniversary Conference, Co-Sponsored with *Appalachian Heritage*. Baird Lounge in the Alumni Building.

March 19: Mary Gray: "There Are No Gay People Here": Expanding the Boundaries of Queer Youth Visibility in Rural

home

Then my journey brought opportunities to explore new and different places. I left Berea and moved to Lexington where I worked as a fundraiser for Girl Scouts, then for the arts in Lexington. Although meaningful, I often felt I was traveling too fast and missing important scenery—the social justice scenery.

So I accepted the position at The Nest and helped the organization recover from hard times and continue its domestic violence counseling, respite child care, and social services. Yet there was still some scenery missing from my journey.

After receiving Dreama's email, I did look into the Promise

Neighborhood movement. I learned about the cradle to career effort and how it was modeled after the work of the Harlem Children's Zone. The holistic approach to ensuring success for young people was very much in tune with my life experiences and philosophy of helping schools, homes, and communities come together to

meet the needs of young people.

I wanted take this fork in the road and become a part of this movement. I was fortunate to be able to do

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Ginny Blackson

America." LJAC Dinner on the Grounds, 11:45 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

March 19: A Community Writers Workshop on Comics and Graphic Narratives with Arwen Donahue, LJAC, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Co-sponsored with the English Program.

April 4: Ron Rash, "Tell the Truth, but Tell it Slant: The Past as Present in Appalachia," the Berea College Convocations Appalachian Lecture, 3:00–4:00 p.m., Phelps-Stokes Auditorium.

April 5: *Appalachian Heritage* celebrates its 40th Anniversary Issue with Gurney Norman, Silas House, and Crystal Wilkinson, LJAC, 7:30–9:30 p.m.

April 8: bell hooks on her book *Beyond RAce*. LJAC Dinner on

the Grounds, from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

TBA: *Kentucky: What Holds Us & Hurts Us*, panel with bell hooks, Silas House, Vicky Hayes, and Landra Lewis. LJAC 6:00–8:00 p.m.

April 16: Dr. Amy Clark on *Talking Appalachian: Voice, Identity and Community*, a book about Appalachian dialects. LJAC Dinner on the Grounds from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

April 18: A Community Writers Workshop on Non-Fiction with Rachael Peckham, LJAC, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Co-sponsored with the English Program.

All events are free and open to the public. You may email Chris_Green@bera.edu to be added to the Quilt ListServ.

'Doors...'



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Liz
Saucedo

Coming to Berea College, I knew I was going to learn new things in general as well as new things about myself. I have lived in Birmingham, Alabama since 2007, but I was born and raised in Cicero, Illinois. What brought me to Berea was that its location is not really close to either of those places. I wanted to get away from home and experience something new.

Like any other freshman in college, I am trying to find myself and what it really is that I love. Receiving the scholarship for Berea College opened a door, but what I failed to realize is that settling into Berea would open an even wider door.

I entered a world that was foreign to me. At first I thought I was not able to fit in, and I felt like I was not supposed to be here. As the weeks passed, I just fell more and more in love with this place and culture; it has so much diversity that helps me broaden my mind to new things. What makes this place so diverse and unique is that I get to be around people from entirely different countries! Their culture and customs are different, and I like learning about them. I also like how on campus there are different religions, which I had known about but was not personally involved with on a day-to-day basis. This, by the way, is amazing and makes me more open to the world around us.

The term "Appalachia" was unknown to me: I did not understand what it meant or what it was. Being here, I have decided that Appalachia is not a label like race or gender is. It is more about who you are. There is not a certain race that belongs to Appalachia: if you believe in the ways of Appalachian people, you can choose to be Appalachian. It is not forced upon you, but it does not hurt to learn about Appalachia.

I am confused and unsure of who I am and what exactly is that I want. A lot of doors have opened and closed in my face with no warning in my lifetime. Some doors led me to bad situations, but at the end one opened to a better outcome.

