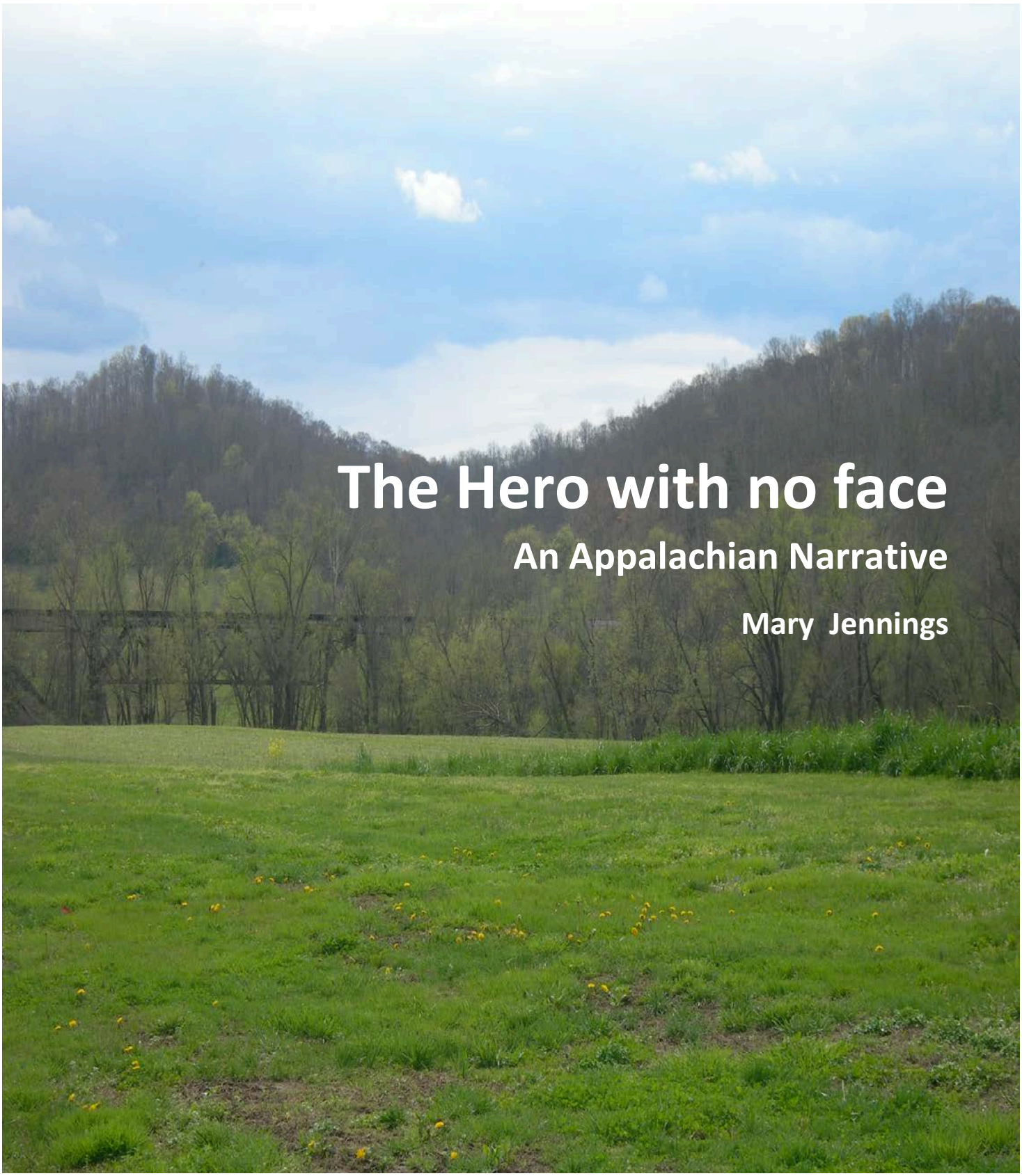
2013

The Hero with No Face: An Appalachian Narrative

Mary Jennings
University of Kentucky



The Hero with no face

An Appalachian Narrative

Mary Jennings

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the creation, development, and editing process of this thesis:

Dr. James Albisetti, thesis chair, for his constructive criticism, guidance, and support of this project even though it is outside of my field of study and not directly involved with his.

Ms. Amanda Fickey for her constant encouragement and belief in me. Without her help, I would never have truly realized how much this project could mean to me.

Dr. Buck Ryan for his creativity and foresight in helping me to implement my ideas throughout the project and to look beyond the work directly in front of me.

Dr. Robert Rabel, Dr. Lisa Broome, and Connie Duncan with the Gaines Center for Humanities for all of their support and willingness to help me with anything I needed. This project has meant so much to me and without the support of all of these people it would never have been possible. Thank you so much to all of you.

Introduction: Part 1

In Beattyville, Kentucky there is a small history museum nestled against a wounded mountain. Railroad tracks run next to the museum and the mountain. In an obscure, dusty corner of that museum sits a Carnegie Medal for heroism. What is that medal doing there and what is the story behind it? In December of 2011 I began a journey to discover the history of the medal and its man. The mere presence of that medal and its obscurity reveal much about a man, a place, a region, and a time in our history. Along the way, I have had the chance to more deeply understand my own history. The story of that man, his history, and his region will be the topic of this thesis.

In order to explore this topic I will critically consider the following questions: What narratives shape the perception of a region or a community? How can stories edit the past and change the future? How have internal prejudice and external bias prevented the addition of an incredible family's story to the national consciousness and its perception of Appalachia? Over the last year and a half, I have listened to a story, woven over generations, that has opened my mind, my eyes, and my heart to the life of one man and his family. I would like to add the story of the Carnegie Medal winner from Beattyville, Kentucky to the narrative of Appalachia.

Although this new narrative that will be explored throughout this thesis is largely positive, this has not always been the tenor of information about this region. For many years, narratives of negativity have largely defined the Appalachian region. Stories of mountain feuds, moonshiners, ignorant hillbillies, and poverty have permeated the American consciousness since the late 19th century. During the early 20th century, over 422 silent movies were made about the Appalachian region playing upon these tired stereotypes. Unfortunately, the same public perception of Appalachia and her people exists to this day.

In January of 2013 I interviewed at an out-of-state medical school for a position in the class of 2017. Although this school is not very far away from Kentucky, fellow applicants asked me: Where is Kentucky again? Do you eat a lot of Kentucky Fried Chicken? Why don't you have an accent? Well-educated seniors and post-college students posed these questions. The only information that many individuals have about the Appalachian region comes from pitifully overused stereotypes.

Beattyville is in Lee County, Kentucky. Lee County was Kentucky's 115th county and was settled in 1870 (US GenNet, 2012). It is debated whether the county is named for General Robert E. Lee or Lee County, Virginia. The town of Beattyville was first known as Taylor's Landing and then was changed to the name Beatty in 1850 after the settler Samuel Beatty. A great deal of the Western portion of Lee County makes up part of the Daniel Boone Forest (US GenNet, 2012). Beattyville uniquely sits upon the merging of the three forks of the Kentucky River. I have visited this town since before I can remember, but the pursuance of this project has given me a new perspective.

Central Appalachia (specifically southeastern Kentucky) has been my family's home for eight generations. Last Christmas break I discovered the story of the Carnegie Medal winner. As I became more closely acquainted with Mr. Charles Lightfoot, I realized that his story had the potential to change the perceptions held about the Appalachian region and bring a new dimension to the story of the mountains.

I discovered that Mr. Lightfoot had received a Carnegie Medal in 1958 for his heroic rescue of a young boy from an oncoming coal train on a sixty-foot high railroad trestle; I wanted to know why I had never heard this story before. My jury project began as an attempt to publicize Mr. Lightfoot's heroic tale. It seemed impossible that the town of Beattyville, Kentucky, population 1,307 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), would neglect such an inspirational and dramatic story. As I delved into interviewing and researching, I realized the depth of complex tensions at work, which had kept, and continue to keep, his incredible heroism in the shadows.

Mr. Charles Lightfoot is one-quarter Native American and three quarters African American. His paternal grandfather was a Cherokee Indian and his maternal grandfather was the child of freed slaves. His family history and heritage is diverse and unique. His story soon became much more than an isolated heroic episode. His entire life began to reveal the narrative of a region as told through the lens of one unique man and his remarkable family.

