



Loyal Jones
APPALACHIAN CENTER
Tradition. Diversity. Change.

Gaining voice

Stories, the Appalachian way

by **Chris Green and Lizbeth Saucedo**

This issue is dedicated to stories—how Appalachians tell them, how they find their way to doing so, and how they help each other gain voice. In this issue, the Appalachia we focus on resides mostly in eastern Kentucky, but the tales they share will resonate with people across the mountains and world, whether in Birmingham, Alabama (the focus on our next issue), in the Andes, the Olympics, or the Carpathians (the focus of the issue after that). Our seven tales include

- how a poet from Lee County discovered that “the life I lived as a young girl was dying, while all I wanted to do was hold it close to my chest and take it to the grave”;
- how a 75-year-old folklorist, musician, and audio producer who lives in Randolph County, West Virginia, has devoted himself to recording thousands of peoples’ voices and their stories;
- how a woman from Rockcastle County first learned she could actually make money telling stories;
- how a novelist from Laurel and Leslie County who is the only college graduate in his family, was given support by hardworking parents when he was growing up and learned “to be a guardian for others”;
- how a recent college graduate from Clay County set about learning that “hillbillies, especially us creative hillbillies, need to find our sacred spaces, wherever they may be”; and
- how residents of Clay County crossed “boundaries of race, economic, and social class” and used what they learned through the Brushy Fork Institute’s programs to found Stay in Clay, a group “to empower our people, bond our community, and strengthen our local economy.”



Swinging bridge in Clay County.

photo by **Judy Sizemore**

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Fall 2015
Volume 43 • Number 1

LOYAL JONES
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Layout/Design: Berea College Printing Services

From one Educating the next

by Sam Cole, '13

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

Some of my first memories in life are those of the farm. I was a believer in practical and active education, you might say, at an early age. I dropped out of preschool because, as my momma told me later, I insisted I could learn everything I needed on the farm in Lee County with my granny and papaw. For years, I helped them work the earth. We put up each summer and ate what the mountain gave us when it got too cold to go outside to do anything but gather more wood.

As I grew older, I found myself gravitating to the old lights, the ones who generations before me had also sought out to learn about justice, acceptance, and making your own way in the world: Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, even Hank Williams, Senior. I listened to them not so much for the music (which made me want to jump from my chair and cry at the same time) but for their lyrics. What they said spoke to me in a way no one else on earth could. And I did not yet understand why.

So I picked up my pen (I was never that good at guitar,

Sam
Cole



hillbilly to another

generation of change-makers

though I played electric bass in our family band for a bit) and did my best to imitate what they had written. I wrote tributes to them. By my senior year in high school, I was aiming to get educated as fast as possible and get on up to Boston (I heard there was a burgeoning folk scene there, at the time), and peddle my wares like folk poets and beat poets of yesteryear.

Music and words put me on a collision course with Berea. I first came to campus because of the Celebration of Traditional Music as a chaperone for a group of much younger students from Lee County, Kentucky. There, I sat in the audience on Saturday night and listened to Nat Reese, the Bluegrass Ensemble, and others. I was stunned. There was a school in Kentucky that actively cared about the same music I did. It was not until later that I learned from my AP English teacher that Berea was a well-known liberal arts college. I was actually planning to go to her alma mater, another Kentucky school. But one day, she cornered me. "Berea is the best. It is where you need to be."

She was totally right. Berea was right where I needed to be. In my first semester, I took an Appalachian Cultures class, taught by the current dean, Chad Berry. I can recall, in particular, a lecture he gave about the movement of people in the region due to patrilineal inheritance, high rate of childbirth, and the lack of farm land. Although that may sound awfully garbled, I remember him tracing the movements of people, my people, from the northeastern shores of the United States, down further south, then back up and into the mountains. I recalled the years of working the land with my grandparents, the way they taught me to put up for hard times, to be thankful for the land that was ours. I cried in class.

My existence, our way of existence in the mountains, was not one of rustic beauty, a pristine beautiful life that my grandparents wanted to pass on; it was one of survival, and one that seemed to not be surviving itself. They were teaching me the things they had found valuable in preserving their own well-being and way of life during the lean years. And these old ways were dying. Although I had felt it my whole life, that day the whole

thing hit me. The life I lived as a young girl was dying, while all I wanted to do was hold it close to my chest and take it to the grave. Even though I had been an Appalachian from the day I was born, from that moment, I knew I would be one until the day I died.

