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Goldenseal

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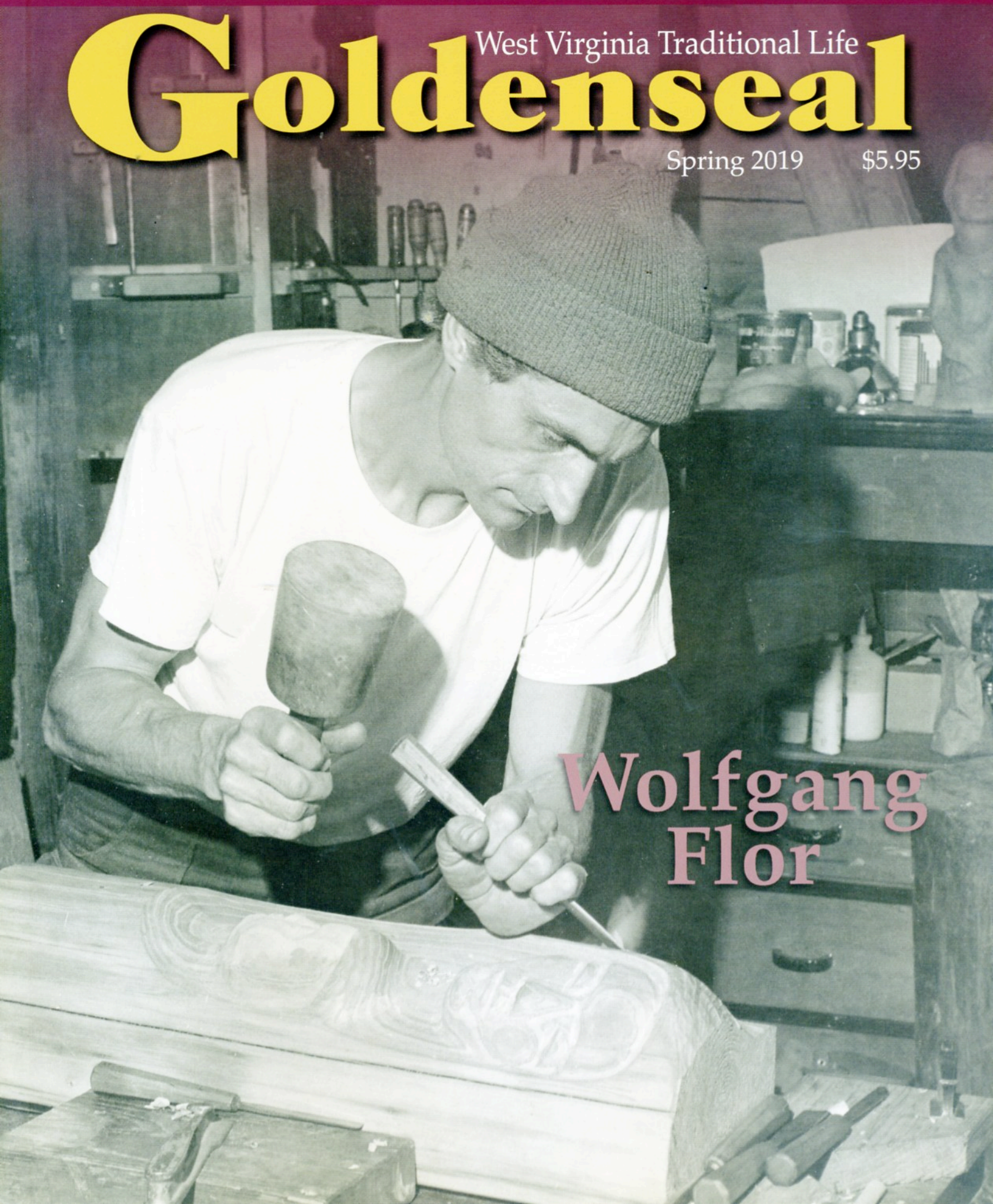

Wolfgang Flor

The blue lobelia is not only gorgeous. It's also one of many natural herbs that can be used to treat stomach aches. Photo by Emily Hilliard. See her article about *herbarist* Marion Harless on page 8.

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On the cover: The late artist Wolfgang Flor of Upshur County. Courtesy of the Jane George Collection.

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From the Editor

In November, I attended the inspiring 50th anniversary memorial service for the Farmington No. 9 Mine Disaster. Our Fall 2018 issue of the magazine was dedicated entirely to No. 9, where 78 miners lost their lives on November 20, 1968.

As West Virginians, we've historically honored our dead in many ways. Until the early 20th century, it was common for women to wear a locket containing a strand of hair from their late parents, spouses, or children. Others paid tribute to lost loved ones with what today might be called folk art. In this issue, Julian Martin remembers testifying by his beloved grandmother's grave [see page 16]. In her story about the town of Orlando [see page 28], Patsy A. Reckart notes how family members would "sit watch over the body as neighbors dropped off food." In her article "A Beautiful Place Called Ugly" [see page 36], Lenore Coberly recalls the tradition of Decoration Day, which involved fixing up and placing flags on graves—after eating a bountiful meal and singing hymns.

Many of these traditions have disappeared over the years—at least in their original forms. The recent No. 9 memorial, though, featured several facets of these, including food; heartfelt recollections of loved ones; the laying of wreaths; a stirring a cappella rendition of "Amazing Grace" by Sharon Clelland, whose father, David Cartwright, died on that tragic day 50 years ago; and something we underscore a lot in GOLDENSEAL: West Virginians' resilience and sense of community.

The memorial, hosted by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), also reminded me of a sad truth. Too often, substantive changes that benefit everyday people only occur *after* tragedies like No. 9. This disaster led directly to the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 and a complete shakeup of the UMWA's corrupt leadership at the time. Both were driven by the widows of the No. 9 victims and rank-and-file miners who'd had enough.

The service also was a reminder that long-term change cannot succeed without constant vigilance by "we the people." Fifty years later, no individuals or companies have

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III, whose uncle John Gouzd died at Farmington in 1968, speaks at the annual No. 9 memorial service in November 2018. Photo by Stan Bumgardner.

been held responsible for what happened at No. 9 because, in part, evidence of criminal wrongdoing was suppressed at the time [see Douglas Imbrogno's article on page 4].

And while the sweeping 1969 legislation was a turning point in U.S. mine safety, more than 76,000 miners have died of black lung nationally since No. 9. In fact, lung diseases related to mining have been increasing since the 1990s. Recent studies show that some 20% of career-long miners in Central Appalachia have black lung. This is double the national rate.

Additionally, a different lung disease, silicosis, is on the rise, especially among surface miners, due to the inhalation of silica dust. Silica comes from sandstone and other rocks, which are crushed as part of the mining process, sending glass-like particles airborne. This should particularly alarm West Virginians because hundreds of men died of silicosis in Fayette County while building the Hawks Nest Tunnel in the 1930s [see the articles by Caroline P. Jennings in our Spring 1997 issue].

The No. 9 memorial was both a solemn tribute to 78 brave men and the families they left behind as well as a reminder that we the people must always be diligent. At the service, everyone wore buttons that read "Never Forget #9." In this case, "never forget" means many things, and we owe it to those 78 miners—and all others who've ever mined coal—not to forget what happened and why.

Stan Bumgardner

No. 9 Lawsuit
The Pain Lingers on for Many

By Douglas Imbrogno

It might seem like the Farmington Mine Disaster, which killed 78 miners, is a matter for the history books. But a half-century later, the explosion that rocked a small Mountain State community, and then the nation, continues to reverberate in the courts.

West Virginia attorney Timothy Bailey represents the miners' families in an ongoing legal case that seeks to bring some closure and compensation to all the families affected by the disaster in the Consolidation Coal Company No. 9 mine on November 20, 1968.

Closure is an impressive sounding word. But for some families, it may never completely occur as 19 of the miners' bodies were never recovered and remain deep underground in the shuttered mine after the coal company gave up trying to recover them.

Some of the families previously received $10,000 settlements from Consolidation Coal (about $60,000 in today's dollars). In 2014, the families filed a wrongful death lawsuit. Three years later, a federal judge threw it out, saying the suit, "brought 46 years after the explosion, is late by more than 44 years" since wrongful death cases in West Virginia need to be filed within two years of the event. In 2018, the families asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to reinstate the suit.

Bailey argues the families didn't learn until 2014 that the mine's chief electrician had disabled a key exhaust fan or that the company had covered it up. Except for the company's "fraudulent concealment," according to Bailey, of the explosion's causes and its hiding of the electrician's identity, the families could have filed the wrongful death case in time. He contends that the two-year limitation should be extended based on when the families learned of those concealed facts.

In November, the Fourth Circuit sent the case back to the West Virginia Supreme Court to answer some questions on the application of state law. "Once those questions are answered, you'll pretty much know whether the appeal is going to be successful or not," Bailey says.

Should the families prevail, a huge settlement would result, Bailey says, with damages accruing along with interest since the 1968 disaster. "It's a very, very substantial figure."

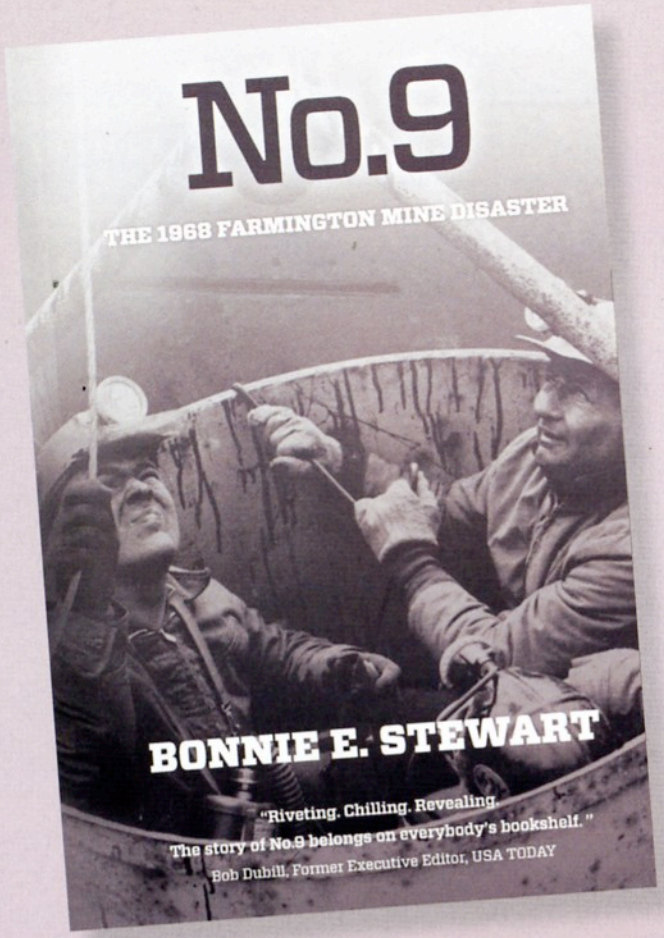
But who will be held responsible?

In 2013, the mining company—which through sales and mergers had become Consol Energy—sold some of its mines to Murray Energy, which took on legal liabilities from the old Consolidation operations, including the No. 9 mine. Murray Energy has declined to comment on the claims made in the families' attempt to revive the 2014 lawsuit, except to release this statement: "Murray Energy did not even exist in 1968, when the accident occurred. There is no higher priority at Murray Energy than the health and safety of our coal miners."

Bailey dismisses the statement as "a red herring. When you take it all, you take it all," he says. "That means you take the good with the bad."

Murray Energy wants to assert "we didn't do it," says Bailey. "We're not suing you because you did it. We're suing you as the successors to the folks who did it."

The explosions at No. 9 continue to affect the community. Bailey says, "Think of the ripple effect on brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, high school classmates, members of churches. If you were to put a circle around the area



Note: The status of the No. 9 legal case was current as described at the time this issue went to press in late January, but new developments may have occurred in this unfolding case. –ed.

. . . it's shocking how many people were impacted."

It's a horrible tragedy when a community loses just one coal miner, says Bailey. "Here we have a community that lost dozens of coal miners. And so, they're hurting. The thing most human beings want is answers."

Bonnie Stewart, an investigative reporter and former West Virginia University journalism professor, spent three years researching her book *No. 9: The 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster*, released in 2011. Stewart lays out in detail a pattern of dangerous conditions in No. 9, revealing a mine operation with a long and notorious history for lax standards and a credo of breakneck production over safety. The book delves into records and testimony that show No. 9 was known for poor ventilation, high levels of coal dust and methane gas, and a failure to adequately test for methane.

The book traces evidence that an alarm on a key ventilation fan used to pull methane from the mine had been disabled before the explosion. The alarm would have shut off power to No. 9 and triggered an evacuation of all 99 miners underground that day.

In response to the disaster, the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act was enacted into law the day before New Year's Eve in 1969. It ratcheted up federal mine inspections, toughened mine standards nationwide, and gave miners safety and health benefits they'd never had before.

But no one has ever been held accountable for the devastating losses from that day. The disaster may be a half-century old, but its story is not just one for historical study, Stewart says.

"For these families, it was never a closed case," she says. "It still isn't."

Adapted from a longer piece in the November 20, 2018, edition of 100 Days in Appalachia *(www.100daysinappalachia.com), a digital publication incubated at the WVU Reed College of Media in collaboration with West Virginia Public Broadcasting and the Daily Yonder.*

DOUGLAS IMBROGNO is a freelance writer and video feature producer based in West Virginia. See his portfolio site at thestoryisthething.com and his video site at thewebtheater.com. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Letter to the Editor

Farmington

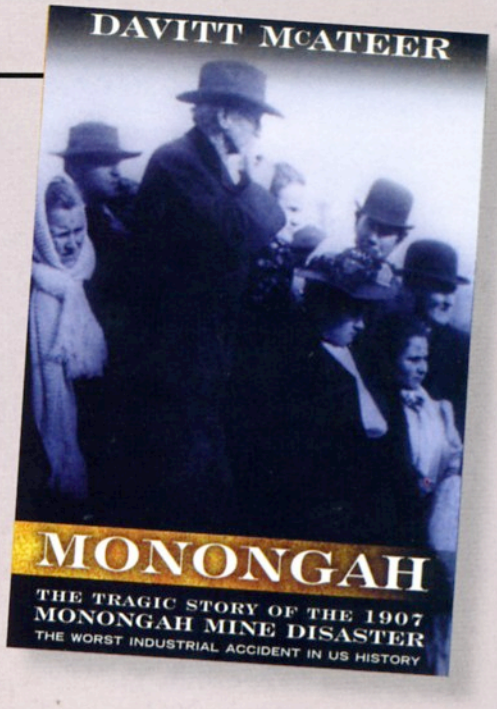
November 19, 2018
Shepherdstown, W.Va.

Congratulations on the Farmington Mine Disaster Fall 2018 issue. This body of work is of great value and helps to explain how important the sacrifices of our West Virginia miners and their families were, and are, to the history of the development of our nation's laws designed to protect workers not only in the coal industry but in all industries. I would offer two additions.

First, I believe that the Monongah Mine Disaster, December 6, 1907, in which nearly 500 miners perished, was instrumental in the evolution of the Coal Mine Safety and Health laws in the United States. This disaster, which was the largest industrial accident in U.S. history, and which occurred only a few miles from Farmington, resulted in the adoption of the first law the U.S. Congress passed to address health and safety in a private industry. This law tasked the U.S. Bureau of Mines to research the causes of mine disasters. Up to that time, the prevailing thought was that only states could regulate private industrial activities. As described in my book *Monongah* (WVU Press), the adoption of the first Organic Act of 1910 creating the Bureau of Mines was a truly groundbreaking event. This law changed how the federal government, not simply the individual state governments, would ultimately regulate private industry.

Secondly, I believe an important study undertaken by a group of West Virginia University Law students begun in 1969 as a result of the Farmington Mine Disaster, later published as a report in July 1970, *Coal Mine Health and Safety in West Virginia*, was important to the adoption of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Nixon in December 1969. That study's results were shared with the Congressional Committee during the act's deliberations and pointed out the failings of the coal industry, the United Mine Workers of America, and the West Virginia and U.S. mine safety agencies. The report also detailed the shortcomings of the previous law and confirmed the dire need for changes in the existing law. That study was edited and published as a book in 1973 titled *Coal Mine Health and Safety: The Case of West Virginia* (Praeger Publishers).

The Farmington explosion was a catalyst for a movement across the country that resulted in workers', their families', and others' refusal to accept the status quo explanation for a disaster. God doesn't hate miners. Mother Nature has predictable consequences when mishandled. Miners aren't so careless that they want to kill themselves.



Together, these people forced Congress to look at the causes of mine accidents and adopt the comprehensive Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 because miners' lives matter.

J. Davitt McAteer

J. Davitt McAteer, now retired, served as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton, directing and managing the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration. In 1990, as Executive Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Law Center, he pressured the U.S. Bureau of Mines into releasing its official report on the No. 9 disaster, 22 years after the tragedy. He also led the independent investigations into the 2006 Sago and Aracoma/Alma #1 and the 2010 Upper Big Branch mine disasters. Recognized worldwide as an authority on mine health and safety, he has authored five books and numerous articles on the topic. –ed.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Bye

George Jordon, II (1960 – 2018)

George Wesley Jordon, II, passed away on December 3, 2018, in Charleston at age 58. The son of the late D. Gene Jordon and Frances Pritchard Jordon, George was a lifelong resident of Charleston, where he established and led various charitable organizations.

A graduate of Davis & Elkins College, George helped create the African-American Heritage Arts Camp and, in 1990, co-founded the Appalachian String Band Music Festival, both held at Camp Washington-Carver at Clifftop in Fayette County. The annual music festival, often known simply as Clifftop, fit a unique niche by welcoming old-time instrumentalists who play in either a traditional or a neotraditional style.

George Jordon at the 1995 Appalachian String Band Music Festival with staff members Kelli Marie Hawkins (left) and Norah Smith. Photo by Michael Keller.

While festival cofounders Will Carter and Bobby Taylor focused primarily on the music and contest side, George and his superb staff at Camp Washington-Carver worked out the logistics of hosting, feeding, and providing running water for some 4,000 campers every year. Bobby notes, "George was the mover and shaker making it possible for us to have the [festival]. George had a direct approach that cut to the chase and made dreams come true and historical things happen."

Thanks in large part to George's dedication during those early years, Clifftop has become one of the premier events of its kind, attracting musicians annually from all 50 states and around the world. Will Carter, who plays bass with the band Blue Yonder, has observed that "without George Jordon, there wouldn't have been a Clifftop." Bobby agrees, emphasizing that George "will be forever remembered for [cofounding] one of the most cherished old-time music festivals in the world."

Corrections

The Fall 2018 issue noted that author Bonnie E. Stewart was a student at WVU when she wrote her groundbreaking book on the No. 9 disaster. She was actually a WVU professor at the time. The photos on pages 62 and 64 of the Winter 2018 issue were taken by Rachel Taylor. Rachel and her husband, Adam Taylor, own and operate Frostmore Farm, mentioned in the article. For more information, please visit frostmorefarm.com. –ed.

"People need to know about plants"
Herbarist Marion Harless

By Emily Hilliard

Some people speak in complete sentences. Marion Harless speaks in entire paragraphs, punctuated by laughter. The first time I went to interview her at her home in Kerens in Randolph County, she spent two hours meticulously preparing us a lunch of traditional Mexican food (even plating it on Southwestern-themed dishes) while regaling us with stories of her work as a comparative psychologist in Venezuela; quoting author Nikki Giovanni; and offering instruction on how to prepare dandelion fritters, what herbs make good root beer, and the best natural deer repellent. We never actually got to the interview, but I'm glad I had an excuse to return for more (on the second visit, we skipped the meal).

Marion, 83, calls herself an *herbarist* rather than an *herbalist*, explaining, "An *herbarist* is a person who grows herbs, and uses them, and an *herbalist* is a person who uses herbs medicinally and doesn't necessarily know anything about the plants! Often herbalists buy everything that they use, and I like to grow things. And so, even though I may use them medicinally, I'm still interested in the growing part of them too." "Interested" is putting it mildly. Marion's knowledge of gardening, cultivating, harvesting, and using both wild and cultivated plants is deep and broad, dating back to her early childhood.

"I've always been interested in plants my whole life, and I guess I just learned things by osmosis the way kids learn the difference between carrots and cabbages and lettuce. I learned all those, plus many, many, many other plants," she says. She grew up in Weirton, where her family kept a large garden, orchard, and vineyard. Her parents also knew wild plants like ironweed and jewelweed (though they disagreed on some of their names), and often ate foraged food like black walnuts, butternuts, wild berries, bitterweed, and dandelion greens. Marion remembers canning hundreds of quarts of fruits and vegetables each year, including peaches, tomato juice, grape juice, vegetable soups, sassafras tea, and wild black-cherry cough syrup. They also made wine. "We made wine out of everything you can think of," she says, laughing, "strawberries, blackberries (we didn't have blueberries), currants, peaches, plums, and grapes. Grapes, grapes, grapes."

In 2018, Marion was a master artist in the inaugural West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program, leading a yearlong study in "green traditions" with Kara Vaneck of Weston. Marion was also a master in the former Augusta Heritage Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program and taught various green traditions at Augusta for 32 years. "*Green traditions* is very, very broad because I didn't want to say we're just going to do natural dyeing or we're going to do papermaking or we're going to learn how to graft fruit trees or etc.," Marion explains. "And so we left it as broad as we possibly could and decided that would be a good title for just passing along information that I have picked up over the years."

Marion's garden is large, wild, and busy, covering every bit of her land and spilling over onto the porch as if the house were a plant, too. Herbs like dill, basil, and mint grow next to tomatoes and other vegetables, which grow next to day lilies and lobelia flowers. There are no straight rows, no visible empty plots, and no "weeds."

Along with access to her extensive plant knowledge, Kara says that Marion's garden was a main selling point in her decision to study with her. "Knowing that I would get to come and spend time with her in her garden with more frequency was really enticing," she says. "It's just been so wonderful to watch the garden change over the course of the year and learn new plants every week and take home cuttings and seeds to propagate."

When I asked Marion why she felt it was important to pass on her botanical knowledge to apprentices like Kara and the thousand or so other students she's taught, she replied, "Because the world cannot live on plastic alone. I think if people knew the many uses of plants, that we would have so many fewer problems in the world, like this opioid crisis."

She spoke of the power of plant-based medicines for pain, rashes, and other ailments, and expressed concern for tree species that are being lost to disease and invasive species. Kara elaborated, sharing another lesson she's learned from Marion, whether directly or through osmosis, "Aside from all of the uses of plants, once a person experiences growing plants, it becomes such a pleasure. It's something to live for—if you have a garden, every day something new is happening, so maybe there are some seeds to collect or maybe one of the seeds you planted is coming up or the leaves are changing color—for me it's a purpose of life!"

Master artist and *herbarist* Marion Harless (right) with her apprentice, Kara Vaneck. Photo by Emily Hilliard.

EMILY HILLIARD is West Virginia's first official state folklorist with the West Virginia Folklife Program at the West Virginia Humanities Council. She writes a regular column for GOLDENSEAL. Learn more about the West Virginia Folklife Program at wvfolklife.org.

The hands and tools of Wolfgang Flor.
Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Maria Flor.

Wolfgang Flor

Master Sculptor

By Randy Yohe

Most noted sculptures created by master artists tend to be roped off in museums, untouchable by the public. Master sculptor Wolfgang Flor wrought his masterpieces from repurposed timbers. No cordoned-off ropes for Wolfgang; he demanded just the opposite, saying, "Wood sculpture is made for the hands. When someone touches my work, I consider it a compliment. What the music is to the ear, the piece of sculpture is to the eye. It must be so you WANT to put your hands on it."

Moreover, the Upshur County artisan didn't *carve* from wood—he *sculpted*. In his renderings, emotional beauty and durability went hand in hand. Wolfgang once commented,

"My work comes from within the log. You could roll one of my pieces down a hill, and it would not be seriously damaged."