Literature Review: Part II

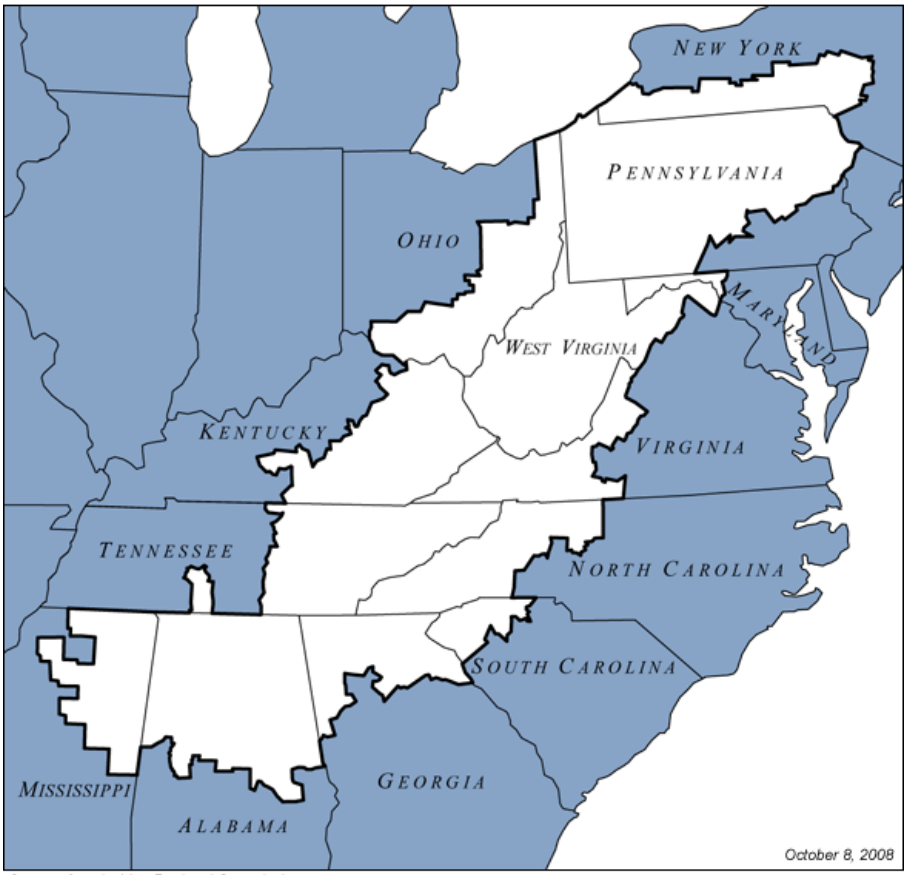
"We are all Appalachians."

-Ron Eller *Uneven Ground*

Section A: History

The region Mr. Lightfoot and his story hail from is one clouded by generalizations and stereotypical perceptions. It is necessary to first explore this region and its context, as much of the story of Appalachia can be seen in the story of Mr. Lightfoot. In many ways, the narrative of Appalachia serves as a meta-narrative for Mr. Lightfoot's individual tale. I will begin by tracing the historical background of the Appalachian region, starting with the establishment and definition of the term: Appalachia.

What exactly defines the parameters of Appalachia as a social, cultural, and physical concept has become almost mythological in popular culture and even obscure in some scholarly work. The Appalachian Regional Commission defines the geography of Appalachia as encompassing parts of thirteen different states including: Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. This thesis will mainly discuss the issues of Central Appalachia, as this is the region where Mr. Lightfoot is from and is arguably the most easily called to mind when most people think of Appalachia. Following is a map of Appalachia as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission.



Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/MapofAppalachia.asp

The term Appalachia originates from the Spanish Narvaez expedition that was exploring a part of Florida and came upon a Native American village, which they recorded as "Apalchen". The official first appearance of the name was on a Spanish map in 1562, labeling the mountains of Appalachia. It was in the late 19th century that Appalachia (the term as we see it today in the English language) was utilized to identify the "2,100-mile-long mountain range" (Hooper, 2012). Although this project does not seek specifically to address this term and its establishment, it is safe to surmise that the word at this time did not hold the political and cultural connotations now associated with

its mention. These connotations will be explored and evaluated as I follow the region's history through time.

As the United States continued to expand, the Appalachian region became the first frontier of the young nation. It was a wild place tamed only by the expeditions of brave explorers like Daniel Boone. Kentucky was the first western border of the United States. People in this region developed varied lifestyles: Louisville was a small town largely unnoticed by the rest of the nation until the steam boat enabled the rapid industrialization of this city, Lexington and the bluegrass area were modeled more closely after the deep South, and Appalachian people developed a lifestyle of subsistence farming in many areas. However, subsistence farming was not the only mode of survival in the mountains. The production of salt and other goods fostered a market economy in the mountains as early as 1850 (Billings, 2013).

The Civil War saw the split of Appalachia between the Confederacy and Union. States like Kentucky were especially divided. Loyalties to either side often varied depending on what side of the mountain you were on, while Lexington and Louisville were more firmly Confederate and Union, respectively. Following the Civil War, many of the roots of the negative stereotypes about Appalachia that we see manifested to this day began to grow. According to Ronald Eller, Appalachia was, "created by urban journalists in the years following the Civil War." Eller continues, "The idea of Appalachia provided a counterpoint to emerging definitions of progress at the turn of the twentieth century" (Eller, 2008).

Between the 1880's and 1930's America as a whole was industrializing quite rapidly. At this point, there were still quite a few subsistence farmers living in regions

like Clay County, Kentucky—my own grandmother and her family among them. The mood of the large majority of middle-class America was dramatically in favor of "progress". To the nation, progress meant industrialization. Appalachia was isolated geographically and there were a great number of Appalachians whose lifestyles were not as conducive to the middle-class conception of progress as some people living on more accessible land and in larger communities.

With this early pride in industrialization fresh on the American consciousness, John Fox Jr. published The Trail of the Lonesome Pine in 1908 (Fox, 1908). This "novel" claimed to hold some level of truth about the central Appalachian region—a truth that was not pretty in many cases (Fox, 1908). Middle-class Americans could congratulate themselves that they were not the backward hillbillies of central Appalachia. Such stereotypes of Appalachia were further propagated by prominent authors such as Arnold Toynbee in his one paragraph summation of Appalachia in his twelve-volume A Study of History. Toynbee quickly summarized the Appalachian region: "the Appalachians represent the melancholy spectacle of a people who have acquired civilization and lost it" (Toynbee, 1947). When Toynbee was asked where his information came from, he admitted he had never been to Appalachia or even really read about the region (Billings, 2013).

Fiction had become fact in regard to Appalachia and the popular media enjoyed the opportunity to profit on a simplistic view of the longed-for past that Appalachia encapsulated. Movies and TV shows entertained Americans outside of the region with a nostalgic picture of a not so distant past in the nation's own history personified by the traditional, "folksy" people of Appalachia. As the nation continued to progress through

the World War II era and into the 1950's and 60's, shows like the *Beverly Hillbillies* portrayed mountain people in a favorable, but limited light. Jed and Granny almost always show the Hollywood types what is really important in life, but always because of their "down-home good country raisin". According to a prominent Appalachian studies scholar, Ron Eller, Appalachia has always represented a sort of nostalgic, longed-for past while simultaneously representing a stereotypically backward, isolated lifestyle. The rise of minority group movements during the 1960's gave Appalachia and her people a chance to begin combating the narrative that had been largely constructed by people outside the region until this point (Billings, 2013).

The sixties saw a surge of advocacy groups for different populations that had been marginalized by the main stream due to race, gender, and socioeconomic status (among other factors). Appalachia began to re-emerge with the same "other" label (separate from the rest of the "successful" United States), but this time the stereotypes had begun to evolve. Appalachia and her people began to be seen as an area and people who needed advocacy. This began a whole new era in the story of the Appalachian narrative.

In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson announced his plans for a War on Poverty from the front porch of a home in Inez, Kentucky. Young, idealistic VISTA workers (Volunteers in Service to America) were disseminated throughout the nation (Billings, 2013). Some came to the Appalachian region to help the poor people of the mountains organize and participate more actively in their community. A new perception of Appalachia was rising. In her 1970 article, "Fatalism or the Coal Industry," Helen Lewis explains the new perspective on Appalachia: "In their search for the causes of the problem

[Appalachian poverty] they see Appalachia as a sub society structurally alienated and lacking resources due to processes of colonialism and exploitation". (Lewis, 2013)

Section B: Perceptions

In this section, I will briefly trace some of the prevailing paradoxical perceptions and attitudes towards Appalachia as both an internal colony and, yet an integral part of American culture. This examination will provide a more thorough context for the life of Mr. Charles Lightfoot and the attention that individuals like him can bring to this region. Furthermore, it is important to consider the perceptions of Appalachia created by those who have done work in the region before this thesis. (This theme will be discussed more thoroughly in the Personal Reflections section). Throughout this paper it is important to remember: "Appalachia is more than just an intellectual idea. It is also a real place where public policies designed to achieve a healthy society, the objective of development itself, have played out with mixed results" (Batteau, 1983). The realities of this region and her people must be remembered throughout this paper with dignity and respect, but also with critical consideration.

