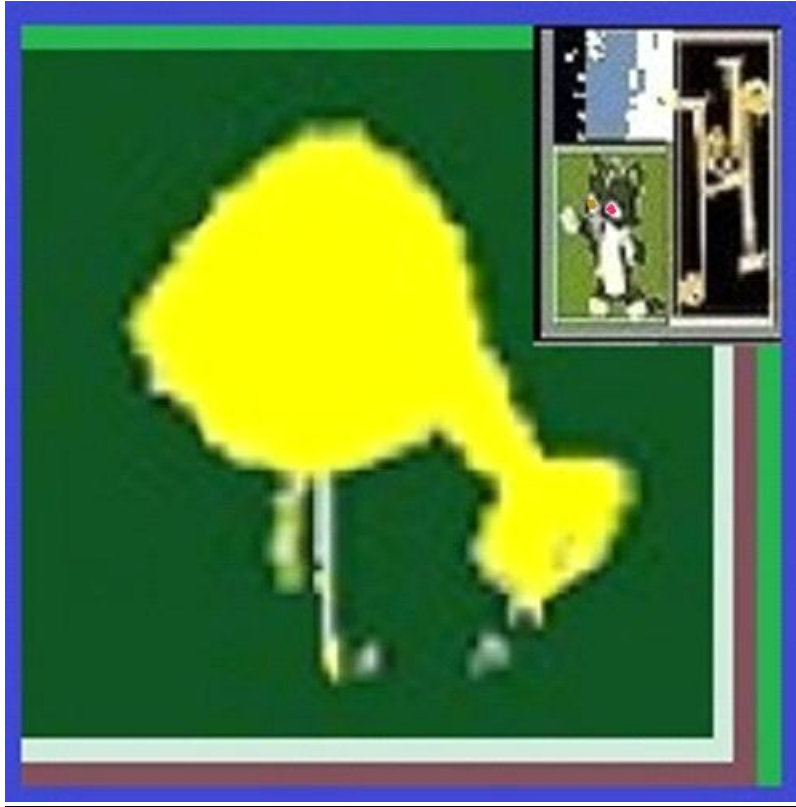


A Country Rag

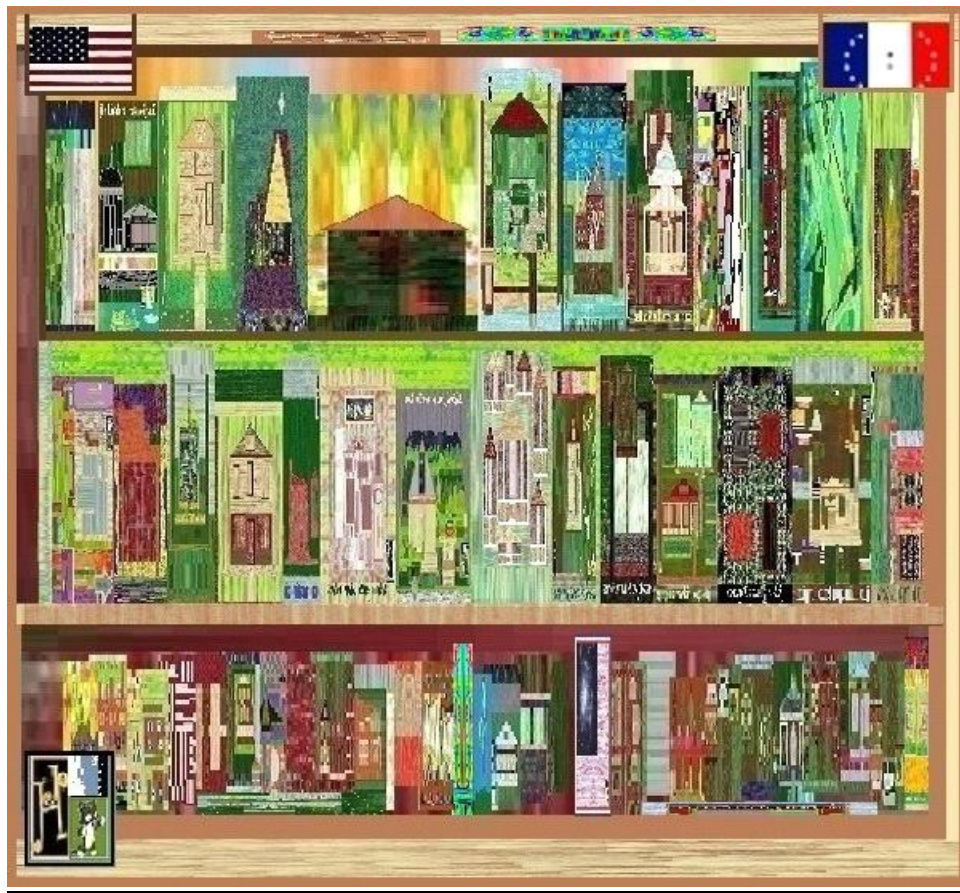
Americana Travel Tweets Anthology



[Travelogue creative non-fiction journal articles and constructions from ACRInc Archives at <http://acountryrag.org/uptodate.html>

and

text excerpts from Chameleon: An Interactive Exploration at <http://acountryrag.org/anecdotes.html>]



by Jeannette Harris

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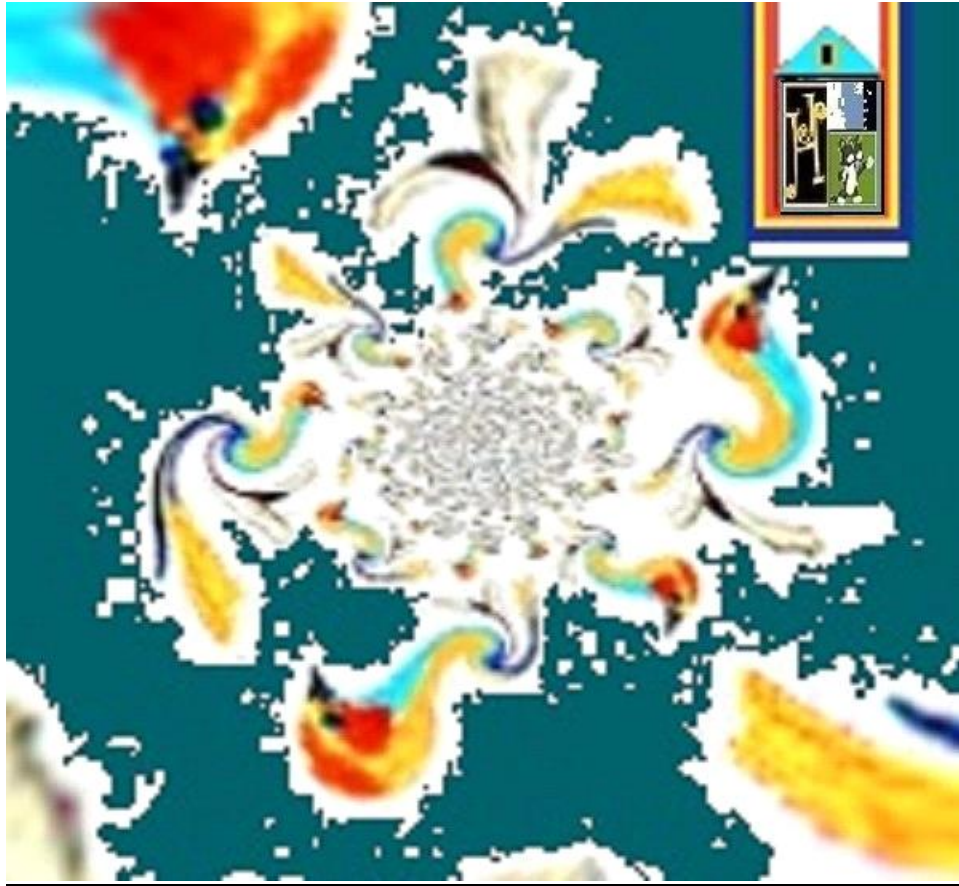
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Alaska!

Maybe a year or so after moving to Jonesborough, Carolyn Moore invited me to be her roommate on a cruise through Alaska's Inland Passage, sponsored and organized by alumni of Appalachian State University, Boone NC, where

her husband had been Chair of the Law Department until he died. With some last minute confusion and scrambling, I obtained a copy of my birth certificate from the City of Angels CA for entry into Canada, where we would stay for two nights in the process of meeting and boarding our Royal Caribbean ship. That mode of travel was a new adventure for me, and I was very excited anticipating the prospect, which lived up to its billing of fabulousness. Carolyn's three daughters -- Susan, Diana and Cassandra -- and one son-in-law, Gary, accompanied us as we flew from Atlanta GA to Vancouver BC, via Dallas, and checked in to a tall, modern hotel overlooking the bay with its myriad boats and barges and surrounding snow-capped mountains. Vancouver is very cosmopolitan with signs in five languages (English, French, Spanish, German and Japanese, I believe) and warmly interesting with lots of shops, cafes and restaurants and generally friendly, laid-back people. The atmosphere was great in every way: beautiful, fascinating, lively, and open.

Our top-tier stateroom had a huge floor-to-ceiling window looking out on water, islands, mainland, orcas and seabirds. The main atrium lobby was usually entertained by a small group of classical musicians on a small, very highly raised round podium, and an all-glass round elevator ran up one side. All the windows, and ones along outside halls, were also floor-to-ceiling affording clear and spectacular views. In the formal large terraced dining room a pianist played a grand piano each evening as we ate sumptuous courses requiring diverse silverware. The pieces are placed by stewards to conform to the order of offerings and are to be used from the outside in. Smorgasbord buffet breakfasts and lunches, as well as mid-meal snacks, were set out in a semi-circular, all-windowed and two-tiered room with variously-sized tables and chairs. When the captain pulled up for a scenic iceberg viewing, we gathered there where an informational ASU lecture was broadcast about those awesomely monumental and glimmeringly blue natural occurrences, plentiful in Alaskan waters and on land, too.

There were several comfortable and gay small lounges with views and music, and one large and dark two-tiered one with a performance stage, as well as a good-sized theatre where we enjoyed a pops musical tribute. Interior walls were lined with very good, original art, and one afternoon a well-known professional house auctioned off diversely sized and stylized framed paintings in the central lobby to an enthusiastic passenger crowd. On the top two decks were amply-sized outdoor and indoor swimming pools, the latter of Egyptian design with angularly-created tiles and wide steps descending into the deepening water. Both were encircled with tables and lounging chairs with stand-up bars. From various outdoor observation decks, we could observe wildlife and habitat as we glided noiselessly by. Weather was pleasant and rarely interfered with our enjoyment of cruise amenities and land explorations. Many of the islands we passed toward the Atlantic side had one or a few buildings erected where homeowners resided in an ultimate recursion from everyday working worlds, urban to rural, of mainlands, countries and continents into the whims and wonders of God and unbounded, unfettered nature.

We all got along well, mingling and separating as we chose mutual and divergent destinations. Every morning, I brought a plate of breakfast foods from the buffet to Carolyn, as she's somewhat older and arthritic and enjoyed extra time to rest, relax and observe the enchantments passing by our twin beds and soft chairs with a table between. Once, when Diana, an Army Judge Advocate at the time (later promoted to General, she retired when her full service commitment ended, returned to university, and became what she is now professionally, a Presbyterian minister), and I were standing by the lobby's picture windows with their couches, chairs and small tables arrayed before them, I asked the name of an island we were passing. She looked at me in some grounded wit and amusement and said, "I don't know, Jeannette. They don't put signs on them, you know." She'd never been

there before either. Tall Susan, an investigative officer with the NC state police, put her arm firmly and tightly around my shoulders as we stood together in emergency life jackets on deck railings for a group photo. The evening before, in the Vancouver lounge of an elegant seafood restaurant after dinner celebrating Carolyn's birthday, Susan began to cry as the pianist played one particular love song. She was in the throes of a disorienting and dislocating divorce and unusually, demonstrably emotional. In consternation, the pianist, along with us, soothed and consoled her sympathetically, as he altered his routine to play cheerier and more upbeat songs. We all ended up smiling and laughing instead and enjoyed the rest of the evening. Exquisite Cassandra, a nurse and major in Army Reserves who had served a year in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm, was the dressiest of us with absolutely gorgeous designer clothes and jewelry. Her husband, Gary, a musician and potter, remained his casual and humorous, sometimes off-beat self, saying once jokingly as we stood in a line somewhere, "Get out of my way. Can't you see I'm an American?"

The ship made three ports of call at distinct and isolated waterside mainland villages -- rural and farming, cosmopolitan with buses to ride around the environs, and quaintly small-town -- where we walked the sights, including constructed homes and vegetation, on narrow streets, browsed small shops and restaurants, and interacted with residents who spend their long winters in close, mutually dependent and supportive community without the infusion of guests and tourist commerce. Our excursions lasted ten days from which we arrived back in Jonesborough enlightened and exhausted, as ASU generally planned our daily schedules from early morning until dinner including, for instance, a formal Elizabethan garden visit and excursion through one native Alaskan outdoor park with authentic tall and thick, colorfully carved and painted totem poles. Before driving down the mountains from Boone NC, we ate an early morning last meal together with the few left somewhat bleary-eyed from our tour, including the university president and friend of Carolyn's who had accompanied us, at International

House of Pancakes.

"And there'll be dancing..."

IntroNOTE: Steve Cook was named last year as a "regional hero" by Marquee Magazine, which has an article in its Summer 2008 issue featuring Music On The Square, with a substantially increased audience now, with accolades and recommendations for attendance during its tenth year anniversary of diversely entertaining presentations of Appalachia and Americana.

"We've had a lot of requests but we're gonna play anyway."

For the past two years, as soon as sidewalks warm enough to sit upon, the Jonesborough Novelty Band opens the first of Friday evening Music on the Square free street concerts. Roads are blocked off, babies gathered, instruments tuned, costumes repaired. Grandmas find their dancing shoes. You won't find Nashville here. Founder, coordinator and guiding spirit Steve Cook has lined up months through mid-fall of mountain bluegrass, blues, celtic, folk, and a storyteller or two. If one can't show, Steve'll play bass with whatever pickup band passes through.

In previous years, concerts by the East Tennessee Musicians Co-op were held

in the park behind Jonesborough's log house but the man who ran it (Bill Howze) retired, musicians drifted off, and for seven years the idea died. Its informal beginnings years ago were at Erwin's Chucky Trading Company, a riverside tavern with tex-mex food and pool tables. The building itself dated back from the 1880s, built as a brothel for railroad company execs and perhaps their out-of-town guests. It doesn't exist anymore.

The revival of an informal co-op performing free, or passing a hat (bowl), spread originally by word of mouth and drew to Jonesborough dozens, then scores, now hundreds of townsfolk and visitors of all ages and descriptions. Greene Valley patients are wheeled out of vans by clinic workers. Youngsters dance on the courthouse steps and its stone bannisters. Couples clog on Main Street. Bystanders sit on benches and curbs, or bring their folding chairs. The Ice Cream Parlor stays open with its over-sized cones. Dillworth's serves supper and its sometimes solo musicians clash and complement music on the street. The sisters and brother at Cranberry Thistle keep their coffee and tea thermoses full. Guests amble amidst pastries and homemade meals, rocking chairs and local papers, magazines, talking with whomever's there. Music on the Square You never know who you'll meet at Cranberry Thistle, or on the crowded street. Steve and Tava Cook's Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery gleams and reflects with unexpected hanging shapes, and steel girders of the new National Storytelling Center rise across the street. The Eureka refurbished hotel next block is nearly complete.

There's the table for voter registration and another selling MOTS t-shirts. The profit goes for promotion now to local radio stations, newspapers, chambers of commerce, hotels, motels. Public radio WETS spreads the news. Most of the musicians are students or professors from nearby colleges: Milligan, Tusculum, and ETSU. Money collected for them goes to performers or to their favorite charities. Marquee magazine and Blue Ridge Country cite it as a model revival of community interaction and spirit, a successful indigenous

endeavor keeping smalltown America vibrant.

Steve says the primary motivation, though, is music, the universal language that all cultures, all ages, all religions understand, the repository of our history handed down through families and friends from this generation to the next, and the dances that go along, our feet and hands telling us of ancestors crossing the seas long ago and settling this land. Main Street is our "family room," he says, the place where we can gather to share our pasts and presents, where we can relax and entertain each other, or do nothing at all. "It feeds our soul," he says. "A shallow life is nothing growing there, like a fallow field. This is real grassroots, inside and out volunteer." Now, even during formal festivals, musicians and other artists form or regroup in coffee houses and on the street. It's a good place to hang out.

And the musicians play on, "however long they feel like playing, however long folks feel like staying." Stevan Jackson on dulcimer, celtic harp, and guitar. The ReelTime Travelers with their fiddle, banjo, guitar, and mandolin. Soon they'll lean against the Antique Mall, tapping and clapping with the crowd, talking, listening to traditional ballads of loves and lives gone astray along the hills of home, brought alive by the Birch Springs Band.

Chimney sweeps dive. Behind Jonesborough spires, the Appalachians dim. Streetlamps come on.

"Let me be your salty dog

or I won't be your man at all.

Honey let me be your

salty dog tonight."

"Boone, NC"

"The sky is blue because air molecules intercept the short blue wave-lengths scattering them across the sky."

From this mountain crest, I sit on a cot, posted by chimney and shelves of books, savor coffee by the picture window as ridges dawn from a settling of pink, white and gray. The view is so high, I might by flying, thought perhaps the Blazer would, rounding sudden hairpin turns and guardless cliffs on yesterday's ascension. I've wakened today to warm visions of friends, one of whom lent me this house, buttressed wood and stone against the horizon. Swayed by a chill, lofty wind, October leaves remain green and lush. With glasses I locate sparse strands of yellow, magenta, sienna. Clouds in smoke-like traces race, thicken, nearly cover the sky. If I stood, walked round

on the top deck to its railing, could I catch a cool ride on those wave-lengths? It feels like I might from here. Just a thin wall, molecules of flesh and skull with so much space in and between, keeps, separates us. Chlorophyll -- a leaf, a needle of pine helping to frame this climbing spiral -- wouldn't do. But we could be lucent, a carbon physic diluted to cycle odd and even in oxygen. We could be air. We could be breath.

**Country Calendar-- -- "Field Report from the
Appalachian Heartland"**

October -- Tuesdays through Thursdays I've been helping out as a volunteer at the Boone North Carolina campaign headquarters for Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama, encountering in the process a widely diverse array of citizens from counter clerks to Appalachian State University professors, babies to the very elderly, out-of-region residents from Springfield Illinois to Coral Gables Florida, and experiences from rudeness to the heights of mountain class. This is "High Country" where home prices can range up into the millions and others rent rooms in boarding houses or seek shelter through church missions. America in progress thousands of feet up in the air geographically and by spirit in many instances. Most of my work involves calling a lengthy list of registered voters -- Democrats, Republicans, and Unaffiliated -- in four counties to determine what issues have been most important to them in determining their ballot and, if possible, for whom they have decided. Additionally, we encourage them to vote early in their best interests and that of officials to avoid congestion on Election Day. A few specifically decline while expressing anticipation of the excitement,

conversation and community usually extant on that very special American occasion. Quite a few say that everything is an issue for them now, but the gradation in sensibility seems to be the economy, war and security, health care, energy and gas prices, retirement, and choice in that order more or less.