An example of this is my struggle with leukemia. Although I suffered so much, I am grateful for the people that I met, the places I have seen, and for coming to Berea College. Without that event happening in my life, I am not sure if I would be where I am now. A lesson I learned is that you should learn to appreciate everything that happens to you, whether good or bad. If you do, it will help you rise and progress; if you choose to not do anything good with what happens, then you will only fall in deeper or stay exactly where you are.

Whenever you open a door, it is a new opportunity. Now I will admit that I have missed a lot of those, but who doesn't?

What matters are the ones you do take: you should not be afraid to try something new. As Thomas Edison once said, "The reason a lot of people do not recognize opportunity is because it usually goes around wearing overalls looking like hard work." Do not let the hard work of an opportunity push you away: whenever an opportunity presents itself, do not knock on the door and expect it to open—knock it down and greet the opportunity. ❖

Liz Saucedo, a freshman at Berea College, works in the LJAC and is studying to become a psychologist.

Time to think

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working in at the time. He worked for the same company and knew the men who perished, one of which was the father of a boy in my class. I tried to scare myself out of it, but somewhere along the way I let the idea of high wages and the pride of being a coal-mining family man outweigh my original views and concerns about the industry.

I saw the coal mines through the eyes of my father and grandfathers who would often light up when talking about their days spent in the mines. Coal mining was rough work and certainly dangerous, but they looked back upon and bragged about their many close calls with death. They also enjoyed the opportunity to work with men who became like a second family in the depths of the mountains. My father once told me, "I looked forward to going to work most days. I enjoyed being with my friends." I wanted to be a part of that, to become a coal miner, to feel the pride, and to be a part of an Appalachian tradition shared amongst other good-hearted, selfless men.

After over a year of begging, I was granted my wish. I quickly learned that mining had changed since the days of the unions. The familial bonds my father and grandfathers spoke of had been replaced with a "look out for number one" attitude amongst miners. Each day seemed to be a new competition amongst men seeking to ensure job security while facing ever increasing production goals.

Still, like many others I became used to the excellent wages and health benefits so much that I was deathly afraid of what could happen should I lose either. I had a wonderful wife and two beautiful children at home who depended upon their daddy to provide for them. I felt like a failure. I did not do well enough in high school to go onto college. I did not gain the skills necessary to keep me out of a coal mines. I would likely end up suffocating from black lung or suffer a broken back like many of the men in my family. It ate away at me every single day, but I felt hopeless to change it. I succumbed to the notion that I was to forever be a coal miner. I had let too many opportunities come and go, so it would be here that I would remain, in a dark tunnel with rock above men and mud below. Like the men who came before me, I felt as if I might as well make the best of it. I entered the mine-electrician training program and worked hard to learn all that I could. ❧

Nick Mullins is a freshman at Berea College. Part two of this article will be published in the next issue of this newsletter.

Berea College Promise Neighborhood Initiative



Promises

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just that when I accepted the position of Director of the Berea College Promise Neighborhood initiative.

Shortly after I started the work and was traveling to Owsley County along the Jackson County ridges and through hollers of trees wearing their fall finest, I instantly knew that the piece of missing scenery was the mountains!

Now, two years later, Promise Neighborhood is providing much-needed resources to three Appalachian counties—Clay, Jackson and Owsley—all designed to help young people travel from their cradles through an educational pipeline supported by family and community, emerging to a successful career and productive life.

We are providing substantial support to students, pre-school through 12th grade; working to increase access to high-quality early learning experiences; helping students become college and career ready; helping families be fully supportive of successful children; and working with communities so children have a safe and healthy place to live and learn.

My life journey has me winding my way to these beautiful counties on a regular basis, enjoying the fabulously curvy roads, across the ridges and through the hollers of these mountains I love so much.

You *can* go home again. ❧

Ginny Blackson is Project Director for the Promise Neighborhood Initiative. When she's not at work or reading a book, she spends her time driving the mountain roads in her beloved Miata, Stella Blue.



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**Snapshots from the
Fall, 2012 Celebration
of Traditional Music.**

Left: Jackie Helton. Right: Paula
Nelson. Below: the "Kentucky
Dulcimer Wall of Fame."

dulcimer photo: Alan Mills