Knowledge of the prevailing perceptions of Appalachia has relevance beyond individuals who are from Appalachia, have family ties there, or live near this region. I propose that all Americans and perhaps even those beyond the borders of this nation should have an interest in this diverse and rich region, people, and culture. In many ways, Appalachia, although often seen as the downtrodden pundit-worthy "underclass"

(Batteau, 1983) of America represents some important concepts that are often unsettling to examine, but must be pursued all the more enthusiastically. As the editor of the collection of essays *Appalachia and America*, Allen Batteau, declares:

> Every succeeding statement of the identity of Appalachia has posed a challenge for the identity of America: A land of progress containing an entire region of backwardness and poverty, a metropolitan society of rapid mobility and footloose individualism, accommodating a subculture that insists on maintaining strong family ties and a sense of community. (Batteau, 1983)

Batteau makes the case that Appalachia serves as a representative area of American issues with poverty, education, etc. Appalachia's problems are America's problems and cannot be solved separately from the issues facing America as a whole (Eller, 2008). Batteau continues during this introduction and goes even further:

> …the paradox of Appalachia and America is no paradox at all, for in every succeeding epoch Appalachia has presented itself as an exemplar and a critique of the salient forms of political differentiation within American society, a presentation that is paradoxical only to those who insist on seeing America in undifferentiated terms. (Batteau, 1983)

Batteau has now suggested that Appalachian problems cannot be treated as isolated sores, instead they are simply the manifestation of systemic infection. He questions the "paradox" of a "backward" society housed within the roaring, fast-paced success of America as a whole. It is impossible to see this idea as paradoxical since Appalachia is a *part* of America, I would argue an integral part. Many times this region of America is treated in a manner reminiscent of colonialism. In fact, Batteau asserts:

> …many scholars have concluded that these relationships of ownership and industrial control justify characterizing Appalachia as an internal colony of the internal periphery of a capitalist world-system. (Batteau, 1983)

Considering this concept, one begins to see how the pieces of such a theory fit together. Appalachian "dependence" (Batteau, 1983) is often discussed in an accusatory or patronizing manner by those on the outside, but when one considers another "paradox": "rich land, poor people" (Batteau, 1983), it becomes clear that this is not so paradoxical. The resources of an isolated area, which requires a more provincial lifestyle to preserve such natural resources, are ripe for exploitation.

Following Johnson's declaration of the war on poverty, photographers and journalists from around the nation descended upon Appalachia, especially places like Letcher County, Kentucky. These outside individuals were trying to document the poverty and dire circumstances that many Appalachian families lived in at the time. Many believed such attention would help the poor people in the region and would draw attention to the exploitation of this region by the big coal companies. However, some Appalachians considered such behavior by outsiders as threatening and patronizing.

In 1967 in Letcher County a Canadian filmmaker and his co-workers were making a documentary, *US*, about the American Dream from the perspective of different individuals throughout the nation from all walks of life (Barret, 2007). The idea fits interestingly with some experts' conceptions of Appalachia. Ron Eller suggests that Appalachia actually "plays a critical role in the discourse of national identity" (Eller, 2008). Eller argues that Appalachia represents the struggle in the American mindset over the true nature of progress and the American dream (Eller, 2008). The filmmakers had travelled to Appalachia to film people whose American Dream may have not been as they

once planned. As Hugh O'Connor and his crew were leaving, they saw a small row of run down houses along the side of the road. When O'Connor looked over at the houses he saw a coal miner who had just come back from the mines, still covered in the black dust, holding his daughter in his lap on the front porch. O'Conner and his co-workers decided they wanted to shoot this scene as part of their documentary.

What O'Connor and the other filmmakers did not know was that they had just stepped onto the land of Hobart Ison. The miner O'Connor and his crew had seen was one of Mr. Ison's renters. According to family and friends, Hobart Ison "worshipped" his land (Barret, 2007). It meant more to him than money and other people in Letcher County understood that for Mr. Ison what was his was his and you did not go on his property without his permission. Hugh O'Connor was not aware of this unwritten rule and so when Mr. Ison showed up as the film crew was finishing their shots, O'Connor had no idea how dire the situation would become. According to people who knew Mr. Ison, he thought that O'Connor and the rest of the filmmakers were making fun of his renters and trying to make the region look bad with their film (Barret, 2007). He was a fiercely proud man and was very upset that O'Connor was on his land filming his renters. Ison fired several shots into the air as he told the filmmakers to leave his property. O'Connor and the others told Ison they were leaving and began packing up their cameras and equipment hurriedly. O'Connor was carrying a heavy battery back to his car. When he turned around and repeated to Hobart Ison that he was leaving and that there was no cause for concern, Ison shot him three times. Ison also shot into the camera that they had been using. O'Connor died on the scene and Ison was taken to jail (Barret, 2007).

Perhaps if the story had ended there, or if Ison had claimed insanity in the trial, then nothing would have ever come of this deadly culture clash. But when Hobart was taken to the local jail, there were people all across Letcher county willing to post bail for him. To some, Ison was a hero who had finally disposed of the outsiders who were embarrassing and shaming their home. Ison's trial was moved out of Letcher County because of this bias in his favor. Even after this move, his trial still resulted in a hung jury (11-1) and a second trial was conducted. Mr. Ison's lawyer convinced him to accept a plea bargain of involuntary manslaughter and 10 years in prison with option for parole in a year (Barret, 2007).

Many seem to believe that Hobart Ison was justified for murdering Hugh O'Connor that day because of the cultural attack O'Connor was launching on their home. Mimi Pickering, the producer of the movie, *Stranger with Camera*, which details the Ison/O'Connor story, says that there were some filmmakers at the time that "mined the images the way they mined coal" (Barret, 2007). Yet, Pickering does not seem to suggest that this is sufficient reasoning for the murder of O'Connor. Rather, she carefully documents each man's story separately and then shows all the pieces of the cultural collision, which killed one and brought some level of acclaim to the other (Barret, 2007). Pickering uses the story of these two men to ask the very relevant question: "What is the difference between how people see their own place and how others represent it" (Barret, 2007)?

Considering the story of *Stranger with a Camera* in light of some of the earlier pertinent literary works discussed, the colonial attitude towards Appalachia can be keenly observed—filmmakers travelling thousands of miles to ogle the "Aboriginal" people of

this rural, exotic place so different from the comfort of suburbia (Barret, 2007). Yet, there is one major difference between the colonial concept of Appalachia and that of some external colony: Appalachians know what their colonial image is. By the very nature of being an "internal colony", Appalachians are aware of the overwhelmingly negative media portrayal of their homes and cities and families. There is no different language, no huge geographical barrier, nothing to separate the projected image of this region from the actual region and its inhabitants. This begs a further question: How has the paradoxical perception of Appalachia affected the recent history of the region and her people?

Science has taught us that the very act of observation can in fact alter the course of events observed. Indeed, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle speaks most directly about the altering effect a beam of light may have on an electron. The observation of the electron in its "natural habitat" changes that habitat and the actions of the electron. Did the harsh lens under which Appalachia was placed post-industrialization affect the future of the region? Renowned Appalachian scholar Ron Eller recalls an early experience when he was embarrassed of his roots:

> This teacher told me I had a lot of talent, but if I wanted to make anything out of myself I had to become somebody different from who my people were. And of course she meant that I needed to change the way I spoke, to lose my accent, to change the way I dressed, to appreciate a different kind of music than I had appreciated. (Ross & Spears, 2009)

The perception of Appalachian backwardness had affected one young boy's life as he was told he must change his cultural context in order to succeed in the world outside. In his introduction to Back Talk from Appalachia, Eller continues, "it [a stereotypical

perception of Appalachia] obscures the diversity of conditions, relationships, and cultures within Appalachian society itself" and "Appalachian scholars have come to recognize that there are many Appalachians, and applying generalizations often contradicts local heritage and experience" (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999).

Back Talk from Appalachia addresses many issues of stereotyping Appalachians by providing multiple articles from authors throughout the Appalachian region. Many of the writings in the book are reactions to the renowned play, *The Kentucky Cycle*. In 1992, *The Kentucky Cycle*, written by Robert Schenkkan, won the Pulitzer Prize (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). Schenkkan told the press his play was meant to show the hopelessness of the American dream for many Americans. He decided after a one-day visit to rural Eastern Kentucky that this was the perfect setting for his six-hour, seventy-seven-character drama about the failed American dream. Schenkkan said of the poverty he saw on his one day in Kentucky: "It was a poverty of the spirit; a poverty of the soul" (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). Although the play was well received by critics, it flopped on Broadway. One critic from the New Yorker blamed its failure on the fact that the play "flounders from over obviousness". Schenkkan set out to write a play that showed the reality of the negative side of the American dream, yet his play propagated many of the classic stereotypes of the Appalachian region (particularly Kentucky). Essentially, *The Kentucky Cycle* and literature like it continue to reproduce the framework of power that their authors claim to challenge (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). As Eller states in *Uneven Ground*, "The tendency to blame the land, environment, and culture of the mountains for the problems of Appalachia obscures our ability to understand the complexity of political and economic struggles within the region

and diminishes our national dialogue on the meaning of progress and most appropriate path to development" (Eller, 2008).

Section C: Blame and Marginalization

Beyond historical precedence, where do such perceptions come from? Why must Appalachia so often be demonized? Many scholars believe that the white southern man pushed off much of his guilt after the civil war onto the Appalachian region and thus contributed to labeling Appalachia and Appalachians as "the other" (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). Eller states: "The persistent belief in Appalachian distinctiveness thus results from a persistent way of writing about the mountain region rather than from the region's actual past" (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). Once again, perceptions govern fact not the other way around. (This recalls Toynbee's historical "facts" adapted from popular fiction.) Why then are big corporations and other business organizations so interested in the region and control of its resources? One answer to this question is partly provided simply from the title of a documentary viewed for the drafting of this thesis: "Appalachia: Rich land, poor people". This title perfectly encapsulates the view that the outside world has of the Appalachian region. Eller suggests this idea comes from a transference of the perception of the wild and untamed nature of the mountains themselves to their inhabitants: "projected images of a wild and untamed state of nature were transferred from the mountains to the people themselves once upper-class, propertied explorers started to appreciate the value of the natural resources there" (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999).