Some of their answers are humorous and witty. One older and very Caucasian-sounding gentleman, when asked what is most important to him of the issues Obama discusses, refuses to address that and says instead in reaction to some subtle racial divisiveness, "I like his looks." Another, when asked his Presidential preference, answers, "Anybody else," meaning perhaps that a mentally-challenged street person he met recently exhibited more perception and intelligence than our recent leaders have from his point of view, and that an unemployed janitor he knows from childhood also has. Others expound very seriously on their concerns for the next generations and their families and friends as well as themselves, including the elderly on fixed incomes and with medical exigencies to address. Reacting to respondents is sometimes problematic. One asked, "Why are you voting for that black man?" A little startled, the volunteer answered, hoping to be clear, helpful and encouraging, "Well, he's half-white. Hello? Hello? Are you there?" An Appalachian State University professor of political science is not impressed that the Democratic candidate received his law degree from Harvard University and was its first ethnic head of the Law Review. "It's an elite school," he protests. I point out that Barack Obama entered on his merits, not as a relative or acquaintance of alumni, and that, considering the complexity of national problems now, "I don't think this is any time to be anti-intellectual" in our choice of the next President and Vice President of the United States of America. The professor has another call waiting and signs off without explicitly expressing his preference, although he states cogently his dislike of socialism over capitalism. There's no time to tell him that I've owned several businesses, as have and do others working in the Obama campaign, and am an enthusiast, particularly on the low to mid

range, of that economic system too.

A few respondents have moved to other areas and are working in the campaigns there: one in Colorado, another in Nashville Tennessee, and a third in Raleigh North Carolina. We exchange pleasantries and notes on what's happening in our respective regions. One younger middle-aged student says that he's voting for Nader and looking for a woman who's a "fascist environmentalist." He wants his bumper stickers to read, when he runs for office, "Polluters will be neutered." I end by pleading with him not to waste his vote during this crucial election on a third party candidate but can't tell if he concurs. A querulous-sounding man explains that he's received before calls for the person whose name I read but that that person has never lived at his address. He goes on to tell me of a friend with the same last name who's lived for years by Watauga Lake down a road unfamiliar to me, but he doesn't believe they're any relation to each other. When I ask if he's planning to vote on Tuesday, he answers, "I don't know. I'm 86 years old. Maybe my son will take me." I urge him not to miss the opportunity to participate in this historic election, and he murmurs agreeably.

Two congenial and minimally-remunerated headquarters personnel -- one an Air Force veteran who served as military police during his tour of duty in Alaska and with a masters in Political Science, and the other a Georgetown graduate of English and Philosophy -- provide coffee, pop, cookies and lunches like sandwiches and pizza for themselves and volunteers, as well as direction and assistance. For the opportunity of a lifetime to be involved in precedent-setting political activities, Mark left his position with the Illinois Governor's office for the campaign, and Blake is biding time energetically before entering law school to follow generally in the footsteps of his father, a corporate attorney practicing in Manhattan, New York. There's a long table with literature and sale items like buttons and bumper stickers with yard signs propped up against the walls. We run out fairly frequently and refer

some to Democratic Headquarters just the next block over. Foot traffic is usually busy and entertaining. One man is from England and requests explication from me of our puzzling Electoral College system. I summarize with some clarity its history and the theory behind its makeup. He remains pleasantly curious, wishing us good luck as he leaves. Another visitor in the company of her six-month-old son walks through the door opening to request literature and stickers. While we're talking, I ask the baby's name and she answers "Jude." Bending over the stroller, I smile saying, "What a great name! What a lucky boy you are!" and Jude grins back making a happy, gleeful motion with his whole body as if he completely understands what I said and agrees, absolutely.

One respondent recounts her conversation just previous with a McCain supporter who has assured her that Obama will disband the Boy Scouts and similar organizations by insisting on the installation of homosexuals as their leaders young and old. A walk-in complains that the machines switched all his votes for Democratic candidates to Republican ones. A volunteer recounts with distressed horror talking to prospective voters in one area that nearly all react volubly that they "would never vote for that nigger." In contrast, a few who turn out to have already voted express their delight at being able to cast a ballot for Barack Obama and the Democrats with involuntary and joyful giggles. A woman volunteer with a law degree and experience as a corporate litigation attorney details the inexplicably odd experience of having her straight hair come out in clumps and grow back with curls while her body exuded strange-smelling chemicals for about two years, perhaps in response to some countrywide meltdown of previously-assured Constitutional guarantees in the personal and professional lives of citizens. The bumper sticker on a volunteer's vehicle reads, "WHO WOULD JESUS KILL?" There is general agreement that the last eight years have been criminal and miserable in violation of truly religious and democratic ideals and that we don't want anything more or less than our Constitutional country, and a healthily progressing world, back.

Betsy, a retired middle-aged Cobol programmer has her fingernails painted red, white and blue and sits her three-and-a-half foot long body on the floor to assemble yard signs whose buyers complain are stolen regularly and need replacement. She wears a pin some days that says, "1/20/09 End of an Error." One undecided voter married to a Democrat switches parties in irritation and disgust with tactics of the opposition, which have cost him another five bucks. A sign on the wall reads: "You steal our signs; we get more money for our campaign." The back of a USA-colored tee-shirt Blake wears one days reads: "'If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.' -- John F. Kennedy, Jr." Betsy tells anecdotally of wearing once a shirt to the mall imprinted with "Vertically Challenged," which she found amusing but no onlookers seemed to notice or understand. Two African-American Appalachian State University professors -- one of English Composition and another of Music with a prestigious jazz band he leads as its alto sax player -- show up now and then to help, and the owner of an automobile dealership delivers a large tray of deli meats and cheeses for making sandwiches. Two massage therapists, a man and a woman made up in cat face for Hallowe'en, come in on consecutive days to volunteer their professional services and set up minimal equipment in the meeting room for weary and sometimes stressed volunteers.

Around 10 p.m. on the Saturday evening before Election Day Jo, our volunteer office manager, and her husband were eating in a neighborhood downtown restaurant before attending a late night film. Her cell phone rang and a voice asked if it was she. Responding affirmatively, the person said, "I have a conference call for you with Barack Obama. Please hang on to talk with him." Jo was sure it was a joke-trick and thought to herself and aloud to her husband, "Sure it is. I'm gonna get Mark in the morning for this." A doubt rose within her and shortly thereafter the voice of the Democratic candidate came over the waves. Jo stood up on her chair, waving her arms and telling

all the other patrons to be quiet, Barack Obama was on the telephone! When I asked her the next morning if she'd written down everything he said so she could remember it, she shook her head in a little sorrow and said that she hadn't but the gist of the message was, "Keep the power going." And we did and have done our best.

During the final two days numbers of volunteers swell until we are literally running into each other in the hallway. Jo, mother of a six-year-old son who visits us once for awhile, is one of those in charge. She's never really worked before and is pleasurably challenged and energized, as well as efficiently organized. Dr. Hall Beck of ASU's Psychology Department joins us with assistance and interesting conversation. So does April Flanders of that university's art department. A specialist in printmaking, she's lived all around the country and in Canada. During a Florida sojourn for the year 2000 election, she and a friend registered to vote in that state at the same time and together. When that Election Day came around, she was allowed to cast her ballot but the friend, an African-American, never received a registration card and became, at the last minute, disenfranchised by missing records. Susan, a clinical social worker, has been my best and warmest friend at headquarters since the first day and we've laughed and giggled together frequently about various happenings past and present. Twelve hundred yard signs delivered on Saturday have been distributed and many of them purloined, according to their owners. A new sign taped to the front room wall reads: "You can steal our signs, but you can't steal the election." In the dwindling hours of "phone banking," a disabled veteran argues with me that none of our governments are any good, they don't really make any difference, there's no use in voting, and the country is about to implode totally any minute. In the midst of a rousing defense of active and participatory democracy, the importance of every single vote and widespread citizen participation in all aspects of government and community with honorable mention for ground-breaking programs that have been initiated historically cross-country and worldwide, the superb qualifications

of Obama and Biden, and warning that he'll "hate himself in the morning" if he misses this precedent-setting, portentous and prestigious vote -- the man suddenly imparts that he hasn't registered to vote and won't therefore be allowed into a polling booth this year. I wish him a good day, suggest that he register later for the next round, and hang up. Maybe he'll convince his wife, or a neighbor. Off and on we enjoy with the others sandwiches handmade by a local friend and Betsy's extraordinary culinary gift to us all in the form of huge prepared platters of barbecued pork, green and baked beans, slaw, and the pieces de resistance: over-sized cookies and cupcakes topped with photo icing of the two Democratic candidates that she ordered Saturday from a baker, and Democratic supporter, in California. We agree that perhaps, like pieces of a wedding cake, they should be home-frozen and saved for eating on an anniversary occasion, say Obama/Biden in 2012. Dispersing little by little as work to be done wanes in the final hours, Susan and I exchange a parting hug and e-mail addresses.

Emily, a widow a few decades junior to me, has been my hostess for overnight stays. One of three daughters and a son to her Republican father, a retired elected Judge who studied to understand the law rather than earning a formal degree and a mother whom she much admired for her profound and unassuming Christianity, she has just switched parties in the past six months to devote all of her extra energies in overturning policies and leadership with which she now whole-heartedly disagrees. She assists variously in Obama offices and also makes the rounds canvassing with voting information and encouragement for citizens to get to the polls and cast their ballot for Barack Obama and Joe Biden. Emily's insightful knowledge about background and issues is impressive and enlightening. As an intelligent humanist, she's a joy to question on viewpoints across the spectrum. She's also a very successful and long-time real estate broker who's owned and remodeled her three-story home over a period of 15 years. Her conveniently-located sales company employs 15 agents; her home is an endless joy of unusual and unique mountain folk art interestingly placed and

arranged. The setting is a fairly developed wilderness up a winding road, and "the digs" are totally comfortable including a front porch and generously-sized back deck. Emily's older cat Freddie and the two young curly-haired, mid-sized and mixed-breed sister dogs are obviously pampered and loved. They have their own mattresses on the floor but sleep, and come and go, where and when they please. One morning as I'm drinking coffee, her very large gray feline sits on my lap for awhile communicating how fabulous his life is, his superior intelligence and consciousness, and his worldview, which is -- sorry, dog-lovers, but I'm just conveying what he said -- that "Cats never totally bliss out, but are always aware, and that's why: Cats Rule." Attractive and flexible, Emily's an excellent cook, funny and smart in conversation, friendly, and laid-back, at least when she's not working, so I feel extraordinarily blessed in both the unexpected assignment to "High Country" and the relaxed fun of spending nights and mornings there.

Country Calendar-- -- "High Country Ramblin'"

Abandoning the Purple Heart Trail to and from Boone somewhat later and feeling rich with a tankfull of gas at \$1.99 a gallon, I head upwards geographically south instead of east for a Gary Carden reception celebrating the release of his DVD An Evening with Mountain Storyteller Gary Carden (a few kudos from the cover: "Gary Carden is North Carolina's answer to Garrison Keillor," Tom Davenport, filmmaker; "One of the funniest and most entertaining devils on earth," Dot Jackson, author of Refuge; "Carden lifts his stories out of his life the way a collector lifts gemstones ... holding them up ... knowing the place where the light hits them best," Mary Ann Claud, Hendersonville Times-News; "I have heard him tell his stories, at which he is a mater, and I have watched his plays, goose bumps on my arms and tears in

my eyes," Kay Byer, Poet Laureate of North Carolina; "I have performed at the International Storytelling Festival many times and have seen and heard storytellers from all over the world and they are some of the best to walk onto a stage. But, my favorite storyteller is still Gary Carden -- he doesn't 'perform,' he talks -- with a heart full of mountain and a mouth full of real. Nothing can beat that!" Sheila Kay Adams) in Sylva North Carolina by way of Asheville. With a stuffed shopping bag of that city's free newspapers and magazines, I relax as usual at Malaprops Bookstore/Cafe ("Using our imaginations is a radical antidote to our societal numbing by computer-ease and advertising slamming.... I am still slowing my way through Mirrors of the Unseen by Jason Elliot. I am learning so much about the Persians and the culture that created the base of most everything (unless it is of Chinese origin) that we do and believe in.... What is amazing to me is the ability of the human mind to create everything without machines and advanced technologies, as the Persian, Mayans and Chinese have done.... As Malaprops Bookstore/Cafe enters her 27th year, we will continue to serve a community willing to read and support a diverse and eclectic selection of worthy literature!... Celebrate who we are and what we have! Vote for your community by shopping in locally owned businesses, and make small but essential positive environmental changes in your daily habits to protect this beautiful place we call home: The MOUNTAINS, the RIVER, the ARCHITECTURE and her READING and GREEN community." -- Eموke B'Raez, owner and founder of Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe and Downtown Books & News) with bread pudding and coffee before a quick tour of the latest offerings at the Woolworth Walk's two story art galleries before moving on toward the Smokies before sunset.

Mason Jars in the Flood,' a collection of stories by Gary Carden Taking the last beautician's advice, I've decided not to comb my curls after they dry, so my hair looks kind of like a used country mop by the time I get there, and I can't find my lipstick. I locate a comfortable, cushioned wicker chair on the last row, from which it turns out I can seldom hear or see Gary tell his

stories, inside the back room of Sylva's City Lights Bookstore. My friend the author and teller, lecturer and professor walks from the next room to the lectern, looks around at his audience, and says, "Is that Jeannette Harris I see back there?" Heads turn as I nod and grin. "Yes, it is, Gary," and look down at the free book we each have been given by the owner of the shop. John Quinnett, retired Qualla Boundary counselor and poet, arrives toward the appointed time of 7 p.m. and ends up in the "standing room only" overflow area where we exchange greetings following Gary's energized performance which has had the crowd smiling and laughing for an hour. John lives in a neighboring county and has had to park his car with its Obama/Biden stickers on Main Street there to protect it from vandals who've undertaken political statements like placing a bear cub carcass wrapped in Democratic Party posters on the lawn of Western Carolina University (the students involved were relieved of their classroom responsibilities for awhile) and throwing beer cans at and through windows of "mislabeled" properties. Dave Waldrop, a friend of Gary's with a Masters degree and 30 years of professional experience in Counseling and Guidance some of whose lyrics have been recorded and performed by the bluegrass and gospel group The Smoky Mountain Boys, introduces himself at the buffet table and gives me signed copies of his poetry book, *am I*, which includes verse written by his admirable mother Lillie Clayton Waldrop Pannell, and CD, *Freedom!*, ("These songs and poems are rich with mountain living. Humorous and profound, they are as natural as trout in the Tuckaseigee. *Freedom!* is a joyous celebration for us all." -- Michael Revere, author of *Fire and Rain*, *Lizard Man*, and other acclaimed poetic works) as we discuss socio-political pasts and present with humor and current rejoicing.

'The Prince of Dark Corners,' a play by Gary Carden Later, as I walk toward Gary's house, I choose the wrong side of his car to round and end up calf-deep in a mud hole. In his book-lined den we discuss literature and events involving mutual acquaintances. He has written an epilogue for Lewis Green who died the previous week but can't find it at the moment. We agree

Lewis was a poetic soul run amuck, and Gary says that he had the great American novel in him thwarted by psychopathological violence, obsessive paranoia, and prejudice as his mind took an increasingly wrong turn over the years after writing *And Scatter The Proud*. Gary tells me about prolific Cherokee author Robert Conley being appointed recently Sequoyah Distinguished Professor in Cherokee Studies at Western Carolina University and recommends any of his 80 or so books. He also recounts the legend of Nance Dude, about which he has earlier written a play, based on *The Legend of Nance Dude* by UNC at Wilmington professor of religion and philosophy Maurice Stanley, in production off and on over the years. Roaming mentally through mountain lore, he recalls the 40,000+ Lumbee tribal natives who claim partial descent from the Virginia Dare (name of the first child born in the Americas to English parents) Colonists on Virginia's Roanoke Island. He also mentions an FDR era Federal Writers Project collection of Tennessee folklore entitled *God Bless The Devil*. Finally, we discuss for awhile the meaning of "dark corners," as the most recent play of his to be produced publicly is called "The Prince of Dark Corners." It is the true story of Lewis Redmond, an "outlaw" during the desperate mountain times of Reconstruction, which sometimes required extraordinary survival behaviors from individuals and families. The protagonist joins others in a region called "a dark corner," where three or more states collide and no one, or one county or town, claims jurisdiction so no law is applied.

'The Raindrop Waltz,' a play by Gary Carden For a few years, Gary relates, he's experienced the attentions and affections of a now-wealthy female acquaintance from high school, a traveler who's visited "Stratford-on-Avon where some writer guy lived" and "a big building in Paris with lots of famous stuff in it." (Shakespeare? The Louvre?) She also bought him a designer wardrobe to help in marketing his performances as an Appalachian mountain storyteller in the process of introducing him to some upscale area restaurants. Finally, clutching a pair of old jeans and a flannel shirt, Gary pecked out an "asta la vista" e-mail to her and retreated to his soapstone

woodstove for reworking his latest book review to be published as ever by Smoky Mountain News. Now free from her accusatory jealousies of every other woman he does or did ever talk with or notice in passing, he envisions also completing the large canvas entitled "Rapture at MacDonald's" on his easel of naked and satisfied MacDonald's customers rising up over the golden arches, topped by a fully-clothed Ronald MacDonald, munching contentedly on their hamburgers and french fries in ecstasy toward the figure of Jesus at the top. Gary introduces me to the computer game Chickenary, which is very funny graphically and phonically, and we play one game until neither of us can construct another word from the randomly generated letters displayed. Our score totals 16, which he adds to his accumulation of points. At 10,000, he'll have won a new keyboard.

Jack, the Jack Russell terrier, has grown large and rotund. He nuzzles my leg but desists from eating my shoes, and Gary takes him in his car to breakfast the next morning at The Coffee Shop, built originally before World War II and used thereafter as a popular drive-in diner with a front porch overlooking the Smokies. In conversation with an older man -- who turns out to be a retired minister writing a book on the healing aspects of humor -- at a neighboring table, Gary recounts the story of a fiddler back then who traveled around the country with his band staying in the finest hotels, eating in the best restaurants, and generally "living the good life" everywhere. He always came back to Sylva, though, "stone broke" and washed dishes at the diner for a spell until returning again to the road. Admiring the Smokies through the diner's picture windows, I listen as Gary recounts the story of a young, attractive and shapely waitress who put her nude picture out publicly and then had to quit her job for awhile because it drove some citizens and customers a little bit wild. My country breakfast of pork tenderloin, eggs, hash browns, endless coffee refills, and biscuits with gravy is delicious. We part company with the preacher, and I am soon again on the road west to Cherokee with the car windows up and doors locked due to its Obama/Biden stickers and internet-relayed post-election threats by some displeased "real

Americans" to shoot or otherwise harm other real Americans. (Will all the unreal Americans please stand up now?)