During this same semester, I was taking a literature class. With my yearning to be a poet, English seemed a natural choice for a major. Compared to my Appalachian Cultures class, however, the subject was boring. We read nothing but old, dead white guys who lived lives I could not understand or readily relate to. I knew this was American literature, but where were the mountain voices I longed for? It did not take me long to find these voices at Berea. They were in paperbacks, past copies of *Appalachian Heritage*, and in self-published books from scholars around the region housed in the Faber Library and the storage cages underneath the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center. I found the world of Gurney Norman, Denise Giardina, Ron Rash, Jim Wayne Miller, and Frank X Walker. Again, these were my people. In the Faber Library, I floundered on good words. I felt full to bursting. The fire I felt to write meaningful words about the mountains that I knew was well stoked.

Wherever I went, with those voices to guide me, I felt at home. I came to understand that my only home was the very one I had discounted as a place I needed to leave as soon as possible. I had been so foolish to not see the depth and breadth of the culture around me while I was growing up. To not try to learn more from the elders of my community, to write down their words, stories, and ways.

Trying my best to make up for it, I filled notebooks with poetry about my home. I learned all I could about mountain writers past and present. Just like them, I wanted to portray my piece of truth about the region. But I wanted to do so in a way that did justice to the people that I loved, in a way that showcased their ingenuity, diversity, and intelligence. It was all too much to take in with just one course. So I took another. And

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Talking across the lines

Editor's Note: *This piece is a section of Michael Nobel Kline's application for the Tamarack Artisan Foundation Fellowship Award, which helps support artisans in their ongoing efforts to preserve and deepen West Virginia's cultural heritage. Kline and three other artists won the award in September 2014.*

As a folklorist, musician, and audio producer, Kline has devoted himself to recording thousands of peoples' voices and the stories they are able to tell of the past. He decided to honor and preserve the lives and events of West Virginians and others across America after studying anthropology, ethnomusicology, and Appalachian folklore in college.

In order to expand these recordings' access to the public, Kline has undertaken the transition of these recordings—many of which were also conducted with his collaborator and wife Carrie Nobel Kline—to archival status at Berea College where they are being accessioned. The Michael and Carrie Kline Collection is comprised of over 1,000 items, audio recordings, writings, and photographs collected over five decades, documenting cultural landscapes as they relate to people, their environment, and tradition.

The Klines describe their work as Talking Across the Lines, see www.folktalk.org. In 2015, Michael Kline was given the Stetson Kennedy Vox Populi ("Voice of the People") Award by the Oral History Association.

Michael Noble Kline

A lifetime achievement in arts for social change

by **Michael Noble Kline**

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

My passion for listening to the voices and reflections of West Virginians spans more than sixty years, and the tapestry of my audio and radio creations is woven from the fabric of thousands of such recorded voices. As a seventy-four year old folklorist, performing musician and audio producer of locally recorded music and spoken reflection, I have combined a number of creative roles in my pursuit and teaching of arts for social change. In West Virginia *how* people put words together becomes just as important as *what* they say. I have heard expressive spoken arts on many levels: improvised performances of life stories, vibrant use of telling dialogue as disclaimer, and an unconscious sense of moral poetics, rich in cadence, imagery, irony, and humor, all of which tickle my soul and haunt my imagination.

I have been driven to record and preserve spoken voices through a desire to get beyond the limitations and deceptions of the printed page, which have always left me hungry for more. Reaching beyond the scope of traditional scholarly history and journalism, this work focuses on the narrative perspectives of individuals as eye witnesses to moments and events in their own lives, who are speaking from first-hand experience with all the emotion and drama of someone who has been through it, or bearing witness to stories learned and remembered from earlier generations.

Preserving such accounts dignifies not only the event, but validates those who lived it and told it, as well as those who heard it and preserved it. Listening to these recorded voices in the context of reflections by neighbors and the wider community generates empathy on the part of the listener and widens public understanding of local stories and issues. The absence of video imagery helps the listener focus on the content and emotion of what is said, rather than the complexion, age, or body-type of the speaker. It levels the playing field in radio productions featuring many voices and points of view.

These spoken testimonials from southern mountain people have little overlap with written accounts *about them* by missionaries, sociologists, regional planners and feature writers, whose stereotyping and baseless assumptions often work against progressive human development.

The post-interview photographic evidence suggests a great unburdening on the part of the interviewing subjects as a result of intimate sharing. In finding their own voices through a process of open-ended interviewing, the subjects know that they have been heard, which has its own therapeutic value. They know that their recorded narratives are part of a larger archival document which enriches the public record and becomes a cherished aural text for succeeding generations, especially family members, when the subject is silenced by death or dementia. The recorded voice is an auditory window into the soul. The way we speak is the most integral detail of who we are.