In Wolfgang's sculptures, the hands were just as important as the ingrained faces. Maria Flor, Wolfgang's wife of 59 years, says the hands fashioned in her husband's works "expressed the whole personality. Was it a worker, or were they refined hands? And how were they moved? In which position did people put them?" As for Wolfgang's own two hands, Maria lovingly exclaims, "He did have beautiful hands. Yes, very beautiful hands!"

The Flors built their enchanting house into this rock formation near Rock Cave. Photo by Vickie Yohe.

Wolfgang Hubert Flor of Rock Cave was 89 when he passed away on December 2, 2017. He was born in Naumberg, Selesia, Germany, on January 29, 1928. After World War II, as a teenager from war-torn East Germany, he was forced into wanderlust. Maria explains how her husband-to-be made the most out of a struggle to survive, "He was a *D.P.*, which is a derogatory term nowadays and was really bad back then. They would say to many people, 'Oh, you're just a D.P.,' not realizing the origin of it. The term comes from *displaced person*. Wolfgang was among 10 million people displaced from Selesia (most of which is now part of Poland). Wolfgang and others were told, "Go walk, or sit in the railroad cars if you are lucky, but just go west."

Young Wolfgang did what he needed to survive while traveling from village to village. His journey turned into a passion to learn what was around him and how it all related to his heartfelt thoughts and dreams. Maria says, "Every stream he saw, he put his feet in. Every church he saw, he would go in and look at the sculptures and whatever was in there. He was influenced probably more by the Middle Ages than anything else. That's all you were seeing at that time."

For a short period, Wolfgang worked with two ladies who were doing some carving. He eventually found his way to Maria's hometown of Herford, West Germany. The two met in a little Catholic church. In Herford, Wolfgang went to a little craft shop where they were making nativities and joined in.

Maria and Wolfgang came to the United States in 1957 and married the next year. He took on any job available, including one at a Greyhound bus station, while doing carpentry work on the side. Maria says, "Since he didn't speak the language, they would use him for hanging doors and things like that where you didn't have to talk. But in the evenings, he would go to his loft, and he would carve and have his ideas and be very stubborn about it. Very stubborn. He exhibited partly in Cleveland but didn't really fulfill his dream."

The couple decided they needed a place of their own that met their personal and creative needs. They wanted to live where the overhead was low, where there was plenty of good wood, and where they could live a simple lifestyle. Maria says, "Wolfgang heard a little radio report with a man saying, 'If it is made, somebody wants it.' He carved that saying onto an old table we got from the Salvation Army.

Maria Flor gives the author a tour of the eclectic house she and her late husband shared for more than half a century. Photo by Vickie Yohe.

I still have that table, now turned into a plaque. We then read a very negative article about West Virginia that said, 'Don't ever go there because there is extreme poverty, and artists and those types of people don't have a chance there.' So, Wolfgang looked at me and said, 'You know what? If West Virginia is that low down, it can only go up. Let's go!'"

Wolfgang and Maria settled on a rugged piece of Upshur County land, outside Rock Cave. Like the heavy wooden sculptures the master artist would soon produce, the couple built their own home and workshop from repurposed timbers—and whatever else Mother Earth had to offer.

Maria says, "We designed and built it ourselves, mindful of the principle not to borrow money because he wanted to keep his freedom. He said, 'If I have debts, then I have to compromise.' We lived very, very simply, which was not hard for Wolfgang because he loved simplicity. We picked many stones out of the stream for our home. He was very peculiar and particular as the stones had to have a flat front and flat top so you could stack them and make a natural corner."

The Flor home is warm, beautiful, functional, and quite unique. The walls and floors of the two-story house are built into a giant, hillside rock formation. A deck off the upper floor looks out over a sloping green lawn and Wolfgang's workshop.

The rolling farmland around the Flors' rural retreat was rich in hewn timbers. Maria says, "We would buy up well-seasoned old barns and buildings. In those years, you could buy it for very little money, maybe a barn for $5 or $10. People just wanted to get rid of it. But Wolfgang saw the beauty in the chestnut. We even bought one homestead in the neighborhood because it had a barn we could store things in."

In his workshop, Wolfgang had at least 90 carving tools but used only about a dozen for his average sculpture. He chose a specific kind of wood—cherry, walnut, or

Wolfgang Flor (far right) loved to share his ideas and techniques with young aspiring students. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Maria Flor.

chestnut—that best suited the particular piece he was working on. He'd study the timber for hours, seeing what was inside and what he could bring out. He'd first make a clay model of every figure he wanted to produce and then take up to 10 weeks to sculpt it. And people all around West Virginia and beyond bought these one-of-a-kind compelling figures.

Wolfgang's figures expressed themes of life. Maria explains, "When Wolfgang sculpted people from wood, themes were his strength. He gave meaning to many of his statues. Let's say the *war* theme, or the *miser*, or *listening*. He felt we all did not listen enough—that this was not a generation of listening people."

She says her husband had a consistent idea about people and life, not just in Appalachia, but in general. Wolfgang felt we have good times and bad times; he sculpted hard lines and smooth lines to emphasize that balance between the good and the bad. Wolfgang also used the grains in the wood, the striations, to emphasize emotion.

Noted Grafton woodcarver Greg Cartwright sought out the master artist after marveling at Wolfgang's sculptures. He says, "[His works are] simplistic and emotional, not truly realistic and not impressionistic, either. Just a very unique and pleasing art form but also very diverse."

One reporter described Wolfgang's work as an attempt to mediate between the old traditions and the extreme modern. Maria says, "Yes, there is some truth to that in that he did not like deformation. As a young man, he had seen a young boy with an [enlarged head], and it absolutely shocked him. He mentioned this many, many times and said, 'Never will I distort the human figure.' He would simplify it, maybe with expressive hands and heads."

Maria feels that the rural poor and young college students perhaps appreciated Wolfgang's art more than anyone. She says, "The poor felt closer to his subjects and his issues. He had gone through poverty and gone through having to listen to people. They understood his themes. Like one theme in a piece, *Who is*

Mrs. Frank A. Baer commissioned Wolfgang to craft this untitled work for Temple Israel in Charleston. Both oak panels are 36" x 13" and were stained with sulfurous drainage water Wolfgang found in coal mines. The left panel depicts Abraham about to sacrifice his son Isaac; the righthand one shows Isaac's son Jacob fighting with an angel. In this 1972 photo, Wolfgang (left) shows his work to Don Page, director of the state Arts & Crafts Division. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Jane George Collection.

the hero? [is] all about war—where he showed the man with the gun, the man being shot, and the woman holding the hand of her dead husband. And his question was, 'Who is the hero?' And, of course, Wolfgang's opinion was there are no heroes in war."

Wolfgang loved to share his insights with aspiring artists. Maria says, "Wolfgang visited colleges for the purpose of having a little extra income as an artist-in-residence. However, he was inspired by the young generation. They questioned him, and he would demonstrate in front of them. He loved people, and his workshop was open to all, especially the backcountry people. We were questioned at times on why we were not participating more in the art scene in town. Wolfgang considered it more important to give his [neighbors] a true idea of what art is all about. He would continue carving as to not lose too much time, but he would let them be right there in the workshop."

Wolfgang Flor's works are on display in more than a dozen West Virginia colleges and universities, in the West Virginia State Museum, and in many places around the country and the world. But his signature creation came in 1968, when nearby West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon commissioned him to create *Twelve Apostles*, which now lines the Wesley Chapel's back wall. Greg Cartwright recalls, "I was a WVU student when the *Apostles* happened in 1968, and I remember vividly it was front-page news."

Wesleyan's communications director, Rochelle Long, says it is internationally iconic, adding, "For our college, the connection is major. People come from all over to see the *Apostles*. It was an honor to know who made these fantastic sculptures in the chapel and see the hands that created them."

Maria says *Twelve Apostles* took Wolfgang a year to create, about a month for each statue. "The wood for them all came from this area, [including] antique chestnut logs from a

Twelve Apostles, Wolfgang Flor's 1968 masterpiece, graces the back wall of the Wesley Chapel at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon. Photo by Vickie Yohe.

doctor's barn in Sutton. The college left him total freedom in his work. He would make a clay model, and the committee would come out. He would explain the research he had done on each one. They liked it, and then he went into the wood." The artist incorporated the distinctive chestnut wood grain for each apostle, depicting a concerned face or a raised eyebrow.

Wolfgang wrote biographies for the apostles, explaining the meaning and feeling in each sculpture. He worked to be authentic as possible, not just to depict the stories surrounding Jesus. He particularly wanted to incorporate something special into "Doubting Thomas" and "Peter the Rock." Greg Cartwright adds, "I'm drawn to go back and see the *Apostles* every time I go back to Buckhannon. I look at them, and it inspires me to look at his inscriptions and the symbolism. He didn't just make 12 unique sculptures of 12 guys from 2,000 years ago. He made wooden people who represented the personalities, desires, and lives of the 12 people most important in the life of Jesus."

When asked about her husband's legacy, Maria Flor says, "To be simple and be satisfied. He would be able to carve a tiny little thing, and he would be satisfied, but he would not sit still. He would still carve a big thing. Whichever job he did in life, he was satisfied. After the war, when he was in the town where I lived, he shoveled coal for the English people, and he was satisfied shoveling coal, even though he already knew how to carve and use those wonderful hands."

RANDY YOHE has his own video production company and does freelance writing, radio work, political consulting, and music festival production. For 30 years, he was a broadcast journalist in the Huntington-Charleston TV news market. Randy and his wife, Vickie, have a website geared to inform, entertain, and inspire baby boomers: www.ourboomlife.com. This is Randy's second contribution to GOLDENSEAL. His first was in our Summer 2018 issue.

Julian Martin (left) and Truman, his uncle, pose in front of the old family barn, built in 1917, at Emmons. All photos courtesy of our author.

Truman and Me

By Julian Martin

My uncle Truman and I killed millions of German soldiers during the Second World War—at least in our childhood fantasy world.

Every workday, my grandfather Charlie Barker drove from Emmons in Boone County over Lens Creek Mountain to his job at the DuPont plant at Belle in eastern Kanawha County. One morning, he commanded Truman and me to hoe the sprouting cornfield while he was gone. I was probably eight or nine years old; Truman was three years older. To my young eyes, that field was daunting. We hoed as far as the shade of a big sycamore, halfway down the first row. The ground was sandy from years of flooding. As young children, that dug-up ground seemed like a perfect foxhole for fighting off the Nazis. We tossed dirt-clod grenades and made appropriate gun noises. We aimed sticks that felt exactly like guns. When Grandpa got home from work, he was, to say the least, unhappy with our day's work.

As kids tend to do, Truman and I sometimes took on each other, too. Grandma said we fought like grown men, punching with our fists, rolling around on the floor and under the dining room table. Even with Truman's three-year advantage on me, he was a little guy, so our fights were usually a draw.

Kin (and that's how he spelled it) Barker was Truman's uncle and my great-uncle, and we trusted him completely. One day, we forded Big Coal River to get to a tiny store, where we charged Red Top tobacco to Kin's bill (Kin acted like he never noticed). We took the tobacco home, hid out in the barn, made a corncob pipe, and tried unsuccessfully to light it. Truman sent me to the house

for some kerosene to put in with the tobacco. We were lucky we didn't set the barn on fire. We tried smoking corn silk and made an unsuccessful attempt at smoking dry sycamore leaves. We were determined to imitate our role models and smoke something.

Our farmhouse had two massive stone chimneys and a cellar for storing potatoes and home-canned food. A dank but pleasant potato smell enveloped me whenever the cellar door was open. The house had the elegant touch of a front porch and balcony, which were seldom used because they were on the south side facing the sun. Our family gathered on the L-shaped side porch away from the sun to talk and do chores, such as stringing beans and peeling potatoes.

Millions of flies were drawn to the horse and cow droppings just outside the picket fence, which separated the house from the surrounding pasture. The screen doors didn't always close tightly and sometimes had unpatched holes, so they let in hundreds of those flies. Their swarming presence caused the white tablecloth, which covered leftovers from the previous meal, to turn black.

For winter living, we closed off the kitchen and dining room from the rest of the house. Heat came from an open-grate coal fire in the dining room and from a wood-burning cookstove in the kitchen. Grandpa and Kin, his brother, dug coal from an outcropping up Thomas Branch Holler to fuel the dining room fire. In cold months, Truman and I bathed in a galvanized washtub sitting near the kitchen cookstove. In warm weather, we washed in Big Coal River; this was before flush toilets emptied into the river.

Five generations of our author's family, from 1937 or 1938: (back row, left-right) Jacob Atkins (who died in 1954 at age 105), Dr. William Atkins, and Ethyl Atkins Barker; seated is Julian's mother, Ruth Barker Martin, with a squirming toddler Julian in her lap.

On winter evenings, we enjoyed Kin singing hymns as he rocked by the fireplace—"Bringing in the Sheaves" and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder" were my favorites.

The farmhouse had neither overnight heat nor insulation in the walls and ceiling. Electric lines hadn't reached our area of Big Coal River. At bedtime, the adults banked the dining room fire with ashes to keep

Julian's hymn-singing Great-Uncle Kin Barker, who kindly looked the other way at our author's mischievous youthful ways.

air away from the coals. In the morning, the fire was easily rekindled with the hot embers in the grate. Grandma told me that Isaac and Spicy Barker, our progenitors and the first Barkers in Boone County, kept a stump burning in the summer as a source of fire for their cookstove.

As the fire was being banked, and by the light of a kerosene lantern, Truman and I would hurry out of the two heated rooms, across the cold linoleum living room floor, past the white enameled slop jar, and upstairs to bed. To answer nature's call at night, it was either the slop jar or outside to the outhouse, where Sears, Roebuck catalogs served as toilet paper and gave us boys a chance to peer at the lingerie section.

On cold winter nights, Truman and I shared a feather tick under a mountain of homemade quilts. It was deliciously scary when the wind banged the big sycamore limbs against the house. Ghosts and strange creatures lurked in the "bore's nest"—a dark, mysterious, and cluttered storeroom of dusty pictures, old clothes, trunks, broken furniture, and a coat tree with a hat on top. Flashes of lightning or a full moon turned the coat tree into a creature, looking in at us as we huddled under our quilts.

Late spring through fall mornings, after Grandma milked the cows, Truman and I herded them up Thomas Branch to graze for the day. Uncle Kin leased that holler for a dollar a month from ARMCO, a Saint Louis steel company. That same ARMCO owned an underground coal mine about six miles up the road at Nellis—where my dad's eye had been put out when I was about five years old.

Following the cows up Thomas Branch Holler, we chewed on birch bark, threw rocks in the creek, ate blackberries, and watched snake doctors (aka dragon flies) glide above still pools of water. We left the cows up the holler and walked back

Julian, in the late 1940s, in his Boy Scout uniform.

home. At the end of the day, we found the hurting-to-be-milked cows waiting for us at the holler gate.

We carried drinking buckets full of water from a dug well down the hill near the collapsing remains of the first house built on our farm. Water for other uses was caught in barrels below the roof downspouts.

By August, it would get so dry that Grandpa would haul the horses and a wooden sled, with two empty 50-gallon water barrels aboard, down to the river. Besides "gee" and "haw," the horses understood the meanings of "get up there," "woe," "easy there," and clicks of Grandpa's tongue. Truman and I rode the horses as they dragged the sled and empty barrels down to a ford in the river. There, Grandpa poured buckets of water—one by one—into the barrels. To reduce the load on the horses, Truman and I walked back.

At fall butchering time, the bladder from the hog was cut out and thrown to Truman and me. We put a hollow stick in the urethra, blew it up like a balloon, and tied it off. We kicked it all over the hillside pasture, fell down, got up laughing, and ran after our "pigskin."

Aw, Grandma. I see her herding and milking the cows and churning the milk into butter. And there she is stirring hot, thick, satin-brown apple butter in a large copper pot over a wood fire. Her long-handled wooden paddle had holes in it to allow the liquid to pass through.

To pick berries, Grandma dressed up in garb that covered virtually her entire body as a swarm of gnats tried to prey on her. Picking berries was slow, hot, and miserable for me, but Grandma could go all morning, picking two water buckets full of berries without giving in to the heat or bugs.

After Dad's eye was cut open in the coal mine accident, we moved to Detroit. In his new job, a sander cut deep into his thigh—that sent us back to West Virginia. I did half a year of kindergarten in Detroit, but when we got back to Emmons, I started in midyear of the first grade. My teacher, Mrs. Morris, lived on the next farm, about a mile up

The Barker family poses by Kanawha River in the 1950s. Truman is in the back row (far right) beside Ethyl and Charlie Barker, Julian's grandparents. Julian's mother, Ruth Martin, is to Charlie's right, and his dad, Ernest Weldon Martin, is holding the baseball bat.

Big Coal River. She came by on my first day and walked the mile with me to Emmons Grade School. After the first day, I walked with Aunt Julia and Uncle Truman. Julia was in the sixth grade, and Truman was a fourth grader.

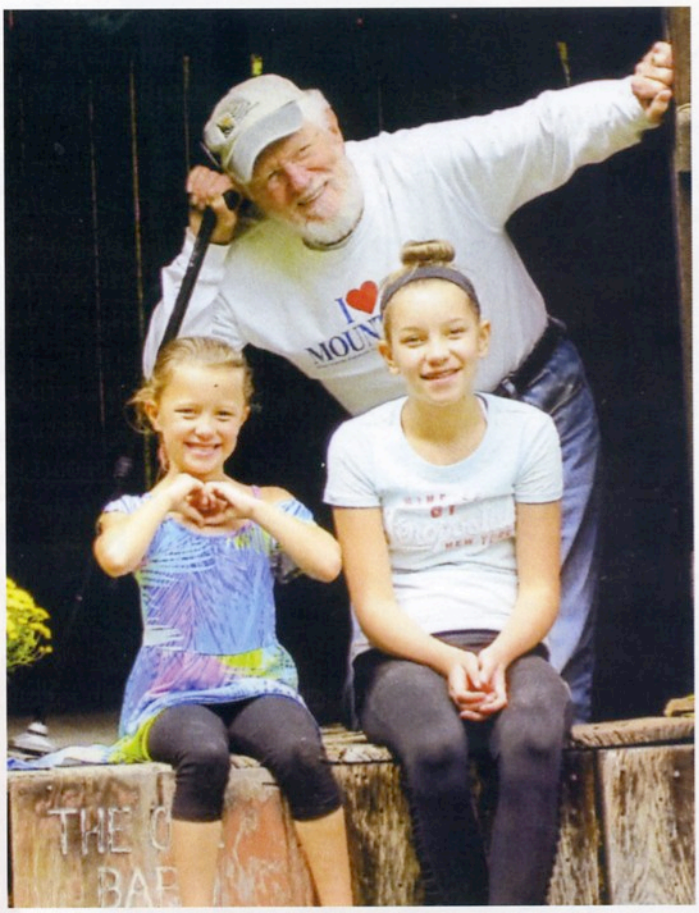
Our one-room school was heated with coal in a potbellied stove; water came from a well, and there was an outside toilet. One day, I was sent to the blackboard near where Aunt Julia was sitting—she whispered the answers to me, and I put them on the board.

I couldn't relate to the city children depicted in our reading books. "Run, Jim, run!" "See Judy run." Those words never inspired or connected with me. Jim and his sister Judy wore nice clothes, and their parents were always dressed up. Jim and Judy's dad wore a suit when he came home from the office and looked nothing like my dad when he came home from the coal mine.

I didn't learn to read in the first grade, and neither did the other two first graders. Early in my second-grade year, we moved to Saint Albans. I was called on to read from the same book we had at Emmons. I remembered the parts that Mrs. Morris had read to us and brazenly recited them as I pretended to read. Unfortunately, I was looking at the wrong page. My first and only F was in second-grade reading. I'm now an avid reader, which is testimony that I survived my second-grade trauma.

Grandma and Grandpa told me about the heroes of the West Virginia Mine Wars. It was word-of-mouth history—history not taught in my 12 years of public school education. I remember sitting at the dinner table and Grandpa saying, "When they killed Sid Hatfield, that was the last straw." Grandpa and his brother Kin grabbed their rifles and joined the 1921 march on Blair Mountain.

Grandma said that a woman they called "Mother" came to talk to the miners—she was speaking of Mother Jones, the national labor organizer. I asked Grandma if she knew where Mother Jones came from. In her innocence, Grandma replied, "I think she was from over in Charleston."



Julian Martin in the 1970s, after his return from San Francisco, and today, with his great-grandchildren, (left-right) Miah and Elizabeth, in the beloved 101-year-old family barn.

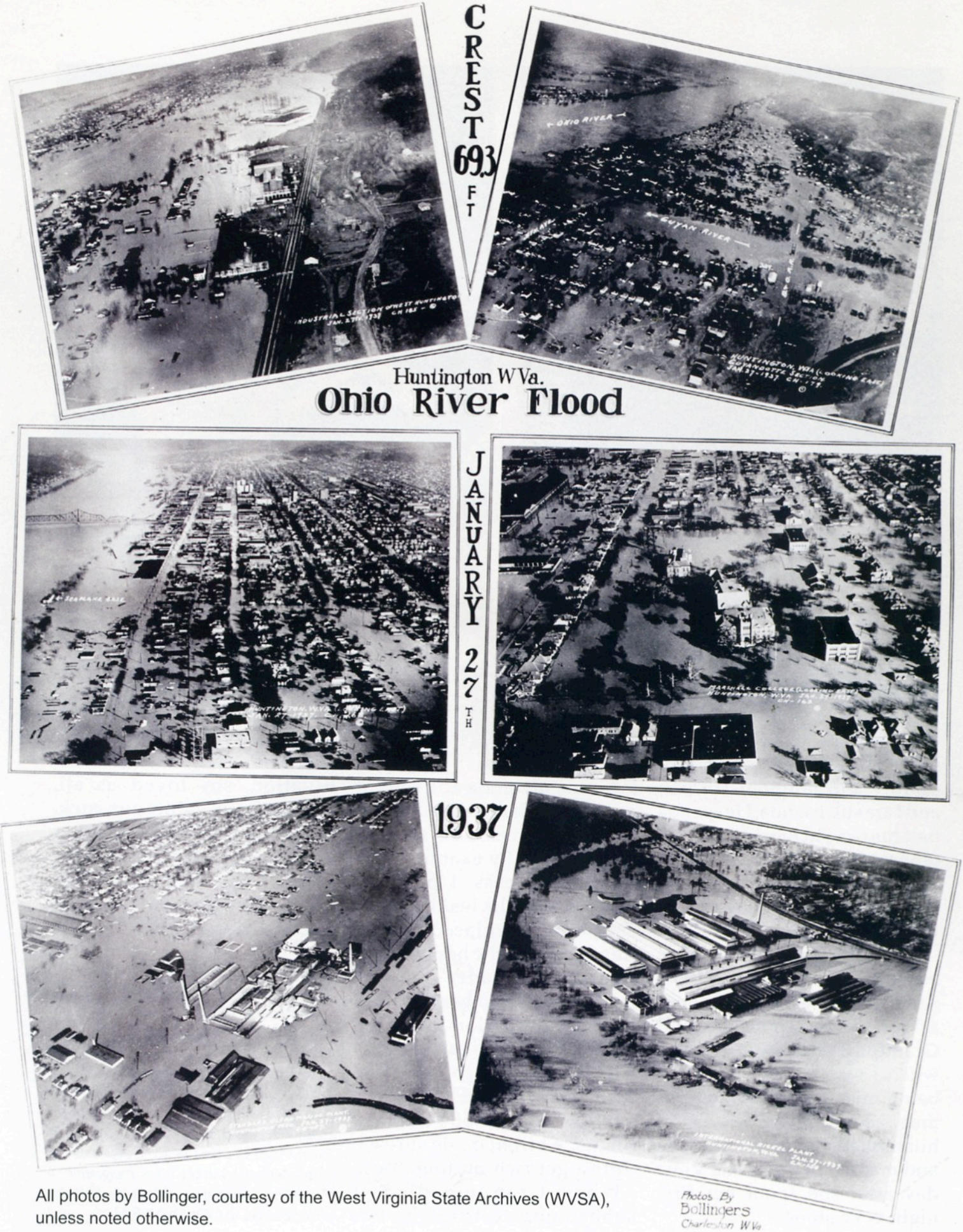
Despite the fact that we are sometimes on opposite ends of politics and religion, Truman and I are still friends. He spends half his time in Florida and the other half at the farm. It's great fun when we get together and reminisce. At the time of this writing, he's 85, and I'm 82.