Views of remaining fall foliage and mountain waves swimming in mist are enjoyable, but I decide to forego the sometimes garish commercialism of Qualla Boundary and head on, with the radio tuned to local live bluegrass pickin', through Great Smoky Mountain National Park toward the out-and-out, in-your-face hype of Gatlinburg, which I still remember as a small laid-back ski resort in the mid-to-late 60s where I first saw and heard informal mountain storytellers on stage performing with country musicians. Some folks believe the back road from the Shenandoah Valley's King's Crossing to the river's South Fork is curvy; however, they need to experience the pavement from Cherokee down to the flatlands to really understanding the meaning of "curvy." Hairpin turn, you say? How about a figure-eight? Okay, I'm exaggerating. A little bit. There are a lot of cars traveling and on the sides of the two-lane with a few suddenly deciding to brake and turn off at a scenic overlook. It's very exciting, especially if you remember not to ride your brakes but just pump them, regularly, instead. The views are truly breathtaking and I've bought various inexpensive and beautifully photographed postcards at the Visitors Center, which also has an extensive display cataloguing the history of FDR's New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps in creating the tunnels and road. Amidst stop-and-go, bumper-to-bumper traffic there, passing by the Hard Rock cafe to my left, I decide to pass on through to Newport Tennessee and home.

But I miss the turnoff to the right and end up in Pigeon Forge instead. Passing by the Police Museum, which appears from its deserted parking lot to be closed, I manage to find the next road east leading toward the Tri-Cities and pass the "hot boiled peanuts" truck parked to the left on the four-lane. I begin wondering if drivers have gotten crazier lately. The posted speed limit is 55 mph. The guy driving to my right puts on his right turn signal and

swerves abruptly left, causing me to brake to a near-stop. Back up to 55 mph, the whole line brakes because someone in the lead has to come to a complete stop apparently before turning off to the right. Nearly all the contents of the passenger seat of my car dive to the floor and later I can't reach the brownies or my cigarettes when I need and want them. I do learn quickly not to take my eyes off the car in front and beside me for more than a few seconds. Bluegrassed out, I feel the need for rock music and change the car radio station and volume to Ronnie Milsap singing, "(I'm A)Stand-By-My-Woman Man."

You know you're finally on a country road when the pavement narrows to a winding, hilly two-lane, isolated barns and cows appear, and you have to grit your teeth to pass a tractor traveling at 7 mph as you round a blind turn. Surprised that the route ends in downtown Greeneville, I stop at "A Gathering of Friends," my favorite antique store there, for regrouping before continuing on to Jonesborough with a few extra odds-and-ends treasures along with the usual accumulation of free magazines and newspapers collected en route and begging to be enjoyed and read.

Country Calendar-- -- "Completing the Circle"

Due to campaign exhaustion, I've missed the \$12/per person Tribute to Veterans, which was free to any who'd served in this nation's military and who were also invited to be voluntary participants in that program -- in addition to their leadership representation in local festival parades -- at Jonesborough's beautiful new two-story and sprawling International Storytelling Center with its brick-lined plazas, diversely ample rooms, and

floor to ceiling windows and doors. I am able though, subsequently, to attend a film and art exhibit that are part of this season's Abingdon Virginia region fabulously varied and always excellent Arts Array(sample offering from 2006 and 2009 winter film offerings) series.

"Mongol" is a cinematic tour of the terrifying and hazardous early days experienced by Temüjin (played by Tadanobu Asano) who became known as Genghis Khan, warring factions amongst his ethnicity and region, love of his child-bride Börte (played by Khulan Chuluun) and their little son and daughter despite obstacles and separations, and final success in uniting them under laws which seem fairly modern in their values. The dramatic performances are riveting and the ending battle sequence against one-time friend and life-saver Jamukha (played by Sun Honglei) orchestrated like a ballet in beauty and technique with the encounter scenes of blood and body parts flying reminiscent of abstract paintings. Co-produced by German, Kazakhstani, Mongolian and Russian companies, scenes were shot mostly in the People's Republic of China (Inner Mongolia -- the Mongol autonomous region), and in Kazakhstan. The movie was nominated for the 2007 Academy Award in the Best Foreign Language Film category. Although media reviews were mixed, I thoroughly enjoyed the sweep of history, custom, culture, and vistas and the revelation of personages and their interactions. Translated from Mongolian to English subtitles which allows the music and nuances of native speech to shine through also.

William King Regional Arts Center's exhibits featured "Female(s) Form(s)" and "Rebis: New Paintings by Virginia Derryberry." The latter is a professor of Art at the University of North Carolina in Asheville and her work blends realism with myth in interestingly modern ways. The former, spotlighting "seven individual female artists who were chosen not for their particular views on or involvement with Feminism, but instead for their individual artistic merit, interesting and experimental aesthetic and the content of their

work," featured seven artists: Jennifer L. Collins, Jennifer Cox, Mary Nees, Suzanne Stryk and Joni Pienkowski (painter, printmaker, illustrator, and my personal favorite for concepts and technique) in painting and diversely productive Val Lyle, a relative of ACR contributor John Lyle and whose recent found-object rope work from a Manhattan sojourn has a socio-political slant, and Mary Tartaro, whose imaginative detailings are whimsically meaningful, in sculpture.

The Center has been nearly fully-funded, through federal grants and loans and private donations, for an excitingly extensive expansion of buildings, space and offerings for public and artists to begin construction early in the year 2009. These welcome and joyous extensions for the Mountain Empire arts community will include artist studios, a performing auditorium, doubling of the gallery size, and gardens.

Country Calendar-- -- "Apprehension and Alchemy"

apprehension [L. apprehendere, to take hold of] 1. capture or arrest 2. mental grasp; perception or understanding 3. a judgment or opinion 4. an anxious feeling of foreboding; dread

alchemy [Gr. cheein, pour; L. fundere, to melt (metal)] 1. an early form of chemistry, with philosophical and magical associations, studied in the Middle Ages: its chief aims were to change baser metals into gold and to discover the elixir of perpetual youth 2. a method or power of transmutation; esp. the seemingly miraculous change of a thing into something better

The AWA held its annual conference July 13-15, in the Culp Center of ETSU. As is the custom for many similar arts and sciences events, workshops are held concurrently, so -- like a menu at a good restaurant -- one is forced to choose reluctantly between, say, a poetry workshop moderated by Rita Quillen and songwriting by Rob Russell.

Being constitutionally incapable of choosing poetry, much as I love it, over music, which at its best incorporates poetry, you'll know which door I chose. Meeting Room #1 soldiered the usual ranks of metal chairs although, participants being artists not scientists or engineers, they were somewhat askew.

Now it occurs to me that, if we had good live music at G-8 summit meetings for leaders and their entourage and for protestors, we might understand and resolve our differences more peaceably. At least we'd have more fun in the process (unless like little boys we really like fighting and war toys. And there my mind comes to a deadend, just like the road I lived beside for nearly 20 years).

Four well-loved regional performers played, sang, and answered questions about the creative process that resulted in: "If I Could Find A Way" and "The Hero" (Roger Rasnick); "Doggone" and "Basketfull of Singing Birds" (Ed Snodderly); "Wild Boys On The Corner" and "What About My Heart?" (Andrena Belcher); and "She's Gone" (Rob Russell).

Ed and Andrena had performed together just a few weeks earlier, kind of next door at the Reece Museum's quarterly "Cabaret" -- musical events set

amidst collections of traditional Appalachian handcraft (including wagons, pianos, and backcountry stringed instruments) and more current art.

Workshop musicians noted that, as in stories and poetry, their songs were a mixture of other peoples' experiences, imaginings and expressions and the songwriter's own, so the result is a melding rather than reflection of the separate individual. Perhaps that is what creates the best of art in any form -- that it speaks to an inclusive expanse of human and divine apprehension.

If it does this well, it appeals universally to a wide audience. Which leads to the bridge between creation and ... getting it out there where people may relate and, hopefully, find reinforcement in the realities of their lives, comforted in sorrow and/or inspired in joy. To that end, and for financial upkeep of course, these four workshop musicians had tapes and CDs for sale alongside books by authors leading or mentioned in other workshops.

There have been many articles and news stories about governmental cuts in funding the arts, both for the general public and in our school systems. Artists -- including writers, musicians, painters, and sculptors -- travel conferences, fairs and concerts to promote their work. They also donate time to educational and civic institutions.

You can help support and continue the tradition in Appalachia of "grassroots" creativity, of soul work, by attending a poetry reading, an open air performance, a gallery show. And, if you're able, by buying a sample to save for yourself and your home. It will be a memory of treasures, a hint of the artists' whole work, a gift of love and pleasure. Alchemy turning sorrow and terror to beauty a body can bear and a mind can stand to know.

To be aware, to truly see time's holograph of horror and transform it with hard work and talent is the closest to divine on earth we'll know and, at its best, the holiest offering and heritage to our "fellow man."

Country Calendar-- -- "It's Raining Men, Hallelujah!"

Jonesborough TN -- My hometown since 1998 celebrates Independence Day with a three-day festival -- called Jonesborough Days and instituting its 38th annual occurrence with an overall participatory crowd estimated at 60,000 in a community whose resident citizens number just a little over 5,000 --beginning on the morning of the Fourth with a colorful and musical parade of heartwarmingly extravagant and sometimes humorous displays of patriotic colors participated in by very elderly women and men through reigning area beauty queens, including "cutest kid," to small children and babies. In celebration of this year's theme, "Farmin' on the Fourth," a young man carries a little son on his lap as he manoeuvres a decorated International Harvester down Main Street. A grandfather does the same on his John Deere with a grandson. Two "trains" constructed of painted 55-gallon drums on wheels with seats cut out of the tops and strung together with heavy utility wire carry two and three years olds, a few looking a little grumpy in the sun and ordered chaos of motorized vehicles, horses mounted and drawing surries, people clapping, cheering and waving, and frequently manicured dogs barking. Two horses are accoutered on their front legs with outsized denim bib overalls. A clown prances by a few gentlemen on the sidewalks dressed as Uncle Sam with tall red, white, and blue top hats and a large middle-aged woman costumed in turquoise as the Statue of Liberty.

It is all led by a flatbed carrying service veterans followed by a smaller construction with Sam Burke of the Jonesborough Novelty Band and Mudbugs and Steve Cook, founder and coordinator of Music On The Square, playing folk and patriotic songs, and the Davy Crockett High School marching band followed by their baton twirlers. The crowd flows into the street as the parade disappears and fans out to kiosks of beautiful and fascinating handmade crafts, fragrant foods, games for children including the traditional three chances for \$1 to dunk a teenaged boy-man sitting on a chair over four feet or so of water, face-painting, and a large inflated water slide. I'm wearing a navy designer tee with a heart of stars and stripes on the front, and quite a few other people are wearing shirts and outfits similarly displaying colors of the Union in various designs. There are three venues with continuous live music changing about hourly: a main tent, an outdoor cafe with umbrella-covered tables and chairs in the International Storytelling Center plaza, and an open jam in the park behind the reconstructed log home by Main Street's Presbyterian Church.

John Markopoulos, also a long-time friend of retired art professor John Lysle, previous ACR contributor, and pony-tailed Greek-Italian artist/owner of a wonderfully overwhelming art and antique shop in the restored Sisters Row, welcomes me in from the store's front porch and we talk about his upcoming participation in the next ACR update until Steve Cook comes in joining the conversation and I leave soon to enjoy the Benedict Trio of a tall, gray-haired man on mandolin and banjo, a younger woman on guitar (they harmonize), and a heavy-set older woman in long flowing brown fiber skirt and white tunic playing virtuoso fiddle. She leads in for a few songs, including "The Tennessee Waltz" and "Whiskey For Breakfast," which she notes, laughing, that she doesn't recommend. Later, in the main tent a version of the Novelty Band with tech professor Sam Burke on electric bass and a young dark-haired woman in jeans, occasionally holding her young daughter, are singing and

playing with a drummer and guitarist. Belting out a solo version of "You Made Me Love You," with a few guttural vocal exclamations in appropriate places, she brings down the house.

There's a Native American Village on Inn Lawn Park hosted by the Intertribal Council where I'm treated to warm and delicious hominy and cornbread by three women sitting on chairs in the shade of a tree and then sit close by the babbling riffles of the town creek, talking for quite awhile with an older polio-disabled Cherokee man from Wise County, Virginia. He laments that younger ones are entranced by computers and drugs, uninterested in mountain hiking, fishing and hunting as he and his older friend sitting nearby still are. All the participants are wearing traditional native dress. When the dancer with his face painted mostly in thick black stripes comes over, I say, "You look very frightening," and we both laugh. A native booth in the crafts area carries tee shirts emblazoned with a photo of four Cherokee men holding formidable rifles imprinted above with "First Line of Defense." I want to buy one but the woman manning the booth who barely speaks or understands English says they're \$15 each, over my budget, so I buy a \$2 painted wooden angel for my dining room Christmas tree and a variegated stone pendant for the same price a little ways down the lines of tents and tables. A shy teenage woman stops me and says, "I love your jewelry," as I laugh and show her my latest purchase. Another woman at a table agrees with me, smiling, that Jonesborough is heaven on earth, "the world before The Fall," as musician, storyteller and department chair Dr. Joseph Sobol once put it.

On the way walking home with my crafts treasures and free little plastic American flag, I pick up the free Voice: magazine for women, thanking God one more time for being here, along with a small request, from my throbbing right ankle vibrating sympathetically particularly, that the Divine not rain and lightning on me, or anyone else, from darkening and rumbling clouds until

we're all safely sheltered. Arriving home dry and unelectrified, I turn on the stereo to listen to my newest Selena CD and rest the aching soles of my feet a little while browsing through Abingdon, Virginia's Highlands Festival pamphlet I've also picked up free, detailing performance and crafts to be presented there freely to inexpensively (from \$16 per show to \$5 for a day's live music pass) July 26th through August 10th, beginning with the Hunt Family Fiddlers from Ireland -- "dancers, singers and champion fiddlers" -- and ending with Barter Theatre's enactment of The Who's musical, "Tommy." Ah, the glorious Mountain Empire.

In the evening, I drive back for a blues performance which begins with five band members gathering in a circle with arms around each other bowing their heads and praying beyond hearing of the audience for quite awhile. Then they break and Lightnin' Charlie hits a hard sliding lick on his electric guitar, leading in the enthusiastic saxophone, electric bass and drums players. Magic has begun. They get into their music and message without applause breaks for the next two high-energy hours. Charlie is tall, lanky and long-legged with a body in constant rhythm covered in a white suit and Stetson hat. His wife, the harmonizing singer on a few songs and dancer sitting with the audience otherwise, is small with longish dark, wavy hair and wearing a blue and white sundress. At one point, she says into her microphone, "I'd talk, but I'm too shy." Between songs, Charlie reminds us that we're still the greatest country on earth, not because of governments but because of our people, and that we couldn't do what we are doing in Iran or the Sudan, for instance. Speaking of gas prices and their effects, including keeping many from traveling vacations this summer, he extolls the joys of home, quotes the Biblical promise that, "We who are last will some day be first," and launches into Otis Redding's "Sittin' On The Dock Of The Bay," "Pretty Woman," and a rousing version of "Honey, that's it! I quit! I'm movin' on."

Charlie then introduces a few original bluesy gospel songs from his latest CD of them by saying, noting that many artists do, "The Lord wrote it. God's still in business." The first says, "He's a life preserver, people, when your ship is going down.... Call on Him before you drown." Asking permission to perform another gospel, he sings, "I'm gone again, don't want to live in sin no mo'...." followed by a song to his wife and then notes, "You don't have to worry about your heart; it's going to last you the rest of your life" before singing the 'good news' song, "Say The Word and you'll be free; spread The Word and be like me; say The Word...." He and the bass player then switch to acoustic guitars for "I'm a blues man; Charlie is my name; I am what I am and the blues are to blame.... The blues sent me an angel, introduced me to my wife...." Some of it's played and sung very softly, so we have to listen attentively to the words, well-enunciated. Switching back to their electric instruments and encouraging the audience again to get up by saying, "Everyone can dance to this, even a white guy like me," they then lead in to a slow, sexy version of "Sea of Love" with couples from young to aged swaying together before pots of plants and flowers arranged at the foot of the stage.

Charlie puts down his guitar and walks over to an electric piano at stage left with a story about friend Jerry Lee and his pubescent cousin-wife Myra, after charging into "Whole Lot Of Shakin' Goin' On." Reclaiming his guitar, the band ends with an a capella hymn by them and Charlie's adult in-law family, a verbal tribute to World War II veterans, in service and not, who saved the world for freedom with their sacrifices, and a blues medley of "America," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Dixie," "Battle Hymn," and "All My Sorrows." You gotta hear this guy! And if he's performing in your area, give yourself a boost and an incomparable treat. This is someone you really want and need to meet!

Lightnin' Charlie has been performing for 25 years, has two young children ("When something's wrong with my baby, something's wrong with me"),

CDs, an autobiographical book, and started playing acoustic two years ago free in nursing and assisted living homes. He says that, regardless of cognizance levels, the elderly respond and want to hear rock and rousing blues only. As I stand up to leave an attractive young blonde woman holds up her tiny and adorable mulatto daughter with short, curly, light brown hair, fixed with a bow, to watch a train go by. Her daughter's face transforms in delighted expressions of awe at the sight and sounds as a young black man unfolds his daughter, sprawled out on his lap throughout the performance, to get up and go home.

More of the same continues all day and evening Saturday ending with the Johnson City Community Concert Band playing by the Visitors Center at 9:30 before fireworks there start at 10:00 p.m. The Band begin with "America" and soft orchestrations of Americana, playing "Battle Hymn," "Dixie," and "America" as town fireworks start exploding in the clear and humid night sky. We're all given disposable glasses that enhance spectrum and size of displays falling in sparkling splendor toward our upturned faces. The band starts up again with hymns from all four services in the order of Marines, Navy, Army and Air Force, ending with "Halls of Montezuma," before quitting again for awhile. Picking up after fireworks are through with the usual skyborne bangs and spangling explosions, they play "Stars and Stripes" as the crowd begins to disperse from sidewalks, grass, and Boone Street. I walk back up the hills with a few rest stops in this micro San Francisco and pause by the apartments' play area where three daddies, despite worldwide economic woes, have spent possibly their cumulative last week's salaries on professional level fireworks which they've been setting off the past few nights until the wee hours for about a dozen kids and other onlookers throughout the town. Happy Fifth!

The program closes with gospel on Sunday afternoon ending with the African-American Bethel Christian Church Choir and last performance of

"Charlotte's Web," performed popularly by area children at Jonesborough Repertory Theatre for \$3 per ticket. In concert with the Town of Jonesborough, all the events have been co-sponsored by 17 major companies and corporations, their names gratefully listed on the community website as well as programs distributed to residents and visitors.

June 6, 2008 -- On my way downtown, I stop by a corner gas station for cigarettes. A slim middle-aged man is sitting on the concrete walk, legs outstretched and back leaning against the building. We exchange smiles and nods as I pass to go inside. On my way back, he says, "Goodbye," smiling again as I, responding likewise, get back into my car and drive away, wondering if I'll have trouble finding a place to park. I don't, am within two easy walking blocks of where I've looked forward to being this Friday evening.

Johnson City's Blue Plum Festival, June 6-7, reminds me a little of the "teeming, steaming streets" of Boston MA's, or NYC Greenwich Village West's, Little Italy. People of all description and dress throng through Main Street, its sidewalks and side streets, old stores and restaurant/bars. It's legal then to drink beer outdoors, and I buy a draught lager for \$4, joking with the bartender that at that price I certainly won't get drunk. White-awned tents set up in the streets offer products from fresh-baked spanikopita bread loaves (\$4) to very reasonably priced and awesome "Renee's Italian Tiles," beautiful landscapes and gardens painted on used and framed window panes (\$40-\$65). I ask if she has a gallery or her work is on sale anywhere, and she says kind of bashfully, no, she's just getting started. I assure her she'll do well with that art and cost, and she smiles and says, "Do you think so?" I assure her it's true, tell her about the two antique art stores in Greeneville, and walk on toward the jazz stage at the east end of Main, passing a large table giving out free copies of that day's Johnson City Press newspaper with the headline "Obama brings message to area" and a

large color photo of the Democratic candidate speaking, surrounded by crowds, before a large, hanging American flag. I take one, and a copy of the two-day festival program event and time listings.