Once wealthy business people began to see the prosperity the land might bring them, they transferred their distaste and perhaps even fear to the people inhabiting this land. This marginalization of Appalachians was convenient as it allowed those powerful individuals to feel unfettered and guiltless in treating the locals mercilessly while exploiting the riches of the land. How did so many Appalachians then become dependent on these big, exploitative corporations?

The turn of the twentieth century and the changing economic markets prompted many mountain families to trade in their dependence on their own farms for dependence on "wage income in mines, mill villages, and other forms of public work" (Eller, 2008). The problem was that when these jobs disappeared, many families began depending on local, state, and federal governments (Eller, 2008). This new system began to create a dangerous kind of dependency that has been depicted negatively by many political pundits and other media sources. The welfare system dependence in Appalachia is complicated beyond stereotyping or simplistic assumptions:

> The new welfare system became a way of life for some mountain residents, who felt powerless to change their situation. A few justified their dependence by arguing that they had earned the benefits during earlier working years and were now entitled to the grants. Others were ashamed to be on the dole but believed they had no other choice. Although government programs and handouts never reached most of the region's poor, the rush to claim public assistance gave rise to the image of the "welfare malingerer" who searched for ways to falsify symptoms of illness to qualify for assistance. (Eller, 2008)

Many Appalachian scholars, such as Eller, try to show the complex puzzle that created the difficulties Appalachia faced and continues to face, but this is difficult as the problems do come from within and without.

The land itself was often blamed for being inaccessible and unsupportive of modern progress. (Roads cannot be built because the land is difficult to access and because no one will use them. More revenue and people are needed to reduce dependence on government jobs, but no one can come to the region bringing revenue because there are no roads—and the cycle repeats itself.) During one interview, Mr. Lightfoot even mentioned the lack of interest in teaching jobs in Beattyville and other Appalachian counties due to the lack of resources or "anything to do" in small towns (Jennings, 2012). Yet the land that has limited much outside access has also defined much of Appalachian life.

The mountain people had and have a complicated relationship with the land in Appalachia. Although there are some individuals who have a strong "spiritual" connection with the land itself, it is often the "family and community ties" rather than a recognized relationship with the land that attaches people to the mountains (Eller, 2008).

The exploitation of Appalachia by her own people and outside interests created much of the canvas onto which the life of Charles Lightfoot was painted:

> The torn and ravaged forests, the boom-bust one industry economies, the tragedy of the chestnut blight, the demise of the family farm, the steady flow of resources out of the region, the careless exploitation and stereotyping of the people, all these factors were interconnected and carried with them a terrible cost. (Ross & Spears, 2009)

In *Uneven Ground,* Eller discusses the interior and exterior exploitation that has occurred throughout Appalachia for the last century. Eller begins his discussion of exploitation with a statement concerning "outside economic interests", but in the very same paragraph says: "Mountain residents themselves have been among the strongest advocates of

growth, and they have engaged in some of the most callous exploitation of the land and of their fellow citizens that has befallen the region" (Eller, 2008). Small town businessmen, government officials, and physicians have contributed to the economic demise of many small towns throughout Appalachia with their greedy, self-serving practices:

> In Harlan County, Kentucky, for example, the secretary of the coal operators' association was the chair of the county Republican committee, while the president of the association was the head of the county Democratic committee. These local entrepreneurs accumulated small fortunes in counties where the majority of their neighbors lived below the poverty level, and were not opposed to using the political system to maintain their good fortune (Eller, 2008).

Again, however, the above quotation does not completely explain the situation within Appalachia. Just as insiders were exploiting their neighbors, exterior government interests were contributing to the challenges the region faced:

> Ironically, the human and environmental destruction levied on Appalachia by surface mining was fed by a public agency created during the Depression to conserve the land and to promote economic recovery. The energy development policies of the TVA in the 1950s spurred demand for cheaper coal at a time when surface-mined coal was just beginning to enter the market. (Eller, 2008)

Appalachia began to be treated as a colonial resource center, instead of a community within the United States. All of these influences created a mosaic of frustration and struggle during Charles Lightfoot's lifetime. Perhaps most pertinent to Mr. Lightfoot and his family's story are the negative effects on education.

In 1960, only one in three Appalachians above the age of twenty-five had finished high school and almost fifty percent of people in this community did not have an eighth

grade education. Kentucky especially suffered from this educational deprivation with only seventeen percent of Appalachian Kentuckians having completed high school (Eller, 2008). Schools did employ a great number of people, and in hard economic times, they often suffered from the same small town patronage systems that damaged many of the other industries in Appalachia: "Jobs as teachers, secretaries, and maintenance workers were doled out according to patronage rather than individual qualifications" (Eller, 2008).

Often teachers in Appalachia were not held to the same standards as teachers in other parts of the United States. For example, Mr. Lightfoot's mother began teaching before she had her government issued teaching certificate: "She worked as a teacher during the school year. People were paying her unofficially out of pocket. Back then you didn't have to have the degree" (Jennings, 2012). Although education was difficult to attain in Appalachian communities, Mr. Lightfoot's family was determined to achieve. His mother took advantage of the lack of official teaching rules to gain experience and money to finance her completion of an official teaching degree.

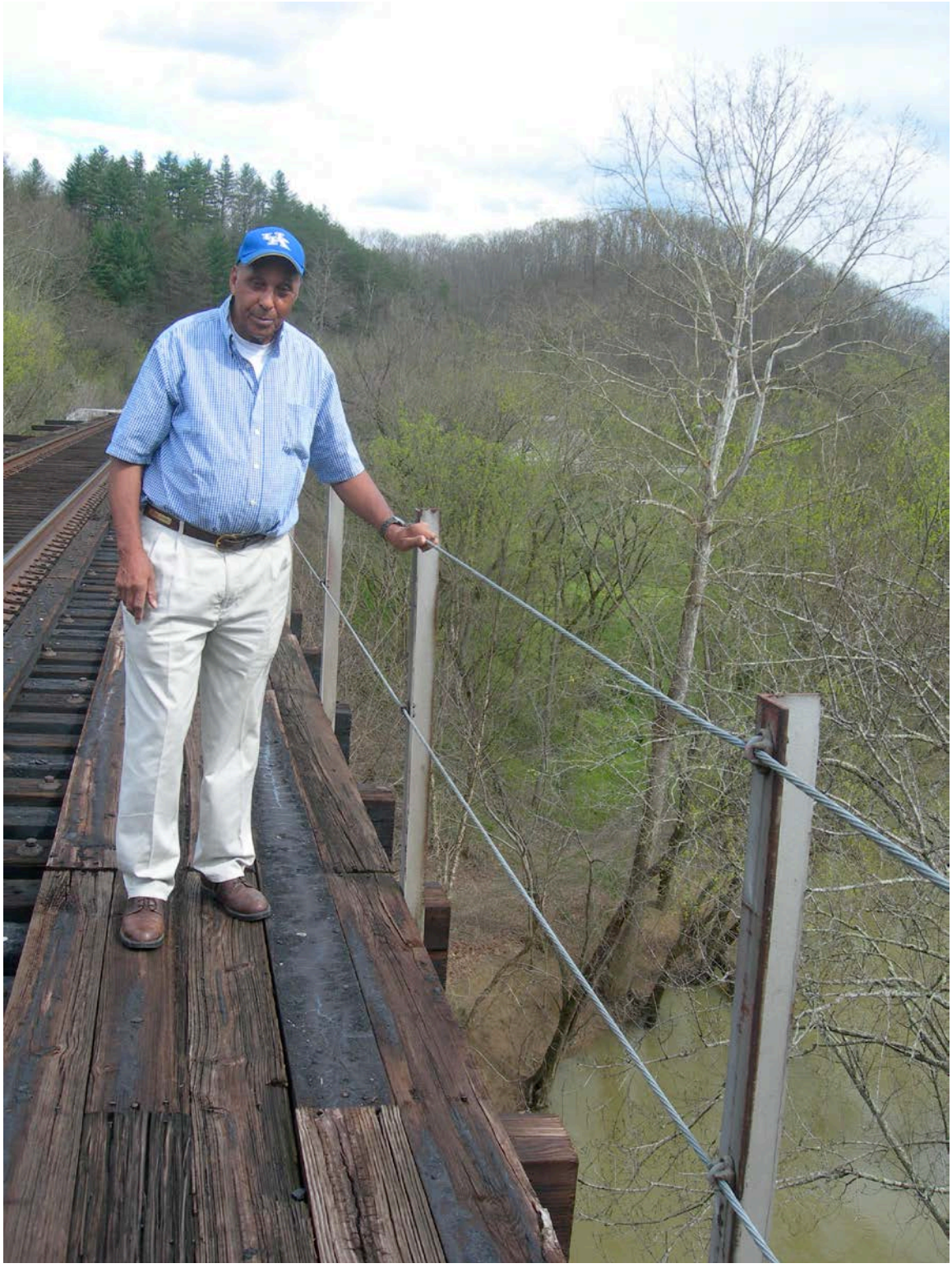
Mr. Lightfoot is a minority within a minority within Appalachia and yet he holds dear many of the same principles that a majority of those in the Appalachian region value. Perhaps this is why his story is so important. Although it is impossible to make broad stereotypes across an entire region, there are common values and beliefs that many Appalachians hold dear (the same could be said for many Americans). In the documentary, *Appalachia: A History of Mountains and People,* Ron Eller says: "One of the things about the mountains is that if you tell one person's story you tell many people's stories and if you tell one family's history there are parallels all throughout the region" (Ross & Spears, 2009). This comment from Eller should not negate the diverse

mix of people present in Appalachia. Instead, it simply points out the complex truth of Appalachia. Although the region was never as homogenous as popular media outlets and some scholars have tried to suggest, there were (and are) similar living patterns and shared values throughout the region. It would be my hope that uncovering Mr. Lightfoot's story could lead to the discovery of other stories of Appalachia buried beneath the combinatorial effect of external bias and internal prejudice.