The big old wonderful house burned to the ground in 1956. Kin died while I was a student at West Virginia University, and Grandpa died a few years later when I was in San Francisco, being mistaken for what *Time* magazine called a "hippie." I hitchhiked home via Canada and made it to Grandma's one day after she spent her first night ever alone.

Grandma and I lived together for a year. She helped me tame my mule and taught me family history, gardening, and the names and uses of wild plants. By example, she taught kindness. I put new tar paper on the leaking barn cupola roof, replaced the rotting boards in the hayloft, and cleared out decades' worth of manure that had been rotting the big foundation logs. One summer, my hog-raising girlfriend, a young couple from Iowa, and I raised an organic garden with 1,500 tomato plants. A blight made sure we didn't get rich on tomatoes.

When Grandma died, I sobbed and testified by her graveside that she was special and that, without reservation, she loved us all. She was our saint, our rock. Grandma Ethyl Atkins Barker and Uncle Kin Barker were saints who smiled into our lives. They both loved us all unconditionally.

JULIAN MARTIN is the 8th generation of his family to be born on Big Coal River in Boone County. They first settled there when Thomas Jefferson was president. His grandfather fought at the Battle of Blair Mountain for the United Mine Workers of America. Julian has a chemical engineering degree from WVU and, in the 1960s, became West Virginia's first Peace Corps volunteer, detailed in his book *Imagonna: Peace Corps Memories*. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



All photos by Bollinger, courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), unless noted otherwise.

The Great Flood of 1937

By James Juett

It's been called *The Thousand-Year Flood* and *The Great Flood of 1937*. It remains the worst natural disaster ever to hit communities along the Ohio River. If you lived in one of these towns, basically all you could do was to keep updated on the rising floodwaters through your local newspapers or by listening to the radio, if you were lucky enough to have one yet. Disasters like this actually prompted many West Virginians to buy their first radios so they wouldn't be caught off guard by the next flood.

In Wheeling's Elm Grove section, Wheeling Creek overtakes a car and Archer's Service Station during the 1937 flood. Courtesy of the Amelia Harper Collection, WVSA.

The precursor came when northern West Virginia and southwestern Pennsylvania were inundated with two to three weeks of snow and rain in January—a combination Arctic blast and a southern warm front had stalled over the region. The rain and melting snow created havoc along the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. Downtown Pittsburgh got a one-two punch since those rivers come together to form the Ohio there.

Other tributaries brought more water into the Ohio. The powerful, churning waters showed no mercy along the river's 981-mile path to the Mississippi River. The flood couldn't have come at a worse time since the country was suffering through the Great Depression. Much of northern West Virginia was still trying to recover from a devastating flood just 10 months earlier [see "When the River Came to Our House" by Geraldine Jacobs Baker, Spring 1997]. In fact, the '36 flood caused more damage than the '37 event in our Northern Panhandle and forced the evacuation of some 7,000 to 10,000 residents from Wheeling Island.

Not to say that the '37 flood was a walk in the park in the North—the Red Cross estimated that 200 were left homeless in Wellsburg. According to the January 15, 1937, edition of *The Daily Times* from Martins Ferry, Ohio, near Wheeling, "The Ohio Valley is going to have a narrow escape from a January flood. . . . Nothing more serious than one of the valley's old time spring freshets." The newspaper proved too optimistic because the rain continued. Two days later, weather forecasters were still hopeful, saying, "The danger will have passed within 24 hours." But an all-day downpour again proved forecasters wrong.

On Wheeling Island, the streets became canals, the water surrounded houses, and one-third of the basements flooded. Rowboats replaced cars as the floodwaters crested at 47 feet, compared to 55.2 feet in 1936. Many evacuated residents stayed temporarily at Market Auditorium, which became a makeshift hospital. Much of downtown Wheeling was underwater, as was part of Route 2 leading south to Moundsville. Streetcars and buses suspended traffic between Wheeling and Belpre, Ohio, and were parked on

The Ohio River completely engulfs houses in South Parkersburg. Photo by WPAR radio, courtesy of the WVSA.

higher ground. Many of Wheeling's factories also closed, and the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad was forced to stop operations due to track damage. One section of track in Moundsville buckled, sending freight cars into muddy soil. And the Red Cross estimated that another 200 people were left homeless in New Martinsville.

By January 24, the situation in northern West Virginia was stabilizing, as water levels began falling on the Ohio between Chester and Wheeling. Down the Ohio, though, the '37 flood would become much more treacherous. By January 23, all 18 of Parkersburg's artesian wells had been declared unsafe due to contamination. By the next day, the B&O and all highways heading into town had been closed. Some homes in the city's Beechwood and Riverside neighborhoods were demolished. On Ann Street, the water reached homes that were nearly 100 years old. An inch-and-a-half of rain fell into the Little Kanawha and Muskingum rivers, which ultimately fed into the Mighty Ohio.

On January 24, fearing gas service might be turned off, hospital officials in Parkersburg asked for electric stoves to keep patients warm. The recently built post office and the Wood County Courthouse were flooded, and the federal courthouse and city building were surrounded by water (heat was turned off in all these buildings). In addition, the Wood County Bank and The Commercial Banking and Trust Company had to set up temporary locations in another part of town. Late that day, Route 21—the road south to Ripley and Charleston—had to be closed due to high water near Big Tygart Creek in the Mineral Wells area.

On January 25, Parkersburg Mayor H. R. DeBussey requested that beer not be sold because the city didn't have enough jail facilities for drunks. The day before, telephone service had been cut off to the jail, where the water had reached the second floor. Sheriff R. E. Hays worked feverishly to move 46 inmates. A local newspaper read, "Relief forces, operating on a wartime basis, were mobilized along a 1,800 mile front today to combat illness and terror among 450,000 refugees in the flood-ravaged Ohio and Trans-Mississippi river valleys."

Just above the banner of *The Parkersburg Sentinel* were the words FLOOD EXTRA. The paper noted that "President Franklin Roosevelt [had] placed all resources of the government at the disposal of 11 states ravaged by swollen streams."

Parkersburg residents were told the rising water could top the record 1913 flood, when the river stage reached 58.2 feet and put the city under 22 feet of water. By January 25, the flood had already left 1,000 homeless in Parkersburg; another 500 were expected to be homeless by nightfall. Complicating matters, a reported 50,000 gallons of gasoline in huge drums had broken loose from the Pure Oil facility—across the Ohio in

The flood turns Parkersburg's Third Street into a lake, inundating businesses and the Wood County Courthouse (seen at the end of the street). Photo by WPAR radio, courtesy of the WVSA.

Marietta—and burst into the river. Parkersburg Fire Chief Lloyd Layman banned the lighting of matches or cigarettes in the flood area. Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers kept busy, as did Parkersburg police officers who, by the 25th, had logged 48 straight hours evacuating homes.

There were undoubtedly heroes during the Great Flood of 1937. Harry Judy, riverboat captain of the *Prince* from Louisville, couldn't continue his trip to Pittsburgh because of high water. He notified his family he was safe in Parkersburg and began rescuing folks. Tragically, on the 25th, Judy was electrocuted just after saving several people from a flooded house near Rockland, Ohio. Donald McDonald, a Garfield Nursery School student in Parkersburg, was rescued from his family's second-floor apartment by an unnamed man in a small boat. Six other children were taken to the nursery for shelter.

The flood crested at 55.4 feet in Parkersburg, 19.4 feet above flood stage. Some residents were moved to temporary housing on higher ground. Water and telephone services were available only on a limited basis. Some citizens rode boats through downtown streets. The city hall, home of the Parkersburg Police Department, was surrounded by water and was accessible only by boat. All police department office work was moved to the building's second floor.

Downriver, Point Pleasant also took a double hit due to high water from both the Ohio and Kanawha rivers. Much of the picturesque Ohio River town was turned into a flood-ravaged wasteland, with many houses floating away. The city's Marietta Manufacturing plant, which would soon produce hundreds of ships for the military during World War II, was covered by water. Unlike businesses, homeowners didn't have access to federal aid to rebuild, and the '37 flood, which crested at 62.7 feet at Point Pleasant, would prove to be the worst in the city's storied history.

By January 5, Huntington newspapers were already forecasting a potential flood. During the next week, business owners in this city of 75,000 began moving merchandise and equipment to safer areas. The Coast Guard, National Guard, American Legion Post 16, Boy Scouts, Sea Scouts, nurses, physicians, Marine Corps Reserve, and WPA and Civilian Conservation Corps workers didn't get much time to prepare or rest, but all provided crucial assistance when the floodwaters arrived.

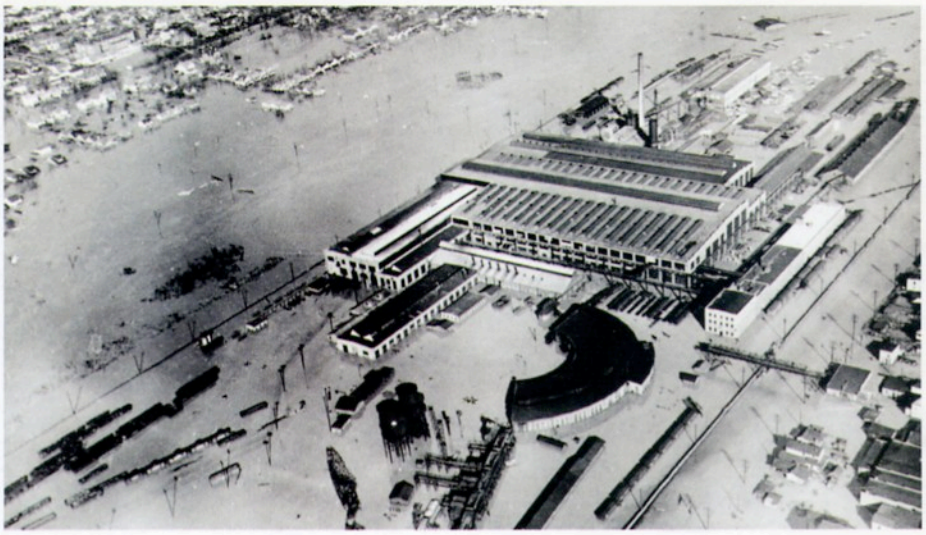
As with Point Pleasant, the '37 flood would become the worst in Huntington's history. Transportation ground nearly to a halt as the streets were badly damaged. The Ohio Valley Electric Railway Company requested permission to abandon its Ritter Park-Norway Avenue line, but its streetcars remained in use, wherever possible. Dogs were running loose in packs,

street holes were expanding to nearly 10 feet in width and eight feet in depth, and natural gas mains were bursting, igniting the floodwaters.

On January 24, Ida Osborne and her granddaughter Shyrene Spurlock of Huntington were killed in an explosion. They were in a boat with three other women and a man when one of the women threw a match into the water, causing gasoline to explode. The child's mother survived but was badly burned.

The city's Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railway shops—the financial heart of town—were swamped, railroad service was suspended for several days, and Marshall College (now University) was closed. In the elegant Keith-Albee Theatre, the seats and carpet were removed for safe keeping. Airplanes dropped food and clothing to flood-stranded Huntington residents. On the 25th, the toll keeper on the bridge connecting Huntington and Chesapeake, Ohio, reported seeing 12 houses wash away from the Ohio side.

On the 27th, the floodwaters began receding. Huntington opened four stations where people could get water approved by the city's health department. The Red Cross had raised nearly $17,000; there were some big donations, but none topped the $10,000 given by the International Nickel Company. Emergency food stations were set up, and, luckily, Huntington had one of only eight Red Cross regional centers along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.



Huntington essentially was founded by the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railway. Here, the C&O shops are submerged by the Ohio.

On Huntington's west side, in the Owens-Illinois Glass Factory maintenance shop, employees rapidly made more than 50 two-oar boats and two barges big enough to transport 20 people. Volunteers from the company rowed to many residents' homes and brought them to dry land. Owens-Illinois also let the American Legion use its personnel office as a division operating base.

More refugees were housed at Huntington High School than anywhere in town. Saint Joseph High School also became a temporary shelter and emergency hospital, treating more than 50 people under the supervision of Dr. Harold C. Beard and Hettie Workman. In addition, the Ohev Shalom Temple, First Presbyterian Church, and Jefferson Avenue Baptist Church were converted into temporary hospitals.

WSAZ radio continually reported flood information and passed along reports of missing people. In one three-day stretch, the station broadcast thousands of emergency messages, asking people by name to call their friends or relatives to let them know they were safe. Owens-Illinois worked in tandem with WSAZ, as its employees took distress calls and dispatched rescuers. The Federal Communications Commission even received complaints about a powerful San Antonio radio station interfering with WSAZ's signal and emergency work.

Other volunteers worked around the clock at the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, relaying messages and giving warning instructions. From January 27 until February 1, Huntington was without water service, a problem exacerbated by freezing temperatures on the 2nd. In Huntington, some 50 houses reportedly were washed away, while another 150 buildings suffered major damage.

The 1937 flood hits record levels in Huntington, nearly reaching the steps of the Cabell County Courthouse while damaging businesses and homes throughout the downtown.

At the peak of the flood, 75 percent of Huntington was covered with floodwater. The city received 12.07 inches of rain in January, compared to its January average of 3.79 inches. About 6,000 were left homeless, and relief centers worked hard to feed 9,000 daily. Ultimately, Huntington suffered $18 million in flood damage; today, that would equate to more than $300 million.

Almost incredibly, the destruction got worse downriver in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Nationally, one million people were evacuated from their homes. The flood claimed nearly 400 lives and caused some $500 million in damages (nearly $9 billion in today's money).

Congress responded by passing the Flood Control Act of 1937, leading to a series of floodwalls being built along the Ohio River. One of the first was in Huntington. Between 1938 and 1943, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers erected a seven-mile concrete-and-steel wall in Huntington, with 4½ miles of earthen levees, 45 gate openings, and 17 pumping stations. Construction was allowed to continue during World War II because Huntington's factories were considered essential to the war effort. The wall was built three-feet higher than the 1937 crest; in more than 75 years since the wall was completed, downtown Huntington has suffered only minor flooding. In the coming years, the Army Corps would build 39 flood-control dams upriver from Huntington and additional floodwalls in Parkersburg (1950) and Point Pleasant (1951).

JAMES JUETT earned a B.A. with a double major in journalism and radio-television from Morehead State University. He was a Huntington disc jockey at WKEE, WTCR, and WRVC. James has written feature articles for *The Herald-Dispatch*, the Charleston *Gazette-Mail*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Courier-Journal*, *Kentucky Monthly*, and others. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The Coal & Coke Railway runs through the heart of Orlando. The largest buildings are (left-right) Charlie Knight's store (white two-story structure), the post office (near the center), and the Dolan Hotel (white two-story structure in the distance). All photos courtesy of our author.

Orlando, West Virginia

Our Own Magic Kingdom

By Patsy A. Reckart

Orlando is a small village in Braxton County right in the center of our state. First known as Confluence, its name was changed to Orlando in 1907. It lies at the foot of three hills [I call it "little Switzerland"]. Behind one of the hills is a cave where, rumor has it, Indians once camped.

Orlando grew into a busy little town in the late 1800s and early 1900s. There were two grocery stores. Bill Conrad's place was better known as Bill-Grab-A-Nickel. He walked with a special-made crutch due to a short leg. Having never married, everyone said he was too stingy to have a wife. The other store was owned by Charlie Knight, who had one leg and also walked with a crutch. On the end of Charlie's store, near the post office, there was a small restaurant, owned by Dick Skinner, that was known for its homemade apple pies and soft sugar cookies.

Charlie's store was a popular place for men to loaf when they weren't working. Each side of the room had a long counter, which the loafers liked to sit on. I especially liked the glass-front candy counter. Women liked to go to Charlie's because, in part, he was a very good-looking man with a wonderful personality. It wasn't long until someone told Charlie's wife, Mary, that women were flirting with her husband. She got so jealous that she hid his crutch to keep him home from work.

Orlando had two hotels and a gristmill. Every fall, my grandpa would haul his dried, shelled corn in my brother's little red wagon down to the mill to be ground into meal. Then, my grandma would make cornbread out of it.

There also were a picture gallery and a post office. The town funeral director, Mike Moran, had his office in the back of the post office, and that's where he kept the caskets for sale and prepared the deceased for burial. Then, family members would take their loved one home and sit watch over the body as neighbors dropped off food.

The town's two railroads, the Baltimore & Ohio and the Coal & Coke, brought in much money. Two trains would arrive in Orlando hourly, picking up and dropping off passengers

and mail. Townsfolk would gather at the post office and catch up on gossip while awaiting their mail.

In Orlando, your neighbors were your friends. The people loved, worked, dreamed, fought, worshiped, and raised new generations to do the same.

David Newton "Newt" Godfrey, the "patriarch of Orlando," and his wife, Mary Jane Skinner Godfrey, about 1900.

The Patriarch of Orlando

David Newton "Newt" Godfrey was one of Orlando's first settlers. He was born in 1835 in the Hackers Creek area of Lewis County. His parents, John Newton and Jane Mitchell Godfrey, had migrated westward from Hardy County. Newt came to the Oil Creek area just before the Civil War and married Mary Jane Skinner.

Newt and Mary Jane had eight children, seven of whom made it to adulthood. In 1875, Newt bought 113 acres near the first railroad crossing on the road to Burnsville and built a fine two-story house. It had an outhouse at the far end of the garden, and there was no running water, but the front-porch well had the coldest water I've ever tasted. Many times, a weary traveler would stop and get a drink on Newt's porch.

Newt continued adding land, including some in nearby Lewis County, and farmed it until his death in 1912. His property was passed down from generation to generation for more than 100 years. Newt and Mary Jane's progeny are still woven into the fabric of Orlando.

Farmwork

All of Newt's children pulled their share on the farm. The boys milked the cows, fed the chickens, and slopped the hogs twice a day to fatten them up. When the weather turned cold, usually around Thanksgiving, they butchered the hogs, hung the hams and shoulders in the smokehouse, and ground the smaller pieces into sausage. The girls helped with the housework, cooking three meals a day, doing dishes, churning cream into butter, and canning vegetables from their garden.

Monday was wash day in Orlando. Every woman was up bright and early to get her clothes on the line first. It was an all-day event because the water had to be pumped from the well and then heated on the stove. The women used two tubs—one for washing, one for rinsing—which set on a wringer. They used homemade lye soap and scrubbed the clothes on a washboard. They put bluing in the rinse water, supposedly to make the clothes whiter, and some of the clothes had to be starched with Argo and cooked on the stove. When the clothes on the line had dried, they were sprinkled with water and rolled up to be ironed the next day with a flatiron, which had to be heated on the stove because there wasn't any electricity. Grandma also washed for the Dolan Hotel for 25 cents a day and sometimes did ironing, as well.

The Godfrey farm was a busy place from sunup to sundown. Like most boys, Newt's son Tom didn't like hoeing the garden, but it gave him a chance to watch the pretty girls as they went up the road—one girl, in particular. She had long black hair and always walked with another girl several times a week. He wondered how he could meet them. So, Tom asked his sisters if they would introduce themselves and walk with them. Tom soon learned that the two girls, Bridget and Anne, were sisters. They were intentionally walking by the Godfrey house hoping that Bridget could meet Tom. Armed with this knowledge,

Tom ran out to the road the next time he saw them. He and Bridget became very good friends, and one day, she invited him home for Sunday dinner. One thing led to another, and Tom married Bridget in 1891.

Newt and Mary Jane Godfrey's house had no indoor plumbing but the coldest well water around. Tom and Bridget met on the road beside this house.

Tom and Bridget Godfrey

They rented a small house in Kemper (which later became Bennett Siding). Tom was a farmer, like his dad, and raised chickens, cows, and hogs. By 1900, Tom and Bridget had five children. Their house was getting too small, so they moved to a log house on Grass Run. One day, their little daughter Lena was playing with a friend, got pushed into the fireplace, and burned the whole left side of her body. Tom and Bridget decided to doctor her themselves. Lena was supposed to keep a pillow under her arm, but she didn't, causing her arm to grow fast to her body. As she got older, it was hard to get a dress to fit her, but she never let it bother her. She eventually got married and had seven children.

Tom and Bridget had a total of 11 children, all born at home with the aid of a midwife. My mom, Ruth—known by everyone as Nellie—was the last of Tom and Bridget's kids, born in 1916 (nearly 25 years after they married). By this time, most of their other children had moved to Ohio in search of work. Only Mom and her siblings Wilda and Edward remained in Orlando.

In 1918, Grandpa and Grandma (Tom and Bridget) bought a house from Mike Moran for $500 (Mike had bought it for $4 by paying off the back taxes). I don't know how they paid for it because Grandpa was too old to work. The house was behind the Catholic church. It was too close to the creek for Grandma's liking, so she had her brother and some other guys move it away from the creek and closer to the church. The house was badly in need of repair. When it rained, Grandma had to set pots and pans under all the leaks. The floors were all uneven since the house had been flooded so many times, and in the winter, the floors were really cold since there was no insulation under them. Grandma would stuff old newspapers around the windows to keep out the cold air and heat the house with a big old coal stove.

Grandpa always promised to fix things up, but he liked fishing more than working on the house. Interestingly, he never owned a store-bought fishing pole. He'd just cut a limb from a willow tree, tie a line on it, add a bobber, and use a piece of lead (found on the railroad track) for a sinker.

Mom

Mom was only two years old when they moved into the new house. She got polio the next year, and when she was five, Grandma took her to a Fairmont hospital to be fitted for braces. When Mom got home, she refused to wear the braces, so they gave them to another girl with polio.

When Mom was seven, Grandma enrolled her in Orlando Grade School. Some of the kids made fun of her because of her handicap, and they'd walk up behind her and step on her heels. One day, when Mom was going home for lunch, a couple boys tried to lasso her, so she threw a rock and hit one of them in the nose. After lunch, she told her mom that she wasn't going back to school because she was afraid of getting a whipping, but Grandma took her back. The teacher made Mom and the two boys stay after school. When the teacher asked if she'd do it again, Mom said, "I will if they try to lasso me again." After finishing the eighth grade, Mom never went back to school, which she later admitted was a mistake.

Times were bad, and there was barely any food in the house. So, Aunt Minnie sent train tickets for the family to move to Ohio. They stayed about four months. Grandpa wasn't fond of city life, so they headed back to Orlando and discovered

that their house had flooded. Everything was ruined, there was nothing to eat, and all the beds were wet. The Red Cross turned down Grandma's request for help. Grandpa's sister Aunt "Duck" Bee invited the family to come stay in the old home place while some of the neighbors got together and cleaned the house.

During the Great Depression, things got even worse. More folks moved to Ohio for work, coming home only on weekends. Some of the men who stayed in Orlando were lucky enough to get on with the railroads or the State Road Commission. Others raised big gardens to sustain their families through the hard times. In 1932, when Mom was 16, she went to live with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Clyde in Ohio.

One evening, Mom was home by herself, and someone knocked on the door. When she answered it, there stood a "friend" of the family. She didn't invite him in, but he entered anyway, sat down on the couch beside her, and started making advances. She tried to stop him, but he was a big man, and she couldn't do anything about it. Since she'd never been with a man before, she couldn't understand what he was trying to do to her. He eventually got scared and left. When the family came home, Mom didn't tell them what had happened. About a month later, Mom began getting sick. Aunt Minnie took her to the doctor and was shocked to learn that Mom was pregnant. Mom then told her the whole story. By that time, the so-called friend had joined the Navy.

Bridget and Tom Godfrey (shown here in their later years) raised our author.

Aunt Minnie already had a house full of kids and didn't think she could handle any more, so she put Mom on a train back to Orlando. Grandpa and Grandma were really upset because they knew Mom wasn't very healthy. All the neighbors looked down on Mom for getting pregnant out of wedlock, particularly since they didn't know the story.