A young woman in a long bright blue dress is playing flute center stage with men on bass and guitar to either side of her. A lone, slim, middle-aged man in the cleared area before them is dancing a kind-of Hindu-ish, Celtic, modern ballet. People stand against the shops and sit on the small raised concrete beds of mulch and trees that line the sidewalks, listening, talking and laughing in small groups. There's a heavy, light-skinned woman with heavy bright makeup and nearly black hair in a long, tight white dress chatting with friends and another larger woman pushed, smiling, in a wheelchair by a young man. One thin young woman in jeans, holding her daughter in a dress up before her chest, lets her down gently to the street.

I've met an old friend from 40 years ago, John Lysle, a now-retired and very spry 70-year-old Asian Art professor, at the Johnson City Art Council's First Friday exhibit and reception, where outstanding art is on display, including the long, rectangular, colorfully-painted and decouped "In The Beginning There Was Music," which catches my eye. An old friend, Dale, from Nolichucky Campground, and I encounter and recognize each other with surprise, restating our names since we've both forgotten, and catch up on each other's lives briefly, as we stand and munch on goodies by the reception table. She is retired on early Social Security now and takes classes at ETSU, hasn't been back to the campground in years. John and I trade divorce war stories, and then he re-introduces me to Jody, a very pleasant and warmly outgoing woman with homes in Wyoming and near Milligan College. We recount tales and agree there's nothing more important on earth than long-time women friends with whom to experience all of life, which interferences with our strictly organized plans. Parting we agree to try to reconnect at Jonesborough's Music On The Square the following Friday

before she returns to Wyoming for the summer.

In the course of conversation, John says, "You're not one of those feminists who hate men, are you?" I laugh, since it's obviously not true, and say, "No. Some of my best friends are, and always have been, men." He laughs as I add, "But I am a feminist." I leave for the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery's exhibit, and we reconnect off and on, ending up at ETSU's gallery on Tipton Street, which has closed. The openers for Doc Watson begin to play around 9 p.m., as John leaves for his car, after we agree to meet at the Jonesborough Library one day so he, a contented computer illiterate, can see ACR and a little piece he wrote for it years ago about guns and their history, a long-time hobby interest of his. I tell him I used to own a World War I German Mauser, and he's impressed, disappointed that I don't still have it. We laugh about it's "kick," and he describes the construction of a black-powder rifle, saying it takes five days just to make the barrel right. He's going to the Native American Festival at Sycamore Shoals National Park in Elizabethton the next day, and I say I've been to it, enjoyably, in a few previous years but won't make it this time due to other obligations. We talk briefly on the phone with his woman friend, who has called from Atlanta where she's staying with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

Realizing that oncoming fatigue won't last me through waiting for Doc Watson's appearance, probably around 10 p.m., I regretfully/gratefully retrace my steps past bazaars selling exotic daffodils in pots (\$15) and hand-lathed bowls and decorations of variegated woods (don't even check the prices because I know they're out of my range), looking forward to being back in the live-in art gallery I call my apartment. Walking toward my car, I pass a young white couple embracing as he comforts her for some harm, and a pale, chunky family of one woman and two younger men standing in a circle by a full shopping cart and holding hands while she prays out loud. I smile and say, not aloud, "Thank you, God," as I cross State of Franklin Road

to the parking lot on Roan Street by two young black men talking and walking jauntily together. Back home, I settle into the couch with a glass of wine, musing over different people, things and events I've just encountered and experienced.

June 7 -- An unusual and edgy band, The Penny Dreadfuls (now Heathcote's Sorrows), is performing their original music as I walk down Roan Street into the Festival area. The woman singer -- with black hair, black-and-white polka-dotted dress, and red heels -- is dramatically and uniquely fabulous. The male singer on electric guitar is a great, well-controlled baritone with a long black ponytail. With shoulder-length curly red hair, the keyboardist is very serious when playing, and the drummer is out-of-sight. After the performance, I add my name to their e-mail address list for notification of upcoming venues. They're also selling a CD, along with others, in another area and the guitar player says it isn't available in stores.

From Russo's lively New Orleans-style ("Laissez les bon temps roulez") restaurant and bar and outdoor cafe I get a chilled Diet Coke in a bottle for \$2, having sworn off \$4 beer, and meander onto Main Street where the husband of "Renee's Italian Tiles" is manning the booth alone tonight. I point out my two favorite artworks and ask how they've been doing. He lists some things they sold and tells me that they were very successful with them in Italy, where they lived for five years. "Oh," I say, "What were you doing there?" "I was in the Navy for 22 years." "That's a good service." "I loved it. They can call me back anytime. I'd go in a minute." "What's the longest you were ever out at sea?" "Three months." "Seems like it would be uncomfortable to be crammed together like that, sardines, for so long." "No, it isn't. There's a lot of comraderie." And he lists amenities, too, aboard ship, among which he lists aircraft carriers. "So," I continue, "You're retired? You just do this now?" "Oh, no. I work full-time as a handyman kind of. And get these windows for Renee and make and put together the boards for the

wood screens she paints, too." "What did you do in the Navy?" He lists some jobs, including commanding a kind of special operations group and being a bodyguard for an Admiral. Some potential buyers come up, and I drift off toward the food tents.

On entering that area, I stop at a table and sign up to be an organ donor, receiving a free good-sized black tote bag, a square refrigerator magnet, and whirring plastic child's toy, all imprinted in large letters with "Give Life." The food's kind of expensive for someone who isn't really that hungry, although it varies enticingly from Greek specialties to Chinese and includes elephant ears and mixed drinks like Pina Coladas. I walk back instead toward the music stages and end up watching and listening to the locally popular and wonderful all-male Jazz Doctors: trumpet, alto and tenor sax, drums, electric guitar, bass, and keyboard. The piano player has shoulder-length gray-white hair, glasses, a black beret, and is a crazy man. He makes faces constantly, moves his mouth, jumps nearly out of his seat and back again, and toward and away from the keys, totally into the beat and what he's playing. The trumpeter, a large, tall, heavy man, is the band leader. Alto sax is a young black man, much applauded during his solos, and the bass player has won a Grammy for sound engineering. Toward the end of their performance a few seven- and eight-year-olds with shiny, sequined headgear come up and throw brightly colored metal bead necklaces out for the audience to catch. Some greedily gather dozens. I have two, which I requested as one of the throwers passed me by. Calming down the crowd, the Jazz Doctors (actually Dick Davis--sax, Mark Thie--piano, Jerome Heitman--guitar, Martin Walters--bass, Dr. Rarde Sanderbeck--percussion, and band leader Dr. David Champouillon [Bach Trumpets Performing Artist, ETSU trumpet professor and director of Jazz Studies, and director of the TN Tri-Cities Jazz Festival] --trumpet and flugelhorn) start playing again, a slow sad-serious rendition of "Over The Rainbow," and the watching faces look nostalgic and a few with a soft smile. As they pick it up again, I'm feeling a little sleepy and decide to wend my back home, passing a table of agates and crystal in vari-colored

shapes and see a cardboard box with iridescent broken pieces in it. The depressed-seeming small middle-aged man with sandy hair mumbles that it's glass when I ask. Questioning further, he says it's iron-oxidized to bring out the natural shapes and shades inside of it. He holds one to the light for me to see how the colors change as he moves it. I'm entranced and buy three useless but beautiful shards for \$5.

Having as nearly always emptied my pocketbook of cash, I stop by the corner grocery store near my home to charge beer and steak, sit again on the couch and think about what I've just participated in, experienced, and seen.

The crowd had been smaller than the previous evening, but more varied yet in shapes, styles, and hairdos. One slim young woman with lovely red wavy hair half way down her back was wearing a tangerine-flowered, loose, long dress and looked like something out of Victoria with her pale, perfect features. A large young man was carrying very close to his chest a one- or two-month-old baby with thick black hair, and a very tall, thin older man with shoulder-length white hair and mustache smiled and moved to the rhythm of The Penny Dreadfuls. A small, 30-ish woman beside me on one of the raised concrete sidewalk beds danced enthusiastically while sitting down to the Jazz Doctors' songs. All the performers got cheers, applause, and dancing encouragement as they played and sang with intermittent "Yeah!"s for anything that struck them as particularly outstanding. The heat and humidity had been fairly formidable, but hadn't seemed to slow anybody down. Altogether, it's a fascinating town.

Community supportive and culturally aware donors for the event ranged from corporate, like BB&T and First Tennessee Bank, through private business, like Nelson Fine Arts Gallery and Johnson City Press, to individual, all thanked with their logos where available on the back of programs

distributed and the most generous having large signs posted, particularly on the front of band stands.

Country Calendar-- -- "Messin' With The Best"

Waiting in line on Sunday, it's my turn at the autograph table to choose from four CDs. I pick up finally "Beau-ti-ful" and "Sidewinder" to hand over. "Jeannette," Chic Street Man looks up, smiles to my laughter, and spells my name right. "You probably know this," I comment as he's writing, "but you're the most extraordinarily excellent blues musician I've ever heard." "I hope some of it reached you." "It did." The crowd murmurs approval and agreement. "And human being, of course," I add. Everyone laughs and he answers in detail my question about a reference he's made the evening before on stage about the difficulty and expense of creating original CDs that maintain an artist's real vision, vitality, message and talents with a general explanation and specific anecdote of mayhem and madness in producing one during an L.A. week's studio time with a phalanx of other musicians and sound engineers. author and Chic Street Man on Jobo's Main Street Jackhammers outside doom one day's work, two more are mangled by company equipment malfunctions, and four days are left to do the best they all can, which is very, very good. My absolute favorites of his unique tunes are "She Moves" and his version and lyrics to John Lee Hooker's "Sidewinder," but all are expressively sublime, including the one dedicated with sentiment and affection to a then near-death 9-year-old girl paralyzed by birth trauma and honored with an evocative French belly-dancing ceremony by her peers and caregivers in that country. One of his outstanding stories entailed being treated first as a serviceman in our Air Force via hypnosis and later of several virulent illnesses by that and by light. On

leaving I mention feeling that I could easily fall asleep listening to him speak French, in whose country he's spent over a year traveling and working to end up most spectacularly in Paris. He responds with a fluently soft sentence or two unintelligible to me, but sounding like a soothing lullaby. I drift toward the checkout counter and out into ISC's little park where morning crowds are massing to plan their last day's storytelling assault.

sales tailgate and tent outside old town home on College Street, Jonesborough TN during Storytelling Festival 2009 There have been 24 storytellers and teller/musicians equally divided between those two categories and by gender over the three days in performances ranging from 15 minutes to over an hour and a half. In between I've sandwiched four hours of volunteer time at the popular Friends of the Library fundraising food booth, where we've stumbled and tumbled into each other waiting on passing audiences from behind the u-shaped tables. African-American locals Robin and her granddaughter, Rebecca who's 11 years old and a potential ballerina, helped in the Friends booth along with Roland and Maryanne, retired here from upstate New York twenty years ago or so, and Library Director Pat Beard, who was also in charge of props for a stint of "The Philadelphia Story" being directed by her son and acted in by her husband and daughter-in-law at downtown Johnson City's Blue Moon Dinner Theatre beginning this weekend. We seem to have garnered a good amount of money -- around \$3,000 altogether at closing -- for supplies and programs ahead and also share some of the pop and home-baked goodies during our "down times." Members of the Jonesborough Novelty Band, along with others including a sound man, have manned the shuttle carts for transporting the elderly and disabled from somewhat dispersed venues of large white tents with their oriental peaks and folding chairs. The band also plays during the dinner hours. There are colorful African turbans, muslim hijabs, cowboy hats, a waist-length braided and beaded beard and babies in strollers to be seen and heard on the historic hilly streets of Jonesborough. Intrepid visitors from the nation and the world hike briskly by informal food

booths set up on adjacent lawns.

Friends of the Library fundraising food tent, Jonesborough TN, during Storytelling Festival 2009 A friend being led down Main Street by his dog stops and chats for awhile. Another tells me Kathryn Windham is her complete favorite, and I'm lucky enough to catch one performance by this wonderfully warm lady who's nearly seen and lived a century of change in America and most particularly smalltown Alabama. Bill Lepp is about the most hilarious teller, or human, I've ever experienced. A one-time West Virginia preacher, his ... well, it could be a tall tale or a whopping white lie ... of encountering a chipmunk and a mountain lion soon after entering a California public forest preserve -- in which he "saves" the lion, among other things -- has everyone in the audience nearly rolling in the aisles and also earns thunderous applause. Chuna McIntyre sings and dances the ways of native Yup'ik -- who call themselves The Real People -- from his tiny Alaskan village for us, preceded by traditional "streamers of welcome" to establish respect between performer and audience, and Baba Jamal Koram weaves mysteries of myth, fantasy and spirituality from the Americas back to Africa in a sonorous low voice accented by his drumming. We're hypnotized as birds fly and tribes walk on and through waters. Bill Harley strums through the horrors of childhood homework trauma recalled, and Syd Lieberman shares anecdotes for nearly two hours during "Abraham and Isaac: Sacrifice at Gettysburg" for an overflowing, serious and appreciative crowd. The husband-and-wife team of the Storycrafters are the most unusual rappers I've ever heard, she being of Russian Jewish heritage and he being an anglophile "from Joisey." The Rev. Robert Jones tells and sings and plays as audience members fill in an enthusiastically harmonious chorus. The Lollipop Shop has overflowed out onto the sidewalk. The food vendors and restaurants along Main Street have also been busy, as have the various shops from imports to antiques to Christmas trees and ornaments.

Like all publically commercial town events, the National Storytelling Festival is organized and enabled by volunteers, mostly local ones, but last year I worked in the sales tent with Lucindia, a tween from Knoxville whose whole family had also arranged to swap a few hours of labor for free attendance. The consequence of that beneficent trade in endeavor-for-entertainment is more operating revenue for the community and wholesome involvement, understanding and interational fun for volunteers who've become increasingly proficient at putting on a comfortably outstanding show all around.

On my last trip up hill by the International Storytelling Center, I pass Steve Cook -- creative director of MOTS, musician, craftsman and co-owner of Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery. "Did you have a good weekend?" He smiles and nods. "We did okay."

Friday evening I've not been able to resist my monthly visit to Johnson City's "First Friday" arts and music events, most particularly at the Arts Council and the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery. At the former, I pick up some hors d'oevres and study abstracts by an Asheville woman. A voice behind me suddenly comments, "They're colorful. I don't understand art very well, but I'm learning." I turn to see a sandy-haired man around my age, and we begin discussing that before turning more enthusiastically toward music, since he comments that he's a professional pianist, most recently for Russo's Cajun-Creole restaurant and cafe next door. Robert S. Kostreva -- whose business card says "Sounds Good! Music That Works Producer Arranger Pianist" -- has studied at the New England Conservatory of Music, lived and performed out West, and met Ahmad Jamal, known to his childhood friends particularly as "Petie." Robert mentions Third Stream musical theory and some others unfamiliar to me, along with the observation that pianists are at the mercy of lead guitar players in terms of notes and notations. He occasionally has the accompaniment of a bass player instead. photo of pen

and ink drawing by Katya from Johnson City's Russian Orthodox church community. On my way upstreet, I spot Russian Orthodox immigrant Katya in a bright red and black punky wig which she explains with a grin belongs to her son and his Hallowe'en costume. She has a new display of intricate pen-and-ink drawings along with her usual decorative garden tiles and knitted accoutrements for sale. Katya smiles as we talk for awhile before I finally chose just one of her fascinating and reasonably-priced oeuvres d'art. The Nelson, crowded with babies in strollers to the elderly and infirm, is also peopled this month by roaming scantily-clad models in decoratively different and colorful body paints amongst hugely enlarged closeup photographs of nudes in various poses, and more abstract paintings along with its standard displays by artists like photographer Bill Lea and multi-media Val Lyle. Having sampled the punch and sated my remaining appetite from cake and assorted baked entrees, I sit with Val's cousin John Lyle for awhile discussing Jonesborough personalities and events as another man eventually places himself with us. A model walks by and I comment, "We are breakin' outta this joint." That man throws his head back laughing and says, "We are breakin' outta here."

Some time later, I drop by the local quick-stop where the usual young pale-skinned male clerk is joined behind the checkout counter by a somewhat heavy young Afro woman with a bouffant "do," and a very tall, thin, deep-voiced and grinning young man of cropped blonde hair streaked in front with bright pink. He is wearing jeans, a tight black scoop-necked jersey shirt with a black cross and another necklace hanging on his chest, heavy blue eyeshadow, pink lipstick and other less lavish makeup on his attractive face. We all converse as I make a purchase and disappear smiling into our near-dawning night. *Dusty.*

Country Calendar-- -- "Small Town America Lights Up"

During the first week of December, the Jonesborough Area Ministerial Association presented their JAMA Christmas Music Celebration at Trinity Baptist Church just outside the historic district and a little bit off Route 11E. It included twelve fiddler/violinists between the ages of around 10 through 60 -- one very poetic-looking teen boy and another younger one, the rest females including the "conductor/violinist," a very positively encouraging, energetic and cheery woman. There were two pianos and one unusually excellent duet/hymn, called on the program "Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!," arranged by Wyrzten. It was obviously, and successfully, challenging for the pianists particularly and well-appreciated by the full-house audience in our rows of padded folding chairs in the large auditorium basement room with its elevated stage. Large screens on either side of that showed holiday scenes and sometimes lyrics. Following the first three choirs from the Presbytery, First Baptist and United Methodist, a collection was taken up for the community food pantry. The African-American Bethel Christian Church choir had been decimated by flu but performed endearingly with the six or so still standing. For their finale, one woman walked forward to the podium and sang by herself the beautiful "I'll light a candle for you, and you light a candle for me" with the remaining choir joining in at the end. As they left the stage, one of their female members sat down at the piano to play a rousing kind of bebop jazzy version of "Go Tell It On The Mountain" while we all sang. The violinists accompanied all those occasions. The performances had begun with bell ringers and it all ended with the Trinity Baptist Choir -- even larger than as it appeared during Jonesborough Days -- finally joined in the festivities by the other five choirs in "Angels We Have Heard On High." Following a benediction by Dr. Mark Harrod, we then all sang the "Hallelujah Chorus" -- which is not as easy as it may seem for unprofessional and unprepared singers, even if the words are displayed for us. But we were earnest and well-intentioned, and it was fun.

photo of Main Street, Jonesborough TN sidewalk precipitation The following week, a packed and expectant crowd -- estimated at "quite a few" by a friendly neighboring bystander and father guarding two young sons and their mother -- lined sidewalks of Main Street for the annual lighted Christmas parade Saturday evening. In the lead, behind the obligatory flashing and honking police car and fire truck, were marching a good-sized troop of Daniel Boone High School Navy ROTC cadets followed by young costumed women twirling white batons shaped as rifles. Santa Claus waved from his multi-lit carriage drawn by one white horse. A later conveyance pulled by a pair of matched miniature ponies having way too much fun to pay complete attention to their direction passed similarly. There were Boy and Girl Scout assemblages, high school marching bands, lotsa miss thises and thats including tiny ones to teens and Miss Teen Tennessee International who had a lot of blonde hair waving and with a smile like the rest, Marine ROTCs, our inimitable Novelty Band, Jonesborough Repertory theatricals in creative costuming including The Mad Hatter, a float with three stuffed "Oo-La-La" baby chicks, The Statue of Liberty and Uncle Sam, and purveyors of candies thrown and hand-delivered along with plastic bags with convenient storage for children from infant twins in a double stroller to ones astride their fathers' shoulders. As the last vehicle passed and Charlie Mauk put away his professional camera, I turned into the Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery for another trip through beauty and whimsy there. Co-owner Tava stood behind the back counter with a slightly jaundiced eye on some unsupervised children amidst one-of-a-kind handblown and shelved originals on display as adults lingered and paid. As the floor cleared, Tava began a wonderful regional country story from mid-20th century about an undertaker called out of town from Bristol to pick up a deceased body. On his return a few miles in, he hit a deer and returned to his client's home thinking the man would want to get and keep the unexpected venison for himself. Instead, the survivor offered to return to the site and help load the animal carcass into the back of the hearse. When the funeral director demurred that he didn't want to be

disrespectful to the deceased, his client assured him that it was all right, that both the deer and his departed wife were equally dead. The street crowd has thinned, cars are passing again on Main Street, and the weather's cooperated nicely in being not too cold and not wet at all for this one of the season's many scheduled town occasions before the much-anticipated arrival finally of the real Saint Nick.