Making a Cultural Voice Even as a Child

In my frequent visits to my family home in Hampshire County, West Virginia, I was blessed with music-playing neighbors immersed in fiddle and banjo tunes, peerless tale-telling, and old-time church singing. The vivid contrast between these two settings kept my head and heart spinning. When in Washington D.C., I longed for our West Virginia home, its deep woods and clear stream, and cool country kids growing up on nearby farm. All my childhood fantasies were of being there. I felt as though I dangled between two worlds, urban and rural, classical and folk, written and spoken. Sensing even in my early years that West Virginia was itself a national embarrassment, I empathized because of my own poor performance in school and the shame I imagined that brought upon my family. In Hampshire County none of those personal issues mattered. It had its own measure of social standards which reached beyond academic excellence.

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From one hillbilly to another

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another. And soon I found myself writing my own major in Appalachian Studies with a concentration in regional literature.

The day I traveled home to tell my parents I was majoring in Appalachian Studies, I packed a VHS copy of the Appalshop movie, *The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*. It was a movie that depicted gross injustices brought upon the region due to the practices of extractive industries. Injustices that I knew, because of Berea, were all too common place for people in the region, and even all over the world. Injustices that continue to this very day through the destruction of the land and lives through mountaintop removal, and the hold that the mining industry still somehow has on the region.

That day, I watched *Buffalo Creek* with my momma and my dad. At the end of it, they were speechless. How did people outside of West Virginia not know about this? How did some West Virginians themselves not know about it? Why was this not taught in schools, shouted from the rooftops, on the front page of the *New York Times*? I had no explanation. All I could say was, “That is why I have to be an Appalachian Studies major.”

Learning about the suffering of my people was what really got to me as a writer. So I wrote poetry about how Appalachian people had suffered at the hands of those outside the region. I wrote poetry about how working people in the region had suffered; how even my own family members had suffered. How people were constantly trying to escape the loadstone tied around their neck, the pain they felt, with things like booze and pills and honky tonk music. Nights saw me

up grappling to understand the concept of things like religion and mysticism in the region, the white washing of the mountains, and the never-ending cycle of poverty that had enveloped counties like mine.

In a way, finding my place, learning the truth, and understanding what I had to write about, to let the world know, was as painful as giving birth. And in a way, I was giving birth. Birth to a new self. I know without a doubt that I would not have learned and experienced any of this were it not for the challenging education I received while at Berea. My professors constantly challenged me to think critically about the region, to delve deeper into topics I found interesting. I did, gladly. And the more I uncovered, the more I wrote.

The injustices against my people that I learned about while at Berea made me angry. But they also made me feel deeply for other minority groups all over the world who had suffered similar fates throughout history. Despite the fact that I grew up in a town where almost everyone I knew was white, I now realized that I could readily relate to people from everywhere in the world. There were “Appalachians,” everywhere, from Afghanistan, to Tibet, to Wales. And Appalachians even from this very region were not always like me. Some grew up in cities. Others were of a different sexual orientation, race, religion, or ethnicity. But they were still my people. I still loved each of them. I found that we bonded over the land, music, family traditions, and values that we held dear. We had much more in common with one another than could ever be different between us.

By instilling confidence in Appalachian youth and showing them the path they are meant to follow, Berea is actively providing the region with activists, artists, musicians, future politicians, and future change makers. I am truly proud to be a part of this long lineage. I am also eager to see what the future of the region has in store thanks to others who are now fighting the good fight with their own talents discovered and honed not only at Berea but throughout Appalachia.

Farming Men

Our people took the land as their
bride,
the plowshare as their bride price.
Now, years after years,
our people have moved on,
but we must remember,
we are the salt of the earth.
You can smell our sweetness in the
tilled soil,
taste it gathered around drop-leaf
tables,
“Go on in and eat, there’s room
for another one.”

We have been tucked in by our
Mother, anointed.
Ashes streaked across our brows by
a loving Hand.
“To you, children, I give all these
things.
Riverbeds, beasts, mountain
streams.
Remember this ...”
And now, in these times of trouble,
we must return to her, supplicant,
thankful,
rejoicing as our backs become strong
and sweat again makes us free. 🇺🇸

Samantha Cole is a 2012 Berea College graduate with a degree in Appalachian Studies.

To be 'born again'

Finding a good group of peers can be difficult but is essential



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Megan R.
Jones

It is essential for a writer to find their writing community. This community is where they feel comfortable sharing their work, receiving and giving critiques, and recharging their inspirational batteries. The people within these communities understand them—they get it. This community does not have to be a physical place you can go; you could send Facebook messages to a private group or post ideas on a forum. Writers from groups that have experienced prejudice and oppression have an especially important need to find a safe community of like people. As an Appalachian American who grew up in an ARC “distressed” county, I found this out first hand during my time at Berea College. If a classmate sends you back a copy of your manuscript and one of their critiques is that you need to add “more vernacular” and they just cannot understand why your piece doesn’t read like a skit from *Hee-Haw*, then they do not deserve to be part of your close-knit writing community.