Mom was 17, and it was a cold, snowy day in January when I decided it was time to enter the world and meet Mom. Grandpa and Grandma called Doctor Peck in Burnsville, and Miss Ollie was there to help him. Miss Ollie told Mom that I would always be special to her. Doctor Peck told Grandma he didn't think Mom would ever walk again, so Grandma took care of me, putting me in bed with Mom only when it was time for me to eat. After a few months, Mom began to get better and walk, but Grandma kept taking care of me. So, growing up, I spent my whole life with Grandpa and Grandma.

Grandpa Thomas Godfrey died in 1950 at age 83. Grandma Bridget lived to the ripe old age of 90, dying in 1965. Both are buried in the Orlando Cemetery.

Mom married Ivan Morrison of Orlando in 1939. We moved to Akron, where Ivan died of cancer at age 35. Mom then married Ray Thomas Hopkins, who lived until 1970. Mom died in Weston on June 6, 2002, at age 86, and is buried near her parents and her two late husbands in the Orlando Cemetery. She was the last of Tom and Bridget's 11 children. Much of the information in this article came from a diary she kept from the time she was a child.

PATSY A. RECKART, a 1953 graduate of Burnsville High School, raised a family of her own and worked in various jobs before opening a craft shop and restaurant in Weston in 1980. She retired in 2005 and began writing regularly as a hobby. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

"I just want to make people happy"
Sculptor Mike Sizemore

By Jessica Lilly

Mountain Artworks is a studio in Mercer County that houses the unique flair, personality, passion, and dreams of metal sculptor Michael Sizemore. While this 50-year-old Oak Hill native's art business has been growing over the past 10 or so years, like many artists, he keeps his day job. And his occupation might surprise you.

"[I'm] a sewer plant operator for the municipality of Athens," Mike explains. "I think that we have one of the best-running sewer plants right here in southern West Virginia, right here in Athens, and we don't put up a lot of flags about that. We don't get a lot of awards. It's just one of those jobs you do."

With a theatrical flair, Mike Sizemore introduces visitors to the sculpture garden he's assembled at his Athens home. All photos by Jessica Lilly unless noted otherwise.

Growing up in Fayette County, Mike noticed a wafting, pungent smell in parts of the community during his time as a raft guide, his first job out of high school. "There was a really stinky place right below the New River Gorge Bridge when you would take out on the river trips. If you didn't take out at Fayette Station, you had to go on underneath the New River Gorge Bridge and take out at this other place," he says. "I remember there was the smelliest creek coming out of Fayetteville."

Its name? Stinky Creek.

Mike's plumbing roots go way back. Even before he discovered Stinky Creek, he grew up hearing about the days when indoor toilets were introduced. "My mother's father was a manager in the mines, so they were the first people in Whipple to have a flushing toilet. Ya know, everything else just went out to the creek," he laughs. "So it was a pretty big deal."

Mike's biggest influence as a sewer operator happened during the1970s while he was in elementary and middle school. He remembers the statewide effort to clean up the environment. "It's pretty amazing that we can take what flows out of your bathroom and your sink and your grinder, and everything that flows out of your house, [and] we can turn it into a drinkable product," Mike explains.

While he takes pride in managing the Athens sewer plant,

Mike's upbringing in Fayette County still inspires him. Here, he examines his sketch of the New River Gorge Bridge for a new piece of artwork.

his heart is in his artwork. You can find his metal-sculpture creations in public and private settings throughout West Virginia, and even as far away as Charlotte, North Carolina. With some pieces towering as tall as 30 feet, his work is featured at Tamarack in Beckley (since 1997) and has been accepted into the West Virginia Juried Exhibition.

"I do a lot of copper work, coppersmithing, not necessarily vessels, but I take that same process and make linear wall sculpture out of that," he explains.

It all started for Mike when his mom made his brothers and him go to school no matter what, even in what seemed like blizzard conditions to a kid. "My mother did not like us to miss school," Mike says. "I think it was a good way to get rid of us because we were hellions.

"We lived fairly close to the school. So you bundled up, and your butt was going to school—no ifs, ands, or buts about it. There weren't cell phones, so they couldn't text you and tell you that school was canceled, and maybe it just hit so quick that nobody knew or whatever.

"I went to school [one] day, and I was the only one in the class. Everybody else was home sleigh riding, but my butt was in school. . . . To give me something to do, [the teacher] brought me in one of those foot stools and gave me a box of chalk, and she told me to draw the solar system on the chalkboard. So I drew the solar system. It took me all day. What I really remember was coming into class the next day, and everybody was amazed at how cool it was. They brought in another chalkboard so they didn't have to erase it. Yeah, that felt pretty good."

That was the first time Mike realized he had something special to share. He also was inspired by his family in Roanoke, Virginia, and his somewhat infamous Aunt Leona. "She moved to Roanoke to work for the railroad," Mike notes, "and she was a horse—snuff-dipping, cigar-smoking, drinking, hard woman. But she was cool."

Mike's cousin Tom had a blacksmith shop in Aunt Leona's garage. That's where Mike heated up his first piece of metal.

As a middle schooler, a mischievous Mike was still looking for a way to leave his mark. "I remember seeing airbrushed T-shirts, and I'm thinking, 'I can do that.' [I'd] been graffiti painting all over Fayette County," Mike admits. "Why not take it down to a small scale and put it on a shirt? So yeah, let me say I did a fair amount of graffiti painting all around Oak Hill. Sorry, Mom and Dad. That was me."

Mike grew up, studied art at Concord College (now University), and then relocated across the country to be with the love of his life, Beth. He moved to New Mexico in 1987 and honed his craft, learning from some of the nation's best sculptors at Santa Fe's Dell Weston Studio Foundry.

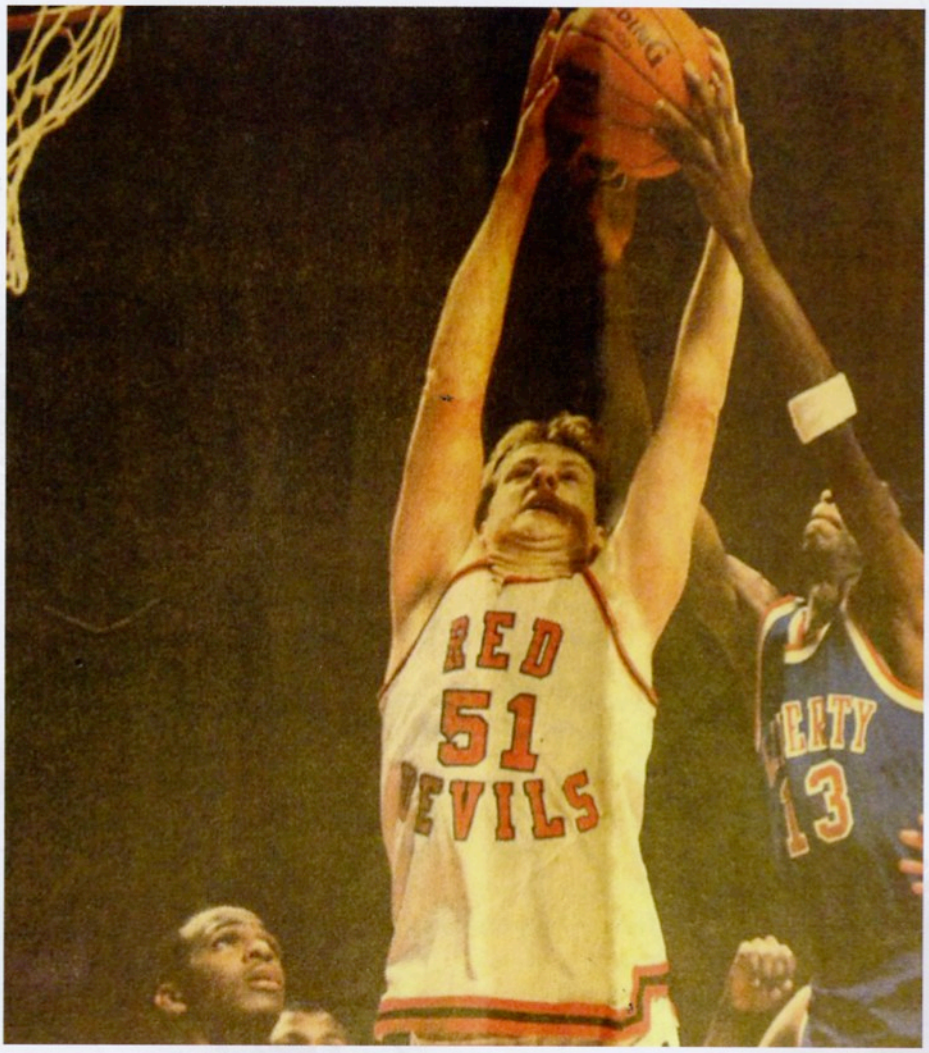
He also discovered petroglyphs, rock carvings left in the mountains by Pueblo Indians. "I would get on my mountain bike and go out to these things and spend hours," Mike says. "I was just mesmerized. . . . There's a language in that. So I would take photographs, or even take a piece of paper and do a rubbing of the petroglyph,

bring it back to the house, and turn that . . . design into sculpture."

He eventually brought that inspiration back to West Virginia and blended it with his affection for our state and its lush scenery. "Certain portions of society in West Virginia are realizing that you can survive here and not be a . . . coal miner," Mike says. "You can actually make a living, [but first] you have to get out of here somewhat to have the influence to make these items . . . whether it's painting or being a theater major or something. Go out and experience life."

It's not easy to make it in any profession in West Virginia, but Mike grew up learning to be resourceful. "Every exit ramp in Oak Hill was just full of bottles," Mike reminisces. "Remember when you could take bottles back and get three cents for them? Yeah, that was our job on Saturday morning. We'd steal a buggy from the A&P, or borrow it or whatever you want to call it because we always took it back, but we took it back full of bottles. Then we'd go inside and get the cardboard things to put the bottles in . . . because they didn't care how dirty they were or whatever. Then, when I wanted money, I'd go get bottles myself, with my friends."

When I look for clarification on the necessity of turning dirty bottles into money, Mike gets overwhelmed with emotion. He breaks down for a moment and steps away to find a tissue. For Mike, bottle collecting began around the age of eight, when he would go with his mom.



Mike channeled his teenage energy into art and even into basketball. The 6'7" center took Oak Hill to the AAA high school basketball finals in 1986, losing to Charleston's Stonewall Jackson, 73-64. Here, Mike battles Clarksburg Liberty's Julius Lockett for a rebound in the Red Devils' two-point semifinal win. Courtesy of Mike Sizemore.

"I just remember the struggle of it all. It was pretty tough, and that struggle got passed down to all of us," Mike explains as he wipes his nose. "It basically taught you if you want it, you gotta go get it. Gotta find a way to do it. Do it without breaking the law; my parents taught me that, too, which we didn't always succeed at," Mike chuckles.

Mike has deep roots in the region. On his father's side, his ancestors were Italian immigrants who came to America back in 1735. Family lore says he had Cherokee ancestors who lived in Clay County in the 1820s. His parents grew up in Fayette County, like Mike did. Even in the boom times, mining coal in southern West Virginia was a hardscrabble existence. He

As you can tell, Mike Sizemore has many talents, and his sense of humor might be at the top of the list.

quickly learned that bartering was a way of life.

"My parents did it on a fairly decent scale," Mike says. "They still do it to this day. They're antique collectors. . . . If you need your grass cut and this person wants a nice cabinet out back that my mom's been collecting for 20 years, she'll get her grass [cut] for the summer, and he'll get the cabinet."

Mike had several aunts and uncles growing up, and they would frequently bring their special skills into family projects to help one another. "They all lived in the same area," Mike recalls. "So Uncle Johnny was good at one craft, and my Aunt Jeannie was good at another craft (that's on my mother's side), and then my Uncle Ray and my Uncle Dink were both electricians in the mines as well as really great auto mechanics. And my dad was not good at that stuff. He was a college kid. He was the first Sizemore to go to college."

Mike learned, too, that cultivating skills such as plumbing can serve you well no matter what your passions in life are.

Inside his home, you'll find colorful walls adorned with paintings, eclectic colors, and metal sculptures. Relying on that time-honored tradition of bartering, Mike has collected hundreds of pieces of art by trading his own work. He shows me around and tells me the stories behind the items, each of which, including his own pieces, has a unique and special story. Some of his own designs come from dreams or visions that he re-creates in his Athens metal shop.

Mike admits that he used to underestimate himself and undervalue his work, but not anymore. "Many people like [that I can] actually take any metal [object] and turn it into something," Mike says. "There's a certain amount of pride that says, 'Yes, I can make that out of any metal you want, and I can make it to your liking, and I'm going to charge you this amount of money.'

"It's taken me a long time to get to that point because I just want to make people happy, and I do make people happy, but now it's just business coming into that fold."

You can follow Mountain Artworks on Facebook or Instagram or contact Mike personally at 304-384-9540 or wvgoose69@gmail.com.

JESSICA LILLY is host and Folklife Project Director of *Inside Appalachia*, a radio show and podcast by West Virginia Public Broadcasting that received a Regional Murrow Award in 2016. In 2015, she was named Alumnus of the Year by Concord University, where she launched the school's first FM radio station. She's been named Best News Anchor for the past three years by the Virginias Associated Press. She was also part of a team nominated for a regional Emmy Award for its coverage of our state's massive 2016 floods. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The log home of Walter and Edna Hauldren at The Sulphur in the Big Ugly area of Lincoln County. All photos courtesy of our author.

A Beautiful Place Called Ugly

By Lenore McComas Coberly

Big Ugly Creek in Lincoln County was a magical place to a heartbroken, lonely little girl. My father, Everette McComas, was killed in a gas-drilling accident in 1929, when I was four years old. My mother, Ida Hager McComas, was pregnant with my sister, Ruth Elaine. I cannot overstate the support given to us by the Baptist church, neighbors, and family, but this is a story about Big Ugly, not me.

My mother, Ida Hager McComas, was born in her Aunt Lena Ferrell's log house. Our family first came to Big Ugly when my mother's dad, Philip Hager, began harvesting timber in the area and floating it down the Guyandotte River to Huntington. He married Sarah Ferrell, who died young in 1902. Philip moved to Hamlin so his four young daughters could have access to a better education. Pearl and Madge later became teachers; Ida and Edna were in the first two graduating classes at Carroll District High School, in 1919 and 1920, respectively.

Edna had always longed to return to Big Ugly. She married Walter Hauldren and talked him into moving back there to teach. She later told me she could have talked him into anything and made him enjoy it. They moved into Lena's house, where I would find so much comfort.

When Mr. Hauldren began teaching at Lucas School on Big Ugly, he soon learned that most of his students were his wife's relatives. Walter's parents and six of his nine siblings became teachers—in Lincoln, Boone, Kanawha, and Putnam counties.

Our author's grandfather, Philip Hager, poses with his four daughters, about 1905. Edna, who'd later marry Walter Hauldren, is on her father's left knee. Philip had timber and other businesses in the Hamlin area and once served in the state senate.

In 1992, some 60 years later, Mayme Ferrell Wall still remembered Lucas School as one of the best experiences of her life. She recalled that Mr. Hauldren played games with the children and always wore a white shirt and tie. With tears in her eyes, she said, "He taught us to take pride in how we looked, and he taught us to read and to love reading." A retired teacher herself, Mayme added, "All I knew about teaching, I learned from him."

There were no rules about age at Big Ugly schools. When a child could get to school, Mr. Hauldren considered it a blessing. He had a natural love of children and saw education as the hope for these isolated families who, proud and industrious, wrested a living from those steep wild hills. After the WPA funded a road over Green Shoal Mountain in the 1930s, it was hardly passable for a car, and with no bridge across the creek, drivers had to ford near the schoolhouse. Cars in that part of Lincoln County were so rare that the schoolchildren were allowed to stop whatever they were doing and watch when one passed by. It wasn't unusual for the teacher to don a pair of wading boots and carry the children across the creek to school.

Mr. Hauldren's son Tom remembered starting school when he was three years old "because I was big enough to walk." Some of his fellow students were 18 or 20 years old. Despite the open-enrollment policy, it was hard to maintain the required 10 students for all of Big Ugly. When Mr. Hauldren began teaching at Lucas School, all of his wife's cousins who went to Fry School began walking the longer distance to Lucas. Fry School was closed.

His daughter Lena Jo Hauldren Blaine, who attended Lucas between 1930 and 1937, described a typical day at the school:

"We placed our lunches and coats in the back of the room and usually gathered around the potbellied stove until a bell was rung by hand. We had the Pledge of Allegiance and sometimes sang. A class usually went to the front of the room for their turn with the teacher. The lower classes went first for reading, and (then we) progressed through the eighth (grade). . . . We covered reading, spelling, and arithmetic during the morning and history and geography in the afternoon. Sometimes, we had health or science. We did our assignments at school (there was only oil lamplight at night), and when they were completed, we played many paper games or drew pictures and colored them. All quietly, of course!

"I do not remember being bored by a lack of something to do. If things did seem too slow, we might ask to bring in a bucket of coal or a fresh bucket of water. Or go to the *restroom*, which was located at the edge of the playground.

"Sometimes at recess, we went into the woods, and we'd swing on grapevines or climb trees to chase flying squirrels (which we never caught). We often fished at recess. In winter, we slid down a long hill by the school. Homemade sleds were [made] of boards with cleats nailed across. We played softball with a stick for a bat and a homemade ball of wound string. There was lots of jump rope."

Our author's uncle, Walter Hauldren, shown here in 1921, was a beloved teacher in Big Ugly.

For students who required more patience, Mr. Hauldren would prop them on his knee, help them recognize words, and count to 100. He'd often share his lunch with children who had just parched corn to eat. His usual lunch was made up of baked sweet or Irish potatoes and biscuits.

Not only a teacher, but a mentor, Mr. Hauldren helped people with all kinds of problems, writing letters and, not infrequently, reading for those who couldn't read for themselves. He even took responsibility for young people released on parole from prison—many of them had become embroiled in long-seething family feuds.

When he got to know the people on Big Ugly, he felt that many had no ambition or hope. At that time, a lot of people believed in superstitions, ghosts,

Our author's aunt, Lena Ferrell, taught the family about medicinal herbs and was a renowned quilter in Big Ugly. Photo by Taylor Studio.

and signs. Once, Aunt Lena saw Mr. Hauldren trimming one of his baby's toenails on a Sunday and scolded him that based on the Bible, it was better never to have been born than to cut toenails on the Sabbath. She later acknowledged that she couldn't find that passage in the Bible. And he once told a student that ghosts don't exist. She'd never been told that before, so he sent her to check the Bible. She was happy not to find any ghosts in the Good Book.

Steep hills rose all around Lena's L-shaped house, which was made of logs and rough-sawn wood. There were three rooms along the front, two of which opened onto a porch. The middle room was a pass-through between the larger rooms. The first room had a stone fireplace and big beds in the corners where the old people slept. The middle room was filled with two beds for children. The end room, where Edna and Walter slept with their younger children, had a window and a back door to the kitchen yard as well as the door to the front porch.

The kitchen had a #3 Burnside wood- or coal-burning stove, and water was accessible from a well. The outdoor toilet was some distance away down by the creek, and a wooden rail fence surrounded the yard and kitchen garden. The family kept cows, pigs, chickens, and sometimes geese and ducks.

With no electricity, sweeping was done with a broom. They would sprinkle water lightly over the floor before sweeping to keep dust from flying. Aunt Lena had a battery radio, which she wouldn't allow anyone else to turn on. She calculated carefully just when to turn on *Lum and Abner*, the *Grand Ole Opry*, and occasional news programs. She'd explain, "I'm saving juice," meaning battery power.

One of my favorite memories of Aunt Lena was taking her to the Keith-Albee Theatre in Huntington to see a movie featuring her favorite radio star, Will Rogers. We all found seats near the front. Early in the show, Rogers appeared on film in his long underwear. Horrified at the sight of a man—her favorite entertainer, no less—performing in his underwear, Lena stood up and pronounced loudly, "Let me out of here!" We all had to file out of the

theatre in her wake.

Lena's brother Clint was another great source of stories. He lived in Lena's house, split wood, and worked with Mr. Hauldren in the garden and hillside cornfields. Clint also made sorghum in the fall for all the people on the creek and sold it from farm to farm. We asked him often why he never got married. He'd tell us about the night he took a girl to a barn dance: "We walked back along the road along the creek. The moon was a-shining so bright, and there, by the creek, was a log. I asked her if we could sit down on the log. She smiled, sat down, and stretched out her leg. I said, 'What size shoes do you wear?'"

We laughed with delight and knew that no further explanation would be given. Despite never having his own children, he was the *most* loving man to young people I've ever known.

In 1936, the Hauldrens built a new log house at The Sulphur (named for the springs on the property). It had an upstairs with three bedrooms—and two bedrooms on the first floor for Aunt Lena and Uncle Clint. A flower-lined lane led to the sandy road that ran along the creek, and a beautiful garden in front provided all the vegetables the family needed. The log barn was across a small branch that ran into the creek, which provided water for ducks. Tobacco was their only cash crop except for ginseng, which they called *sang*. Once a year, agents came over the mountain and down the creek to buy the sang roots.

When medical emergencies arose, Walter and Edna turned to her sisters for help. Once, a ruptured appendix nearly took Lena Jo's life. They took her to St. Mary's Hospital in Huntington. Edna, who never left her child's side except during the surgery, credited the hospital nuns with saving Lena Jo's life. When their eldest son, Tom, was bitten by a dog, they sent the animal's head to Charleston for testing. They were told the dog wasn't rabid. Two weeks later, the sheriff informed them there'd been a mistake—the dog was rabid. They took the little boy to his Aunt Ida McComas' in Hamlin, where he underwent daily rabies shots for three weeks. He recovered with no permanent effects.

With all the hardships, you might expect some bad memories, but such is not the case. The hills, woods, and creek were beautiful, and the family knew the trees, birds, flowers, and wild animals. Daisies, honeysuckle, black-eyed Susans, and spring flowers were there for the picking. The woods yielded sassafras, pawpaws, persimmons, blackberries, and huckleberries. Lena taught Edna a great deal about medicinal herbs. Edna, well educated for her time, was also a skilled seamstress with considerable artistic talent. She designed and cut patterns for many quilts made along the creek.

Lena died at age 80 in 1941—10 days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Hauldren children, assorted cousins, and I sat up all night by the fire telling stories about her. Back then, the deceased were buried promptly in the hillside graveyard. Someone, usually Mr. Hauldren, would lead the singing and read scripture. There was no church on the creek, but traveling preachers often came and held services, including Lena's funeral.

On Decoration Day—the last Sunday in May—folks would gather for dinner at the foot of the graveyard hill behind Uncle Milt Ferrell's house. We'd eat vegetables, cornbread or biscuits, chicken, and fruit cobbler or stack cake. Relatives from Hamlin would bring coffee, cheese, light bread (yeast bread from the store), and the best-loved treat: baloney, in great hunks, to be sliced thick and eaten with bread and onions. With good pitch and a feeling for rhythm, Mr. Hauldren and a quartet would sing from a shaped-note book.

In 1938, the Hauldrens moved to Hamlin so the children could go to high school. Walter taught in Carroll District schools for several years and then began working for Bob Adkins, his brother-in-law and a Hamlin natural gas producer. Walter kept the books, solved problems at the wells, and often sought leases for drilling. Bob called him a good and honest man who could tell good stories [see "Bob Adkins: Lincoln County Gas Man" by our author, Summer 1992].

Lena Ferrell watches over Walter and Edna Hauldren's children about 1930: (left-right) Lena Jo, Tom, and Nelle.

Walter loved to tell stories and often used them in class to make a point. One was about a pig that got its tail caught in a mash barrel and had piglets, each with a little barrel on its tail. In telling this fable, he let the children know they would look and act less ridiculous in life if they avoided mash, stills, and whiskey.

Edna Hauldren died in 1989. Walter went on living in their Hamlin house, with help from his housekeeper, grandchildren, and friends. He appeared never to have made an enemy. He enlivened every occasion with his stories and humor. I got to visit Uncle Walter when he was in his late 90s, and he told me something he'd never told anyone before: "I never did drink or smoke. I never did gamble or fool around with women who weren't my wife. I went to church when I could and sang hymns. I never stole anything from anybody or got into a fight. But, I'll tell you, Lenore, I had a bad fault. I really loved clothes better than anything! I would be better dressed than anyone."