[Click here for Charlie Mauk's Parade Photos from Jonesborough Herald & Tribune](#)

photo of antique car on Main Street, Jonesborough TN In reflecting back on the year past and although there have been many high points in events, interactions and travel, perhaps my favorite recollections are of the entertainment, conversations and value of Jonesborough and Tri-Cities Flea Markets and a few vendors that stand out very pleasantly and fondly in my memory. There's a single father who buys merchandise in bulk variously and sells what are to me sometimes absolute treasures two or three for a dollar, and occasionally a box-full for ten. He's whimsical and witty in chats about interests, experiences and the world in general and once even takes a check for produce when I've run out of cash and just must have one of his offerings before it's snatched up by another discerning eye for bounty at a bargain. A youngish woman from England with her wonderful cockney accent and cheery disposition sells art, including her own, and signs a lion's head drawing for me with a personalized inscription of good wishes and blessing. Advised by a middle-aged woman vendor who's complimented me in passing on the good looks and obvious comfort of my coat, I purchase a bag of fresh tangerines at a special cost from one of her neighbors. A young woman with her husband's assistance sells handmade and unique beaded jewelry devised at home while watching over her toddlers. A few veterans of informal commerce mark down their already low prices while sharing stories of items and themselves. One offers me a chair for sitting when I complain once that my back and feet are ailing and we talk comfortably for awhile about

happenings here and there. Perhaps the most outstanding, though, is Raven Heart. She is mid-fortyish, in a wheelchair from Parkinson's Disease and multiple sclerosis, part Apache and part Cherokee, small with very straight, thick and beautiful jet black hair to her waist. Her wares are Native American jewelry, dream catchers, belts, purses, and ceremonial objects of indigenous materials, some of them rare. The beauty and strength of her spirit, her soul shine out from bright eyes and a sweet smile despite the inclemencies of physical dishabille. She's raised four children of her own on her own, and one adopted son also, through good times and bad. In parting, she advises that hair should only be cut on the full moon to enhance its health and luxurience, and I share that later with friends who also might find that wisdom useful. On my most recent visit, laden with three full bags of wondrously interesting objet d'arts at bargain cost, I stop at a final table for picking up a small bouquet of pink silk roses and white forget-me-nots priced at a dollar to go in a found, tall and well-aged brass mug. But Herman, as he later introduces himself on request, an older country gentleman with longish white hair, insists instead that I have them for free and, smiling, stuffs the posies intently into one of my bags. How much better and more pleasant can an informal event be than one that ends with free flowers from a stranger in passing? The Flea Markets have been, in part, my way of checking in with the world as it really is beyond the headlines, full of heart-warming encounters and wondrous delights in enlightenment and merchandise. I very much recommend them in this new year.

Country Calendar-- -- "A Windie Town"

Over a three-day weekend, our first annual Windiefest filled some buildings and streets of Jonesborough with music, talk, and food -- most particularly

chocolate. A ticket for Choccolatta Joie de Vivre entitled its bearer to discounts at venues from Earth and Sky Confections to i fancy foods to our favorite hangout, The Cranberry Thistle, and many others along Main Street and its side avenues. While savoring a homemade truffle, one could drop by the latter shop's commodious back room to hear and see regional favorites actress Rema Keen, psycho-social worker and entrepreneur Kim Bushore-Maki, prolific author/playright Jo Carson, and founder of Smart Women Julie Hellwich discuss their experiences and then answer questions in an informal dialogue. Might as well pick up a discounted dark chocolate praline decadence topped with whipped cream and chocolate bits while there also.

Smart Women Venerable and venerated speaker Jo Carson described her experiences dealing with complete loss of hearing, unremediated by any mechanical aids employed and accompanied by tinititis, and later stomach cancer surgery and healing treatments, including chemotherapy, for that. She described how the unsought but welcome appearance at her home of friends from over many years and places for various helpful durations had made the difference between determined survival and incapable demise. When asked if she felt vibrations, for instance from music, Jo said that only those of drums affected her and were actually healthful for her heart.

Of three workshop offerings Saturday afternoon, I chose drumming on the second floor -- actually contiguous to its three-acre backyard garden park grounds -- of our artfully and comfortably designed Storytelling Center. Jessie Lehmann of Asheville NC's Boom Chix (earlier Chix with Stix), an all-woman drummer band, had arranged unfolded chairs with cushioned seats in a generous circle central to the large-windowed front room. An awesome display of drums in all sizes, shapes and colors were gathered toward a corner for our choosing. She explained briefly the differences in sound and technique expected for each type and her professional background over

twelve years or so, including five months altogether in Western Africa playing with native drummers there. During some of that time she was also studying for and earning her bachelor's degree in Philosophy and now owns and directs a private company she created that presents interrelational therapies for corporate divisions and their personnel -- at least when she isn't playing with one of three Asheville bands, including also African and Samba/Salsa-style.

Susan Lachman, WindieFest founder/organizer -- Click for more info The room fills slowly with women, and one man, from teens to retirees, who each choose a drum for themselves, sticks if necessary, and find a seat. Jessie describes and demonstrates each series of beats we will follow and practice together. In some cases, as the combinations intended or remembered become more complicated, she explains them with entertaining aural sounds and hand gestures that are worthy of a video all in themselves. There's talk of her returning for lessons here monthly also. Toward the end, Susan Lachmann joins our now-full and resplendant in sound circle with a kind of native marachas composed of large nuts perhaps and we repeat a series of changing taps and beats on and on and on until it becomes at once interesting and hypnotic in a rising, self-perpetuating insistence of tonal movement that seems like its message might cross the boundaries of states and oceans and nations. Two couples join at the last with their small, pink-dressed daughters held up in their arms to enjoy it all also.

I've bought a caringly-used djembe from Jessie toward the beginning of the workshop, played it throughout, and now have it to carry several blocks down Main Street to where my car is parked. This requires some stopping at benches to just relax and recall and think about it all, while tapping lightly off and on on the djembe. One woman passerby stops staring and finally notes that she'd been a marching band drummer all through grade and high schools and college. She still has a set at home and is teaching her

six-year-old son, now at her side more or less. Another young boy races and hops by imparting to me excitedly that the Easter Bunny at festivities in the park had red eyes. I'm appropriately impressed and awed. An older woman asks the price of the djembe, eyes wide at the response, and declares I've gotten a very good deal indeed.

Windiefest logo earrings Sunday's noon brunch featuring the event's creator/coordinator as speaker is moved from Old Quarters to Main Street Cafe where gourmet foods are displayed on a long armoire against the back wall and we seat ourselves at cozy round tables, joining old friends and meeting new ones. I'm lucky to sit with, amongst others cordially communicative, Kim Bushore-Maki who entertains us with well-told stories of trips, encounters and characters met, over the years with her husband to various parts of Italy -- including Sicily, Rome, Venice and the provinces, which were her favorites -- where she has relatives. Perhaps my favorite is of their first visit when she was five months' pregnant. Where that situation is greeted, she said, without special notice or rearrangement in the United States and its outposts overseas, the Italians felt and behaved very, very differently. Leaving their temporary countryside residence for city dining via taxi, for instance, in Italy the restaurant owner and their waiter insisted, after the meal was finished, that they wait, appropriately entertained and feted, until all the rest of the diners had finished and vacated so they could be safely driven back home by restaurant personnel. Kim has worked for ETSU as a counselor and professor for nine years until recently resigning to start her own business in downtown Johnson City of "alternative" healing approaches to psychological and social maladies in particular.

photograph of actress Park Overall and educator/musician/organizer Susan Lachman Following a few trips to the buffet bar and clearing of our tables, Susan stands comfortably toward the front and slides into her reminiscences. There are stories and insights from her experiences as a long-time resident,

community activist, entrepreneur, musician, educator, family member and mother. Perhaps her most notable prior organizational success was the series of Good Goddess exhibits ranging from Johnson City to Jonesborough of art by women; however, she's also been an outstanding creative force in educational and therapeutic programs for children. And, of course, she's best known as being the beloved host for 14 years of public radio's "Women On Air" -- a show introducing innovative and traditional female musicians and enlightening interviews with them on their backgrounds, observations, techniques and inspirations in the course of their careers. She takes questions at the end and is finally asked by one participant to sing for us, which she does a capella (although she plays guitar, dulcimer and drums in particular and professionally). She chooses a song with which I'm unfamiliar by a Canadian songstress/musician and with a very clear and strong, perfectly-tuned voice conveys these words from "Testimony" by Ferron

There's godlike

And warlike

And strong

Like only some show

And there's sad like

And madlike

And had

Like we know

But by my life be I spirit

And by my heart be I woman

And by my eyes be I open

And by my hands be I whole

They say slowly

Brings the least shock

But no matter how slow I walk

There are traces

Empty spaces

And doors and doors of locks

But by my life be I spirit

And by my heart be I woman

And by my eyes be I open

And by my hands be I whole

You young ones

You're the next ones

And I hope you choose it well

Though you try hard

You may fall prey

To the jaded jewel

But by your lives be you spirit

And by your hearts be you women

And by your eyes be you open

And by your hands be you whole

Listen, there are waters

Hidden from us

In the maze we find them still

We'll take you to them

You take your young ones

May they take their own in turn

But by your lives be you spirit

And by your hearts be you women

And by your eyes be you open

And by your hands be you whole

Following that folk/country aria, Susan set up her small laptop in a back cove so we could record our impressions and comments on the very First Annual Windiefest also. Earlier she had introduced Paula Giovanetti, a young family friend and ETSU art design student, who'd created out of Windiefest's windingly lovely logo handmade hammered-copper jewelry, earrings and necklaces in their own handmade copper-mesh bags to sell, partly for fundraising. The logo and other event festival graphics were contributed by Susan's also-talented sister Jean. photo of Susan Lachmann In a later e-mail discussion with Windiefest's creator/originator, Susan wrote in explication: "To sing that song in that space for all those reasons was a pinnacle moment for me. I have met Ferron on several occasions; in person and phone

interview [through her WETS 'Women On Air' series]. She has been at the Down Home, is a Mother now and I assume still living in Washington state. Native of Canada. Kind of broody. The song, 'Testimony,' stands as an anthem for its time in the women's music movement. The story of its composition is quite compelling also.... [Ferron] is a different sort of character. Pensive, introspective. Once in an interview I commented to this effect and asked if it was her intention. She answered, 'I'm Canadian,' which I took to be some reference to the landscape of chilly, grey, brooding -- all reflected in her delivery. I heard her live concert in Lexington KY back around '78; it was produced by AmberMoon Productions. There was a cricket in one of the stage plants. I heard her also at the Orange Peel in Asheville five or six years ago and sold product for her and her band after the show. Another band member, Jamie Sieber, plays electric cello. And I was backstage for her show in Charlottesville VA. At that time, Ferron's first child was just learning to walk. For awhile, Ferron was even promoted as a 'humorist'! In regard to myself, I am first a vocalist. Performing as a folk singer began at age 13. There is nothing I love like I love singing." And we are so blessed to have that vocal brilliance and instrumental facility, felicity right here in our midst. I've enjoyed seeing and hearing Susan play in quite a varied assortment of stands -- from the Reece Museum to the Cranberry Thistle to Music on the Square. If you're lucky you might catch her voice and fingers "doin' their thing" here somewhere, announced or not.

The following weekend is First Friday artwork exhibits and music in Johnson City. The Nelson Gallery is full of mostly familiar visitors, including my college-era friend from ETSU and VCU John Lyle and his long-time female companion, Carole. There's a classical violinist playing on the slightly-raised front stage with its cafe-style small tables and chairs against panoramic floor-to-ceiling windows on the street. At his feet is a small box with some dollars and I add one to it in receiving a broad and warm smile and nod. To the left of that are comfortable chairs around a circular coffee table where John, Carole and I converse briefly, as ever, about Jobo and art, sometimes

Mideastern religion, in general. A tall and slender young woman with brilliantly pink hair passes by. There are toddlers as ever and an occasional art afficiando in a wheelchair. Earth Fare has again provided three varieties of garbanzo bean spread with thick-sliced bread chunks and their goozy dark chocolate bark that incorporates nuts and seeds in an unusually artistic and delicious confection. There's punch for free and wine for a suggested offering. I've studied the student sculptures on display and believe I hear a band playing down the street. I do! It's a six-piece ensemble set out in front of the bead shop with most listeners arranged on the concrete raised beds for trees and flowers on the sidewalk opposite in front of Atlantis imports. Jazzy blues fills the evening air and suddenly two young women, a blonde and a brunette, appear in unmatched mideastern costuming -- satin-type skirts to the street and halter tops all enlivened with many many sparkling sequins of different sizes and colors. A young man on trumpet joins the band and the dancers step out, barefoot of course, into blocked-off Main Street to keep the beat with their hips and bellies and arms. Huge smiles break out through the informal audience, and the drummer in particular seems especially inspired, as is natural actually. That jam goes on for what seems like a very very long, but thoroughly enjoyable and interesting duration.

A few weeks later a weekend's welcoming celebration of the season of our warmer months includes -- amongst the familiar myriad of Tricities entertainment opportunities and happenings -- storytelling at the Jonesborough Visitors Center, Culp Auditorium jazz presentations by the ETSU Music Department's combo and ensemble, and the Fifth Annual Appalachian Heritage Crafts Fair by the Nolichucky River at Davy Crockett Park in adjacent Greene County.

Although the evening musical salute includes two well-known professional guest artists, Jim Snidero and Walt Weiskopf, my personal favorite turns out to be Justin Stanton on piano -- a masters degree student now in Texas and

undergraduate alumni of ETSU. He is simply outstanding and another musician who very obviously gets into what he's doing with full-bodied attention and knowledgeable enjoyment while staying in sync with and energizing others in the combo. He's a joy to watch and listen to as his fingers move in unexpected beats and combinations over the keys, solo or in syncopation with the drummer, bass and guitar players, alto and tenor sax, and vibraphone enthusiast. Their choices, not listed on the program but announced before each piece, include "Sugar," "Five Hundred Mile High," "Afternoon in Paris," "Afro Blue," and "Bernie's Tune." Director of the Jazz programs, Dr. David Champouillon, appears then dressed all in black as are all the students assembled on stage. An unusually large man, he bows and turns around for the audience, finally asking, "Does this outfit make me look thinner?" French horn professional Ray Crenshaw, a friend he introduces somewhat later as his next-door bunkmate while they served together in the Air Force band, also turns around a few times for the audience before inquiring if his black pants make his butt look smaller. Dr. Champouillon opines that it, rather, makes the pants look smaller. But they do also get down to some funky jazz. "Harlem Nocturne," "In The Mood," "Satin Doll," "Fever" with the smokily-dressed Charice Smith singing accompaniment, and "Black Orpheus (Day in the Life of a Fool)." The Culp Auditorium is very well-designed acoustically and for audience comfort, as the seats on their angle all afford an acceptable view of the stage and its participants. There is a semi-circular balcony also, so it is at once cozy and reasonably commodious. Both the combo and ensemble are perfectly professional in sound and appearance. If you close your eyes, you could be in a dimly-lit uber-metro upscale lounge or a gleamingly-bedecked concert hall anywhere in the world. Quite a number of the students are Powell and Topalian Jazz Scholars also, meaning their academics must meet and withstand the pressures and demands of their musical dedications, which are obviously quite prodigious.

Daytime for the weekend is fair time with its congenial grouping of vendor

tents beyond the reconstructed one-room home of Davy Crockett and the Mountain String Band playing in the 100-acre preserve's covered wood pavilion of picnic tables and benches on a rise close above an aqua-serene stretch of the river as it bends and demarks the park's boundary line.

Jimmy Rater from Greeneville, an experienced and superb craftsman in woods, is set up first as one walks toward the cluster of folk offerings. His wares gleam with the grains of our native trees in goblets and plates and serving dishes and toys. I can't resist one of the latter, an Appalachian traditional one of blocks the shape of playing cards that unravels from either direction in seeming magic and delight. Further on, a couple from outside of Memphis have traveled cross-state to display, demonstrate and sell their handmade psaltries, described as violins without necks, and hammered dulcimers, all constructed and highly polished of native woods also. The largest one of the latter instruments sounds like church chimes when played and spoils me for all the rest. It's also pretty expensive and best left to those who've made a study of playing and caring for one expertly. Prices range from \$95 for the narrowest of triangular psaltries on upwards.

A few tents further in I spot some enticing carvings and gravitate toward wares of a Kingsport man who, it turns out, has moved here from Kenya seven years ago. He is of the Luo tribe, one of over fifty indigenous to that country. He says that our President's Kenyan family is "from his block," about 30 miles distant from his native home, and we agree that our First Family is a miracle of the best sort that we never would have expected or predicted but very much enjoy in the actuality. He explains that the official languages of Kenya are Swahili and English but that there are 27 dialects, separate tongues which don't share a common root so one doesn't easily understand or speak any other tribal language but one's own, and he has become fluent in seven. A family member ships the soapstone and mahogany with which he fashions his art, figurines from his homeland and

dishes and covered boxes decorated with etchings of Africa. Colorfully large woven baskets hanging from a rope overhead are made by his mother. With my precious pink soapstone sculpture and mahogany carvings, I'm drawn by nose and tummy toward two tables laden with home-baked goods including fried apple pies and pumpkin bread rolls.

