

The Gravy Infusion



Photo by Heater Dent

Highlights from Fall Term



- [Coat of Many Colors](#) Art Project
- Weekly Crochet Nights
- Kayaking Trip with Students to Lake Owsley
- Nature Art Quilt on Mountain Day
- [Celebration of Traditional Music](#)
- Dr. William Turner's Visit to Berea
- Maywoods hike with students
- Visit to Challenger Center in Hazard, Kentucky
- Building an Appalachian themed Putt-Putt Course
- The [Where I'm From](#) map and photo project
- Chris led the [Appalachian Speak Symposium](#)



"The woods are acres of sticks. . . . When the leaves fall, the striptease is over; things stand mute and revealed. Everywhere skies extend, vistas deepen, walls become windows, doors open. . . . The mountains' bones poke through, all shoulder and knob and shin. All that summer conceals, winter reveals."

~Annie Dillard

From *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
Roanoke, Virginia

Learning from Dr. William Turner

by Heather Dent

Over a decade ago, I sat in a small classroom a couple floors above the Appalachian Center, learning about Contemporary Appalachia from the ever-charismatic Dr. William Turner. To learn about Appalachia from a Black professor born and raised in Lynch County, Kentucky, reading books like *Uneven Ground* by Ron Eller and *Lost Mountain* by Erik Reece, was an opportunity whose magnitude I was not able to realize at the time.



I've since graduated and now work for the Appalachian Center as a Program Associate. Dr. Turner went on to retire and write his newly released book, [*The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachia*](#). Our paths crossed again this fall when he came to Berea as a distinguished convocation speaker for his talk "[Between Birmingham and Black Mountain in Kentucky: The Harlan Renaissance in Central Appalachia's Coalfields.](#)" It had been over a decade since I saw him, but he was the same as he ever was. Wearing a suit and bowtie, he paced up and down the floor of the stage, captivating the audience with his sense of humor, speaking uncomfortable truths, and even singing Bill Withers's classic song "Grandma's Hands."

Dr. Turner was an endless fountain of knowledge on Appalachian history, but he also knew the importance of keeping up with the times. We were not only encouraged, but REQUIRED to keep up with current events. I remember frantically browsing online for tidbits of news before rushing off to class in the mornings. That way if Dr. Turner called on me, I would have something to share. He had a way of calling on you when you least expected it, and while we were not punished for not staying up with current events, I couldn't bear to disappoint him.

Dr. Turner demanded that his students fully engage. It was not enough to show up and read the materials. He wanted us to be curious, think critically, and not be afraid to delve in to difficult and uncomfortable truths. I remember receiving a C on a paper once (a low grade for me) and asking where I went wrong. He said, "Your paper has all the right ingredients, it's just opaque. The message is unclear." To this day I strive to make my message clear in my writing and get at the heart of each story.

So what is the heart of my words today? I suppose it's the fact that students are lucky to have mentors like Dr. Turner in our lives. Someone who expects greatness. Someone who challenges you to think differently. Someone who cares deeply about Appalachia and for his students.

Question of the Month

How do you hold and physically relate to the books you're reading? What does it look like? Do you hug them to your chest? Do you fall asleep with them under your hand? Do you have piles by your bed or maybe on the kitchen table? Do you take them outside?

Send your answers to Heather, denth@berea.edu