Walter Hauldren died on August 6, 1993, at age 96, and is buried next to Edna in Hamlin. Today, Big Ugly Creek remains a beautiful, but endangered, place. As economic depression threatens its people, I think back to a song we sang every morning at school: "Many were the visions bright which the future ne'er fulfilled, but how sunny were my daydreams on the West Virginia hills."

LENORE McCOMAS COBERLY is a native of Hamlin and a graduate of WVU. After completing an MBA at the University of Pittsburgh, she moved to Madison, Wisconsin, with her chemical engineer husband. At 93, she's a prolific writer and reader. In 2015, she released *For I Am Mountainborn*, a book of poetry, and just recently completed her memoir. This is her second contribution to GOLDENSEAL. Her previous article was in our Summer 1992 issue.

All photos by Susan Ray Brown.

Salt Rising Bread
A West Virginia Tradition

By Susan Ray Brown

Just like our rolling hills and winding rivers, our food memories root us West Virginians in a place and a time we cherish. They help us tell our stories of home. One of the most-beloved and best-remembered foods in many West Virginia homes is salt rising bread.

Katheryn Rippetoe Erwin, my grandmother, was famous in her Greenbrier County hometown of Ronceverte for the salt rising bread she lovingly made for her family and neighbors for more than 60 years. Though many people loved her salt rising bread, I claim the right to say that I loved it more than anyone. In fact, she used to tease me that I loved her salt rising bread so much because it had the same initials as my name. No doubt that my lifelong love affair with this unique bread grew both from the deliciousness of the bread and from the fact that my wonderful grandmother made it for me.

Just down the street from Grandmother, Mary Ellen Cobb also made salt rising bread, often donating it to her church for bake sales and other fund-

raisers. Mary Ellen won the first prize for salt rising bread at the West Virginia State Fair for several years. The prize was all of $6, but winning the prize for our state's best salt rising bread meant much more than its dollar value.

Not far away, in Durbin, Joyce Varner, like lots of women in Pocahontas County, made salt rising bread for over 40 years. Up in Harrison County, near Bridgeport, Alma Davis first made it when she was 76 years old. Her elderly mother wished to have some, so Alma taught herself to make it. Other women, like Velda Moore from western Monongalia County, are still making salt rising bread for their families and friends after 50 years of baking it.

The fact is many women in West Virginia and other areas of Appalachia have baked this bread for generations. It began in the late 1700s when pioneers learned to make it out of necessity to feed their families. At that time, commercial yeast wasn't yet available for bread making. The origin of this bread likely happened when a bowl of leftover flour and water used in cooking sat overnight by the warmth of the hearth or woodstove, leaving a bubbly mixture the next morning. The women discovered that this mixture made their dough rise. As the pioneers moved westward, the knowledge of how to make salt rising bread traveled with them, eventually making it as far west as California. To this day, many Californians still love salt rising bread, though it is harder and harder for them to find it.

Mary Ellen Cobb of Greenbrier County displays the ribbons she's won over the years for best salt rising bread at the West Virginia State Fair.

Chances are the traveling pioneers ate their salt rising bread without much adornment. But in homes, especially in years to come, people found many ways to enjoy it. In our mountains, some people like to soak their bread with hot coffee, then pour cream and sugar over it. Some also add a slice of cheese on top. They call this "bread and coffee." Another fond way of eating salt rising bread is with tomato gravy poured over the toast. Others like making grilled cheese sandwiches with the bread or using it in turkey stuffing for the holidays. But, by far, the preferred way to

Salt Rising Bread Stories

Just as there are favorite ways to eat salt rising bread, there are also favorite stories about it. Here are just a few that have been sent to me:

•Soda in salt rising bread is a hotly debated topic around these parts (southern West Virginia). I'm not sure what would happen to me if I used soda, but I know curses would rain down on me. As I think about it, this is the only strong belief in my family. I left West Virginia in 1969 to go to school in Atlanta. My grandmother would mail me salt rising bread and butter. I don't know why she sent the butter; they had butter in Atlanta. The smell of salt rising bread made for some interesting comments. Mom, also, used to make this bread and give it to our neighbors. They would eat it as dessert. Grandma would use a huge darning needle to get the air bubbles out of the dough. After it came out of the oven, she would brush butter on the loaves, then wrap them in butter-soaked cloth, and put them back in the pans for the butter to soak in. Might be time to get that recipe out!

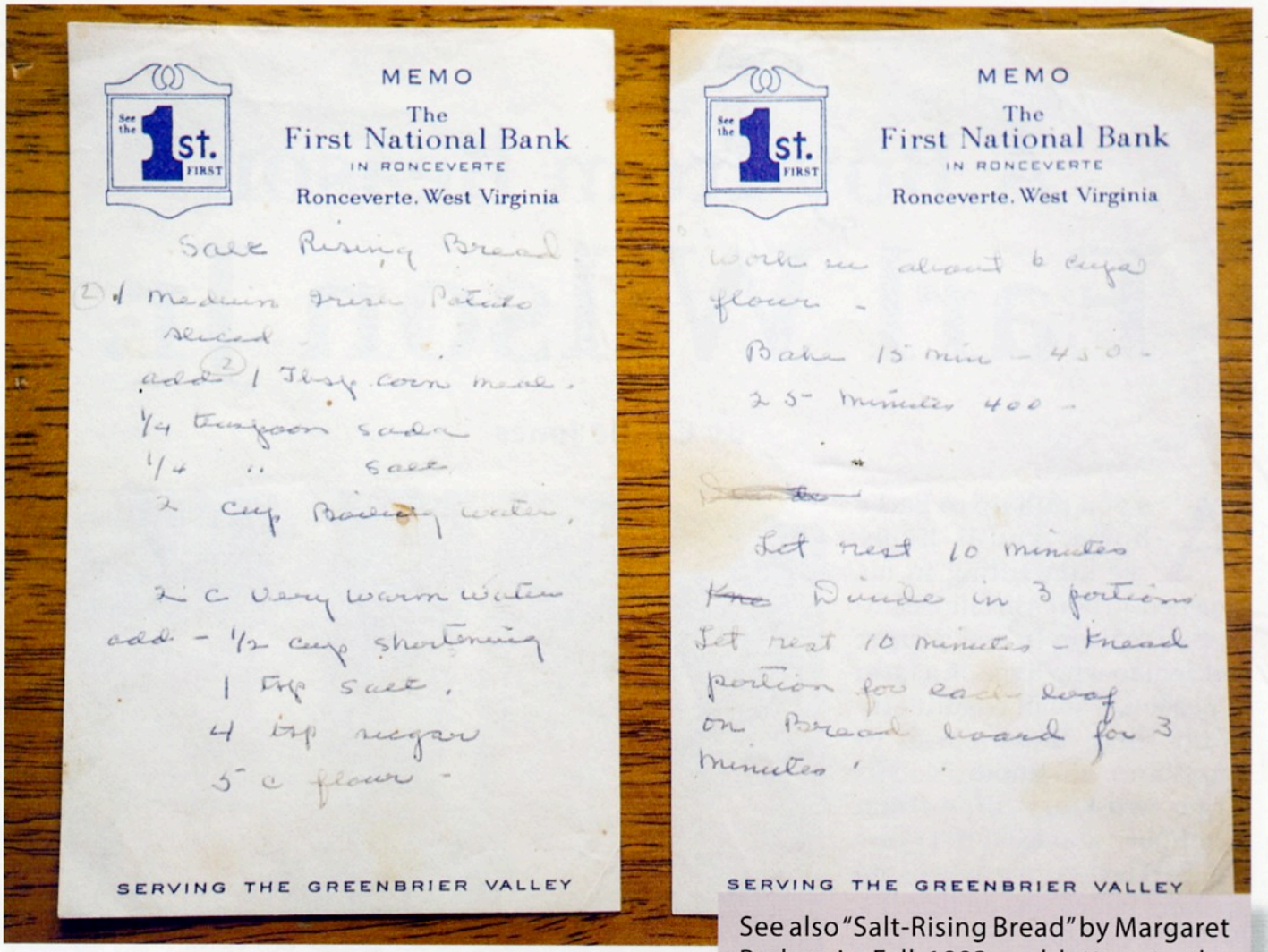
•My family lived in Job (Randolph County) in the '30s and '40s. My father worked in the coal mines and was often away for weeks at a time. It was during these times that my three sisters and I enjoyed my mother's salt rising bread. My father objected to the distinct aroma the salt rising bread had and forbade my mother from making it when he was home. He even had the audacity to refer to this delicious bread as "stink" bread. Try the bread toasted with fresh butter and tomatoes out of the garden—heavenly!!

•My mother got on a kick in the 1970s of making salt rising bread. The recipe she used was from a neighbor. Its wonderful aroma filled the house in late August and September, when the tomatoes were ripening, whetting our appetites for bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwiches. What an excellent combination the flavors made! Mom did a lot of canning—tomatoes, chili sauce, and pickles. One year, she decided to make some homemade ketchup, too, which was indescribably yummy! I decided to try it on toasted and buttered salt rising bread, as one might apply jam. Wow, what a treat for my palate with the pungent salt rising bread flavor mixing with the slightly cinnamon flavor of the ketchup!!!

•I grew up fond of salt rising bread. It may have been as much about the ritual and the magic as the taste. My grandmother would always wait for a hot, sunny spell to make the bread. She would set [it] to rise on the back lawn under a red-and-white checkered dish towel. Unlike both her conventionally leavened and quick breads, this seemed like alchemy to a kid. A pinch of soda, that potato starch, and the accompanying odd aroma (as her recipe card says, "If it does not have that odd odor, don't use"). Somehow, in the hot sun, the magic always happened. She insisted on slicing it very thinly.

•I grew up in West Virginia eating salt rising bread. You knew it would be good if when you walked into the baker's house, it would smell of "dirty socks." The worse the smell, the better the bread. The best way to eat it was to toast it. We always slathered it with butter. None of that "Pollyanna" sweet cream butter but that "harsh" butter from milk that had soured a bit and then was churned.

•My Aunt Nell and Uncle Rube lived on Pittsburgh Avenue in Fairmont during the war years of the '40s. They supplemented their income by baking and selling salt rising bread. I lived with them in East Fairmont, and, twice a week, for several years, my Aunt Nell would start in the very early morning making her bread. She would fill a laundry basket with warm bread, and by 6:00 a.m., my Uncle Rube and I would carry it to a food store located near the East Side Theater. Her bread was so well known that a line would form waiting for our delivery, and it was gone within minutes. She died in 1943, and I have not had any since.



MEMO
The
First National Bank
IN RONCEVERTE
Ronceverte, West Virginia

Salt Rising Bread
2 c Medium Irish Potato
sliced
add 2 1 Tbsp corn meal
1/4 teaspoon soda
1/4 " salt
2 cup Boiling water,

2 c very warm water
add - 1/2 cup shortening
1 Tsp salt,
4 tsp sugar
5 c flour -

SERVING THE GREENBRIER VALLEY

MEMO
The
First National Bank
IN RONCEVERTE
Ronceverte, West Virginia

Work in about 6 cups
flour -
Bake 15 min - 450 -
25 minutes 400 -

~~Too~~

Let rest 10 minutes
~~Knead~~ Divide in 3 portions
Let rest 10 minutes - Knead
portion for each loaf
on Bread board for 3
minutes.

SERVING THE GREENBRIER VALLEY

The salt rising bread recipe of our author's grandmother, Katheryn Rippetoe Erwin.

See also "Salt-Rising Bread" by Margaret Barlow in Fall 1993 and letters to the editor in Winter 1993.

eat salt rising bread is simply toasted with butter.

So, just what is it about salt rising bread that has compelled generations of grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and friends to persevere and pass on this often difficult and always time-consuming tradition to one another for over 200 years? The answer varies from baker to baker. But one answer stays constant: They did it to nourish body and soul.

Nourishment for the body is understandable. But this bread nourishes souls, as well. No matter who you ask, if they have eaten salt rising bread, they have a story to tell you about it. It might be about the "stinkyness" of the bread, or anxiously waiting until early morning to see if the starter worked overnight, or eating the toast with butter on a cold winter evening to soothe an upset stomach. In the end, it's all about the memories that keep us tied to those we have loved.

When I'm missing my grandmother and wishing we were once again sitting together, talking or singing on her back porch, I like to recall going to her house nearly 40 years ago on Saturday mornings to have breakfast with her. The alluring aroma of fried bacon, eggs over easy, and toasted salt rising bread led me straight through her kitchen door to my seat beside her at the table. Today, with a tear in my eye and a lump in my throat, I remember those breakfasts as if they were yesterday, and I miss her even more.

SUSAN RAY BROWN has a website dedicated to her favorite subject: www.saltrisingbread.net. Susan and Genevieve Bardwell are the authors of *Salt Rising Bread: Recipes and Heartfelt Stories of a Nearly Lost Appalachian Tradition* (St. Lynn's Press). It can be purchased online, at Tamarack in Beckley, or at Taylor Books in Charleston. Salt rising bread is baked and shipped daily at Rising Creek Bakery: risingcreekbakery.com. You can contact Susan at srbwva@gmail.com. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

A Boy from Beason
Earl Wilson Jr.

By Carole Jones

As you pull up to Earl's home, you'll likely see him sitting in his screened-in porch in fair weather. Earl Wilson Jr. is a dapper gentleman who lives on a farm in Beason, a small community about three miles south of Pennsboro on Route 74. His large two-story nine-room farmhouse is at least 100 years old. Earl was born in one of the upstairs bedrooms on June 13, 1929. He believes that Dr. Lief Walton (1888 – 1956) delivered him into this world. A lot of older folks in Pennsboro likely will remember Doc Walton.

Earl was born three months after Herbert Hoover became president and four months before the stock market came crashing down. Earl's family fared relatively well during the Great Depression as many farmers were about as close to self-sufficient as one can get. Earl says his father went to the Bank of Pennsboro to get his money out, and there was $16 in the account. But, he quickly interjects, "$16 was not a bad sum of money in 1929." Many weren't so lucky and lost some or all of what they had. Earl recalls his father giving food to those less fortunate in the '30s.

Earl Wilson Jr., 89, with his cousin Jean Moore in Beason. Photo by Carole Jones.

The 300-acre farm at Beason sustained the Wilsons through the hard times and the good. One day, Earl's mother came back from the store upset because her groceries came to more than $5. She had bought the few items they couldn't raise in their own huge gardens; the Wilsons grew corn, wheat, soybeans, green beans, and potatoes, to name just a few crops.

Earl was the first-born child of Earl and Rebecca Jane Elder Wilson, who he describes as "an angel." His paternal grandparents, Leamon and Isabella Wilson, once lived in Earl's home. Earl was soon joined

by baby sisters Mabel Staggers (deceased) and Annabelle Day, who now lives in Missouri.

The Wilsons were no strangers to work. Earl says, "I could never convey to anyone how hard I worked when I was a kid. When I was four or five years old, I was milking cows." They had about 25 of them and sold the cream to the Carnation plant near Clarksburg. In addition, they sometimes had up to 100 head of beef cattle. "We had sheep," Earl notes. "[We] sold the wool plus lots of chickens and eggs to Hathaway Hatchery near Harrisville. We had horses and pigs, too." Earl also helped put up hay, hoe corn, and cut grass with scythes, regardless of how hot it was.

"There was no tractor until years later. Mabel and Annabelle also worked like dogs in the house," he says. "While we were working in the fields, Mom and my sisters would bring us lunch in big picnic baskets. A tablecloth was spread on the ground. Lunch consisted of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, and green beans. We ate on real plates and used silverware. There were no sandwiches, either." In the fall, the women could can 50 quarts of vegetables at a whack.

The cows made good use of Little Beason Creek, which runs right through the farm. But the creek was also the hub of a large rural playground. "We used to go swimming in the creek," Earl recalls. "On Sunday afternoons, there could be as many as 50 kids down there." They used the flat fields behind the house for baseball games and, every July, picked huckleberries on the hill behind the house. Earl also took turns riding bikes with Myles Lamm (born on the same day as Earl).

Earl's parents, Earl Sr. and Rebecca Elder Wilson. Courtesy of our author.

Earl remembers Christmas fondly. The three Wilson children usually received two or three gifts each. "One Christmas," says Earl, "I got a pocketknife and a football, but I did lose the knife the same day—somewhere around the barn." Another Christmas, he got a nice wagon from Santa, but Earl says he got suspicious "when I saw [wagon] tracks going from the barn to the house." The Wilsons usually bought their Christmas trees because there were none on the farm, but the decorations were all made by hand.

Earl started first grade at Pennsboro Grade School in 1935. The school had two buildings: one with first and second grades and a cafeteria and the other with grades three through six and the office, occupied by Principal Denton Hall. The playground had a big, wooden merry-go-round, teeter-totters, and wonderfully heavy swings. Lunch in the cafeteria was nutritious and stuck to your ribs. Back then, no one had junk food. Earl says he was never spanked at school or home, yet he was afraid to do anything he wasn't supposed to do.

The bus ride to school was an adventure in itself. At that time, the road was only about nine feet wide. "If the bus met anyone, they had to get off the road," he says.

Ora McDougal, his second cousin, was his first teacher. "Miss Ora," as everyone called her, lived up in a large two-story house in McDougal Holler. There was a six-acre apple orchard behind the house. Every day, Ora's father, John McDougal, brought one or two bushels of apples to school for her to give out to the well-behaved children.

Earl jokes that his favorite subject was recess but admits that he really loved math. By the time he started first grade, Earl already knew his ABCs and could read a little because his father constantly read the newspaper to him. His second-grade teacher was Myrtle Collins, who was still teaching when I went there. She was the most creative and loving teacher I ever met. For instance, when you learned to count to 1,000, you could go to the drugstore, and she would buy you any Little Golden Book you wanted.

Earl recalls one school memory that was a bit humbling. "In grade school, they had music once a week. We were singing one time, and the teacher was walking back and forth. After class, she asked me to stay. She told me the next time we sing, she just wanted me to move my lips. I didn't have to sing anymore," he says.

On Halloween, Earl and his friends never went trick-or-treating (it's difficult going from house to house when you live out in the country). So, the kids found other ways to amuse themselves. One Halloween, some guys led a cow up the school stairs and left it in the office. When Principal Hall came in the next day, everything was covered in manure. Neither Earl nor Myles knew who did it, so the culprits got away with the prank (unless anyone wants to 'fess up now, some 80 years later).

In 1940, Earl entered seventh grade at Pennsboro High School, a short walk from the grade school but a very big leap towards adulthood. Earl says of Principal "Pop" Sullivan, "He was quite an amazing man. He was also exacting and punitive. One day, my cousin Jim and two or three other guys and I went on a field trip. We had taken the fence down along the road and had the wire all rolled up and the posts all stacked up. . . . We rolled the fence back in the road, put the posts back in the road, and [an] owner called 'Pop' Sullivan. He had to go back up there and clean it up by himself. He kept the three of us in his office for a week—just sitting there. He never said a thing to us, just walked by and looked at us. We felt very small. Finally, Friday came, and he said, 'Ok, you guys today are gonna walk back along that road and apologize to all those people.' So, we decided who was gonna do what. I had three people I was supposed to apologize to, but none of them were home."

Earl says he didn't date much but did love a girl from afar. "I loved her all my life, but she never knew it," he says. To this day, he keeps her name a secret.

Earl attended football games at Myles Stadium and saw movies at the Penn Theater. In 1947, he graduated from Pennsboro High, ready to take on new challenges. He went to the two-year Potomac State College in Keyser to study agriculture and then continued his studies at West Virginia University. "I should have graduated in 1951," he notes. "But I was home for Christmas [my senior] year, and my mother and I stopped by the courthouse in Harrisville to see when I was going to be drafted. The Korean War was in full swing then. The receptionist couldn't find my number." She told him his draft notice had been mailed out the day before. An Air Force recruiter was sitting there and asked if Earl had been drafted yet. Earl replied that he hadn't, so he enlisted before actually receiving his draft notice.

The next week, he was at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and then was transferred to Otis Air Force Base in Massachusetts, where he served as "morning report clerk" for two years. During that time, he met his future wife, Theresa Riordan of Boston. After his stint in the Air Force, he and Theresa returned to West Virginia, and he graduated from WVU in 1953. For the next 32 years, he taught at the Bristol County (Virginia) Agricultural School, retiring in 1985. He and his students would spend half the day in

Earl Wilson Jr.'s house in Beason, where he was born in 1929 and eventually returned to. Photo by Carole Jones.

class and the other half working with animals.

Earl and Theresa had six children: Rebecca Jane, Elizabeth Jean, Earl III, Teresa (Terry) Eileen, Patricia Ann, and Michael Allen. Earl's growing family forced him to take on a second job at a mill that dyed yarn. He served as the plant's manager and maintenance supervisor for almost 20 years. He later worked for a masonry contractor, laying pavement, building stone walls and fireplaces, and doing almost anything else related to bricks and mortar.

The extra money helped put all his children through college; although, each received a scholarship to help defray expenses. Earl says, "It cost a lot of money—everything I made for years—but I have no regrets. They are all good kids, never in trouble."

Earl and Theresa divorced several years ago, and he moved back to Beason. "My biggest mistake," Earl reflects, "was leaving the farm, but I did, and I accept the way it worked out. I'm proud of all my kids. There's nothing like being back in West Virginia. I wish I had done it 10 years ago. I'm here, and it's good."

In Beason, many things seem similar to Earl. His house looks the same. The beautiful meadows and hills are still unchanged by time. But Earl laments how much life has changed, "People aren't like they used to be. We'd go to [the Beacon Methodist Church] on Sunday, and usually we'd bring some family home with us for dinner. Or the people from down the road used to come up every evening, and we'd sit out on the porch and tell stories. Sometimes, they'd tell ghost stories, and I'd be scared to death. People don't visit that much anymore. Everyone's too busy with their electronic toys."

But Earl is much loved and cared for. A neighbor, Brenda Dodd, stops by nearly every day to check on his food supply, make a list of what he needs, and clean his house. Meals on Wheels delivers his lunch during the week. His daughter Terry and others make sure Earl makes it to his doctor appointments. I visited him three times last year and hope to go again soon. Perhaps I will even tell him some ghost stories.

Thomas Wolfe observed "you can't go home again" because everything is always changing. But if you're willing to adapt—in yourself and toward others—it doesn't matter. What doesn't change is one's love of family and friends, and there's no better proof of that than Earl Wilson Jr. Here's a man who's lived nearly nine decades, served his country proudly, been married and divorced, has six children and 16 grandchildren, and taught agriculture for more than 30 years. Throughout it all, he's charted his own course, which has led him back to this old home in Beason. So, yes, I guess you can come home again.

CAROLE JONES is a Ritchie County native who writes about West Virginia people. A graduate of WVU, she's an award-winning cook, baker, and nurse. She resides near Parkersburg. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Rockyside

A Forgotten Mining Community

By Tom Zielinsky

High atop a barren Hancock County hillside overlooking the Ohio River is the old community of Rockyside. The town started with the discovery of clay in 1830 near the mouth of Holberts Run, just south of New Cumberland. For nearly two years, James Porter and Thomas Freeman dug clay and shipped it by barge to brickyards in Pittsburgh. Two years later, Porter and Freeman started making their own bricks, which were shipped upriver. Many of Porter and Freeman's bricks became the building blocks of modern Pittsburgh and its burgeoning steel and iron factories. And that's how Freeman's Brickyard—the first of many in the area—was born.

Brickyards, like the Eagle and Union yards (shown here), once lined the Ohio River in Hancock County. All photos courtesy of our author.

While most West Virginians typically associate mining solely with coal, Hancock County was a regional center for mining clay, the most important element in brick making. The area had two specific forms of clay, Kittanning and Clarion, which were slightly different but contained a common property: flint. Kittanning clay worked better for making construction and paving bricks, while Clarion was better suited for sewer pipe. Both could be vitrified, or made into a glassy substance, by heating them at high temperatures.

Over the next 12 years, five additional brickyards were established, tapping into local clay mines and stretching from the south end of New Cumberland to the mouth of Kings Creek near present Weirton. In 1837, Hancock County produced some 200,000 bricks just for the Pittsburgh market alone.