Although I am not sure if there are many people exactly like Mr. Lightfoot, I do believe his story is the future of a rising Appalachia. He must be the face and the future that influences children and young adults raised in the region to be the next leaders. His compelling story must become an integral part of the Appalachian narrative.

The Story: Part III

"I was told by my professors and field supervisors that the problems of poverty in my community were the result of cultural deficiencies, antiquated values, and low expectations..."



Section A: Charles Lightfoot

"They thought it was a nickname", he said (Jennings, 2012). Charles Lightfoot was the first black man to play baseball for the Beattyville Team of the old Bluegrass League, a class D minor league (Jennings, 2012). When people saw him play, they thought his last name was just a nickname for his swift feet and impressive jumping abilities. At a game in Winchester, Kentucky, Mr. Lightfoot was told he couldn't play because "that black team [an all-star team from the city, probably Louisville] had played down there and they got in a fight with the white guys and we went down there and played [and] they didn't want me to play" (Jennings, 2012). According to Mr. Lightfoot, the Lee county team would not play without him. Finally, Winchester allowed him to play and the game began. When the game was over, Mr. Lightfoot said that the Winchester players came over and shook his hand and apologized for not wanting him to play (Jennings, 2012). "But I didn't make no trouble, see?" he told me during our interview (Jennings, 2012). At first blush, I was happy to hear of the Beattyville players' solidarity in refusing to play without Charles. I was also glad that the Winchester players realized they had been mistaken and apologized to Mr. Lightfoot. But with his single statement about not causing any trouble, I began to see the paradoxical complexity of deep-seated prejudice and implicit understanding that existed (and in many cases continues to exist) in small-town Appalachian communities.

In the memoir Red, White, Black, and Blue, a black man, Bill Jones, describes his life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia, during the forties and fifties. He mentions a similar attitude about causing "no trouble" in his town: "Growing up in the African

American community we faced a number of stressful situations that we, the four children in my family, were socialized to ignore or suppress in order not to rock the boat or invite further hostility" (Drennen & Jones, 2004). Although Mr. Lightfoot and Mr. Jones may not have been the direct recipients of demeaning language or racist actions, there was an implied societal standard, which was necessary to follow in order to prevent direct attacks. In other words, there was no true freedom to live in equality, but there was a level of tolerance, *if* one was willing to follow strict social standards.

In another part of the memoir, a white man, Bill Drennen, describes his experience in the same community. One night Bill had a party and invited one of his black friends, Albert Calloway. Everything seemed to be going fine at the party until Bill's father called him to come upstairs. Bill's father told him, "it is not appropriate" for Albert to be here and that some parents of the other kids would be concerned if they knew "Negroes were coming to this party" (Drennen & Jones, 2004). This again shows the limits of tolerance in the community of Charleston. Albert was allowed to play football with Bill and the other teens, but he was not allowed to socialize with these people outside of sports. Although integration had begun to allow African Americans to enter into parts of the "more equal" white world, society continued to force certain stereotypes upon them.

In Mr. Lightfoot's case he was able to play baseball and even praised for doing so: "We'd get out there and get around the bases, but they [other teams] wanted me to get out and practice with them. I'd get out there and warm up with them, but when game time would come I'd go back and play with my team" (Jennings, 2012). But he could not "cause any trouble". In other words, he was forced to continue to subscribe to a

subservient position in order to play the game he loved. This paradox is further evidenced by Mr. Lightfoot's denial of ever experiencing racism in Beattyville. He said, "you didn't know you were black unless you looked in the mirror" in Lee county (Jennings, 2012). Yet, when he told me about the presentation of his Carnegie Medal to the Beattyville Historical Museum his words were poignant and powerful. The same day that Mr. Lightfoot went to donate his medal to the museum, a member of the historical board had brought in an old Coca-Cola sign. Mr. Lightfoot told me during an interview in a subdued tone, "they didn't care about my medal, they were distracted by that coke sign" (Jennings, 2012). Mr. Lightfoot was allowed to play on the baseball team, but he could not be recognized as an amazing member of Beattyville society for saving the lives of six black children. All of this left me wondering why. Why was his story never published in the *Herald-Leader*? Why did so few in the Beattyville community know about his heroism? And why is his Carnegie medal still in a dusty corner at the local Historical Museum?

This paper will attempt to explore in depth the life and perspective of Mr. Charles Lightfoot within his community and within a relevant scholarly context. Mr. Lightfoot's life is at once inspirational, fascinating, and difficult. It is my hope that this project will bring greater recognition to him personally and to his family's history. I have and will continue to pursue his story with his dignity and his personal interests most deeply at heart. I hope to do justice to his life in my writing.

Section B: His history

At the beginning of this part of the thesis, there was a quote from Ron Eller referring to the blame that outsiders put on the mountain people themselves for the poverty they suffered. Eller was told as a child that "cultural deficiencies" and "low expectations" caused the problems his people were experiencing. After hearing the story of the Lightfoot's, it is hard for me to believe that everyone in the region was the product of "cultural deficiencies".

Mr. Charles Lightfoot was born on October 2, 1938, to Lena and Charles Lightfoot Sr. in Owsley County, Kentucky. For as long as he can remember, Charles' mother taught school. She taught in Owsley County for twenty-seven years and three months and then in Lee County for eleven years. Lena was born in 1907 in Owsley County and her father Henry Ges was a teacher himself in Lee County: "the little log building that my father taught in was behind the building where I taught up at Tellega" (Williams & Mills, 1975). Her father's father (Charles' great-grandfather) had been a slave in North Carolina on a plantation in Durham. When the slaves were freed after the Civil War, the owners of the plantation came to Owsley County and Henry's father came with them. According to Lena, in an oral history interview conducted by students at Lees College in 1975, her grandfather, "didn't want to give them up and they didn't want to give him up so he stayed with these people" (Williams & Mills, 1975). The name Ges came from these white people. That is how many former slaves took their last name at this time. Lena's father grew up with this white family and went to school with some of them at Berea College and became a teacher in Lee County.

It is not entirely clear when, but at some relatively early point in Lena's life her father no longer taught school (it is unknown whether he lost his job or there was no

longer funding for his work) and instead became a mail carrier. Lena recalled in her 1975 interview that her father " raised us on $0.75 a day and my mother working. Sometimes, you know, she wouldn't get any money she would just get food for us" (Williams & Mills, 1975). Lena talked extensively about her parents in this same interview. At one point, she told a story she remembered about her mother:

> Sometimes she'd work all day long—for milk and butter or a piece of meat out of the smokehouse. She started working for people with children so she could get us clothes. And I've got a corn on my foot today from where my blessed mother worked for a pair of shoes for me. And they were too small and I didn't tell her, but I know how I got it. (Williams & Mills, 1975)

Lena went to an all girls' school in Frankfort and graduated from the eighth grade. At that time, people who were interested in being a teacher could take an examination after eighth grade and if they scored highly enough they would receive a teaching certificate. One could receive a 1st grade or a 2nd grade certificate from this certification. ("Grade" in this context refers to the level of teaching certificate, not the a level in a scholastic system.) A 1st grade certificate meant that a person had a four year "contract" to teach and a 2nd grade certificate meant that a person had a two year "contract" to teach. Lena took the examination, received a 2nd grade certificate and began teaching at the age of seventeen in Owsley County. According to Lena she "got a school" at such a young age because, "the black teachers from the city they didn't like the country—nothing going on. They got along fine with the people it was just hard to get them to stay because there was no big excitement" (Jennings, 2012).

Lena normally taught all black students, but "sometimes it was raining and all, and they [some white students] couldn't, they had so far to walk, they couldn't go to their

school, they come to my school, these white children did" (Williams & Mills, 1975). When asked about problems in the school with the addition of these white children, Lena stated: "Didn't have any problems at all. They [the children] didn't pay any attention to color. Everybody just played together" (Williams & Mills, 1975).