Unfortunately, it can be hard to avoid those sorts of people. Even a school with a mission statement that includes educating “students from Appalachia,” the school I described to people from back home my freshman year as “the first place I have ever felt like I truly belonged,” sometimes puts their students in uncomfortable situations. During another class, my professor gave us the assignment of writing a piece from the point-of-view of “an uneducated person.” I balked a week later when my classmates who volunteered to read their pieces aloud all did their best to impersonate an accent that sounded like mine. Professors are not always innocent, either. I was asked at least twice if I came from a church that handled serpents. Any student who comes from a group that has been made in to an “Other” can vouch that classmates, faculty, and/or staff sometimes (or quite often) do not understand how problematic they can be. I was lucky enough to make friends with a few other majors in English Writing who were from the mountains. I learned to truly appreciate their feedback on my work. A few special professors were great at listening to my concerns, and they helped me develop my craft in countless ways.

You cannot help but feel displaced, and we Appalachians are all too familiar with that. I cherished my writer friends and professors who understood me, but I wanted more. I wondered what I would do once I graduated from college and was not able to take a creative writing class every semester. I was very grateful when my professor, Silas House, recommended that I submit a manuscript to the Hindman Settlement School’s Appalachian Writers Workshop. This was a place I had heard about in the Acknowledgment section of novels and in discussions with writers about where they got inspiration and the best feedback. A magical place with a Troublesome little creek. If you could name a successful Appalachian writer, they had a connection to Hindman. I was not sure if my writing was good enough, but I trusted my professor’s judgement. Silas says that he first submitted his manuscript because Lee Smith told him to and you just do not say no to Lee Smith. It is very hard to say no to Silas House, as well.

I have been attending the Hindman Settlement School’s Appalachian Writers Workshop for four years. During my first summer there, it was everything I had wanted it to be. I heard readings from writers I admired and was able to *talk* to those writers and get to know them. I filled an entire notebook within the five days of the workshop. I met people from all over who had come to Knott County for the same reason; their desire to write about and for the region. These people understood why I put what words I did down on a page. We could get over the language and culture barrier and get down to the meat of what we all wanted to improve within our stories, poems, and memoirs. This place was like Berea: it made a little weirdo from Clay County feel like she belonged. I have heard Gurney Norman tell stories about James Still to a table full of people over coffee and have eaten pimento cheese sandwiches with Barbara Kingsolver while we discussed the idea of hillbilly reality TV. At the end of my first workshop, I heard the majority of us attendees

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own a new path

and you don't want to draw attention to your story, so you need to wear neutral colors, [and] don't call any attention to drawing attention to myself: I mean when I was coming over here I just loved it wearing bright clothes, colors that you didn't wear. It just had to be anything here [at Berea], and so I know I loved that, being different. Because I love my jewelry and I just loved being able to be lucky to get through that. I decided to do for a grade, he said that when you come back in here Monday, go to one place, anywhere on campus. Ones and fives and



he, you know—this is the ones, this is the twos, this is threes, this is fours, and this the five and he was a five. He joined a group. He was five, well guess what number I got? I got a five! Then three more got a five, and so we fives are watching the ones, twos, threes, and fours leaving knowing they're not going anywhere. They know exactly what grade to give out. We had to go with Dr. Robie, and we went to the Draper building, to the Fireside.

The students told the stories and then he told a story. I can remember it was something about some man carrying a rock around his whole life. Everywhere he went he had this rock, and finally he's on this ship and he was like, you know, his arms were hurting. I can't remember what it was. Well I said, "Why don't you put down the rock?" He was like, "Oh!" and he dropped the rock and it goes, "KUSH!" That was the, into the water, it goes, "KUSH!" and that was the end of the story.

Well, actually I thought this was the awfulest story I ever heard, but of course my time's coming up and so I'm like, "That was just awesome." He said, "It's a story with a point." I said, "Yes, very deep, yes," you know? Cause it was my turn and I knew I could not do what he said. I could not do the gestures, and pronounce each word very clearly like, "The sky is blue. The well is deep." That's how he was teaching us, and I thought the best I can do is a Grandpa Story because he was more laid back cause grandma was like a lil' hen. She just jumped around everywhere, and I'm very active, high energy.