By the mid-1840s, the nearly 2½ miles of land hugging the Ohio River south of New Cumberland had become prime real estate for developers. The Northern Panhandle's brickyard revolution was in full swing.

Around 1870, Isaac Evans and F. Shane entered into a partnership and began building the Rockyside Brickyard plant

In this rare photo of Rockyside, notice how duplex-style brick houses (beneath the arrows) were built on the hill just above the brickyard.

roughly 1¼ miles north of New Cumberland. The growth of the brickyards demanded far more workers than New Cumberland could supply. Captain John Porter, one of the pioneering brickyard developers, began recruiting immigrants from eastern Europe, namely Russians and Czechs from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. These newly arrived laborers needed places to live close to the brickyards, so houses were built on the hillside directly above and slightly south of the Rockyside Brickyard. At the time, brick making and clay mining were strictly jobs for men, so the houses were available only to single men.

In the late 1860s and 1870s, small wooden buildings gradually were erected. Then, as more men came into the area, a very large wooden building, known as the *barracks*, was constructed. It could house nearly 200 men. The workers ate their meals in a somewhat smaller building. Then, in the late-1880s, duplex-style brick homes were built to house married couples.

At one time, nearly 300 people lived in Rockyside, including both of my parents and their parents. They had no modern conveniences or running water, only springhouses and wells; although, the spacious outhouses could accommodate several people at once. There were no phones, and the closest general store was nearly two miles away in New Cumberland. As a result, just about every family planted gardens and raised cows, chickens, rabbits, horses, or mules. Despite this hardscrabble life, the workers and their families did, however, have one another. Even though times were tough, they managed by sharing what they had with their neighbors.

As the youth population grew, a one-room school was added. It housed eight grades, each with a separate row of desks. Since most of the immigrants were Catholic, a small Catholic church was built on top of the hill in 1904. In 1920, Father Francis Olszewski became the permanent priest of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in New Cumberland. He renovated an old boarding house into a Catholic mission school. Initially, some of the students had to walk more than two miles from Rockyside to attend the new school. For the sake of modern conveniences and closer access to the school, the men who worked in the brickyards and clay mines eventually started relocating to New Cumberland with their families.

Meanwhile, new brickyards continued popping up, with a total of seven just south of New Cumberland toward modern Weirton: Freeman's Landing (the first), Black-Horse, West Virginia Fire Clay, Claymont, Anderson Brothers, Sligo, and Lone Star; by 1904, though, nearly all the brickyards south of New Cumberland had closed. The owners of West Virginia Fire Clay, which had started as a brickyard, discovered they could make more money by serving as a clay distribution center. West Virginia Fire Clay remained open until 1963, serving both the Crescent and Union brickyards and shipping directly to out-of-state users.

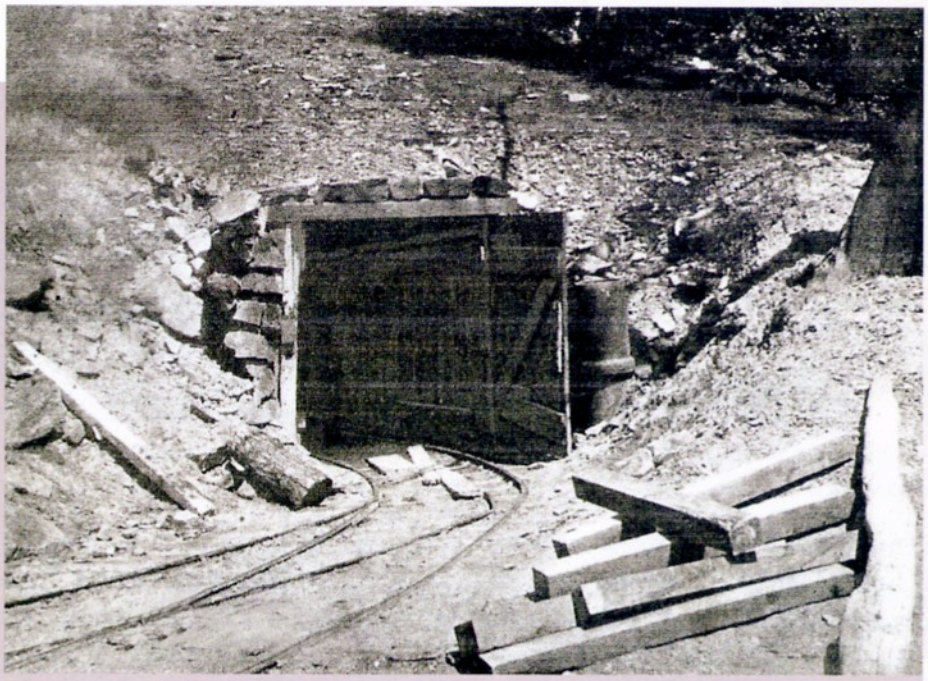
There were another eight plants to the north, between New Cumberland and New-

Clay Mines

Clay mines were always opened very near the brickyards; Hancock County was unique in having all these mines located in close proximity to the Ohio River. In the mines, the clay was found on the bottom, topped by a layer of coal, then a large layer of sandstone, followed by several feet of earthen shale and dirt. Because of this layering, the mines were dug at an angle from the river bottom to the top of the hill. The clay was brought out of the mines in railcars powered only by gravity, pulled by mules to the various tipples, and then dumped near its respective brickyard.

Clay mines contain an enormous amount of water, which will drain forever. This is still evident in a number of areas. Today, all the mines have been closed and sealed with the exception of the Globe, Rockyside, and Etna #2. Small openings are still in place at the Globe and Rockyside mines, but without knowing exactly where these openings are located, they would be hard to locate. The Etna #2 mine is completely opened but extremely difficult to find. It's in an area roughly 1½ miles up a steep hillside situated deep in a very rugged ravine. –Tom Zielinsky

See our Spring 1986 issue for a photo essay on sand mining.

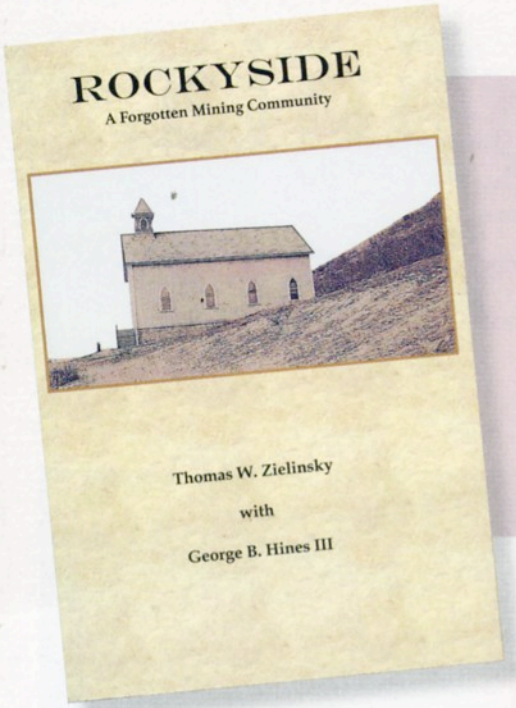


Entrance to the Crescent Mine, which provided clay to the Crescent Brickyard, just outside New Cumberland.

ell. Some tended to come and go—often due to fire. The Cunningham and Taylor plant, started in 1880, was in operation only for a couple of years. It completely burned down and was never rebuilt. The first Globe Brickyard started as the Standard Fire Brick Company before changing its name. Captain John Porter and his brother James, who owned this plant, kept it separate from the other brickyards. Sometime between 1904 and 1906, the Globe burned down and was never rebuilt. Captain Porter then purchased property just south of Newell, started a new brickyard, and also named it Globe. The new Globe Brick Company began operations in 1909. This plant would change ownership several times before finally closing in 1986.

In 1894, Mack Manufacturing of Philadelphia purchased all the brick-making operations immediately north of New Cumberland and one south of town. Mack paid its workers a daily rate of $1.50 for clay mining and $1.75 for brickyard work. Sometime around 1915, Mack changed its pay rates from daily to hourly. Mack invested heavily in mechanized equipment and installed two steam shovels. By 1920, though, the brick business was slowing down, and the brickyards and mines had become financial burdens. So, Mack sold its interests to Wheeling

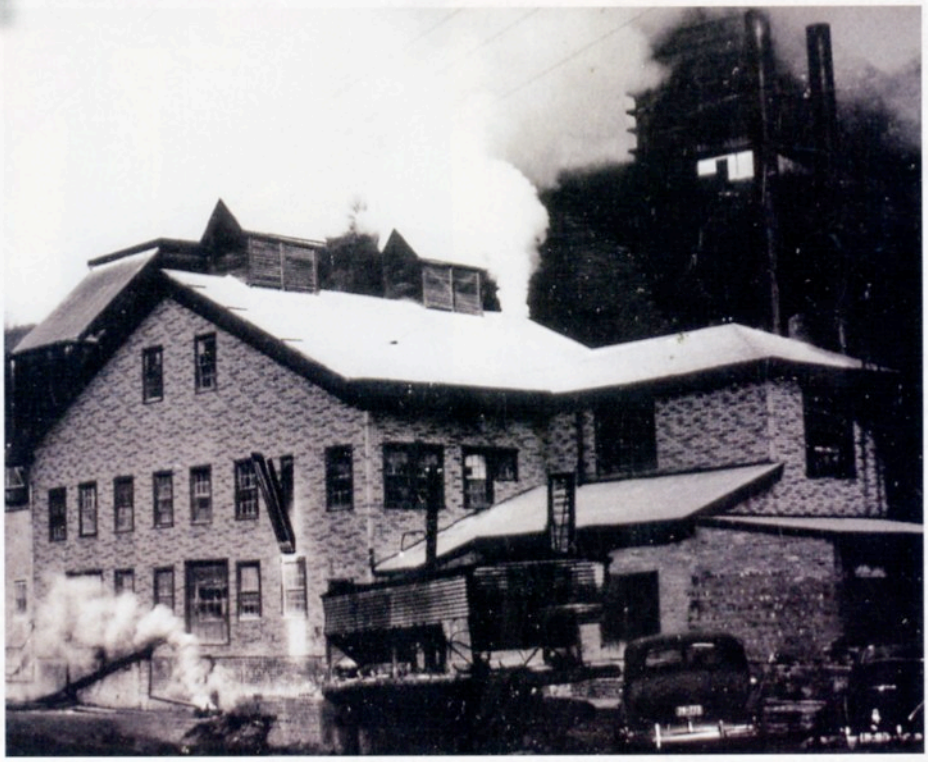
You can see a painting of Rockyside by Jim Watson on display at the Swaney Memorial Library in New Cumberland.



Our author and George B. Hines III have published the book *Rockyside—A Forgotten Mining Community*, which examines this topic in more depth. It describes how clay is mined, how brickyards were constructed, and how bricks were made. It looks at 150 years of brick making and clay mining in Hancock County (1830 - 1980), detailing each brickyard, the type of equipment used, and whether the yard produced bricks or sewer pipe. The book, which contains more than 250 photos and illustrations, can be purchased for $20 from TZielinsky Publishing LLC, 340 Country Club Boulevard, Weirton, WV 26062.

Capital. In 1924, W. A. Bonitz of Pittsburgh purchased the remaining assets and consolidated the group of companies under a single name: Crescent Brick Company.

Crescent Brick continued operating with just two brickyards: Crescent and Union. The Crescent Brickyard was just outside the New Cumberland city limits, while the Union yard was over a mile farther north. Crescent continued making bricks until 1965, when it finally closed. The Union Brickyard stayed in operation until 1979, when the last clay mine was closed and sealed. Its brick operations ceased the following year. Union's clay crusher building is the only structure remaining from Hancock County's brick-making glory days; the remains of the rest have been buried with the exception of a few small brick foundations.



The Union clay crusher building, shown here about 1940, is one of the few old brick-making structures in Hancock County still standing.

TOM ZIELINSKY was born in Steubenville, Ohio, and raised in New Cumberland. After 33 years of service, he retired in 2003 as Senior Director of Information Strategy for Weirton Steel Corporation and retired again in 2013 as technology director for the Hancock County Commission. He has degrees in electronic engineering, computer science, and an MBA from Franciscan University in Steubenville. His first book, *The Final Days of Weirton Steel*, was published in 2010. He resides in Weirton with his wife, Patty. They have four children, 10 grandchildren, and one great-grandson. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

A West Virginia Teacher in Space

By Melanie Vickers

On January 28, 1986, the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded seconds after liftoff. Six astronauts and classroom teacher Christa McAuliffe perished that day. I had wanted to be the teacher riding atop that rocket. It's been more than 30 years now, and children and adults still ask me, "Aren't you glad it wasn't you?"

How did I get close to being on that tragic space mission? It all began in August 1984, when I heard President Ronald Reagan announce, "One of America's finest, a teacher, would be the first private citizen to fly in space."

Kanawha County educator Melanie Vickers poses in the space shuttle captain's seat. All photos courtesy of our author unless noted otherwise.

I believe teaching is the most important profession in our country. In 1984, as a teacher at Saint Albans Junior High School, I got excited thinking about the thrill of space travel and how much I wanted to represent teachers everywhere.

In December, I spotted a flyer from NASA at our school—in the office garbage can. I grabbed it, pulled a stamp from my wallet, and dropped it in the mail. The thick application arrived. For weeks, I wrote and rewrote eight essays and developed a project I would teach from space. My family left notes around the house: a space shuttle drawing with me in the pilot's seat, pictures from our trip to the Kennedy Space Center, and a sign reading "Do Not Disturb—Astronaut at Work."

My spirits took flight in March when I made the state finals. I videotaped an interview with West Virginia judges and passed physical and psychological tests. In April, my principal called me into his office and said, "You better sit down." I leaped in the air when he said that I and a teacher from Parkersburg had been selected as the West Virginia Teacher in Space candidates. The other Mountaineer chosen was Niki Wenger of Parkersburg's Vandevender Junior High. I felt like I could soar all the way to the national competition in June.

At Washington's L'Enfant Hotel, NASA rolled out the red carpet for the 114 teacher candidates (from more than 11,000 applications). At our welcome

dinner, the head of NASA said 10 finalists would be chosen and then narrowed down to one. I felt like I'd already won.

Challenger pilot Mike Smith presented slides on the six-day work schedule for 51-L, the shuttle program's 25th flight. Astronauts Judy Resnik and Joe Allen spoke about their earlier flights and how standing on the space arm outside the shuttle felt like being on the world's highest diving board.

NASA divided us into four groups. I was in the *Challenger* group, and so was Christa McAuliffe. She and I were social studies teachers in our mid-30s and married with young children. Her friendly smile and New England accent caught my attention.

Scientists presented sessions on how to eat, sleep, and use the bathroom in space. I attended press conferences; took lessons on the international space program, planetary sciences, and satellites; and was certified to be a moon-rock specialist. A reception was held at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, where we viewed the IMAX movie *The Dream is Alive*. It was magical. But the goosebumps came when in the East Room of the White House, I heard, "Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the United States." All of a sudden, Ronald Reagan was standing right in front of me.

Each teacher interviewed with two superstar judges. My insides shook before meeting Esteban Seriano, a nationally known educator, and *Apollo 17* astronaut Harrison Schmitt (now the last living astronaut from our nation's last trip to the moon). Their friendly smiles and warm handshakes put me at ease.

The final day, I graduated and received a 50-pound canvas bag of space science materials. The week had made me feel like E.T., extraordinary teacher. The next day, I was disappointed to learn I hadn't made the top 10 but was excited to find out Niki had made the cut. In July, the 10 teachers went through another round of testing and interviews.

At the White House in July, Vice President George H. W. Bush announced that Christa McAuliffe would become the first teacher and civilian in space, with Idaho teacher Barbara Morgan as her backup. The eight other finalists received positions at NASA centers. Niki worked out of Langley Research Center in her area of expertise: gifted and talented students.

The rest of us became space ambassadors. On nights and weekends, I took to the roads of West Virginia. From preschool classrooms to colleges, teachers' organizations, libraries, businesses, and civic groups, everyone was eager to learn about space. I joined the West Virginia Civil Air Patrol and taught student aviation.

On January 20, 1986, NASA flew all of us space ambassadors to Cape Canaveral for the *Challenger* launch. We all hugged like long-lost friends. NASA drove us close to Launchpad 31-B. I was mesmerized envisioning Christa perched in the shuttle, nose to the stars. In reality, she and her crew members were in quarantine. Dust storms on

Melanie Vickers (waving to the camera) and her fellow Teachers in Space.

a foreign landing strip, bad weather, and a broken door lock had forced NASA to delay the launch from January 22 to 26 and then yet another day.

I'd recently transitioned from the classroom to become principal of Watts Elementary in Charleston. My school responsibilities were important. I and many of the other teachers flew back to our homes on Super Bowl Sunday, the 26th.

When I arrived at school on Tuesday, January 28, the countdown clock had started. "We're going today," Christa said, giving a thumbs-up to the press. The clock stopped as teams hurried to clear icicles from the launch pad. At the first lunch bell, I hurried into the cafeteria, where our kindergarten teacher grabbed my arms. Her face was pale white, as her voice shook, "You're not going to believe what happened."

I ran to the TV. *Challenger* had launched at 11:38 a.m. I stared at the white clouds shaped like a pitchfork that hung in the powder-blue sky. A hollow-sounding voice said, "Controllers are looking very closely at the situation. Obviously, a major malfunction. The vehicle has exploded."

"This can't be real," I said to the teacher. "They have to still be alive."

The nightmare was real. Seventy-three seconds after launch, the space shuttle had ripped apart in the skies over Florida. The worst had happened. Christa, Dick Scobee, Mike Smith, Judy Resnick, El Onizuka, Ron McNair, and Greg Jarvis were all gone. My throat burned, and tears filled my eyes. I turned around to see the kindergartners staring at me.

My phone started ringing constantly—from family, friends, reporters, and even strangers who were concerned about me. Two days later, I flew to Houston to attend the memorial service at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center. Our Class of 51-L stood together.

President Reagan postponed his 1986 State of the Union address to speak to the families, the teachers, and, most importantly, the children: "The *Challenger* crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them." "America the Beautiful" played as NASA T-38 jets, piloted by astronauts, flew overhead. One craft swept from sight in the *missing man formation*.

All the teachers in the program met for lunch. A reporter inquired of me, "Would you go now, if asked, after all this?" I didn't hesitate. "Yes, I would," I said. "If NASA offered, I'd ask, '*Where's* my helmet?'" Every teacher's head nodded.

President Reagan ordered an investigation. Chuck Yeager, our own Lincoln County hero, served on the president's panel. The decision to fly was flawed. An O-ring in one of the rocket boosters had leaked fuel, causing the shuttle to ignite. Advance warnings had not been heeded, and the astronauts had been left out of the decisions. Shuttle flights were halted. NASA's mission now was to find out what went wrong and fix it.

Flying home, I thought about how my mission as a West Virginia Teacher in Space had changed. Our students back home had watched the tragedy live. They'd be looking to see how we, as adults, reacted. I knew when faced with adversity, West Virginians were strong. The real story of *Challenger* was not how Christa and her crew had died but how they had lived their lives. I had an opportunity to teach an important lesson.

Challenger's starboard solid rocket booster explodes 73 seconds after takeoff, claiming the lives of seven astronauts, including teacher Christa McAuliffe. The disaster shocked the nation and became one of those "I remember where I was" moments for an entire generation. Courtesy of NASA on The Commons.

First, West Virginia children paid tribute to teachers. I worked with Terilyn Wilson, a teacher and friend from Logan County, to begin West Virginia Pennies for Christa. Students across the state donated pennies to build a statue of her. A year after the *Challenger* disaster, a bronze likeness of Christa was unveiled at Sunrise Museum in Charleston. While West Virginia dignitaries spoke, the words of 11-year-old Amy McLaughlin truly captured our hope for the future: "Even though Christa did not get to teach her lesson for us, she taught us that we don't have to be famous to achieve important things. The *Challenger* explosion was a tragedy for NASA, but plans must continue for the Space Station."

West Virginian Jon McBride, a Navy pilot-turned-NASA astronaut, spoke to our students at Watts. He shared that when he was growing up in Beckley, the job of astronaut didn't exist. "Study hard," he said, "because the job you get when you're grown might not have been invented yet."

I was an instructor in a graduate class where teachers were developing space science lessons for grades K-6. At NASA's Wallops Island Flight Facility in Virginia, I spent a week with middle-grade students doing science experiments and launching rockets. Meeting Homer Hick-

West Virginia schoolchildren raised money to build this statue of Christa McAuliffe on the grounds of Sunrise Museum (now occupied by a law firm) in Charleston.

am, a former rocket scientist and McDowell County-born author of *Rocket Boys*, filled me with pride. He signed for me his book *Crater*, about a teenager on the moon, with the note, "The Moon is yours, seize it."

Challenger Space Centers opened all over the country. In West Virginia, teams of students can still experience simulated space flight at the Challenger Learning Center at Wheeling Jesuit University. At NASA's IV&V Facility in Fairmont, teachers can attend conferences and obtain resources, and students can compete in rocketry, robotics, and aviation.

NASA continued to bring us space ambassadors together. We teamed-up to build space structures underwater. At Marshall Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, I rode across a room in an extravehicular mobility unit (EMU)—the ones astronauts wear for protection outside the Space Station. I was honored when Astronaut Fred Gregory said, "We like to think it will be America leading the way safely in space and prepared by teachers like you."

Twenty-one years after the loss of *Challenger*, NASA kept its commitment to fly a teacher into space. In August 2007, Barbara Morgan, Christa's backup and a fully trained educator-astronaut, was ready to launch on the *Endeavour*. Again, the space ambassadors gathered in Florida to cheer her on to the International Space Station.

On the banks of the Banana River at the Kennedy Space Center, I joined hands with my teacher friends for the first time since 1986. We yelled out the countdown: "10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1!" The engines ignited. A rumbling began in my toes and moved through me to the ends of my ponytail. We all held our collective breaths. Not until 73 seconds had passed did any of us speak. Then, screams of joy erupted.

Eight minutes into the flight, a NASA announcer said, "For Barbara Morgan and the crew of the *Endeavour*, class is in session."

When I got back to the hotel, Space Florida drew the name of one space ambassador to fly in weightlessness. I nearly left the ground when they called "Melanie Vickers."

"Can I go today?" I sprinted to the front of the room.

Two days later, I joined a small group of space enthusiasts at the Kennedy Space Center. I rode a bus to Astronaut Drive and saw a beautiful plane with ZERO-G painted on the side. I climbed the metal steps into the belly of the plane. All the seats were squeezed into the back, and the rest of the plane was covered with padding, like tumbling mats.

Over the Atlantic Ocean, our coach announced, "Time to get up." Taking off my shoes and putting on socks, I bounced to the center of the plane.

"Everyone down. One minute to Martian G." On Mars, you weigh one-third of what you weigh on Earth. The plane rose then did a nose-dive. I popped up, floating on my back a foot off the floor. I flipped over and did pushups on my fingertips. For the next hour, the plane did parabolas of popping up and over. During Lunar G, one-sixth of my weight, I sat like a genie crossed-legged in the air. The ultimate flight experience came during One G, full weightlessness. I did somersaults, karate moves, and a game of "Teacher Toss," where I was a human volleyball. Finally, I flew across the plane like Superwoman singing, "Almost Heaven, West Virginia. . . ."

Landing on the shuttle runway, I stepped off to have the pilot shake my hand. "You have defied gravity," he said. He then turned my upside-down nametag right-side up.

West Virginia's two Teachers in Space: (left-right) Niki Wenger and Melanie Vickers.

"Christa so stirred our hearts and fired our imagination. President Reagan promised this nation and its youth there will be more private citizens, more ordinary people. . . . We are the first generation to leave our cradle Earth. How lucky we are to be a part of this greatest pioneering venture of all time. . . . This statue is not just Christa; it's you, and it's me. It's every American who has wanted to go into space and every American who ever will."