"Every place she taught we had to walk", Mr. Lightfoot told me laughing, in reference to his early school years following his mother wherever she was teaching. He said, "when I got old enough to go to school I done been in the schoolhouse for years" (Jennings, 2012). Education was very important to Lena Lightfoot for her only child, but also for the rest of her family. Mr. Lightfoot told me his mother taught her two brothers and five sisters. It was not easy for Lena's family to afford the expenses of school, but her older brothers and sisters were willing to make sacrifices for the future of the family. Charles said, "the ones that was older than her they let her go to high school and her grandmother and grandfather worked and they put her through high school and they stayed home". The family bonds of Appalachian people proved strong in the Ges family. Lena's siblings and parents pulled together allowing her to become well educated enough to help the entire family. Charles told me that she paid them all back eventually though when she bought a piece of land for her family to live and work on.

When Lena went to high school in Frankfort, she was forced to board at the school and could only come home once during the school year for Christmas:

> Back then there was a little train from Stanton over here into Winchester a small train and from Natural Bridge over here and she'd go over there and catch the train and her father had somebody to take her on over to Lincoln ridge to high school. She only get to come home once through the school term and that was at Christmas time. (Jennings, 2012)

Lena attended the high school associated with Kentucky State's Campus. She was able to attend high school and then continue on to receive her teaching certificate (Drewry, 2009). Education became no less important to Charles' mother after she finished her own schooling. She felt that being a teacher was what she was supposed to do: "My father used to say to me you can be what you wanna be. I didn't understand that at first. I wanted to be a teacher and I thought I had to be that because he had told us we could be what we wanted to be" (Williams & Mills, 1975).

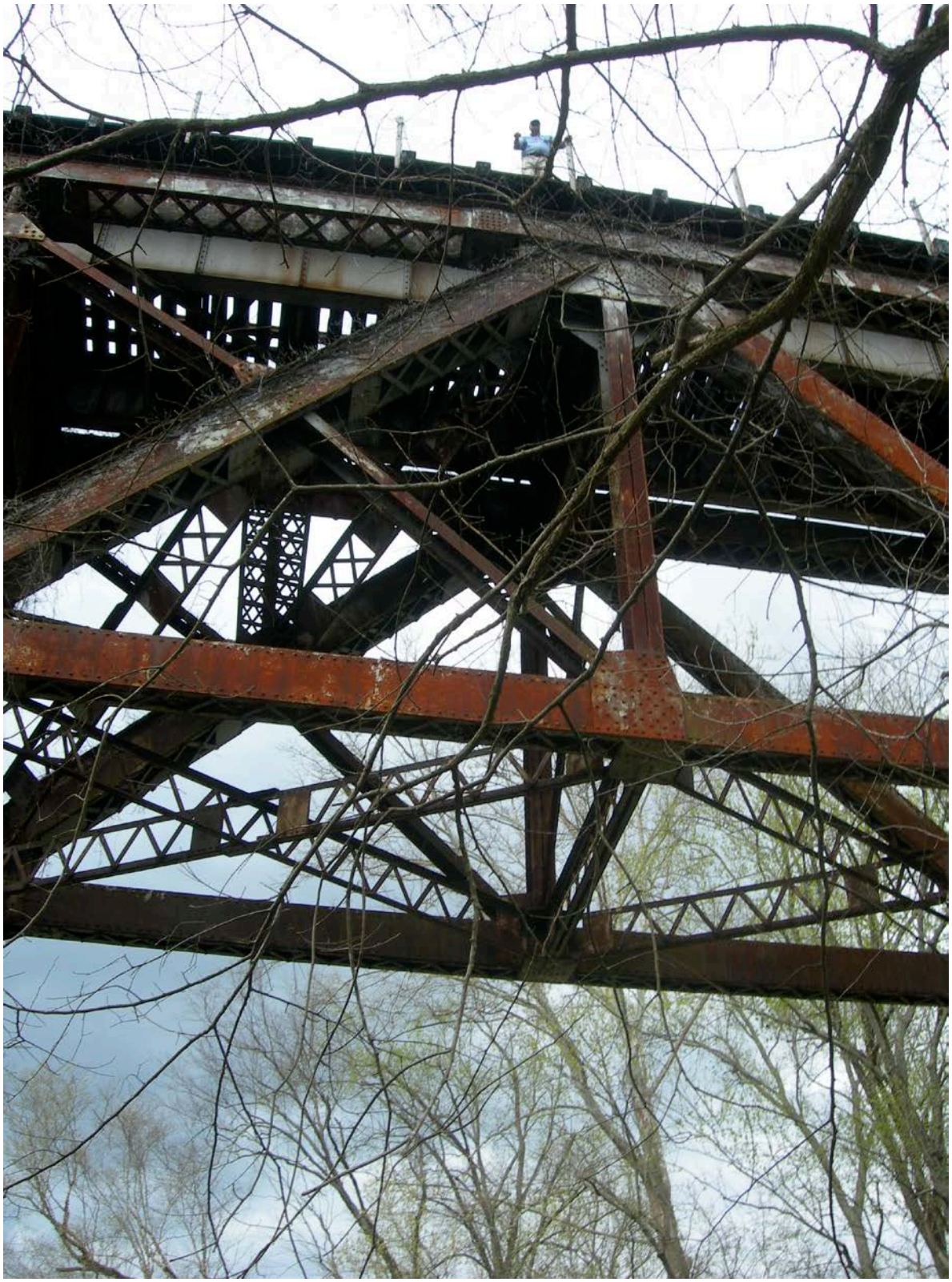
At Coal Branch School in Lee County, Kentucky, Lena Lightfoot taught students of all ages. Charles recalls that some were bigger than she was, but she taught them just the same. Education throughout Appalachia was limited and often the education that was available was very different from that which was offered in the cities or suburbia. Lena Lightfoot was a dedicated teacher in a thankless environment. When there were snow days, some children would come to her house to be taught. Most astonishingly, Lena walked across a sixty-foot high railroad trestle every morning to get to the school where she taught. Segregation forced her to teach at the isolated Coal Branch School. There was only a dirt road to Coal Branch and that did not even reach the school. The only way to get to the school was to cross the trestle.

Every morning Mr. Lightfoot Sr. would pick up his wife, Lena, as well as the youngest children at their homes and then Lena would lead them across the trestle. Mr. Lightfoot Sr. worked at Begley's auto parts and it was difficult if not impossible for him to pick up all the children and his wife and take them to school before he had to get to work. According to Charles, his father did not like to be late so this arrangement with the school being across the trestle put Charles' whole family in a difficult position (Jennings,

2012). At this time, Charles attended the old Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky. But he constantly worried about his mother crossing the trestle alone with the children:

> But she was taking those children to school everyday across that trestle by herself and then and see my mother she was in her fifties then, in her late fifties then. You think a fifty year old woman walking that trestle everyday with six children there's no way if something had happened no way she could have gotten em off! (Jennings, 2012)

After seeing the railroad trestle in the following picture and the height of the drop, it is doubtful to imagine that anyone could have gotten the children off the trestle as Mr. Lightfoot did. Then again, he did receive a Carnegie Medal for his incredible act which saved the riches of Appalachia from destruction.



The summer before his seventeenth birthday, Charles decided not to go back to Dunbar. He decided to stay and help his mother instead:

> Me and mom were real close and dad too. The three of us was real close. I would never forgive myself if I had finished high school and something had happened to her. It's better me come back and help her than it was go on and take a chance on her getting killed. Education was important but it was better for me to come back and help her. I got thinking about it and if she had got killed I never would have gotten over it when I could've helped her, you know. (Jennings, 2012)

This decision to quit school was difficult for Charles, but his Appalachian family roots (so often typical of this region) proved more important to him than his academic education. On October eighteenth of the same year, one of the most monumental moments in Charles' life occurred.

Mr. Lightfoot describes the morning in 1955 as foggy with a crisp, cool breeze on the air. On this particular day, Charles was leading six children across the trestle; all were between the ages of five and seven. Suddenly, Charles heard the whistle of a coal train at the Tellega crossing. He told the children to "*RUN!*" As they sprinted along the trestle, they jumped from tie to tie, until they reached the gravel shoulder ahead and were safely off the trestle. Mr. Lightfoot caught his breath and looked around. Then he heard a yell.

Only five children had made it to the shoulder and safely off the trestle. Six year-old Hugh L. Thompson (recovering from Polio) had fallen between the ties and was stuck in the middle of the trestle terrified and calling for help. Mr. Lightfoot best describes what happened next in his own words:

> …the train was very close and when Hugh hollered and I looked back and seen him laying out in the middle of that trestle, then I went back and got him. The train was getting too close for us to get back off the trestle [and] that made me have to jump onto what I call the lifeguard, that two-foot guard. (Jennings, 2012)

To clarify, Mr. Lightfoot heard the yell of Hugh, and then, without hesitation, rushed back towards the oncoming train and grabbed Hugh out from between the ties. At this point, the train was bearing down upon the two (only 325 feet away). There was no time to run to the shoulder where the other children were safely stationed and there was no room for Mr. Lightfoot and Hugh to stand on the edge of the trestle while the train passed. In a feat of remarkable athleticism, Charles jumped over the side of the trestle to a small metal support platform (his self-described "lifeguard") 4 feet below and only 14 inches wide. He did this while clutching Hugh!