So I gave 'em a Grandpa Story cause it was more drawn out. It was in dialect. It was one I grew up with and I had to give it the way it was given to me cause that's who was telling it, my ancestors coming through my voice, and when I finished you could hear a pin drop. They're all looking at me, the students and him. Just looking at me and I said, "What?" He said, "That was the best storytelling I have ever heard. I am so embarrassed that I have been teaching this class and you have this ability." And I was like, "Yeah, I'm good. I'm good." [Laughs] "Yes, I'm good." It doesn't take much to build my self-esteem up, and then he wanted to know where that story came from. I told it was from Grandpa; well then, he just got all excited. He was like, "Wow, you're the real thing." He wanted to know all about my background then, of story [telling]. He wanted to talk to me, meet with me, talk with me, and so I started telling him about my background in storytelling



Anglin Falls in Rockcastle County.

photo by Karen Roussel/CC4.0

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Historic Pennington cabin in Clay County.

photo by Judy Sizemore

To be 'born again'

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read aloud from Jim Wayne Miller's "The Brier Sermon," an epic poem about always remembering your homeplace. As many of you are probably aware, the poem is punctuated with cries of, "You must be born again!" I had read the poem before, but it was a truly spiritual experience to hear it in that way. It touched me so much that I did my Theatre Capstone paper on a staged reading of "The Brier Sermon." With the stresses of the real world, of work, family, and sickness, sometimes you forget your purpose as a writer. Perhaps you did not fulfill that New Year's Resolution of finishing a manuscript. Maybe deadlines have passed for submissions without you even noticing it. Hindman is where I go to be born again.

Maybe your place isn't Hindman. We hillbillies, especially us creative hillbillies, need to find our sacred spaces, wherever they may be. The arts have always helped change the world, and I know we have a lot we want to change about our region and how the rest of the United States views us. Drop those people (or at least ignore them if you're stuck in a class) who want to know why Mamaw called a bag a poke, and instead find those who can tell you exactly what Mamaw would face if she got arrested for threatening a man at the grocery store with a pistol. ❖

Megan Rebeckkah Jones is a 2013 Berea College graduate with a degree in Theatre.

Talking across the lines

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By the age of seven I had made my choice about which culture I would pursue. I chose the one with a powerful oral tradition and to endure the other as long as it was necessary. That early choice had a powerful effect on my development as a critical thinker and activist. I was a pugnacious young advocate for my beloved adoptive home. Since finishing school, I have devoted much of my professional career to tracking down, befriending, documenting and promoting local musicians and their traditional music throughout the state of West Virginia and beyond, and generally espousing the values, arts, and causes of mountain people the world over.

As an anthropology major at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. (1960–64), I formalized my interest in ethnomusicology and Appalachian folklore. By my mid-twenties I was steeped in authentic Appalachian roots music and visited a wide variety of sources, from the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains of Virginia and West Virginia over into the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky and Tennessee.

Community Involvement: Singing my way through the Poverty War

During those formative years I was also writing songs, many of them parodies, of what I saw going on during the mid-1960s as an Appalachian Volunteer, an anti-poverty worker in the coalfields of Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. Strong songs were a way of affirming local struggles and recognizing courageous strivings for positive change and collective purpose. I wrote and sang on back porches, in public gatherings, classrooms and on picket lines, in the spirit of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, and produced my first long-playing record, *The Poverty War Is Dead*, in 1970.

Don West and the Pipestem Cultural Vision

I was in the late 1960s singing coordinator at the Highlander Research & Education Center under the direction of Myles Horton in Knoxville, Tennessee, a



ABOVE: Michael Kline interviews Jim Costa at the LJAC's Celebration of Traditional Music in 2013.

RIGHT: Carrie and Michael Kline singing at the 50th Anniversary of the Appalachian South Folklife Center in West Virginia.

photo by Louise Sheiren



job that had me focused on leadership development through cultural organizing in the coalfields of southern West Virginia and beyond. In that capacity I frequently visited poet Don West at the newly established Appalachian South Folklife Center in Pipestem, West Virginia, and helped him bring together the early authentic folk life festivals in the late 1960s and early 1970s featuring the best of old-time musicians in the region. It has continued over nearly half a century to be a performance venue for my own music.

From Don West I was learning the importance of poetic icons as cultural weapons of the spirit in a war against cyclical poverty and oppression; in other words, if we could get people singing together, they might begin organizing for stronger communities and better public health and education in those regions left high and dry in a fluctuating coal economy. Don dreamed of informed, unified, proletariat voices and votes bringing about a more responsive government. He had seen the arts and poetry of the region inspire and inform the

labor movement over his life time, and he knew the power of song in consciousness raising. Peer group education would lead to a process of prioritizing social issues, participating in a decision-making process, and budgeting limited resources. His summer youth programs emphasized his desire to cultivate early leadership through literacy and the arts.