–Niki Wenger, at the dedication of the Christa McAuliffe statue in Charleston

As a West Virginia Teacher in Space, I particularly love how young people are still inspired by the story of *Challenger* and Christa McAuliffe. I often hear them say things such as, "I would like to go to space"; "I want to go to the moon"; "I have to go and learn some science"; "Every night, I look up at the stars, dreaming about what is up there"; "I've been thinking about studying space in college"; and "When will a student get to fly in space?"

Sitting in West Virginia's classrooms today are our future explorers, discoverers, and pioneers. *Challenger's* greatest legacy is that its lessons and inspiration will never end.

Christa McAuliffe and teachers worldwide were honored in 2018 from the International Space Station (ISS). Educator-astronauts Ricky Arnold and Joe Acaba completed Christa's mission by teaching her lessons. Teachers are welcome to use Christa's lessons in their classrooms: www.challenger.org/challenger_lessons/christas-lost-lessons/.

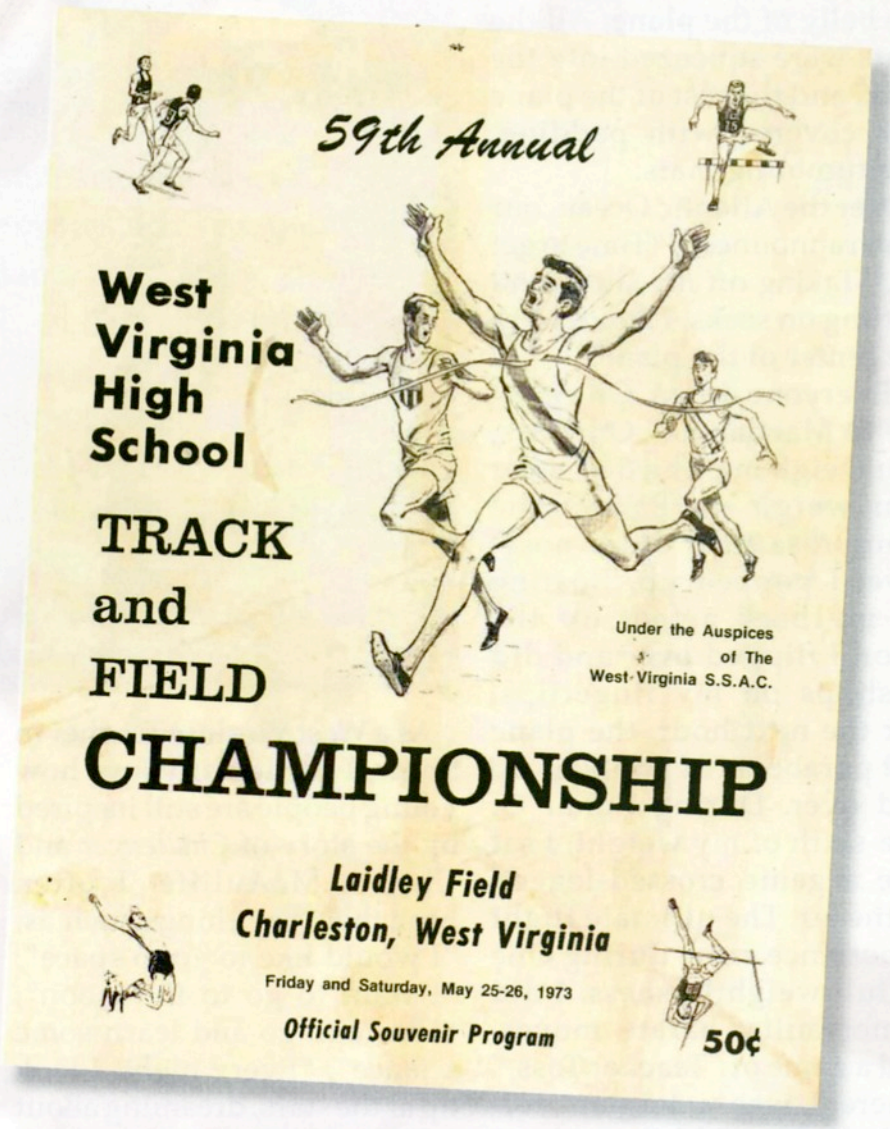
MELANIE VICKERS teaches at Marshall University in Leadership Studies, tracks the International Space Station each time it flies over her home in Charleston, and is writing a children's book about Christa McAuliffe: Teacher in Space. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The Oceana Six

By Wayne Basconi

I graduated from Oceana High School in Wyoming County in 1973. It was a good school, and I have fond memories of my time there. One of my more memorable experiences was being part of the "Oceana Six."

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the school had good athletic teams: our school won two state basketball titles and was the state runner-up in football three times. This athletic success was due primarily to good head coaches: John Beckelheimer in football and Paul Greer in basketball, along with their assistants. Fielding a track team in southern West Virginia was sometimes a challenge for smaller high schools due to the lack of facilities and track coaches—which usually fell, by default, onto the shoulders of the football or basketball coach. In some cases, track was little more than a spring conditioning program for the other sports.



That wasn't the case at Oceana, thanks to Coach Beckelheimer. Although very much a football coach, he wanted the track team to be as competitive as possible. Starting the team in the mid-1960s, Coach Beckelheimer marked off a track at the football field, prepared areas for field events, had hurdles made, and did whatever else it took to have a track team.

When I say the coach marked off a *track*, I'm using the term loosely. It wasn't a permanent track with painted lanes like you usually see. Rather, after football season, the school removed the fence from around the field and marked off lanes for a track. Like other tracks, it was oval, but it took five laps, not the usual four, to run a mile. It crossed the football field diagonally, then cut across the softball diamond, and ended at a place where cinders had been

put down in the past. So, to run a lap, you had to cross three different types of surfaces. A sportswriter once referred to our team as the "dirt-track warriors," which sounded about right. But it was good enough. Also, after training there, you couldn't help but run faster on a *real* track, like the ones at Woodrow Wilson High in Beckley or Laidley Field in Charleston.

In spring 1972, all the pieces came together, and Oceana won the State AA Track Championship. Although we lost a few seniors from that team, a number of us underclassmen were returning. So, our prospects for 1973 were good. We went undefeated, winning the county and conference titles and various other meets. As the end of the season approached, we started thinking about whether we could win the state title again.

Entire track teams didn't go to the state meet. Only those individuals and relay teams that qualified in their respective events at regional meets went on to the state competition. In our Region 6, only the top two finishers in each event qualified to move on. We won our regional meet at Woodrow Wilson and were feeling pretty good about ourselves on the bus ride back to Oceana. We'd just completed an undefeated season, and we were headed to the state meet to defend our title. That is, we were feeling good until someone counted heads and made the surprising discovery that only six of us—Ron Miller, Sam Hall, Mike Toler, Pete Short, Mark Kanott, and myself—had actually qualified for the state meet. To be specific, the six of us had qualified for only 10 of the 18 events.

Our first reaction? "This may be a problem." At the state meet, athletes scored six points for first place, four for second, etc., for each event. The team with the most total points won the state championship. Obviously, the more people you had competing, the greater chance you had of scoring points. You didn't need a big total to win since the points tended to get spread out among the various teams; however, that made every point important. A couple of fifth-place finishes could be the difference between winning and losing it all. It immediately became apparent that with only six participants competing in 10 events, we might not be able to amass enough points to win.

That year, Coach Paul Greer had taken over after Coach Beckelheimer had become ill. Coach Greer thought that at best, we might score 32 points, which could be enough to win it all. At least, that's what he told us, but I suspect he had his doubts. We would find out soon enough, with the state meet coming up the following Friday and Saturday.

Ron Miller had qualified in four individual events, a very strange combination of 120-yard high hurdles, 180-yard low hurdles, shot put, and discus.

All-around great athlete Ron Miller wins in the shot put—just one of his four events—at the state finals. All photos from the Oceana High School yearbook.

Ron was an exceptional athlete in football, basketball, and track during his four-year high school career. At 6'4" and 205 pounds, he had all the tools to succeed in sports: size, speed, quickness, and strength. He was routinely named to the all-county and all-conference teams and was all-state in football his senior year—with a scholarship in hand to play football at West Virginia University. In track, he was an outstanding hurdler, leading us to the state title the previous year by winning the low hurdles, getting third in the high hurdles, and running on the winning shuttle hurdle relay team. For 1973, he'd added two very different events to his repertoire: shot put and discus.

While being good athletes in their own right, shot-putters

and discus throwers are usually the bulkiest, slowest guys on the team. They rely primarily on their strength and size. They're rarely tall, slender hurdlers with a sprinter's speed. Apparently, no one had told this to Ron Miller because all year, he'd been winning at both throwing events. At the state meet, he would compete against the best in his new events.

The state meet was always held at Laidley Field (now University of Charleston Stadium). It started on Friday evening with the qualifying preliminaries and four finals. The remaining finals took place on Saturday.

On Friday evening, we got off to a good start. Pete Short, Sam Hall, Mark Kanott, and I won the two-mile relay. Ron then went to work, winning the qualifying races in both hurdle events. For good measure, he tied the state meet record for the high hurdles, which had been set by Byron Johnson of Wayne County three years earlier. And then, incredibly, in between the two hurdle events, he won the shot-put final. I'm guessing that was the first time a hurdler had placed in, much less won, the shot put.

We failed to place or qualify in any other events on Friday. Nevertheless, our two first-place finishes put us ahead in the overall team standings with 12 points. The real test, though, would come on Saturday, when we would compete in only five of the remaining 14 finals.

Our author crosses the finish line, winning the 880-yard run for Oceana.

Saturday's activities started with the field events. Ron took up where he'd left off the night before by winning the discus. Then, he got second in the high hurdles. Technically, he finished with the same time as the winner but was nipped at the tape by future WVU Hall of Fame football player Tom Pridemore of Ansted.

The next event was the 880-yard run. I managed to win the race for the second straight year. Ron then took third place in the low hurdles. Our one remaining event was also the last event of the entire meet: the one-mile relay.

Going into it, we were in first place with 31 points. Ceredo-Kenova, which always had a strong track team, was in second and within striking distance at 28½ points. It would all come down to the one-mile relay, and both of us had teams running. Ceredo-Kenova needed to outscore us by three points.

While the rest of the team went to run the relay, Ron and I watched from the Laidley Field infield. I remember thinking how odd it was that there were only two of us to cheer on our teammates. Neither Oceana nor C-K placed in the top five in the last event, but since C-K hadn't gained any points on us, we'd won the 1973 West Virginia AA State Track title—and with just six people. It was a great feeling.

After the trophy presentation ceremony, we took a victory lap around the track, as was our tradition. Given our number, we probably looked more like a group of friends out for a weekend jog rather than a state championship track team.

Coach Greer, who'd thought we could score 32 points, was more than happy to settle for 31 and a title. Greer had previously coached two AA basketball state championship teams at Oceana. In fact, sportswriter Frank Giardina has said that Greer's 1965 basketball team—led by longtime NFL and college football coach Joe Pendry and Ellwood Pennington, the father of future Marshall University quarterback Chad Pennington—was "one of the best teams in state history." Now, Greer had the distinction of coaching state championship teams in two different sports.

At least one newspaper headline referred to us as "the Oceana Six," which sounded rather sinister to me, like an organized crime gang. But the Wyoming County School Board was impressed and presented each of us with a small trophy commemorating the achievement.

Obviously, we couldn't have done it without Ron Miller's amazing performance, which I still consider one of the greatest athletic feats in West Virginia high school sports. While other track athletes have scored as many points as Ron did, they've usually competed in events that require similar skills. For example, a top sprinter can sometimes dominate races and relays based solely on speed. Ron's events—the two hurdle races and two very different throwing events—required a wider range of athletic ability.

Our author runs a leg in the two-mile relay, helping Oceana win the state championship at Laidley Field in Charleston.

After graduation, I attended Marshall and competed on the track team. One of my teammates turned out to be Byron Johnson, whose high-hurdles record Ron had just tied. Byron told me he was proud of that record and couldn't believe it had been tied by a guy who'd also won the shot put. He asked how a shot-putter could be such a good hurdler? Personally, I've always thought about it the other way around: How could a great hurdler be such a good shot-putter?

WAYNE BASCONI graduated from Oceana High School in 1973. He completed his undergraduate studies at Marshall University before earning a law degree from WVU in 1979. Now living in Nonesuch, Kentucky, Wayne worked 22 years as an in-house counsel in the energy industry. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL. His first, featured in our Spring 2013 issue, was about his parents' hardware store in Oceana.

"The water is perfect!"

By Gary V. West

I expect this story will be accepted as a tall tale or ascribed to the faulty memory of an old man. Well, as a 7th-generation West Virginian, I swear that no embellishment was needed and that my memory is fully intact, no matter what my wife might tell you. You might want to skip this story if you're not a trout fisherman or if you don't know a trout fisherman. However, even if you don't know a trout from a catfish, you may still find it an interesting read. It goes something like this:

Our author nets a 25" brown trout—about 100 yards downstream from where he first hooked it—at his favorite fishing hole. All photos courtesy of our author.

Once, for a brief time, the Mountain State had perhaps the most prolific trout stream in the Eastern United States. It may have even rivaled the legendary rivers of the West. To say that it was every trout fisherman's fantasy would be an understatement. The kicker is that it wasn't on the stocking schedule. That's a bit misleading, though, because there were unpublished stockings of fingerling rainbow, brown, brook, and tiger trout, which started it all. For non-fishermen, fingerlings are young trout, usually 3-5" in length. Well, those fingerlings thrived in that river. They grew and grew and reproduced there. The stream also had a considerable population of native brook trout. Because they all fed on natural food, the meat became glorious shades of pink, orange, and reddish in color. When you ate one, you knew it hadn't grown up feeding on hatchery pellets. Their meat was firm and delicious. Later, I'll tell you where this stream is, but first, I must tell you of my introduction to it.

Growing up in West Virginia, my trout fishing experiences were primarily centered around the agony and mess of opening day. That was when trout were stocked in all the streams and lakes, and then the waters were closed until the opening day in April. No matter where you fished, you found yourself shoulder to shoulder with packs of fishermen casting to the same spots. After opening day, my father and I seldom fished for trout. The average trout back then was only about 10-12" and, worse yet, had only half the fight of a similar sized smallmouth. So, the 1950s and 1960s didn't exactly make me a trout fanatic. After the Navy and college, the bulk of my fishing amounted to chasing smallmouths and catfish.

That all changed in May 1977, when two friends showed up at my house on a Saturday. They brought a cooler and said they had something to show me. Peering in the cooler, I saw three large fish that I first thought were salmon. Actually, they were brown trout measuring 20, 21, and 22 inches. My friends opened one of the gutted fish and exposed the deep, bright-orange meat. My first question was obvious, "Where did you catch these?" Their answer

was on upper Gandy Creek in Randolph County. As I learned a few months later, that was a bit of a fib.

By mid-August, my thoughts of those big trout had more or less faded. It was a Friday night, and I was home with my family. It was raining like hell and had been for most of the day. That's when I got a call—one of the best of my life—from my friend John, one of the guys who'd caught those big browns. He asked, "Do you want to go fishing tomorrow?" I told him it was going to rain all weekend. When John knew something you didn't, he'd let out a funny little chuckle and then explain what you didn't know. I heard that unique laugh, and he said, "The rain is what we want." Then, he explained how rising, discolored water is ideal for trout fishing. I interrupted him, "John, this is August, and there's been no stocking since May!" He laughed again and said, "You go with me, and I'll guarantee you'll catch trout." My memory of those browns came rushing back, and only then did I say, "Ok, I'm in."

With some lingering doubt, I told him I'd drive. I wasn't about to waste a whole Saturday in the rain chasing some elusive leftover trout. By driving, I figured I could decide when it was time to leave. I asked him where we were going, and he said he'd tell me when we got on the road. He also instructed me not to bring any bait. "Leave the spinners, lures, fly rod, and corn at home," he said. "We'll only be using worms."

A steady rain followed us from Fairmont to Elkins. We pulled off at the first gas station we saw to buy worms and snacks. The closer we got to Elkins, the more John got pumped. He kept saying that the stream should be perfect. I'd never been with a fishing companion this optimistic and excited. I still couldn't feel it but was hopeful.

When we left the station, I said, "Ok, where are we going?" He told me, "Take 33 East. We're going to Dry Fork."

Now, I was really surprised. I'd passed by this small stream many times on trips over to the North Fork, Smoke Hole, and Blackwater. It looked like some great water, but I'd never seen Dry Fork on the trout-stocking pamphlet or even anyone fishing on it.

Four mountains east of Elkins, we dropped off Rich Mountain into the valley of the Dry Fork. As soon as we hit level ground, we drove over a small bridge and saw the stream. John yelled out, "The water is perfect!"

It looked a little high and murky green to me, but what did I know? We parked just past an old mill site, and there was an old iron bridge about 40 yards away. We grabbed our vests and poles, put on our rain gear, and surveyed the water. I saw a long run that began about 25 yards above the bridge and ended under it. The water was moving faster than normal, but it was fishable. I judged it to be around four-feet deep.

We climbed over the far side of the bridge and took up our positions. John was at the head of the run, and I was about halfway down. John told me to use *only* a #10 or #12 hook and just half a worm. Within 5-10 minutes, John had landed two fish. They were 12" or 13", and he released both. I'd yet to get a strike, but as soon as John released his second fish, it happened. A nice-sized brown trout jumped from the water within six feet of me with my bait in its mouth. I tightened the line immediately and set the hook. I felt its strength as it took me downstream, using the current to its advantage. I was now close to the bridge, and the fish turned upstream. A few seconds later, he made another jump and threw my hook. I was sorely disappointed, but John's constant excitement had entered me like a spirit. We both thought the fish that got away was around 16". John just smiled and said, "There will be more."

The rain finally ended around noon, and by 1 p.m., it was partly sunny. After we left that first run, we made about five or six more stops along the river—wherever there were runs and holes. We found ourselves between the hamlets of Job and Whitmer. I'm not putting you on. I bet we caught between 15 and 20 trout each during those stops. They were wild browns, wild rainbows, native

Our author shows off a colorful brook trout, West Virginia's official state fish.

brooks, tigers, and non-native brooks—all between 8" and 14". I was struck by the fall colors and white-tipped fins on all the species. They'd all fought like angry smallmouths. John kept only two fish, and I had three in the cooler. John was right when he said, "There will be more," but I never envisioned anything like this.

Let's pause for a moment and get back to how all these fish got here. Some of you may remember seeing a large sign up on Gandy Creek years ago that said it was an "experimental stream." Apparently, it was all the way down through Dry Fork, as well. With the exception of the natives, all these fish were stocked as fingerlings or were later born there. Anyway, that's the story I got from several people over the years, and it's the only one that makes much sense.

After we broke for lunch, John took me about 400 yards off the road and through some woods. When it opened up, I saw a very large, deep run. It had cut sharply into the opposite bank over the years and left a seven-foot-high mud cliff. We were around two or three miles below Whitmer. Within five minutes, John hooked into a huge brown. After a long battle, I netted the massive fish for him. It measured 21" and was just plain fat. It was to be the largest fish of the day.

We caught a couple more in that run and then decided to split up for a bit. John went downstream, and I went up. I hadn't gone but 100 yards when I came to one of the most beautiful pools of water I'd ever seen. I stood there in the middle of the smaller rapids and just stared at it, taking in the whole scene. I was anxious to throw my first cast but just stood there instead. The pool was only around 30 feet from top to bottom. The rocky banks fell off abruptly to deep water. I judged the pool to be around five-feet deep. The left side had overhanging pines, and the right side was heavy thicket with one big maple tree. I finally made a cast. I can't remember how many fish I caught there, but I know it was well over a dozen. The largest were 14-15"; most were 10-13". There were a lot of tiger and other trout varieties. In the years to come, I found many such holes on the

river and always appreciated their beauty.

I caught up with John about two hours later. He'd had success downstream, as well. I never thought I'd get tired of catching fish, but we'd worn down rather quickly. We called it a day with our limits in the cooler. Dry Fork would become my primary fishing destination for the next eight years. In the following years, I seldom saw anyone else on the stream. It remained an underfished river. I told a couple of friends and my son about it, but no more than that. A few locals fished it, but I rarely saw them. I fished it every month of the year in all conditions. It became an uncontrollable passion. From its confluence with Gandy downstream to well past its meeting with Red Creek, I learned every run and hole on the river.

Wanting to preserve the fishery, I kept few fish over the years. Between 1977 and 1985, I caught seven browns, measuring 19-25". I also caught a 23" tiger. Releasing the fish that were in the 14-18" range was a common occurrence. I tell you that not to boast but to illustrate just how amazing this river was. I'm sure that anyone else who fished it then could tell you similar stories.

I use November 1985 as sort of an end mark for my fishing there because that's when the horrible flood hit. Besides devastating towns in the area, it had a profound effect on the streams. Gone were all the holes and runs I knew like the back of my hand. Also, I heard that many fish perished in the low areas bordering the creek and that heavy equipment brought in for flood prevention had destroyed a lot of habitat and aquatic life. I can't blame the government, however; the tragic flood made it a necessity. I waited until May 1986 before journeying back down there, but I didn't fish. It just wasn't the same. That fall, I tried my luck again, but few fish were left. For the next six years, I went back now and then, but it still wasn't the same.

Our author and a whopping 25" brown trout he caught between Job and Whitmer.

There were signs of improvement, though, and occasionally, I had a decent day. In 1991, just when I thought Dry Fork might recover, another blow came: it was placed on the regular stocking schedule. Once again, for non-trout fishermen, regularly stocked trout are hatchery-raised adult fish, usually 10" and up. Most are caught within a week. With that action came crowds of new fishermen, and Dry Fork became pretty much just another put-and-take river. Soon, the remaining native brook trout and other wild trout began disappearing.

I know that others fished Dry Fork in its prime. A man from Clarksburg landed a monster brown that was close to the state record, and a local resident caught a 26" brown. That might have been the same one I'd hooked twice, only for it to tear my line to shreds on both occasions.

I still make it over to Dry Fork a few times a year, but it's mainly to relive old memories. About four or five years ago, I began noticing land along the river being posted. Now, 75% of the spots I used to fish are posted "No Trespassing." I guess reliving 25% of my memories is better than none.

GARY V. WEST is a Marion County native and a graduate of Fairmont Senior High School and Fairmont State University. He is retired from business, teaching, and case management. He seldom fishes now but spends his time with woodwork and golf. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Solar Mountain Records
Keyser's Groovy Shop

By Carl E. Feather

Bart Lay estimates he has between 40,000 and 60,000 vinyl records, or LPs, in his Keyser shop. Nevertheless, he literally dreams of discovering more records.

"I had this dream last night," Bart tells me as I flip through a box marked "folk," pulling out LPs by Joan Baez and Judy Collins I once owned as a teenager. "I was at a flea market in this dream, and I found all these records I'd never seen before. Yeah, I dream about it."

Bart's shop, Solar Mountain Records, was a true vinyl shop years before millennials discovered the organic sound and tactile feeling of a record. The store's name, Solar Mountain, comes from the house he and his wife Andrea live in near the store. The house is *off the grid*. It uses solar energy to charge the batteries that power the turntable, lights, refrigerator, and other appliances in their hillside Mineral County home.

The shop is on the grid, although lighting is minimal. Sunlight pours through the plate-glass window down four long rows of record bins, filled with world music, bluegrass and country, classic rock, spoken word, and on and on. They even stock eight-track tapes—used, of course.

Like many baby boomers, Bart never really got out of vinyl. His father was a trumpeter with the Airmen of Note, the U.S. Air Force's premier jazz band. As the son of a military musician, Bart moved around the country and spent time in Germany during his childhood but considers Jacksonville, Florida, his native home.

His late father, Jimmy Lay, introduced him to records and a career in music. "It goes back to my dad. . . . He had records, so I would go down and listen to them. One day, I asked him, 'How do you play jazz?' He handed me a stack of Count Basie albums and said, 'Listen to these.'"

Bart went on to become a drummer and was in the Air Force band from 1983 to 1987. He tried his hand at a number of civilian jobs and eventually landed near Frederick, Maryland. When the new millennium rolled around, Bart did some soul searching that put his career back in the groove.

"Once you turn 40, life is flying by. I thought that I'd better do something that I really enjoy," he says. "I looked inward and asked myself, 'What is it you really enjoy?' I love records. And I didn't see any record stores in the area."