Sounds of the Mountain String Band are also at hand, or ear, now. With baked goodies secured, I find a setting spot amongst the twenty or so folk gathered in the pavillion for enjoying the country quartet arranged against the backdrop of river and greenery of its banks sliding upward toward paved stairs and walkways. Children in different sizes and accoutrement wander and dangle and run barefoot and not, while some on-lookers tap or sing along as the small crowd morphs and mingles. The mandolin player switches off to violin. She's a soft-spoken middle-aged woman who seems to be good friends with some members of the audience as well as the band, the rest of which is three gray and white-haired men, a little older perhaps than she, on banjo (the lead singer), guitar (harmonizing vocals) and bass. My favorite tune turns out to be "Our Immortal Home," a very lovely song played and sung beautifully and a charmer in that environment and atmosphere. The wife of the banjo picker sits at a front table and during a few of the typically Appalachian songs plays something I've seen before, known in Appalachia as a limberjack, but that's a little difficult to describe. It's part toy, part percussion -- a little wooden, painted man, jointed, and held above a board that's hit rhythmically so that it looks like he's kinda clog dancing and his feet are also keeping a drum beat. It's entrancing and funny and also useful as it does add something to the musical composition in sound and in sight, and delight. The lead singer makes and sells them also.

On my way back toward the car, after another look-see of the log cabin with its large open hearth, I stop to read the large signage describing Davy Crockett's accomplishments and travelings across Tennessee from this spot

where he was born (then the State of Franklin) all the way west and then south into Texas to die with his comrades-at-arms pinned and surrounded in the Alamo, laid seige for 13 days by Mexican General Santa Anna and about 1500 of his troops, some 50 years later -- by all reports having brought with them to their earthly demise two or three offenders for every one caught inside. He is sometimes best remembered as a singular and occasionally lone voice against native american displacement, what turned into the Cherokee Trail of Tears -- an outspoken stance that cost him his elected position as a representative to Congress. Aside from his courage and prowess as a hunter, frontiersman and soldier, he's beloved as a lifelong devoted champion of "the common man." Davy Crockett 1786-1836.

Country Calender -- --"On The Road"

Forget alternative energy. Just plug into your favorite local musician or musical group. Ivy Road is the duo that rocked Jonesborough's Main and side streets during a recent Friday evening Music on the Square performance to the largest and most increasingly enthusiastic audience/participants I've yet experienced here. No recording or video can really do justice to the sound and ebulliance they radiate. Their renditions of "(You Make Me Wanna) Shout" and "That Old-time Rock 'n' Roll" nearly set the stars and moon to boogeying along with bystanders on the sidewalks and in their chairs. Singer and drummer Lynda Laws explained how she met Bristol TN's multi-instrumentalist and songster Jason Lloyd while performing as a stand-in guitar player at a Jonesborough music venue. Nervous at the prospect of performing alone before a public crowd of mostly strangers, Jason walked by and asked, perceptively, "You want me to stand in with you, ma'am?" Fourteen years later, the answer is still a quite amazing, "Yes." In

the interim they've toured Scotland for three years with a Celtic band and played nearly every other genre including some never intended for a duo, or even a band. Whether our local police in bermuda shorts and riding or pushing their bicycles will be able to resist breaking out into dance on the street next time is problematic. This beat is difficult or impossible to resist. And all you feel like saying after the final encore of the night is, "Rock on!"

Country Calendar-- --"Go Rest High"

"Carolyn was the kind of person who would go to the Ladies Room and come out with the personal stories of everyone in there." So daughter and Rev. Dr. Diana Moore soothed and regaled an overflow gathering of friends in remembrance and commemoration for the passing of Jonesborough's Mrs. Carolyn Dabbs Moore, an integral and beloved citizen neighbor of our bereaved community. "She was," Diana shared, "a difficult act for her daughters to follow," having graduated from high school at 16 and with double majors from university at age 19. They did their best and succeeded admirably in their uniquely different ways. We were reminded that she loved their Dad, her only husband, very much and visa versa. They met as college actors and continued that interest together elsewhere including here. She didn't like Mother's Day and one main reason was that one year he took her, and their three daughters, out to dinner for that occasion to a good restaurant which, as all are, was very busy and slow on that day. He had an infamous short temper. When they arrived home, she broke the silence by saying, "Don't you ever take me out to dinner again for Mother's Day."

Carolyn's father (a Dabbs) was a well-known writer and activist for civil rights. Martin Luther King Jr. named him in a letter from jail as one of three outstanding southern white men who'd stood up and out for the right during

those contentious and sometimes violently dangerous days. She was the second daughter of his five children; her mother died when she was two, and her father remarried, siring three others. Diana recounted that the daughters as youngsters were very woebegone to move from all the action of Johnson City to the boonies of Jonesborough, where they knew they would have no company and no boys would date them. That turned out to be untrue. Carolyn and husband Richter became locally famous for their parties, which were "very unusual."

In the last year of life, her daughter continued, Carolyn donned a pink wig one day before going with Diana to her regular Saturday morning breakfast at the Cranberry Thistle. A few weeks later inside Diana's church, one of the young parishioners had dyed her hair pink and Carolyn commented on how much she liked it. The mother replied, no doubt a bit acidically, "You wouldn't if it were your daughter," and Diana thought to herself in response, "How would you feel, then, if it was your mother instead?" Carolyn insisted on getting out to vote two weeks before her passing and, a lifelong and self-described "yellow dog Democrat," chose a Republican for one office, because there was no opposition. Diana remarked that at that instant, "There were earthquakes everywhere as that happened. Earthquakes."

In the basement meeting room, easels had been set up with selected photographs taken and saved from throughout Carolyn's long and lively, diverse and committed, curious and involved lifetime. Most congregants assembled there were colorfully and sometimes unusually attired for the occasion of sharing stories and a few regrets. On leaving though, I thought, "That's probably the closest Presbyterians will ever get to a real Irish wake," and that Carolyn enjoyed it, that perhaps that was her last earthly request.

"Carolyn Moore was a member of FOCIS and served with the

Development Committee for years. I've known her since 1975 when I first came to Jonesborough and lived for 18 months in her Victorian 24 room home.... She shared her family with me in profound and wonderfully crazy ways. Sponsoring her coming into FOCIS was a way for me to share my family with her.... Your good daughter, Pastor Diana, reminded us that you are the GOLDEN THREAD that ties all us diverse characters together in a unique tapestry. Part of tapestry is wonderful design and structure. I love you, my wild Irish rose." -- social activist/artist/instructor Margaret Gregg

"She was a very dear and strong friend, not just to me, but to many, many people, and she made a huge positive difference in people's lives around the world by her spirit and resolve. Tears are appropriate, but I can't think of anyone who'd more want her friends, town, state and nation to...carry on. She suffered a lot physically and was very very brave and stoic about it all. I don't recall ever really hearing her complain through the years about that. Which always reminds me of an old (Jewish) saying: 'God must love you very much to make you suffer so.' I know a lot of people don't understand that, but believe it has to do with rising above it, e.g. Beethoven was completely deaf when he wrote his most beautiful and memorable orchestrations, sonatas...." -- jh, FOCIS newsletter

Country Calendar-- --"God's Spell"

Jonesborough Repertory Theatre can be counted upon for very affordable, wonderfully professional and uplifting, seriously thought-provoking to utterly-indulgent entertainment by performers of all ages and descriptions. The most recent children's production of "Godspell Jr." at \$5 per ticket was no exception despite the youthful ages of all the cast. Four adult musicians (keyboards, drums, guitar and bass) accompanying them on stage right

complimented and enlivened delivery and atmosphere within that recently upgraded theatre structure. The pianist, an older white-haired woman of unusual durability and skill, earned my complete admiration and that of the rest of the audience during that one of four presentations after only one week's rehearsal for all! One boy singer, dancer and actor of perhaps eight or nine years stole the show, nicely and naturally. If he isn't headed for Broadway, surely it's somewhere similar where he may have an equally whimsical, mischievous, and joyous romp through talents and affections.

This shortened version of the popular stage musical maintains its most favored songs but in two acts instead of three. The most rousingly enthusiastic for this matinee were "Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord," "O Bless The Lord," and the finale, a line of the cast harmonizing to "Day by Day," with which the audience, standing in appreciative ovation, joined in natural symphony and sympathy. Rep costuming is always appropriately colorful in design and style as are makeup and other adornments. These youth perform with exquisite professionalism in their ensemble and solo numbers, some of which are very humorous also. Additionally, they appear to be having a wonderful time of it all. The cast ranged in ages from around five to seventeen, more female than male -- leaving some girls to perform, sometimes comically, cross-gender -- but the two main male character actors were outstanding. We felt blessed by and for each and every one of them.

Country Calendar-- -- "Seeds"

The little padded packet from Horizon Relief arrives and I open it somewhere between expectantly and gingerly. It is a small bottle of "product" let loose into the Gulf of Mexico and a fundraising endeavor of those put out of work by that calamity, advertised as conveying the "tragic beauty" of that reality. I

anticipate something loose in oily water that can be shaken and the shapes inside rearranged naturally in that process. Instead, it's something that looks like a small piece of bark -- dark brown and hard with seeds encrusted into it -- laying in a somewhat clear fluid. A Certificate of Authenticity elegantly printed declares, " "This certificate hereby guarantees the authenticity of the limited edition vials of opportunity. The vial contains recovered oil from the April 20, 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil disaster," and contains a round silver holographic seal on the lower left corner with what appears to be the Gulf of Mexico imprinted on it and the warning, "secure secure secure secure." A notation advises that the bottle is not to be opened as it contains "emulsified crude oil" and should be kept away from children. Also enclosed in the plastic bag are a few small cards reminding of the vial's origin from Horizon Relief. I write "Brit poo" on the back of one, e-mail the organization's Creative Director, Sarah Gibbens, to compliment all involved on such an inspiringly well-organized and presented product of their own in the midst of that very difficult situation, and put all together in a safe place, which hopefully I'll remember later on. It occurs to me that the seeds embedded in the "bark" of oil are like the Biblical mustard seed that grows into a tree, a seed of hope and faith that, as time goes on and we all do our best, our beautiful Gulf will be restored and its inhabitants also to health and productive growth.

Country Calendar-- -- "Travelin' Mercies"

July 25 -- Asheville's Bele Chere (believed to mean "beautiful living" in an ancient Scottish dialect) is similar to many other Appalachian three-day festivals except larger. Tents are set up wall-to-wall on streets and sidewalks with vendors displaying their wares and there are stages for live

performances by local and regional bands. The trip south on Route 26 from Jonesborough is uneventful until I hit downtown Asheville traffic and its blocked-off thoroughfares. Navigating around deadends I discover that my usual multi-storied parking place is full, and so is the \$5 one when I rediscover it a few minutes later. Disregarding the one for \$15, I find a space which may be legal downhill from Patton Avenue and walk up toward the festival, stopping to ask two policemen where I might find an event guide. They confer, shaking their heads, and then one points me toward a small purple stand which turns out to have map and schedule handouts.

Passing by quite a few tents, I stop at one sponsored by the Greek Orthodox Church and buy four small spanikopita for \$5 from one of their heavily-accented counter people. Turning toward Grove Arcade, I come across a tall young man completely painted head to toe as a copper statue standing near the sidewalk. He really doesn't change expression or move, except to breathe ever so slightly, no matter what you say to him until you put money in the tin before his feet. Then he suddenly breaks into a wide smile, bows toward you while pulling a few pieces of candy from the bowl in his hand, and hands them to you with a grin.

Browsing through more tents, I end up at my favorite "stomping ground," Malaprops Bookstore/Cafe (Signature Drink combinations of espresso and flavorings: Choccolachino, Anais Nin, Isabel Allende, Robert Frost, Rita Mae Brown, White Rabbit, Gail Godwin, Deepak Chopra, Tom Robbins, Walt Whitman, Goddess Steamer) for imported coffee and a 20-minute internet exploration for \$3 at one of their three cyber stations at the window overlooking activities on the sidewalks and street. An informal band has set up on one corner and another is tuning and rehearsing on a stage at the end of that street. I can hear them from inside and as a woman begins to sing. Back on the street, I walk past more tents and down side streets to the Used Bookstore, where I chose three free used books, a few magazines and

newspapers, and purchase the glossy international ARTnews for \$6 from its many, many enticing worldwide offerings. They don't sell posters and I'm looking for one of the known universe, so they direct me to Instant Karma across the street. That shop doesn't have one either but they do have rosemary incense on sale for 50 cents and a great postcard for \$1 that I just have to have. A few shops down is another store that looks like it might have posters, so I venture in. It turns out to be a music store and I end up with three CDs for \$4 each: Mariah Carey "The Emancipation of Mimi," Jewel "Pieces of You," and U2 "One," plus more free literature.

There's a band setting up with a woman lead guitar player in a dress and heavy black boots at the end of the street, but I'm getting tired and have quite a bit to carry with me now in the midday sun's heat. Walking back toward Patton Avenue, I pass a little boy with longish dark curly hair sitting alone at a table with a sign that says, "Cold drinks \$1," so I have to buy a ginger ale from him. He grabs the dollar bill and stuffs it quickly into his cardboard box with the others, then hands me my aluminum can from the cooler by his right side. I sit in a little walled off brick courtyard on a cement railing drinking that, smoking a cigarette, and watching the company. There's a South American couple with a tiny daughter in halter top and shorts who's clapping her hands and smiling at me. I smile back and clap a hand against the side of my ginger ale can. Her father comes over from a corner and whistles at her, then leans down and gives her a big hug before the three of them walk back smiling toward the street.

Getting up again, I pass tents begging mercy for animals and selling fund-raising raffle tickets for preventing violence against women for a Cherokee, NC organization. I buy one of those and sign a petition to be kind of animals. Another tent is soliciting help and signatures for saving an architectural landmark, The Basilica of St. Lawrence, for a park rather than demolition. The "Obama 08" stand is manned by an enthusiastic young man

and woman who give me a car decal and advise that his Berlin speech can be seen on YouTube that day. I stop at the Art tent area, speaking with one wonderful woman artist from Atlanta GA and another from Raleigh NC, and then, since there are no vendors selling anything for \$1, all I have left out of over \$30, I make my way downhill toward my car with only two heavy grocery bags full of goodies purchased and free.

One bag has started to break and I offer my remaining dollar bill to a vendor for an empty bag to put the tearing one in. He doesn't have one, refuses the money with a shake of his head, and leads me instead to his old SUV where he rummages around and comes up, shaking his head again sadly, with nothing usable for that purpose. The contents of the breaking bag, including a small cup of free couscous, have splattered out over the hood of his car, so I sweep all that up, tie the bag securely at the top and carry it the rest of the way cradled in an arm upside down, thanking him of course for his trouble before leaving. Personnel at the Asheville AM news radio station tent give me a free car decal, magnetized to-do list, and cap. As I near the bottom of the hill, it turns out my car has not been towed away for being in an illegal spot, nor on closer examination does it display an illegal parking ticket on its windshield.

Getting out of Asheville toward Johnson City TN has always been a little tricky for me. One time I ended up on the Blue Ridge Parkway, going north fortunately. With all the festival auto jams and blocked-off roads I'm leery, but make it to Route 26 West, just barely without a scratch, and into Friday evening rush hour traffic headed toward Weaverville. Since I tend to be writing notes off and on as I'm driving, it all reminds me a little of bumper cars at amusement parks, except I don't hit anyone and, thankfully, they don't hit me either. I'm onto the highway's trick of changing the speed limit from 70 mph on a flat to 55 mph going down a long and softly bending grade, catch just in time the exit sign for Jonesborough, and wind my way past the

Nolichucky River and through an edge of Cherokee National Forest to arrive home safely with all my booty.

The Official Festival Guide notes amongst "three decades of change in the Bele Chere city": "1979 First Bele Chere festival is held with a \$5,000 budget and a paltry six weeks of planning. At least one attendee enjoys it enough to return the following year with a friend.... 1982 Stalwart independent bookseller Malaprop's Bookstore opens at 61 Haywood St. Berets, clove cigarettes and lesser known works by Kafka become popular accessories in town.... 1987 U. S. Post Office opens on Coxe Avenue. The song, '(I Just) Died In Your Arms' by Cutting Crew is heard emanating from at least one customer's parked car as they lick their stamps.... 1990 Chocolate Fetish (40 Haywood St.) is first listed in the city directory. Short-lived truffle-smuggling ring is brought to justice.... 1994 Fifth National Poetry Slam is held in Asheville. A winning entry goes something like this: Bele Chere, Bele Chere, thousand-winged woman of light. Revolution simmers in the still, heated air. Pass that corn-dog, OK?... 1997 Jack of the Wood brew pub and restaurant opens at 95 Patton Ave. Men in kilts come out of the closet.... 2004 Condominions open at 37 Hiawasee St. at the site of the former Interstate Motel. In the following weeks, three streetwalkers apply for unemployment benefits.... 2008 Bele Chere celebrates 30 years. At least one attendee returns wearing a threadbare 'Bele Chere 1979' T-shirt."

The Guide also notes "Today, Bele Chere is the largest free festival in the Southeast, featuring six stages of live music, whole blocks of merchants and artists and a food court to rival that of any festival in the country. While many of the region's outdoor festivals have come and gone, Bele Chere has thrived. Some 10,000 people braved the fledgling fest in 1979, but recent years have seen attendance regularly veer toward 400,000. And as Bele Chere has grown, so has the city -- at this point, it's hard to tell which gives the other the bigger boost."

July 27 -- This time I get to the festival early enough to find a great parking space in my usual public garage off Haywood Street. It's charging \$5, whereas usually it's either free or very little, but it's worth it to be that much closer to the action, as they say. Secret Agent 23 Skidoo, kid-hop, is playing on the stage as I turn the corner toward Malaprops. Mothers are holding their babies and small children while dancing to the beat. Little kids are jumping and swaying with each other in the street, and some are held up on their parents' shoulders so they can see. Everyone seems to be smiling and happy. It's a very mixed crowd in age, culture and ethnicity. At Malaprops I read the usual unusual graffiti in their Women's Room stall ("Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen -- Hebrews 11:1"; "Tremble a little upon the threshold. Today you have been born out of abysmal sorrow and useless knowledge, words, devices, instruments of calculation and dysfunction; out of hates and holocausts, ghosts and gruesome facts, crimes, visions and disasters -- and despair, now a friend and helpful."; "I think I'm in love with my boyfriend.") before ordering a coffee and piece of blueberry crumb cake to enjoy in the air conditioning while checking the festival guide for this day.

There's an Asheville soul band, Jar-E, playing at Mountain Xpress Lexington Avenue stage, so I end up wandering back down there by Instant Karma and the Used Bookstore again. Jar-E turns out to be so great, kind of unique and original jazz to my ears really, that I break my usual prohibition and pay full price for a CD, "War Songs and The Muse," which they sell for a very reasonable independent band price of \$10. There's the lead electric piano player and singer/songwriter, electric bass, drums, trumpet and saxophone, all male with an African-American on electric guitar. On the street people are dancing again. It's a small crowd and one young, shortish and thin man is catching everyone's attention. He's the best dancer I've seen in years, just very natural and into the music completely, with moves to the ground and

around and his hands eloquently here and there. He seems very professional and is obviously enjoying it all. He catches my eye a few times and after the performance thanks me. I think I was dancing and laughing a little bit too, in sync so to speak. It was just soooo good. I tell the woman manning their table about Jonesborough's Music On The Square and that perhaps the band might like to perform there. They're interested, so I leave the address and contact information on a sheet of paper for them with encouragement to explore that possibility. One table is giving out stick-attached largish blue circles that say, "I am an Obama 08 fan," and I soon spy a blonde-headed little boy waving one before his face to create a breeze for himself in the mid-day heat.