The Appalachian Folklife Center has asked me to serve on a planning board for the Fiftieth Anniversary Festival in July 17–19, 2015. What an opportunity to re-examine the vision that launched this beautiful, rural learning center with its incredible mountain vistas and neighbors devoted to memories of rich music festivals and leadership workshops through the 1970s and into the present. The Center still has a critically important role to play in community and cultural education southern West Virginia. ❖

You can read Kline's whole piece at www.berea.edu/ljac/?p=266

The charge is to do good

Editor's Note: In May 2013, Silas House was given an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by his alma mater, Eastern Kentucky University, along with First Lady Michelle Obama. This is the text of his commencement speech.

As a professor at Berea College, I attend two commencements a year, so I know very well the mixture of excitement, relief, and sadness you all are feeling today. I also know that you want to get your diplomas and see your friends and family-members get their diplomas, so I will not be speaking to you very long. Then we can get to the most important part of this day: commencing, moving forward into the wide, wonderful world that awaits you.

For the past years you have been immersed in books and formulas. You've studied art and equations, issues and philosophies. Hopefully your brain is full to the brim with all the knowledge you have gathered during your time here. And by now I hope you realize that education is the key to everything. Education is power. Education offers the rungs on the ladders to success. There is no doubting that. So, with that in mind, I want to talk to you about ways of thinking about education in different layers and I want to give you a handful of charges that I am asking you to do now that you are a college graduate.

I want you to know that I am the only college graduate in my family. I was raised in a small red and white trailer near the banks of the Laurel River in a little community called Robinson Creek, in southeastern Kentucky. I know what it is like to have been called "trailer trash". I know what it's like to be judged based on where you're from and the way you talk. Even today people assume they know everything about me because of where and how I was raised and because of my accent, an accent that most people attach to poverty and ignorance.

Although I didn't know one single person besides my schoolteachers who had been to college, I never remember not having the desire to go. I always craved knowledge and more education. I still do. I try to learn something new every single day, whether it is how to perfect a recipe or facts about an author's life or tips for raising the best tomatoes.

The people I grew up around did not have the chances I had, and I would bet that a lot of you come

from similar families. My grandfather had to leave school when he was in the fourth grade to help support the family. He worked in the coal mines of Eastern Kentucky for thirty years and eventually lost his leg during a roof collapse. But after six months of fidgeting recuperation, he went right back into those deep mines and worked for ten more years, wooden leg and all. I'm proud to be a coal miner's grandson.

My father was one of nine children being raised by a single mother after her husband died. All of those kids had to work, and they worked like dogs all of their lives. Today their bodies bear witness to the back-breaking work they did in the fields, or in factories, as waitresses, store clerks, and plumbers. My father served in Vietnam and came back carrying the shrapnel and the scarred memories with him. Then he took a job as a mechanic and a factory supervisor while also working in concrete. I'm proud to be a veteran's son.

My mother was an orphan who relied on the generosity of cousins to make herself the first person in her family to graduate high school. By the time she was out of school her main objective was to make a home for herself. So she started working and never stopped. During my entire school career she worked in the lunchroom of my elementary school, where she and the other women labored in greasy, hot, crowded conditions, but never lost their ability to laugh and be good to the students who lovingly referred to them as the lunch ladies. I'm proud to be a lunchroom lady's son.

No one encouraged people in my family to go to college, and they were too busy keeping food on the table to even begin the process.

I believe that I wanted to go to college so badly because I saw how hard all of them worked. I wanted to honor them. I saw the way my father's feet had been gnarled and twisted by wading water for weeks in the rice fields of Vietnam. I saw the raw, pink wrinkles on my mother's hands from working with bleach all day in the school cafeteria. I took note when they put aside savings for me to go to college, when they scrimped and saved so I could have whatever I wanted.

When you leave here today, thank the people who have sacrificed so you could have more than they had, who worked the long hours, who encouraged you to get an education. I am charging you to tell them how much you appreciate them. A word of thanks is never wasted.



Silas House at Eastern Kentucky University in May 2013, where he delivered the Commencement speech.

photo courtesy of EKU Communications and Marketing

And I ask you to put your time at college to use not only by using that degree to get a job, but also to keep your mind open, to be accepting, to love others for exactly who they are. I charge you to obey the Golden Rule. This is the ethic of reciprocity and is the most essential basis for the modern concept of human rights.

A key element of the Golden Rule is that a person attempting to live by this rule treats all people, not just members of his or her in-group, with consideration.

The Golden Rule has its roots in a wide range of world cultures and is a standard that different cultures use to resolve conflicts. Although it shows up in all major religions, it is the most basic rule for being a good person regardless of any kind of belief or nonbelief system, and one that you should apply to everyday of your life as you go out into the family of things.