He opened a store in Keyser with the 8,000 or so records he already owned. "My father and my mother (Jimmy and Linda) helped me open it up," he says. Bart decided to specialize in vinyl although most other so-called *record* stores were already specializing in CDs, DVDs, and games. With vinyl seemingly on the way out, it was especially difficult to make it financially.

"Those years were brutal. I did most of my business online; the Internet was how I managed to survive. It has been a real roller coaster being retail," he says. "I got stick-to-it-ness. I don't give up. I'm not a quitter."

He slowly built up a following of faithful shoppers who come from as far away as Parkersburg. Jason Arnold, a vinyl collector from Cumberland, Maryland, drives down a couple of times a month. "I

Bart Lay proves that some things—like vinyl records, Hank Williams' music, and "stick-to-it-ness"—never go out of style. Photo by Carl E. Feather.

got into records about 30 years ago, when I was 10 or 11," Jason says. "I have just always liked it; I never really stopped buying records."

He favors old rock from the 1960s and 1970s—the music that was playing on turntables when Bart was a teenager. Bart says that classic rock, punk, and heavy metal are the most popular albums with his buyers. The albums' covers are often as collectible as the music inside.

He tries to specialize in early, original pressings while being cognizant of his customers' limited resources. The majority of the stock is priced at $5 a record, or three for $12.

"I haven't raised my prices since I opened," he says.

Boxes and crates stacked randomly in the front window make up the bargain section, where every album is just $1. These bins include a plethora of Christmas, easy-listening, and "Nashville sound" albums.

He purchases entire collections from folks who are moving and don't want to haul their records to their next destination; some just want to thin out their collections or raise some cash. The store carries a few CDs and even cassettes, which are experiencing a slight revival. The cassette market, however, is limited mainly to folks who have cassette players in their cars.

Bart spins records throughout the day. "Yesterday, I started out with *Dylan's Greatest Hits*. I was in a Dylan mood because of all the outrageous political stuff going on. Then I switched to Brian Auger, some hillbilly, and some pop," he says, adding that the playlist depends largely on his mood.

Bart enjoys all types of music and can talk both the technical side of reproducing music from vinyl and the artistic side of performing. The day I stopped by, he had to excuse himself after 20 minutes because he had a gig that afternoon drumming at a political rally. When he's called out to play, friends step in, spin records, and ring up sales until closing time.

"I've been a patron of record stores all my life," Bart says as he gets ready to leave for the gig. "What do I know? I know records. And I am still learning. There are so many records I haven't heard yet and want to hear."

Solar Mountain Records is located at 21 Armstrong Street in Keyser. It's open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

CARL E. FEATHER is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Ashtabula County, Ohio. He has family roots in Tucker and Preston counties and is the author of the book *Mountain People in a Flat Land*. You can also follow Carl's blog at thefeathercottage.com, where he often writes about West Virginia. Carl has been a longtime GOLDENSEAL contributor, dating back to his first article in our Summer 1987 issue.

2018 Vandalia Contest Winners

On Memorial Day weekend 2018, the Culture Center on the State Capitol Complex hosted the 42nd annual Vandalia Gathering, a free celebration of West Virginia's finest traditional arts, music, dance, stories, crafts, and foods. Here's a list of the 2018 contest winners. Please join us **May 24-26, 2019**, for our 43rd Vandalia! All photos by Steve Brightwell.

Youth Old-Time Fiddle (15 and under)

1st place: Liam Farley, Chapmanville
2nd place: Silas Powell, Jane Lew
3rd place: Kaylee Polk, Red House

Old-Time Fiddle (59 and under)

1st place: Jake Krack, Marlinton
2nd place: Tessa Dillon, Morgantown
3rd place: Jesse Pearson, Huntington
4th place: Dan Kessinger, Saint Marys
5th place: Johnny Cochran, Elkins

Senior Old-Time Fiddle (60 and over)

1st place: Jim Mullins, Saint Albans
2nd place: John Morris, Ivydale
3rd place: Linwood Clark, Walker
4th place: John Longwell, Gandeeville
5th place: Paul Epstein, Charleston

Mandolin (all ages)

1st place: David Asti, Charles Town
2nd place: Luke Shamblin, Elkview
3rd place: Dan Kessinger, Saint Marys
4th place: Robin Kessinger, Saint Albans
5th place: Chandler Beavers, White Sulphur Springs

Bluegrass Banjo (all ages)

1st place: David Asti, Charles Town
2nd place: Nick Freeman, Charleston
3rd place: Seth Marstiller, Mill Creek
4th place: Cary Landis, Morgantown
5th place: Silas Powell, Jane Lew

Lap Dulcimer (all ages)

1st place: Hunter Walker, Beckley
2nd place: David O'Dell, Glenville
3rd place: Ezra Drumheller, Prosperity
4th place: Leah Mabry, Beckley
5th place: Martha Turley, Ona

Old-Time Banjo (59 and under)

1st place: Nick Freeman, Charleston
2nd place: Hunter Walker, Beckley
3rd place: Pete Kosky, Charleston
4th place: David O'Dell, Glenville
5th place: Jesse Pearson, Huntington

Senior Old-Time Banjo (60 and over)

1st place: Jim Mullins, Saint Albans
2nd place: Paul Gartner, Yawkey
3rd place: John Morris, Ivydale
4th place: Dwight Diller, Marlinton

Youth Flatpick Guitar (15 and under)

1st place: Hazel Riley, Hillsboro
2nd place: Silas Powell, Jane Lew

Flatpick Guitar (all ages)

1st place: Bryant Underwood, Charleston
2nd place: Robin Kessinger, Saint Albans
3rd place: Matt Lindsey, Culloden
4th place: Dan Kessinger, Saint Marys
5th place: Jarrod Saul, Sumerco

Quilts / Wall Hangings, 1st place (all ages)

Pieced quilt: Debbie Chancellor, Nitro
Applique quilt: Marie Miley, Huntington
Mixed / other: Cathy Taylor, Charleston
Wall hanging: Amy Pabst, LeRoy
Award of Merit: Carol A. Miller, Bruceton Mills

Favorite Family Bar Cookies (all ages)

1st place: Lisa Asti, Charles Town

Youth (15 and under)

1st place: Kendall Atkins, Scott Depot

Pound Cake (all ages)

1st place: Holly Baker, Charleston
2nd place: Karen Cobbs, Charleston
3rd place: Lynna Middleton, Charleston

2018 Vandalia Liars Contest

Biggest Liar

Kennie Bass

Photo by Steve Brightwell.

I'm going to take you back to 1969, Arthur I. Boreman Elementary School. I was six years old. The "I," by the way, stands for "Ingraham," and he was our first governor here in West Virginia. Our first-grade teacher was Mrs. Blanch Humphreys. I'm not saying Mrs. Humphreys was old, but I think she voted for Arthur I. Boreman in his election.

Anyway, she gave us an assignment. She said, "I want you to go home, have your parents tell you a story with a moral, and then bring it back and share it with the class."

So, we go home, and the next day, we come back. The first person she called on was my friend Brian Harris. She said, "Brian, what moral did your family tell you?"

He said, "Well, we live on a little farm, teacher. We've got a chicken coop that has room for 20 chickens. So, we are headed to market to sell them eggs. My daddy sends me out to the chicken coop. I take the biggest basket we had because I was gonna collect 20 eggs, but when I went out, only 10 eggs were in the chicken coop. I didn't understand. Talking to my daddy, he said, 'Son, the moral of that story is you don't count your chickens before they're hatched.'"

Well, then she called on my good friend John Fisher. John said, "Well, teacher, we live on a farm, too. We collected our eggs and were headed down to the market in the car. We hit a pothole in the road—'cause it *is* West Virginia—the basket fell in the floor, and all the eggs broke."

The teacher said, "What's the moral of the story?"

He said, "Well, you don't put all your eggs in one basket."

Then, she said, "Little Kennie, what story did your family tell you?"

I said, "My daddy told me a story about my Uncle Bobby.

Biggest Liar: Kennie Bass, Dunbar
Bigger Liar: David Yaussy, Charleston
Big Liar: Nancy Belle Anderson, Charleston
Youth (age 15 and under): Zane Wilkinson, Ovapa

He was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. One day, he was flying a sortie—that's a mission—and he was flying over Vietnam, and his plane was hit by enemy fire. He had to bail out, so he hit the ejection seat, and he hit the silk. As he's floating down to the ground, all he has with him is a fifth of Jack Daniel's, a machete, and a submachine gun. He looks down and sees a hundred Việt Cộng in a circle all around him. So, he chugs that Jack Daniel's, throws the bottle away, lands, and here they come. He took his submachine gun out, and he's shooting them, and 70 of them drop dead. But then the gun jams. Then he pulls out his machete. Now, he's chopping them up. And he's stabbing them through the heart, 20 more times, but then the blade breaks. Now, it's hand-to-hand combat. Well, he starts wading into those guys. He's ripping them up and breaking their necks until all 100 die bloody, horrible deaths."

Well, Mrs. Humphreys is standing at the front of the room. Her face is as white as her hair. She looks at me and says, "What kind of moral could you possibly get from a horrible, terrible story like that?"

Well, Daddy says the moral to that story is "you don't mess with Uncle Bobby when he's been drinking."

Youth Award

Zane Wilkinson

I'm Zane Wilkinson, also known as Boy Wonder, and I'm the West Virginia Shin Kicking Champion. I am doubting at this point if you think that shin kicking is a real sport. But I tell you, last summer, I got bored, so I decided to get on the Internet and find new daring sports I could take part in. Shin kicking was the first one that came up on my Google search. The rules of shin kicking are simple. You stand in front of one another and kick each other in the shins until they can't handle it any longer.

With two older brothers, I automatically knew I had the necessary skills to compete. I was a natural. My short legs gave them almost no target. I went to the big city of Shincinnati to practice under the famous Crimson Shin. After a few days of practice and preparation, I was ready to compete.

The first competitor was a lady who saw how small I was and said, "When the chips are down, sometimes you have to take it on the shin"—after I broke her ankle. The second competitor was a one-legged man. I had a leg up on him. He didn't have a leg to stand on. The final competition was against the master. . . . He had a massive shin. Sadly, he also had a glass shin. So, in essence, I am the reigning West Virginia Shin Kicking Champion because I kicked the shin out of him.

Photo by Steve Brightwell.

2018 Vandalia Award Recipient

Bil Lepp

By Stan Bumgardner

At the 2018 Vandalia Gathering, storyteller extraordinaire Bil Lepp of Charleston was presented with the Vandalia Award, our state's highest folklife honor. It was only the second time in Vandalia's 42 years that a person known primarily for storytelling has received the award (the first was raconteur Bonnie Collins—who also performed songs—in 1990).

It was a fitting accolade for the five-time winner of the Vandalia Liars Contest. Bil has performed at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, guest-hosted the *Mountain Stage* radio broadcast, and entertained tens of thousands annually at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. In 2011, he was also honored by his peers as the first West Virginian to be named to the National Storytelling Network Circle of Excellence.

Given Bil's many achievements, my first question for him seemed obvious: "So, why just one L in Bil?"

He threw his head back and laughed (a characteristic trait)

Randall Reid-Smith (left)—curator of the state Department of Arts, Culture and History—names storyteller Bil Lepp as the 2018 recipient of the Vandalia Award. All photos by Steve Brightwell unless noted otherwise.

Bil (left) stands alongside his proud parents, Sally and John Lepp, at the Culture Center after being named the 2018 Vandalia Award recipient.

and then replied, "Well, there are two answers, one that only people our age would get. Back in the *old days*, when you got the highest score on a video game, you could put in only three letters. The other reason is that I just thought it would be cool. But then, I found out that Bil Keane, who drew *Family Circus*, also did that, so it took some of the edge off."

Other than his sharp wit, there's not much of an edge to the 48-year-old Lepp. The youngest Vandalia Award recipient in history has a friendly carefree style that lends itself to storytelling.

Bil was the fifth and youngest child of John and Sally Lepp. Growing up in their household, humor was like air, water, or food are to the rest of us. [You can read more about them in Bil's Spring 1998 article "The Lying Lepp Brothers."]

"In my family," Bil recalls, "all truth was fluid. You could say anything in the name of entertainment, and it was always up to the listener to decide if it was true."

The ability to tell stories and laugh about life was handed down genetically from his Grosspapa (German for grandfather) Gehard Lepp. Gehard was born in Russia, fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War, and was forced from his homeland in 1920. As Bil quipped in his 1998 article, "Grosspapa came to America via Turkey, Austria, Switzerland, France, and Pennsylvania."

But it was Bil's oldest sibling, Paul, who would become his biggest inspiration. Paul Lepp, who passed away in 1998 at age 36, was an equally gifted storyteller. He won the Liars Contest a record six times. Bil stopped competing after his fifth victory because he "didn't think it was fair to tie Paul's record without having him to go up against." The Lepp brothers won 11 of the first 16 Liars Contests.

Bil gives tremendous credit to the contest's founder, former GOLDENSEAL Editor Ken Sullivan, for recognizing our state's storytelling heritage [see "Vandalia Award Recipient Ken Sullivan" by John Lilly, Fall 2015]. "I never would have gotten into storytelling without the Liars Contest," he says. He adds, though, that it was Paul who really shaped the contest into what it is today—West Virginia's premier competition for tall tales. Paul first competed in 1986, the contest's third year, and helped make it "West Virginia-centric."

Bil competed for the first time in 1990. His first two years, he finished second to Paul but then captured the title himself in 1992, defeating his brother for the first and only time (Paul wasn't in the contest for Bil's four other wins). Bil says that the Liars Contest is the perfect venue for becoming a West Virginia storyteller because "you have a large captive audience—since it's held in one of the few air-conditioned places at the Vandalia Gathering—and that the audience, being mostly from West Virginia, already knows what you're talking about."

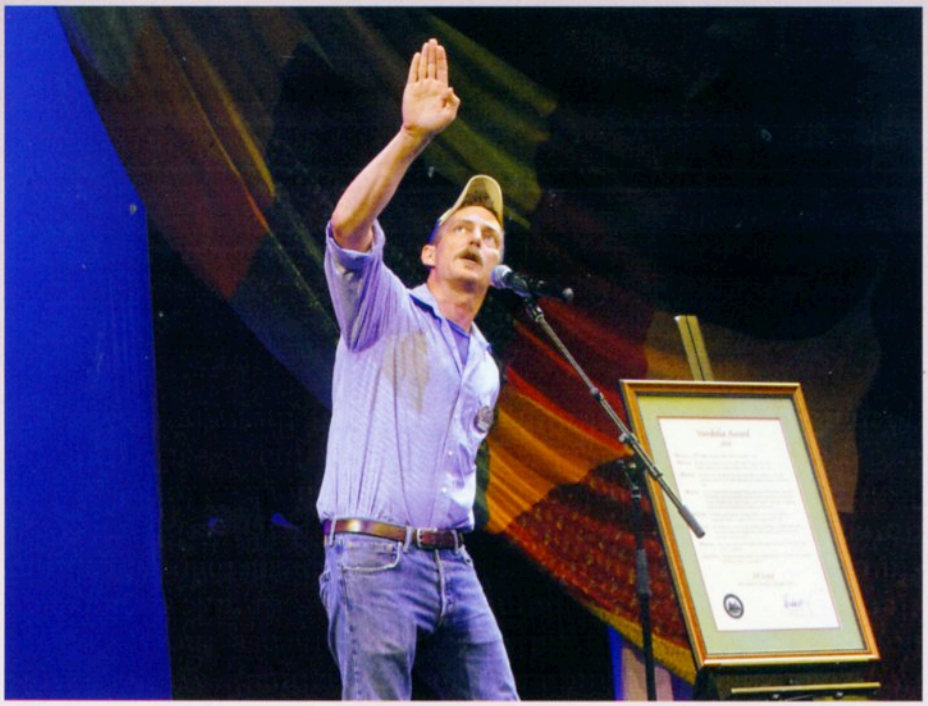
Bil entered the Liars Contest for the last time in 1999 (although he regularly returns as emcee), but his progeny

have kept the Lepp tradition going. His son Noah, 18, and daughter, Ellie, 15, have both won the Youth Liars Contest. One of the running jokes at the Lepp dinner table is to ask everyone who's won the Liars Contest to raise his or her hand. Bil's wife, Paula, is the only one left out, but Bil notes confidently, "She'd win if she entered." He proudly tells folks that he's the only father in the world who encourages his kids to lie.

Bil became a full-time storyteller in 2002 and quickly established a national reputation. I asked him whether his own "West Virginia-centric" stories ever go over the heads of non-West Virginians. He said he was questioned about it only once. In 2000, his first time at the National Storytelling Festival, somebody declared that he wouldn't have much of an audience for West Virginia tall tales. Bil laughs again and says, "Well, I've now performed in at least 40 states, and there is almost always someone from West Virginia, or someone with positive connections to the state, in the audience." In fact, his "West Virginia tall tales" made him even more popular as he established his own niche on the national stage.

Bil's written books of material on different topics, but his most popular stories revolve around an imaginary place called "Halfdollar, West Virginia," located "somewhere under Summersville Lake." When he takes the stage, he strives for two goals: make the audience laugh and shatter negative stereotypes about his home state. He intentionally dresses down for the part—donning a T-shirt, jeans, and a ball cap—and portrays a fictional cast of characters from Halfdollar, much like in old radio shows. It often catches people off guard as his distinctly West Virginia characters use their vast vocabularies to talk about deep philosophical, theological, and political ideas. As Bil puts it, "I think it shocks a lot of people to realize that West Virginians can dress the way we do and

Bil competes in his first Liars Contest, in 1990—before he'd grown his signature mustache. Photo by Michael Keller.



Bil spins a yarn for a packed crowd at the 2018 Vandalia Gathering. His Vandalia Award is displayed to his left.

talk with our accents and still recite Newton's 'second law of motion.'"

Bil's stories often focus on West Virginia themes, such as railroads and fishing, and avoid controversy. A graduate of Duke Divinity School, he once was a United Methodist minister in the Meadow Bridge area of Fayette County. His storytelling gigs keep him so busy that he doesn't have time to be a pastor anymore; however, he still works in some religious humor and delivers guest sermons at churches from time to time (rarely offending anyone). Even his seemingly non-religious stories draw upon his faith, emphasizing themes such as humility (the braggart getting his or her comeuppance) and helping the poor.

While Bil has written some political pieces for online and print sources of late, he approaches it with his customary wit and tries not to pick on specific people or parties but rather the institutions. He notes that each year, our legislature introduces a few bills that provide him with good material. Bil believes that humor is a positive way to tone down the prevalent political rhetoric, observing, "You're not going to convince anyone that they're wrong just because you think you're right."

Bil seems so much at ease on stage you might think he's winging it. While he does make up occasional one liners on the spot, he writes and rewrites his stories for six to 12 months. "Then, it takes me another six months of telling them before I really feel like they are coming together," Bil says.

He works so hard at it, in part, because he wants people to understand more about his home state while having a good laugh. The bottom line is that the material must be relatable. Even though he's talking about small-town West Virginia, his stories and messages are universal. He likes to quote author Stephen King, who refers to himself as the "literary equivalent of a Big Mac and large fries." Bil says he's been called the "jelly donut of storytelling"; he argues, "What's wrong with that? Who doesn't like a donut? Especially a jelly one? What's wrong with giving the audience an hour of humor? An hour for everyone in the room to put aside their religious or political differences and just laugh? I'm happy to be the person who lets them relax, forget about what's going on outside the theater, and just laugh together."

As self-deprecating as Bil can be about himself and his stories, he truly has become an ambassador for West Virginia, not just nationally but back here at home. He eagerly spins his yarns at state conferences and conventions, often

2018 Vandalia Award recipient Bil Lepp.

giving non-West Virginians their first real introduction to the Mountain State. He's definitely evolved into this role. As he admits, "In the beginning, all I wanted was to win the Liars Contest, and to do that, I had to have stories that depicted West Virginia in a positive light. And then, I started getting invited to other states and became more aware of the negative image that others have about us. I wanted to change their stereotypical views of West Virginia in a non-confrontational way. That prompted me to develop this cast of characters who could speak articulately and humorously on many subjects using West Virginia accents. So, without ever directly saying that West Virginians are way smarter than you think we are, I just tell my stories, walk off stage, and hopefully leave the audience thinking, 'Huh, I thought we were going to get more of a Larry the Cable Guy.'"

"So, I put more of a conscious effort into that," Bil says. Before the moment gets too serious, though, he adds with a grin, "And I don't know that I'm smart enough to do anything else useful."

When you talk to Bil Lepp, it doesn't take very long to realize he is very smart on many subjects, dearly loves West Virginia, and has a rare innate talent to make people laugh. What better ambassador could West Virginia have? Just as New Jersey has Bruce Springsteen, West Virginia has its one-and-only Bil Lepp. Keep us laughing, Bil, and keep showing the world why there's no place like West Virginia.

You can order Bil's books and audio recordings or book him for a show by visiting Leppstorytelling.com.

STAN BUMGARDNER is the editor of GOLDENSEAL.

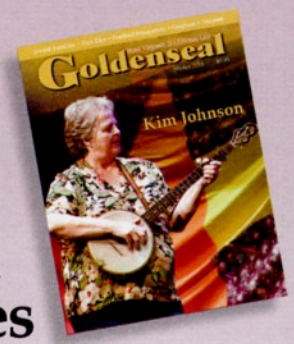
Paul Lepp (1961 – 1998), decked out in his custom fishing vest and Stroh's hat, tells a story at the 1987 Vandalia Gathering Liars Contest. Photo by Michael Keller.

Remembering Paul Lepp

By Bil Lepp

If Paul were still alive, he would be the one touring the country, and I'd be lucky to pick up a storytelling job here or there. Paul's stories were always well thought out. They were current and relevant to the audience, easy to follow but never as simple as they seemed.

In one of his first Liars Contests, he told about fishing up at Marmet and hooking his line onto a cargo plane. He went along for the ride, naming every bridge on the Kanawha River coming into Charleston. Then he turned up the Elk River, calling out all those bridges, and landed the plane at the airport. He



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tied it all into the true story of a plane carrying marijuana that crashed at Kanawha (now Yeager) Airport in 1979.

The next year, he did his New River Gorge Bridge story, naming the state bird, state animal, state flower, etc. That was probably his best-known one. For a long time, they used it in fourth and eighth grades to teach facts about West Virginia. Those stories set the tone that if you were going to win the Liars Contest—your story had to focus, in some way, on West Virginia.

One difference between Paul and me is that I've never done a lot of specific political humor. Paul was more upfront about it. At the Liars Contest back in the '90s, you had to re-tell your winning story before a packed house at the awards ceremony. Well, Governor Gaston Caperton was handing out the blue ribbons one year. He had run on a platform of not raising taxes but then ended up supporting a tax bill. Paul's story that year was about running for governor, and he said, "If I'm elected, I won't raise taxes." And then he added, "Oh wait, that was somebody else's lie." Right afterward, Governor Caperton had to stand up, walk the five steps from the front row to the stage, and hand Paul his ribbon. That was Paul.

Even in moments like that, though, Paul was naturally likable and genuine. When he went on stage, he looked like a fisherman. He wore his fishing vest with his Stroh's beer cap. He *was* authentic. Paul walked around the house dressed like that. And he knew his subject matter inside and out. If he could have sat on the riverbank and fished his whole life, that's what he would've done. Even though he was telling tall tales, there was never a reason *not* to believe what he was saying. He looked like the kind of guy who could hook onto an airplane and get himself into and out of any situation mostly through dumb luck.

The key to a great tall tale is that you can't be the hero of your own story. If you get up there and talk about how great you are, who wants to hear that? So, Paul always played the fool. He was just someone who bumbled into bizarre situations and—only through more bumbling, not a giant stroke of genius—managed to get out of the problem. And he seemed believable the whole time he was saying it. He never overacted. He just told you what was happening.

Part of what made Paul so good was that he went by Mark Twain's doctrine: "The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it." You have to maintain a straight face and tell these ridiculous stories while pretending you don't understand why anyone's laughing. Paul was the best at that.

Even these dogs love the music (and quite likely the food) at the Vandalia Gathering. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

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