Mr. Lightfoot hung onto the "life guard" platform for nearly forty-five minutes as the train and its 186 coal-carrying cars came to a stop. The train finally stopped 700 feet beyond where Mr. Lightfoot and Hugh had jumped over the side, proving that it would have been absolutely impossible for the train to stop in time to save them.

Once the train had passed, Mr. Lightfoot described lifting Hugh up onto the track and then jumping up himself. Charles carried Hugh off of the trestle and all of the six children, including Hugh, continued on to school. It was not until he saw all of the children safely sitting on the shoulder that Mr. Lightfoot says: "my knees just gave in a little" (Jennings, 2012). After this terrifying event, the L&N railroad conductor on the train spoke to him about what had just happened and later nominated Charles for a Carnegie Medal.

This event occurred in October of 1955. After an extensive nominating process by the L&N railroad company, Charles received the Carnegie Hero Medal for his outstanding act of heroism. After receiving the medal, Mr. Lightfoot says he still did not realize what he had really done: "I was just a kid and it was somebody talking. I didn't really understand what it really meant…you know…to be a hero. To me, I just saved a boy's life" (Jennings, 2012).

After the railroad incident, there was no way that Charles could go back to high school. Many of the children continued to be terrified of the trestle, especially Hugh, who for a time, would not even walk across it. Mr. Lightfoot said one of the local landowners near the school started letting him and the children walk across his land so they could avoid the trestle, but when the river was too high and in the winter, they were forced to walk the trestle again, but the children didn't stop coming to school even though their route had been proven to be perilous. (This determination may be surprising when one recalls that these children were the products of "low expectations".)

By 1966, the schools were desegregated and the roads were finally fixed so a school bus could access the Coal Branch community. Eventually though, the Coal Branch school was not needed because the African American children attended the previously all white, in town school:

> …then President Kennedy desegregated the schools then they started coming down here. The ones down here didn't have to go to Coal Branch and then the ones up there they fixed the roads so they could get a school bus up there and they could come to school down here. (Jennings, 2012)

At this point, Lena Lightfoot retired. After retiring from the school system, she volunteered at the preschool in Beattyville, where she worked for five years with my grandmother.

Her son's story did not end here, however. Charles Lightfoot worked hauling furniture all over Kentucky:

> The first job I got was with Oak's Truck Line he hauled furniture and stuff out of Lexington and we went out in the rural areas like up Buckhorn and all over Owsley county and part of Breathitt county and Lee county and some of Wolfe county and places like that. (Jennings, 2012)

After working with the furniture for a while, Mr. Lightfoot began working for the shoe factory in Beattyville. He was so enthusiastic to work at this new job that he showed up the day after he was offered a job:

> He [the owner of the show factory] said you come up Saturday to the factory in the morning about 7 and you come up to the factory and sign some papers and we'll put you to work Monday. And then I went that Saturday morning and filled the papers out and he was showing me around and I told him I said: "What about me just starting right now?" and he said, "Alright". And I worked half a day and then I worked up there till it closed. (Jennings, 2012)

Mr. Lightfoot and his father (Lightfoot Sr.) were well acquainted with a local business owner, who employed Mr. Lightfoot Sr. for years. After Mr. Lightfoot's work at the shoe factory, he began working for this local businessman full-time.

> Then I started working for Mr. B. I worked for him full time, that happened in the early eighties then I'd say in about a year I started working for Mr. B and then I worked till he died for him—from the early eighties till he died about three years ago. (Jennings, 2012)

Mr. Lightfoot became very close with Mr. B and always let him drive because, "that tickled him to death and from then on every time he got ready to go someplace he'd want me to go with him" (Jennings, 2012). The two were quite inseparable even at the end of Mr. B's life:

> And the day he was in the hospital there. I think he died two days after the day, Mrs. E. and I think Mrs. C was going, and they said we going down to see Mr. B, you wanna go? And I said yea and I walked in and it tickled him to death. (Jennings, 2012)

Mr. Lightfoot's life tells the story of a man devoted to helping others. Yet, he does this without question, without self-aggrandizing, and without a second thought. According to him, if he didn't do it, "somebody else would", but it is hard for me to imagine that there are many people in the world so dedicated to the well being of others, sometimes at their own expense. (One recalls that he abandoned his own education to protect his mother.) After hearing the stories of Mr. Lightfoot's mother and her family, as well as Mr. Lightfoot's own philosophy, it seems that his entire family models a simple, yet poetic philosophy on life: "A person is just what they do".

The Lightfoot's narrative is powerful and unique. Yet, there are some parallels between this family and others in the region. The story of the Lightfoots must be assimilated into the narratives that have shaped the region up until this point. The narrative of this family has the power to evoke an evolution in external perceptions of Appalachia and to inspire people within her borders.

Part IV: Reflections

In this section I will review and reflect upon my experiences throughout the thesis process. I will consider my personal bias, the observational biases that may have occurred during the interactions between Mr. Lightfoot and myself, and the internal bias (within Beattyville) that has kept his story hidden.

Section A: Personal Bias

Mr. Lightfoot, his story, and his family have become integrally important to me and I am without a doubt positively biased in their favor. It is hard for me to tell if this has negatively impacted the work I have done, as I am too mired in my own bias to safely make such an assumption. However, I felt that as the primary researcher on a previously undiscovered story about a family which by all accounts lived an incredible narrative—finding a way to utilize the scant resources provided them by their outside community and their own community—I should not approach the story with a cynical skepticism. Perhaps I should further clarify that this sort of attitude is not really in my nature. All of this is to say, that while I believe I am a discerning individual, I have not sought falsehood and scandal around every corner of this story.

Furthermore, I did not push controversial/difficult questions in personal interviews with Charles Lightfoot. Perhaps a more experienced researcher would have pursued more racial issues and difficult experiences Mr. Lightfoot could recall about his community. Perhaps there is a gap in my research due to this lack of zealous questioning.

To me, Mr. Lightfoot is and has become even more so, a friend whose trust I do not wish to betray. I did not feel it moral to repeatedly bring up memories or experiences that were painful or embarrassing for him to relate to a young white woman. When I experienced a push back from him or a visibly pained expression when discussing certain issues (specifically the Coca-cola sign incident), I did not question him repeatedly. I allowed him to finish his thought and in some cases asked a follow-up question, but left it at that. Mr. Lightfoot very likely protected his community and me from the full depth of some stories that he related. I did not feel it was my right to breach his choice to protect either of these parties. This is, after all, *his* story.

This being true, I would like to continue with a little more of his story in this section that I did not put in the more historical Part III of the thesis.

Section B: Internal and Observational Bias

I visited the Beattyville historical museum near the end of the completion of this thesis. Although I had heard rumors from people I know in the community that Mr. Lightfoot's medal was not on display, I wanted to see for myself. I visited the museum one weekend and received an enthusiastic tour from a member of the Beattyville community. I saw medals from local men and women who had served in the armed forces, as well as other military memorabilia. I saw arrowheads and old-fashioned farming implements that were found and used in the area, respectively. I saw cooking tools and old railroad signs. I saw a wedding dress from the 1940's and a quilt made by a local resident. What I did not immediately see was Mr. Lightfoot's Carnegie Medal. I

looked for the medal during the entire tour. Towards the end, I was looking at a glass case with snake skins inside and a model of a cabin on top. Near the back of the case, sitting on top between the wall and the staircase, I found a shadow box with the Carnegie Medal and original letter inside (Jennings, 2013). I was able to find the medal and letter and they were in an area where they could be seen (albeit with some difficulty and quite a bit of dust). However, the medal was never specifically mentioned in the tour. I am certain that if I had not made an off hand comment about it there would have been no mention of Mr. Lightfoot at all. In fact, when I did briefly mention that I had heard of the story I received no response other than an "uh-huh" from the tour guide (Jennings, 2013).

Appalachia as a region has been marginalized and stereotyped by the outside world, but there are forces within her borders that have prevented stories like Mr. Lightfoot's from being widely known and celebrated. A complex system of intertwining prejudices has become apparent throughout the research process for this thesis. The lack of local community recognition of Mr. Lightfoot's story combined with the external marginalization of the Appalachian region as a whole have kept the story of the Lightfoots undiscovered and unappreciated until now.

It is hard for me to imagine the cause behind the lack of local celebration of Mr. Lightfoot. It is, perhaps, easy to jump to the conclusion that racial or socioeconomic prejudice against the Lightfoots from more powerful forces within the Beattyville community has kept the Carnegie Medal winner's deeds out of the local limelight. I do not, however, have any direct evidence for this beyond assumptions and inferences. Therefore, I do not wish to condemn the town of Beattyville or the Historical Museum for the lack of attention Mr. Ligthfoot has received. Instead, I hope to bring recognition to

him and his family without accusations against others. Mr. Lightfoot himself did not condemn his own community and I do not wish to go against his actions.

Although Mr. Lightfoot suffered local bias against the propagation of his story within Beattyville, there were those who appreciated his heroic act. A few individuals in Beattyville have been interested in his incredible story:

> Ms. M was a teacher here in town and high school teacher and every year she would borrow that medal to teach her class by. She'd say I want your medal I want to tell the children about it and she'd probably keep it four or five months or all school months and then when school was out she'd get it back to me and then Tom he was telling everybody about it and he wanted me to let him see it and I uh took it down there to his place and left it and he kept it four or five months and I saw him in town one day and he said when are you gonna come get your medal? (Jennings, 2012).