I charge you to be careful of judging others based on the assumptions you might have about them based on their socio-economic background, sexuality, ethnicity, politics, religion, or anything that makes them different from you. Our world is so fractured at this moment, and I think that one thing that feeds so much of the hatred in the world is the current state of disrespect that people so freely spew to one another. While our new global and digital world has allowed us access to things we only dreamt of 20 years ago, the internet and the 24 hour news cycle has divided us as much as it has united us. I am so troubled when I go online and see people cursing one another because of political arguments. I am troubled when I see people openly berate women using profane pejoratives and justify it by saying that popular music does the same. I'm troubled when I see a culture that thinks gay-bashing and rape and exploitation of the rural for their natural resources is acceptable. That's the world I see today, and we all have to be a part of changing that

climate of disrespect. I ask you to be a guardian for others. I ask you not only to make sure that you respect everyone but that you demand that others do the same. I charge you to leave this university and be the best person you can be and I ask you to make sure that every morning when you awake to think about the positivity you can put out into the world.

You've not only learned facts and figures during these years at Eastern Kentucky University. You've also learned how to coexist with others. You've learned how to learn. So that is my final charge to you, to ask that you learn something new every day. I ask that you do not quit your education when you graduate today. You should take note that this ceremony was not billed as a graduation but as a commencement. Whereas graduation means "a completion of studies," "commencement" means "a beginning, a start". Commencement is much more appropriate to what this day is for you, because this is much, much more than a completion of studies. This is, in a way, just the opposite. It is the beginning, the start. The true beginning of your truest learning when you go out into the world and not only apply what you have learned in books, but most of all, what you have learned about the best part of yourself. ✦

Silas House is the NEH Chair of Appalachian Studies at Berea College.

Citizens unite to encourage

by Donna Morgan

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

“At Brushy Fork Institute, we saw what others were doing in their communities and realized that you don’t have to be an elected official to do these things.” Thus begins Margy Miller’s explanation of how she and a group of Clay County, Kentucky residents got started working on a variety of projects to improve the quality of life in Clay County. Like many economically distressed counties in Appalachian Kentucky, this county is working to overcome issues such as high unemployment, poverty, and health disparities. Providing education, tools, and resources for people working to improve life in communities like Clay County is at the heart of Brushy Fork Institute’s mission under Berea College’s commitment to serve the Appalachian region and the communities from which many of Berea’s students come.

“Our project got started when people in Manchester

(the county seat) heard Vaughn Grisham speak,” Margy says. As the founder of the McLean Institute for Community Development at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Vaughn Grisham advocates for community-driven development and creating structures for strong civic engagement. Through his connection with Brushy Fork Institute, he has worked with several Kentucky communities, including Clay County.

Using what they learned through Brushy Fork Institute’s programs, Margy Miller and several other residents of Clay County founded Stay in Clay. The group describes itself in this way:



“Stay in Clay is a group of people who have come together to cross all boundaries of race, economic, and social class, to empower our people, bond our community, and strengthen our local economy. The group was formed to help boost the spirit, pride, and morale of our people and help improve the look and condition of our hometown/county. We want Manchester and Clay County to be the place people want to live, stay, retire, visit, come home to!”

“A few weeks after we founded Stay in Clay, we returned to the Brushy Fork Annual Institute on Berea’s campus, and we came back home on fire!” Margy proclaims. “We discovered so many things we could do.” Stay in Clay now meets monthly and calls for

Sexton

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and he said, “Do you know that people make a living with this? And there is a storytelling festival in Louisville.” And I said, “No. I didn’t know.”

He wanted to know if I ever heard of Richard Chase [a folklorist associated with Jack Tales] who went through the mountains collecting these Jack Tales, and he wanted to

know if I knew any Jack Tales. I said, “I don’t think I know any Jack Tales.” Then he told me to get that book about Richard Chase and I thought, “Well, yeah, I know all these stories,” but we had changed the name. We weren’t saying Jack—now I do, professionally it’s just easier, but you don’t have to. When you’re at home with family, you want to name somebody. Like this happened to Dillard or Amos, you know, make it more real like, “Oh, yeah, he used to live on the other

[hill over there], yeah.” You know, so like, “It was one of his ancestors.” You make it more personal that way. So when I read Richard Chase’s stories I realized, oh, yeah, I know these stories. I’ve heard these stories.

Dr. Robie asked if I would come and tell stories to one of his English classes and I said, “Yeah.” And he gave me five dollars. I got five dollars to tell a story! I’m like this is good and then I came and did another one—he gave me \$10 dollars. Then the faculty had then heard about me, and they

residents to 'Stay in Clay'

people to attend with this invitation: "Positive people willing to work with us for the betterment of all things in Clay County urged to attend!"