Onto Pack Square and down Biltmore Avenue, after purchasing a small white ceramic jewelry ornament with blue Chinese writing and Buddhist symbols that nobody in the booth understands or can interpret, I discover that Blue Spiral 1 gallery is closed but the Haen is open, cooled and with new contemporary paintings and sculptures. The owner says he believes the Johnson City area will be the next arts and music place developed and populated more extensively, as Asheville has been over the past few decades. I say, "Oh, no!" because I like it all just the way it is, and he laughs as I walk out on and down the street again. Behind the stage on the sidewalk a young woman fiddler is playing with her case in front of her for pocket change. I throw in a dollar and start talking with her. Maisie looks French with her facial features and light brown hair wound on the top of her head, but it turns out she's from Maine and has a classical violin education. She makes her living partly from a farm she owns up there and teaches strings and world travel stories to grade schoolers as a volunteer, but travels around the world yearly also to play in the streets and meet the people. She mentions Italy, Turkey and North Africa as being the most surprisingly friendly. Italy loves the classical music and when she plays folk, they think she's a gypsy. Most prefer the violin and look down on fiddle-playing. Her parents are both musicians and she studied classical before dropping out in

favor of travel instead. First she hiked the Appalachian Trail from Georgia home. I asked if her parents "freaked" at her hitchhiking and nomadism, but she said no, after the Trail they believed she could handle just about anything. The worst thing about hitching, she said, was the music some people played on their radios which she had to listen to until her stop, gratefully, came up. A male friend built his own boat and has traveled the world by sea for a year, returning unexpectedly just last month. I tell her about Jonesborough and its street musicians during events like Jonesborough Days, and she sounds very interested, says "It sounds like my kind of place." I say I hope to see her there and move off toward Battery Park where a Southern Rock band is toward the end of their gig.

Web Wilder & The Beatnecks are in their 50s and 60s it appears and full of energy and verve. They're playing "She's A Mojo Worker" with a great beat and sound, as I walk up and sit on the curb next to "Nana" singing and dancing with her little blonde-haired and pouty, wide-eyed grandson. The band is drums, electric rhythm and lead guitar and bass, the latter with shoulder-length gray-white hair he waves occasionally in the air. They're great fun and, when they're done, I walk into Grove Arcade where it's cool and I can get another coffee and dessert, strawberry rhubarb pie this time. Stopping on my way out at Stall Market, which turns out to be closed, and The Fresh Quarter next door, which isn't, I discover they have fresh figs grown locally and from California on display. The owner and I converse about the fig situation internationally, finally agreeing that the dearth of canned ones in syrup particularly and their general scarcity may be due to Middle Eastern wars and upheavals, since that's their Biblical growing place and seasonal comfiture. He says that in ten years there won't be any bananas available either because they're cloned rather than from seed and a blight is killing them all. I leave with a small baggie of assorted dried forest mushrooms for \$1 and concern over the fig and banana problem, which is very serious and deserves more media and research attention.

The bottoms of my feet hurt, it's hot and humid, and I'm getting tired, so I head back toward my car, stopping at the WNCW 88.7 FM alternative music and news radio booth for one of their bumper stickers and another one from NARAL Planned Parenthood ("... advocates for public policies that make birth control and education more accessible. In doing so, unwanted pregnancies become less prevalent and abortions become less necessary... We provide birth control services to prevent unwanted pregnancies and distribute condoms to also prevent sexually transmitted infections. We test for diseases and viruses, including HIV, to limit further infection among partners and the community. We also provide treatment for infections that can cause serious health effects, including infertility. We offer immunizations to protect from contagions and from cancers. We also provide screenings for breast and cervical cancers.... When parents speak openly and often about sexuality, their children are far less likely to engage in risky sexual activity at a young age. Their children learn to speak comfortably about sex so they can forthrightly refuse sexual advances or else talk openly with a partner about using a condom.... education programs help parents, children and families communicate about sex in order to lead healthy lives.... We promote abstinence and provide medically accurate information regarding birth control and disease protection.... We seek to develop healthy relationships predicated on mutual respect and communication -- between partners, with parents, within families and among peer groups.... [Programs include] 'Teens taking action,' 'Are you an askable parent,' and 'Adolescent parenting program'." -- Preparing the next generation, 2007 Annual Report [Total Liabilities and Equity 7,618,383], Planned Parenthood WV-VA-NC-GA-SC) in the tent next to that one, and passing more babies in strollers passed out on their backs from the colorful, sometimes raucous busy-ness and mid-afternoon sun. Painter John Charles from Kingsport TN suddenly appears before me as I begin to cross Haywood Street again with his arms open and saying, "Jeannette! We meet in the strangest places!" We hug and he introduces me to a commercial painter friend from Elizabethton. That man

tells me that he served in the Army and was twice ordered and dressed in line for the Korean War, but his sergeant liked him and pulled him out each time. We laugh about his good fortune. He studied art in Cleveland OH for three years and is a successful muralist and realist in style. John returns from a booth with a bumper sticker about loving dogs and tells his friend, as he tends to repeat, "She has more creativity in her...." He pauses and I offer helpfully, "Navel?" He continues, "... tip of her little finger," holding one of his up demonstrating, "than most people have in their whole bodies." I laugh and invite them both over to see my Christmas tree, explaining that it's now so crowded with ornaments it's difficult to find a new, free branch to hang one from and the floor around it has gotten quite crowded with an amazing assortment of stuffed animals in all colors and shapes and sizes. My latest favorite is a black manicured poodle sitting on a red heart-shaped silk pillow and with a red silk heart hanging from his mouth that says, "Kiss Me," and the very large brown dog stretched out in exhaustion beside the tree now has a small dalmation sprawled across the top of his head and onto one of his floppy ears. I'm also fond of the two new penguins, especially the one wearing a red bow tie and santa hat.

Parting from them, I stop at the stage where fun folk Billy Jonas on guitar and vocals and his band of a fiddler in military hat, woman singer, and man on bongos are set up. They're performing the upbeat "God Is 'In'," followed by "Coup D'etats" with examples of random good luck in natural balance to Murphy's Law that what can go wrong will also, and winding into "Pharoah, pharoah, pharoah! Oh, baby. Let my people go!" with a great, rousing beat. People in the street are, as ever, dancing and clapping. He invites five or six children on stage to play bongo, tamborine and various shakers with the band and ends with "Love is a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. I'll be a sanctuary for you. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you." It's a lovely, sweet song and the crowd drifts off in different directions with me reclaiming my car and finding my way toward the TN Tri-Cities with no trouble at all.

Walking toward my apartment, I meet a disabled neighbor walking Gypsy, a little wire-haired terrier. She wags her tail and trots toward me with her luminous eyes wide open and lovingly trusting to be petted and talked with. When I ask her background, my neighbor relates that Gypsy was abandoned to the wilds, including much larger mating males, by the original caretakers and rescued unable to walk and with thistles ground into her matted hair. Cleaned up and adored, Gypsy recovered completely with no signs a year or less later of hostility or psychoses from her childhood traumas and ordeals. I tell my neighbor about marrying the love of my life ("He's gorgeous") and she's happy, says she's looking forward to meeting him, and we go our ways, both smiling.

Country Calendar-- --"Takin It To The Streets"

The Johnson City Arts Council has moved to much smaller quarters down Main Street in the King Center and I find it, sliding quietly through the front door, with its program already in progress. Out of the blue, retired professor John Lysle says my name so loudly on spying me there that it interrupts the speaker and everyone, or so it seems, turns to look at me. Grabbing him firmly by an arm and dragging him back out of the circle of onlookers and listeners, I whisper, "Shhhhhh!" as a woman regroups and continues to announce background and awards for student entries on display in a competitive show. Later, we enjoy a few hors d'oeuvres while viewing the artwork and then amble down the block to the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery where two musicians are just setting up. Inside, there are three tables in the back of gourmet goodies, including salmon fillet surrounded by cream cheese rounds topped with capers, pieces of chocolate-on-chocolate truffle cake, open-faced cucumber sandwiches, and very thin slices of prosciutto with

cantaloupe on the side. There's red and white wine and punch also. The artwork is varied in substance and style, including sculpture and photography as well as acrylics and oils and watercolors from traditional to wild.

Taking a smoke break, I wander back onto the sidewalk where "Gray Wolf" are playing. They are two middle-aged men on electric guitar and bass, excellent musicians, who play and sing while I'm there "Rock Me, Mama" and "Desperado" by the Eagles and Clapton's "Layla." Thoroughly enjoyable, they say, "Thank you, baby," to women clapping and, "Thanks, big man," to the men.

Back inside and in discussion with a friend of past experiences, he comments suddenly in an awed tone, "You went to Steele's parties? How did you get an invitation?" I mention Carolyn Moore, Margaret Gregg and a few other friends who were and are close companions of the well-known regional artist and retired department chair. In the midst of that, a man introduces himself as Stephen Lawhon, a regional promoter of worthwhile events and one of several current coordinators of a new project to honor native heritage with a building and annual festivities beginning March 15, 2009. He also turns out to have a private practice in clinical psychology, in which he has a PhD, and to be one-eighth Cherokee. I tell him about my "Cherokee passkey," and he tells me about a public meeting this coming week of regional writers to listen to an author speak about saving Appalachian mountains.

Down the street again at the next corner another band is playing composed of five men, one an African-American on rhythm guitar. The drummer is a young man with a short black ponytail who's as crazy in movement and expression as the jazz player for the Blue Plum Festival was on his piano a month or so earlier. He's definitely carrying the group of rock-blues-jazz

musicians, along with the lead guitarist who picks and slides his way through a dizzying variety of notes and sounds. But it's humid and I'm getting tired, so I head back toward my car and pass on the corner at the parking area side of the archway a young banjo player wearing glasses who looks up and smiles while strumming a bluegrass tune.

Country Calendar-- --"Bringin It All Home"

The Virginia Center for the Ballet Arts offered, as part of Abingdon's Highlands Festival, a free performance preceded by delicious hors d'oeuvres on Thursday evening, August 6th, beginning at 7 p.m. In a tribute to Center excellence, some of their troupes were chosen to perform in Williamsburg for Britain's Queen Elizabeth II when she last visited this country. Eight dancers, who had only two weeks previous to learn their routines, presented with appropriate costume change classical, "on point," and then modern, with regular ballet shoes, choreographies to music from Gershwin to Pink Floyd. The latter, and last, was just totally outstanding -- very unusual, original in rhythm and import. They danced separately, in pairs, threes, and ensemble with the least accomplished allowing glimpses of "spotting" themselves -- finding a mark to turn or leap against in balance and direction, but the most professional were flawlessly miraculous and graceful. Altogether they complimented each other beautifully in cooperation and friendly competition during their solos. In between routines, you could see them catching their breaths and working to regain energy and new direction. To give them a break once, four were announced by name and brief background. One had just garnered her driver's license and we were all warned to be careful on the roads, dancers having a somewhat unique perception of motion, balance and gravity. ("One wheel on the pavement's

enough, isn't it? Actually....") The oldest, a University senior and awesome expert in seemingly effortless form, is planning to leave for New York after graduation to pursue her career.

The Center accommodations are less than inspiring as the Center's upholstered lobby chairs are somewhat threadbare and the ballerinas presented their expertise in a bare studio room lined with exercise bars, a wall-to-ceiling mirror at one end, and audience folding chairs set up in about ten rows. Walls are intriguingly decorated with Degas' ballerina prints and photos of students practicing. There is also an interactive display of photos available for purchasing. A surprising number of children, including some boys, were in attendance and most of them sat cross-legged on the floor. Three young teenage girls were later brought up and introduced as pupils who practiced bravely with the older students. Unfortunately, on leaving it turned out that three ginny emsnibbits had completely blocked in five cars, including mine, wrecking the sceance, ambience, magic and moment of the final, kind of space-agey performance with disruptive consternation as we waited and attempted to locate them with the no-doubt startling advice and revelation that other people live in the world too. Swearing to myself at that ugly crack in message and feeling meant to be left with the ballet audience, I drove back gratefully over the state line again, saying to myself, "Tennessee!!! Home, home, home again, safe and free!" Although this state's Welcome Center seems to be open 24/7, or close to it, Virginia's turned out to be closed, at 5:30, when I stopped earlier on my way north. Foregoing Tennessee's this time on returning, I arrived again gratefully back in Jonesborough around 9:30.

Country Calendar-- --"Just One Of Those Nights"

Johnson City Tennessee's Unity Festival is called Umoja and features mostly native African-American performers and crafts. Among my favorite tents was Manding Imports of Africa with its friendly and informative Atlanta Georgia owner manning the tables and piles and racks and boards of fascinatingly original handmade articles. Stopping by the tent selling goods to raise funds for the Democratic Party Presidential candidate, I purchased a dark green t-shirt imprinted with the sayings "We are the ones we have been waiting for" and "We have a dream" for \$10, pretty reasonable as prices go these days as I've come across some going for \$25 to \$30 each. Another religiously-affiliated booth sold many with interesting motifs and messages; I chose the one imprinted, "No weapon formed against me shall prosper Isaiah 54:17," also for \$10. The major attraction out of bands and storytellers and humorists was the celebrated and fabulous Plunky and Oneness from Richmond Virginia, a band composed of Plunky on sax, two electric pianos, guitar, drums, and a woman singer. The woman pianist also sang often, as did Plunky on every tune with lyrics. Go out and buy the CDs! they're great! and have been around in various configurations for quite a few decades. At Music on the Square on a subsequent evening, the bluegrass band Tomahawk played as folks in the large crowd smiled and danced, talked and laughed and clapped their hands. During an interval, the band leader asked, as do many groups, that service veterans in the audience raise their hands. We were then reminded that we owed our freedom to their sacrifices, asked to applaud them, which we all did, and then a song was played for them which had to do with coming home from foreign lands. On a following Friday, Ras Alan and The Lions entertained with regional reggae music, which is somewhat unusual and was very much enjoyed.

On another evening, as I walk into Asheville North Carolina's Pack Square, there's a quartet of young men playing. One's on tuba, another drums, one of which he juggles regularly in the air. When I laugh in delight, it disconcerts

him and he drops the next one, laughs and picks it up to continue syncopatedly. One plays accordion and then a harmonica with an abbreviated keyboard, which I've never seen before or knew existed anywhere. The fourth plays guitar, a regular harmonica, and also sings. A short-haired, bright-colored young redhead walks by with her guitar and winks at the musicians as she looks on to find a personal space for playing. I drop some money in the open guitar case and walk on toward the Haen Gallery for their exhibit and reception featuring an on-site experience of the artist himself.

West Virginian Lynn Boggess will knock you out with his innovative talent and personal affability. He's a treasure and the gallery owner said she owned five of his pieces. I congratulated her on her good fortune and that of her husband, another amiable attendant who startled me by pushing me out toward the room as I walked by an artwork hanging. He apologized for frightening me as I stared with lack of comprehension and explained that the paint was still wet and he was a little worried about it. I assured him an abiding love of art and that I would never damage a piece in any way, except very accidentally. He smiled and we reintroduced ourselves to each other before I aimed for the buffet, which had quite a few delicious delicacies to munch on with white wine poured by a young woman server. Another asked if she could take my plate when I was done and I assured her that I loved being waited upon, as we both laughed and she assured me that tips were not expected or accepted there. A young couple played banjo and guitar as the friendly, reasonably-sized crowd chatted and viewed the displays which included other extraordinary artists too. For an example, one was priced at \$15,000. Excellent, original art rarely comes cheap, but the viewing at least is free and worthwhile.

The Boggess paintings are wild. I felt like I could look at them close up forever, with their multitudinously varied textures and color combinations of

outdoor scenes. Because of unusual three-dimensional qualities, his work doesn't translate as effectively to photographs, which provide just a hint of extraordinary dexterity and reality. When I asked how he handled the very much larger canvases, he responded to my surprise that he's made a humongous easel for them and takes that with him along with the canvas to the mountains he calls home. When asked about the bugs, he said that bees and hummingbirds often mistake his representations for the real thing and he's very likely to go home reporting to his wife that he's been buzzed three times or so that day. To quote Marian Hollinger, Curator of James David Brooks Memorial Gallery at Fairmont State College WV, "Nature has been acknowledged in his work and accepted for what it has to offer in the way of healing and beauty.... Boggess' work cuts through ... specious queries to a plainer truth: that beauty simply is -- an unavoidable irrefutable fact of the natural world. In their unhedging presentation of this fact, Boggess' paintings offer solace and respite, even to the most casual of viewers, just as do the original locations in Nature which were his impetus.... Because Boggess has chosen to paint Nature directly, and because he sees it as beautiful and endangered, he draws us into his fierce political vision. Because that vision is so disciplined that the artist presents it for us, without commentary, we may choose for ourselves which memory to recall; which path to take." Boggess comments to me that residents of his state are becoming more militant in insisting upon preservation of resources there, a fact to which we both express agreement and celebration with mutual smiles and hope for the future of legendary mountains, rivers and streams, and plateaus in "wild and wonderful" West Virginia.

On my way back toward the car, a young man with longish red hair is singing, playing folk guitar and jumping up and down in the air. I sit on the end of a bench in front of him and a Vietnam Marine vet sits down very shortly beside me. As we talk, he mentions my birthdays, says, "It's the end of August, isn't it?" I correct him that, no, it's the end of this month and I'll turn 64. He looks surprised and comments that I don't look like it. I thank him, saying that I

don't usually feel it either. After a minute or so, he asks permission to play "Happy Birthday" for me on his harmonica, to which I agree readily with the assurance it will be a thrill and a pleasant remembrance. He's part Irish and looks it, an artisan who also plays guitar and a writer. Familiar with Jonesborough, he's been invited to play there but never made it that far. As I get ready to leave, he makes a birthday present for me -- a baby blue balloon poodle complete with black ink eyes and a smiling mouth -- as I watch it transform curiously, wondering what it's going to become. Another vet, known to the crowd, also sits down and asks for a cigarette, which I give him. He's facially disfigured, has difficulty speaking. A Cherokee who is homeless except for his home on Asheville streets and company there. I walk off with a little regret as it's getting dark outside and go through the streets with my blue poodle waving. The hors d'oeuvres at the Haen have been wonderful and dinner in Grove Arcade at my favorite organic cafe with its conversationally friendly and enlightening personnel and reading material ain't been bad neither. I buy a small petrified wood that looks like blue and brown stone in one of its shops and head for home, thanking God again for my deliverance to the Mountain Empire with its irrepressibly and irreplaceably great people and places. It's true too that there's no place like Asheville on a Saturday night, my companions and I completely agreed upon that.

Country Calendar-- --"And One Of Those Days"

The Appalachian State Fair, held for a week in Gray TN, offered Thursday as Seniors Day, when a day's pass ticket was only \$4, so that's the afternoon I chose for my first-time visit there. Aside from many carnival rides on the grounds to the left, there were quite a few buildings and craft tents to the right. That's the direction I headed, perusing tent offerings first and ending

up with one bracelet from a Native American man and the many enticements from jewelry to clothing that his booth offered for sale from \$5 to \$40 or so. Checking out the commercial buildings, I picked up my share, and maybe more, of free hard candies from counters and tables and got by the Republican Party booth in my green and black Barack Obama t-shirt without incident. Two black women at the Crafts building, which was stupendous, saw it and started talking with me as I passed by, sharing information about a Unity Festival scheduled later in the month for Elizabethton and giving me a free plastic tote bag. A nice man in the last commercial building had given me a green cloth one to hold free goodies I'd gather together too. The wildlife exhibit in that building was great too. And the domestic animal one in the next building over was also. The VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Tri-Cities chapter gave out free refrigerator magnets imprinted with "If you enjoy your freedom, thank a Vet" and "Vietnam War Veteran," both of which I picked up gratefully for home along with two well-written and informative booklets about post-traumatic stress syndrome, a common disorder amongst service people returning to and dealing with everyday life and interactions with those who've not had wartime experiences.