No one has ever had the opportunity to work as closely with Mr. Lightfoot as I have over the past year. This alone has been an incredible honor because Mr. Lightfoot's life goes beyond one heroic day. After completing several interviews with him, I have come to realize how much his heroism is not out of the ordinary. Instead, his incredible actions fit with his entire life of sacrifice and giving. Mr. Lightfoot's self-identified mission is to help other people: "Just trying to help everybody I can. If anybody needs help and I can help them, I will" (Jennings, 2012). Furthermore, Mr. Lightfoot does not see himself as a unique individual in his community. He told me that whenever he does something for someone else he does it because he can, but that if he was not there to do it, someone else would (Jennings, 2012). When I pointed out that not many people could have saved the children from the train in the way he did, he just smiled and said: "well I don't know, I was just lucky" (Jennings, 2012). Mr. Lightfoot continued on to tell me that he knows if

he does something for someone else in Beattyville then he can depend on them taking care of him. He has a strong personal attachment to his community, particularly the people within it. Mr. Lightfoot perhaps exemplifies an individual who does not have a great spiritual attachment with the land itself, but through the isolation of his community by the geographical barriers of the mountains, he has become very attached to his small town's way of life and interconnectedness.

Mr. Lightfoot's deep personal connection with his community fascinates me. He always speaks very highly of Beattyville during our talks, but I wonder whether it is possible that he truly feels he has never been mistreated here. When he spoke to me about taking the Carnegie Medal to the museum, he seemed very hurt and frustrated by the lack of reception it received from some individuals. Yet, he has never said anything negative about Beattyville as a whole. This paradoxical attitude is reminiscent of conclusions made by Finlay Donesky in the article "America Needs Hillbillies". Donesky's article addresses the famous and infamous (at least for many Kentuckians) play *The Kentucky Cycle*. The many negative reactions to this play (detailed above in Part II) are directed towards the playwright, an outsider. Yet, Harry Caudill, the author of Night Comes to the Cumberlands, levied many heavy charges against his own people in several of his works and has been accepted by many as a voice of reason and even justice against the devastation of strip mining. How is this possible? Donesky even suggests in his article that Schenkkan wove some portions of Caudill's "gene theory" into his play.

Mr. Lightfoot's lack of criticism of his community as a whole sheds some light on the Caudill-Schenkkan contrast. Although Beattyville people may not have always

treated Mr. Lightfoot with respect and equality, Beattyville is still his home. He associates this place with his own loving family and the other individuals who were good to him. Mr. Lightfoot has a great loyalty to his home. It is interesting to consider though, what exact entity his loyalty is focused on. Is it the people of Beattyville? Is it the land itself? Is it the government infrastructure? These questions are most interesting to consider in the light of my visit to the historical museum and the lack of emphasis on Mr. Lightfoot or his story.

Currently, I cannot identify an exact answer to this question. Mr. Lightfoot's family does not hold a great deal of property so it is not entirely logical to assume that it is the mountains themselves that he treasures. His stories about the people at the museum and his other insistences that the people treated him and his family really well—as though this were something unusual, lead me to believe that the people alone, as a whole, would not explain his great loyalty either. There is the possibility, that all of this supposed "loyalty" I am identifying is a concept caused by my own observation. In other words, Mr. Lightfoot enjoys talking about his community with pride to someone who is mostly an outsider. Even if this is the case, it is still fascinating to examine why this pride in place is so firmly rooted in the psyches of many Appalachians.

Section C: Personal Connections

I have not only witnessed this devotion to place in Mr. Lightfoot, it is something that is very present in my own family. It is a concept that connects back to Ron Eller's description of his family's weekend (or evening) trips back to Appalachia, even when there was no longer any work there and his family lived in the city (Appalachia: A history of Mountains and People). This concept is fascinating to me, for it is related to one of the most difficult cultural "issues" Appalachians uniquely hold dear (especially in a mobile world): an attachment to place—roots that run deep, like the mountains that sustain these communities. Although he is a minority within a minority, Mr. Lightfoot shares this Appalachian cultural value with thousands of other people from this area, but perhaps most importantly, he shares it with me.

The bond that I share with Mr. Lightfoot has not only given me a window into the origin of some of my own values, it has affected my future career interests. I will enroll in medical school this coming fall. After talking with Mr. Lightfoot, reading and researching about the region, and feeling the pulse of Appalachian values in my own veins, I have become very interested in the practice of rural medicine. Physicians often have the chance to be leaders, allies, or exploiters of small communities. I hope that in my own career I will always view small communities with honor and respect and that I can influence those around me to do the same. I look forward to the opportunity to talk

with patients as I have talked with Mr. Lightfoot—as a friend and ally. Again, I must reiterate the honor and privilege it has been to work with Mr. Lightfoot. His story represents the true wealth of Appalachia.

References:

Appalachian Regional Commision (Cartographer). (2008). The Appalachian Region [Geographic boundaries]. Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/MapofAppalachia.asp

Ballard, S. (1999). Where Did Hillbillies Come From? Tracing Sources of the Comic Hillbilly Fool in Literature. In D. Billings, G. Norman, & Ledford K. (Ed.), *Back Talk from Appalachia*: *Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Barret, E. (Producer and Director). (2007). *Stranger with a Camera*. [Motion picture]. United States of America: Appalshop Inc.

Batteau, A. (1983). *Appalachia and America: Autonomy and Regional Dependence*. Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky.

Batteau, A. (1983). Rituals of dependence. In A. Batteau (Ed.), *Appalachia and America: Autonomy and Regional Dependence*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Billings, D., Norman, G., & Ledford, K. (1999). *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Billings, D., Blee K. (2000). *The Road to Poverty*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Billings, D. (2013, January). *Appalachian Studies 200*. Lectures given by Dr. Billings. APP 200, Lexington, Ky.

Carnegie Hero Fund Commission. (1958). *Charles William Lightfoot*. Retrieved from http://carnegiehero.org/search-awardees/

Caudill, H. (2001). *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*. Ashland, Kentucky: The Jesse Stuart Foundation.

Cheves , J., & Estep, B. (2012, December 21). Chapter 4: Disillusioned, Harry Caudill blames 'genetic decline' in Eastern Kentucky. *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Retrieved from http://www.kentucky.com/2012/12/21/2451229/chapter-4-disillusioned-harry.html

Donesky, F. (1999). America Needs Hillbillies: The Case of *The Kentucky Cycle*. In D. Billings, G. Norman, & Ledford K. (Ed.), *Back Talk from Appalachia*: *Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Drennen Jr., W., Jones Jr., W. (2004). *Red, White, Black, and Blue: A Dual Memoir of Race and Class in Appalachia*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. (Drennen & Jones, 2004)

Drewry, Henry N., Doermann, Humphrey, (2009). *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and Their Students*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Eller, R. (1982). *Miners Millhands and Mountaineers*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Eller, R. (2008). *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*. Lexington : The University Press of Kentucky.

Fox, J. (1908). *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

US GenNet. (2012). *Lee County Kentucky Genealogy.* Retrieved from http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ky/county/lee/

Hooper, E. (2012, September 25). *Appalachia by Any Other Name*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ed-hooper/appalachia-by-any-other-name_b_1913510.html

Inscoe, J. (1999). The Racial "Innocence" of Appalachia: William Faulkner and the Mountain South. In D. Billings, G. Norman, & Ledford K. (Ed.), *Back Talk from Appalachia*: *Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Jennings, M. (2012). *Interview with Mr. Charles Lightfoot I*, University of Kentucky, Beattyville.

Jennings, M. (2013). *Interview with Mr. Charles Lightfoot II*, University of Kentucky, Beattyville.

Jennings, M. (2013). *Historical Museum interview*, University of Kentucky, Beattyville.

Lewis, H. (2013, January). In D Billings (Lecturer). *Helen Lewis: Fatalism or the Coal Industry?*. Lecture given by Dr. Billings. APP 200, Lexington, Ky.

Lewis, R. (1999). Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia. In D. Billings, G. Norman, & Ledford K. (Ed.), *Back Talk from Appalachia*: *Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Ross, J. (Producer), & Spears, R. (Director). (2009). *Appalachia: A History of Mountains and People* [Motion picture]. United States of America: James Agee Film Project.

Ryan, I. (Performer), & Baer Jr., M. (Performer) (1966). In Simon, A. (Executive Producer), *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Los Angeles: The CBS Television Network.

Shelby, A. (2006). *Appalachian Studies*. Nicholasville, Ky: Wind Publications.

Toynbee, A. (1947). *A Study of History*. (1st ed., Vol. 5). New York, New York: Oxford University Press.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010*. Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk

Wilkinson, C. (1999). One Being "Country": One Affrilachian Woman's Return Home. In D. Billings, G. Norman, & Ledford K. (Ed.), *Back Talk from Appalachia*: *Confronting Stereotypes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Williams, J., Mills, J. (1975). Interview with Lena Lightfoot, Lees College, Jackson.

Willis, J. (Producer and Director). (1968). *Appalachia: Rich Land, Poor People* [Motion picture]. United States of America: National Educational Television