Armed with education and resources from Brushy Fork Institute, this group certainly has accomplished many things for the betterment of Clay County, in partnership with others in the community. Members of the group have undertaken or played a significant role in the following projects:

- **Community Strategic Planning Session** in collaboration with Jackson County, Kentucky, with Dr. Vaughn Grisham (funded by an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex-E-Grant through Brushy Fork Institute)
- **Monkey Dumplings:** a local theater production based on oral histories from the county (funded by an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex-E-Grant through Brushy Fork Institute)
- **Salt Works Festival:** founding this local festival included installing decorative salt kettle planters, building a primitive stage at a pioneer village, and holding activities to celebrate the role of salt making in the development of the county and town (funded by an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex-E-Grant through Brushy Fork Institute)
- **Manchester River Trail:** planning and completion of a walking trail that will be used for

wellness activities and that will lead toward Manchester's designation as a Kentucky Trail Town (initial planning and development funded by an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex-E-Grant through Brushy Fork Institute)

Projects and investments in the county through Berea's Brushy Fork Institute might seem small to some outsiders, Margy observes. "But it is huge for us," she adds. The efforts of this group have led to some big results for Manchester and Clay County. In 2014, the Kentucky League of Cities presented Manchester with the Enterprise Cities Award in their Small Cities Showcase. Meanwhile, Clay County took first prize in the Pride of the Counties Exhibit at the 2014 Kentucky State Fair. Stay in Clay members occupied the booth at the fair for ten days in order to promote tourism potential of the county and bring attention to area attractions.

Having been raised in Clay County, Margy Miller now works for the city government. And her community service and the experience she has gained in partnership with Brushy Fork makes her work more than a job. "I never thought I had a calling to do anything until we started doing this. Now I know my calling is to do what I can do to help my community. Brushy Fork Institute has led us to so many things that we would not have done."

Donna Morgan is director of the Brushy Fork Institute

wanted to hear me, and so they had a faculty something going on, and he gave me \$50 or the College did. Then other professors were talking to me and learning about my life, and you know it's like, "We got the real thing here. The real thing."

If I had not come to college, I would have never had known that it [storytelling] was an art. That it had value. I would have never brought it out of the mountains. I would have never shared it outside of my family. So the experience of college for someone like me, who had been so

isolated and not out in the world, was the experience of being able to see the world. To read books. Mommy used to say, "You always have your nose in a book," like it was a bad thing; there's always work to do. So to read at home, I didn't read, even after I got married that was something I couldn't do. I couldn't read when the kids got home from school or Marion got home from work. I slipped in reading; you didn't have that time to yourself. So [in] college you got to read. You got to do this. So it was all this reading and everything, it just opened the world.

So how did Berea College nurture that? In a roundabout way, I mean, definitely if I had not taken that storytelling class, that one class, I would've never known.

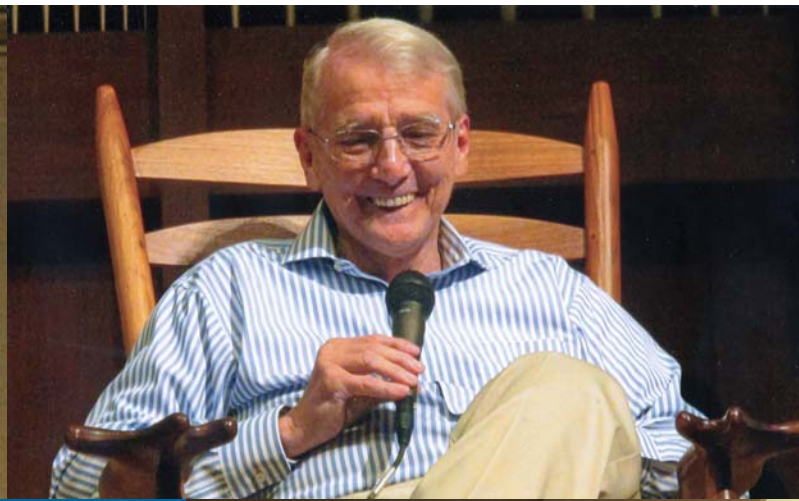
So, coincidence? I don't believe in coincidences. It was meant, and it was these little steps that lead me, but that time I never thought I would become a storyteller. It was just a way to make easy money. It was really a way to celebrate my Appalachia. Where before using my dialect they say, "You're ignorant." I had nothing to come at that, [to] combat that



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The Appalachian Symposium

On September 9th and 10th, 2015, the Appalachian Symposium gathered together 29 of the region's best known writers and an audience of 400 people for front-porch style public conversations about literature and Appalachia. Recordings of the symposium can be heard at www.berea.edu/ac/as15.

The photos above, by Warren Brunner, are of Loyal Jones and Gurney Norman who closed out the symposium with a rousing conversation called "A Public Conversation Between Legends." These two friends also happen to be two of the people who have had some of the most significant impact on the culture and the literature of Appalachia.