First place for open show art in one category went to a colorful oil of an old guy with a long white beard, straw hat and bibs sitting in a front porch chair and playing the fiddle. There were a few outstanding paintings, excellent pencil drawings, and a *lot* of outstanding handcrafts like quilts and collages and stuff like that. In another building there was timber rattlesnake, a white bass (never saw that before), and an Eastern Spiney Softshell, which is a wild-looking hard-shelled round thing about 2" in circumference with a weird triangular-shaped head sticking out. Also a waterfall and pond with mallards swimming. The domestic animals had one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Baby ducks with an aluminum slide about four feet long from a platform into a pool and a little rising where they could waddle back up again. They loved it and kept going round and round, falling sideways and upside down as well as forwards in a good-sized groups. It was totally

adorable and entertained everyone who passed by. They were also selling them for \$5 each, chicks for \$3, guinea pigs for \$15. There was a pinto horse, alpaca, two white and gray donkeys, a bovide (don't ask me, it looked like a small cow) llama, parakeets blue and green, Lady Amherst male pheasant with red white blue and gold feathers, Sika deer which are very sweet, gentle and beautiful looking only 2-1/2 feet tall, fainting goats and one lamancha goat whose pupils were round not straight across, pigs, and a miniature horse. Feed cost 25 cents from boxes but I didn't buy any. In some other buildings there were *lotsa* cows including quite a few with large, full udders and kids being pushed in strollers.

Country Calendar-- -- "The Fourth in the First"

According to the weekly Herald and Tribune, there is a controversy amongst Jonesborough citizens about results for a \$50,000 marketing study which recommends use of "The World's Storytelling Capital" as a tourism "branding" motto for the town. Some other favorites are "Tennessee's First Town" and "Tennessee's Oldest Town," emphasizing its being both and also capital of "The Lost State of Franklin (not the band but the place)," having failed by one federal Congressional vote from becoming capital of the fourteenth state of the Union. In settling another controversy, memorial bricks for those who served the Confederacy are allowed now according to Mayor Kelly Wolfe on advice of counsel, to be intermingled in the Veterans Memorial Park with those who served in Union Armed Forces of all our wars. John Lyle, ACR supporter and contributor, has offered his vacant Main Street lot for Union reenactor encampments in reciprocal appreciation that the General of his ancestry will be there remembered, along with on Route 11E with its historical marker, while John continues to play his usual role as a

foot soldier of Dixie in multi-state gatherings to replay strategies and consequences of the War Between The States.

The kickoff dinner for Jonesborough Days festivities -- listed as a Southeast Tourism Society 2009 Top 20 event of the Southeast -- is held the evening of June 30th behind the town's old Courthouse, its larger and newest one having just been completed on West Jackson Boulevard with a green dome overlooking a bit distantly the busy town and county it serves. As a New England teenager listening, dancing and giggling surreptitiously with friends to Elvis 45s and black and white television appearances, I would never have imagined or believed that 50 or so years later I'd be sitting under a large tent with four very long rows of tables and chairs, munching on barbecued pork and boneless chicken breasts and cob corn, in a tiny historic Tennessee town and talking with friend Sandy's husband -- who rides his black street bike in his black leather to their Main Street Bathtastic shop every day where he sells the beautifully artistic soaps he makes before returning home to play perhaps his trumpet or create more artistic soaps -- and watching the young, handsome, well-built, blond, funny, Republican town mayor Kelly Wolfe, descendant of one of the area's oldest settling families and owner of Wolfe Development, confer with Alderman Dr. Terry Countermine, playing mandolin not banjo for this set, on whether or not the sunshine laws allow them to perform together on-stage. He then launches into his excellently ebullient and exuberant Elvis impression of "Don't Be Cruel," "All Shook Up," and "Blue Suede Shoes" backed by the Jonesborough Novelty Band, which had just previously played "Yankee Doodle Dandy" in a nice touch of "old home" for me, strumming and harmonizing along. And grinning. Along with a lot of other people. A t-shirt that says "Jonesborough, Land of the Free" with a flag waving and the head of an eagle over it in navy blue is available reasonably from some town stores. T-shirts from the Visitors Center read "Red Rockets (fireworks) White Lies (storytelling) and Bluegrass (music)," the theme for this year's celebrations, and with a caricature of performing Novelty Band members imprinted brightly on the front, cost a very

reasonable \$10 each.

Wednesday evening is the first year of an annual gospel choir competition to see whose voter donations sum the highest entitling that group to be the official donors of all contributed to be given for charity, our largest area food pantry stressed by current economic realities, especially in serving school-age children and their families. Appropriately, the event opens with a set by the Methodist Church Children's Bell Choir, which earns my vote and closes with the ringing of chimes to "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to much applause. The program ends with the Trinity Church Choir, so populous that I'm breath-holdingly concerned as they file onto the temporary stage to stand closely together beside their band of electric piano, drums and bass. But they survive by the grace of God and bring down the house and night sky's attention with the strenuous glory of harmonized enthusiasms of voice, strings and beat ending with the rousing acclamation of "Jerusalem!" my absolutely favorite piece. Their conductor then announces that the choir's CD is free to anyone making a contribution. "If you don't make any, you have to take two." I do both, saving one for my Goddaughter, and noting with pleasure that the last hymn is there recorded along with nine others also unfamiliar to me previously. In a "Jonesborough Land of the Free" navy blue t-shirt with its eagle's head over a waving U.S. flag and wearing a popular broad-rimmed "Tennessee hat," I talk briefly with Melissa, the town's marketing director, as I had earlier with Marion Light, originator of the recent Veterans Park upgrade and regional Democratic Party chair, before leaving.

Later my neighbors are also treated to those musical praise songs, particularly the last one performed before folks, including babies, then chattered away to cars and homes. Artist Margaret Gregg -- one-time nun and long-time social activist (see Mountain Sisters by my favorite former Anthropology professor and ex-chair of the Appalachian Women's

Association, the multiply-awarded Dr. Helen Lewis), ACR contributor and fellow Green Party official -- and I parted company so many years ago frequently with the mutual promise, "Next year in Jerusalem!" although whether we meant spatially or spiritually or both isn't quite clear now, so that hymn has special layers of resonance for me, and no doubt others.

One of two kiddie trains on Main Street, Jonesborough TN The glory of America and life in "The Lost State of Franklin" parades a little after 10 o'clock Friday morning through an enthusiastic throng lining Main Street sidewalks and occasionally rewarded with free bottled water, store coupons and candies for the children, with the State Farm Insurance Company tent giving away free flags also, and more candies. In the lead arm in arm are the copper-green Statue of Liberty with her torch and book and very tall-hatted Uncle Sam in the stars and stripes. Nearing entry review and judging stand, the adored Jonesborough Novelty Band secured on its float strikes up "Yankee Doodle Dandy" followed by reenactors marching in Union blue and then Confederate gray with two women in period dress walking behind them all. In an order of their own appear mounted horses, high school marching bands, the Intertribal Dancers and representatives, Little Miss Jonesborough reaching to climb off the back of the convertible seat and other regional beauty queens, The Overmountain Men from Fort Watauga in Elizabethton, Representative Dr. Phil Roe's two prize-winning floats -- a huge inflated eagle followed by T.C. and the High Road Band, a popular performing teen rock/country quartet, who later rouse a crowd most particularly in playing their rollicking version of "Rock Me Mama" with a lead singer sounding somewhat similar to the early Dwight Yoakam and an entertaining earringed bass player plus drummer and lead guitar -- and a wide assortment of shined and flag-decorated tractors steered by older men holding young boys on their laps or between their knees. Adults of all ages cheer, hoorah and wave the red-white-and-blue while children rush for goodies thrown on the ground and a wide assortment of groomed and leashed pet dogs watch and yip and prance under feet around chair, and other, legs. After an hour or so,

the last entry rolls by and the crowd moves off disjointedly in cheery unarray for shops and cafes, vendor goods and live musical events scheduled at various venues including the covered porch before the Mary B. Martin (named after the wife of a recent million dollar private donor) Storytelling Hall of the International Storytelling Center and a large tent with two rows of set-up folding chairs in the large parking lot behind the old Town Courthouse, where also all the children's games and rides are aligned, along with unusually not-unpleasant "port-o-potties."

That evening at around 10 p.m. is the fireworks show, produced from the area around the Visitors Center, and it is pretty awesome too. I stand on the back deck stairsteps next to my Central American neighbor who is recording all of it. Right when we think there just can't possibly be any more color and light and shapes and bangs, there are, ending with a monumental finale explosion, triggered by machine I heard later, into the already smoky dark sky. Before and afterwards, and to the delight of adults as well as children, some neighbor/parents also set off an impressive number of spiraling white streamers and explosions high into the night from our central garden and play area.

The Barefoot Movement performing in Jonesborough TN, July 2009 The weekend is alive with music! And there is a wide assortment of choices to be had within easy walking. "We're very happy to be back in the coolest town in the world -- self-proclaimed, and it is really" says Noah Wells, lead singer/songwriter and fiddler for The Barefoot Movement, this time with a few new and excellent musicians on lead guitar and drums from NC, a woman on bass from Ohio, and a mandolin/banjo player from TN. They also play a very unusual, original piece written by their guitar player. These are folks who ... know their strings. And really can play barefoot. Little Fiddlin' Carson Peters cavorts backstage as any healthy five-year-old will while his band sets up and then directs the action for nearly an hour in comfortable

and virtuoso style. While Dad tries to keep up on rhythm guitar with The Rockhouse Stringband, his Mom smiles and laughs delightedly from the hand-clapping, foot-tapping and finger-snapping audience. The banjo player switches to lead guitar and then back again. I decide Carson has to be the reincarnation of some extraordinarily well-educated and practiced, beloved violinist somewhere in the world who lived to a very old age still learning, exploring and performing. There just is no other explanation possible. Other than that he's a completely normal pre-kindergartner and seems to enjoy it all and just take it in stride. "Nothin' to it. What's the big deal with everyone anyway?" He first picked up strings hanging out in his home around the time he learned to walk also.

Sunday, I stroll down the hill and into the main drag where food and craft vendors are still set up under tents and the street is full of what the local newspaper later counts as the remnants of around 40,000 celebrants altogether convergent on this little town of under 6,000 full-time residents. I've run out of places to hang and arrange beautiful and reasonably priced jewelry from native stones and handicraft and other objet d'arts, so just wave and talk briefly with a few vendors I've gotten to know from as closeby as Erwin, Rocky Mount and Bristol and another from Greeneville, South Carolina. A small baby boy in his stroller taps one leg naturally to the rhythm of a bluegrass band of older gentlemen with guitar, mandolin, bass, banjo and fiddle performing under the roof of the International Storytelling Center's "Doc's Front Porch" stage while the roaming audience arranges and rearranges itself on straw bales set out generously and the comfortably-laid rocks of boundaries between grasses and bricked patios and walkways. Hovering clouds sprinkle intermittent drops on my black "Tanya Tucker" hat this Sunday as I pass the 12-year-old fiddler and his guitar-playing father with their open case for donations on the sidewalk. Vari-colored and styled ramblers on barricaded Main Street and in its shops and cafes have thinned.

But !Lightnin' Charlie beckons from the Presbytery and it's time for the "I love America Home of the Brave" show to begin with its choir, two outstanding pianists, a young teen fiddler and an older banjo playing choir member to begin a presentation of patriotic songs, beginning with a monumental classical piece that ends in bars from "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by a young concert-master who gives way to the older woman who usually plays there and no doubt elsewhere. There's a little history reenactment mixed with hosanna songs before Charlie appears to loud and beloved applause with his acoustic guitar and gets us all into a jazzy version of America The Beautiful to start his assemblage of unusual beat and sound that fills the auditorium sacristy. He ends, on request of the Choirmistress, with "An (not 'un,' he says) American Medley" of "Dixie," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the black spiritual "All My Trials," and a triumphantly delivered version of "Battle Hymn" filling the room and skies reaching to the heaven he invokes and envisions verbally and musically.

Fiddlin' Carson Peters performing with his band in Jonesborough TN July 2009 Jonesborough Repertory Theatre is about to produce its final performance of "The 1940 USO Show," which has been presented to popular acclaim and sell-out audiences for the past few years with a changing selection of songs and dances accompanied by a six-piece band of drums, piano, trombone, trumpet, alto and tenor sax. On my way walking back home I comment to Janet Browning, peripatetic owner of the Museum Warehouse, in passing, "Your husband looks pretty good and happy in drag," and she smiles. "He does, doesn't he?" We are referencing one of the skits in which our long-time Town Manager and another town man dress in blouses and skirts and high heels to flutter and flirt with men in tux dancing with women in seamed nylon stockings and period dress, including hats and gloves. In another set his clear voice rings out in song, as it does also regularly within the Presbytery Church Choir.

But for that one Congressional vote, of course, "The Lost State of Franklin" comprising eight counties of East Tennessee would be what was and is spiritually an ever-Union state formally floating sometimes uncomfortably or awkwardly amidst the sea of the southern Confederacy with my adopted and long-time home town its governing hub, as it was of all of Tanasi/Tennessee briefly, standing firmly and proudly in its small shop and farm and abolitionist, free-state history.

To my ears bluegrass, although I overdose on it occasionally living in the heart of that country, is the true musical voice, along with gospel, of rural Appalachian people, while folk music is more of an echo of our origins across the seas harking back to a more ancient heritage as transliterated over centuries in style and tonality but not message. Even for an intrinsic and inveterate music lover, it's possible to develop a yearning need here for the "silence" of natural sounds, which fortunately are easily and readily accessible. So, "Music Capital USA" gives way to only the soft drumming of rain in starless damp darkness of an encompassing and cozy warm night. All the tents are folded and put away until Jonesborough's next major event "of, for and by the people," fall's world-infused Storytelling Festival when the public beat masses again onto this tiny town's old and storied streets.

One thing's been established again for sure. This is a town that knows how to throw a party right. As ever with Jonesborough public events and fund-raisers, volunteers have organized and staffed it all. If you live here, you understand very well why Tennessee is called The Volunteer State.

Here's to the Parks!

For my regular dose of nature in the rough from town I drove west on outstandingly scenic back or main roads to public parks like Davey Crockett to wind along its overgrown riverside footpath by the tumultuously intriguing Nolichucky on the curling, mountainous way to our other "first town" of historic Greeneville, also in contention with the outpost of fascinating Rogersville for that distinction. Choosing an alternative southerly direction I might aim toward mountain-ringed Erwin, uncomfortably famous for having once hung publically to the death a rampaging and murderous adult circus elephant, on old route 81 as it meanders in two-lane glory through domesticated farmlands and landscaped suburban order to a wild side of the island-splattered Nolichucky and on to the neatly-maintained forested public boat landing on the river and into the cliffside dirt road leading to the dead end of a private riverfront commercial campground edging Appalachian Trail grounds.

In addition to Jonesborough's Davy Crockett State Park, I also visited off and on the main area river at Erwin's Nolichucky Campground, Nolichucky Campground complex -- an amazingly diverse construction between the rolling to roiling river, sand-bedded and cliff-defined, and wild-wooded delights of the storied and awesome Appalachian Trail -- whose very skilled woodworking owner is a friend of friends. Offering tent spaces, new cabins, and older miniature A-frames for rent by the water or national forest, it also affords easy access to the Appalachian Trail. Both sites have wooded and wild paths by riverbanks and opportunities to slide into chortling or serene sandy-bottomed waters for cool swimming, wading or relaxing on rocks in the heat, busy or unoccupied. Large rafts and colorful canoes pass through the relatively calm waters by the campground for lively encounters with rapids in sight just below. There's a good-sized pond with a fishing ramp, and visiting seasonal waterfowl, for sunning and talking beside and a large covered open-sided building where great area musicians play weekends

under the moon and stars to comfortable and enthusiastic crowds

Close by Persimmon Ridge Park affords surprisingly sweet encounters for an in-town facility, with nature's wilder aspects on well-worn dirt trail paths and planked ones, including small bridges over its rock-strewn running brook and opportunities to explore unmarked and untamed outposts of densely high mixed woods, comfortably inviting nooks and crannies for solitary commune.

Once, we camped for two nights at the largely diverse and beautiful Jenny Wiley State Resort Park in Prestonsburg, Kentucky and went to a nearby horse track and betting establishment, where I watched an assortment of characters leafing through record pamphlets and testing their latest theories, since I seldom gamble at tracks or machines and then very sparingly. The beautiful Kentucky scenery was marred repeatedly by mountains with their tops blown off for accessing coal deposits easily. You'd think companies involved would level and reseed the ground so that the land would be pleasant and usable again, even if just hilly and flat, but they don't. Huge, ugly craters filled with rubble and dust stand out on the landscape ever-reminding residents and visitors of corporate disregard for people, animals, birds and beauty.

Dr. Bill and Ginger Stone invited me to go with them to Standing Stone State Park, a wilderness area with cabins and buildings for visitors, in helping to organize a statewide Green Party of Tennessee. Bill had already begun to structure an area chapter, which met at the popular local coffee house in Johnson City owned by a mutual Jonesborough friend -- Dr. Don Garcia whose PhD in Philosophy from a Hawaiian University led to businesses strewn with enticing journals and books and newspapers for clientele as well as conversations -- although that entrepreneur was originally from the North and Florida. Ginger had become an especially good friend with whom I

traveled and played piano duets and took painting lessons informally. The drive was pleasant and uneventful and we settled comfortably into our cabin rooms without any problem. A large open building was a meeting and partying place, although on the last day, we met in one divided into a few conference rooms of various sizes.

Ginger invited me twice to accompany her to the family's childhood home in Parkersburg WV at the very northwestern tip of that state with a wonderful river convergence and old, empty and abandoned mansions lined back with their expansive lawns from an original main street. We stopped at New River Gorge once, an incredible site, on the extraordinarily scenic drive there, attended introduction of a new symphony to and for America by a regionally famous composer, and participated in the crowded and festive home marriage of one of her neices and reception following that.

Nearly a decade later and post-autumn 2010 stroke Junior, an entertainingly in-transition erstwhile neighbor in need of pickup work, cooked and delivered hearty meals for me post-release from rehab hospital. My favorites any time of day were succulently-prepared and invitingly-displayed eggs sunnyside up, fried sliced potatoes and onions, biscuits and gravy. He drove me on request to the local grocery and got me safely into and around in a motorized cart there for shopping on my own, fresh air, and town interactions along the way. We also enjoyed Main Street Music on the Square performances, restaurant specialties, and vendor fare.

With others one evening, we dined to Lightnin' Charlie's music and tales at now-relocated Cranberry Thistle's cabaret cafe' and one impromptu day rode the back way toward Erwin's rolling-to-craggy mountain range, choosing an unfamiliar two-lane headed toward a summit. With no turnoffs it turned out, as we checked the gas gauge, until the "Welcome to North Carolina" sign at

the crest -- a few miles from the nearest occupied and commerced town.

Other pleasant days we drove narrow park-forested and river-lined roads around his nearby backcountry childhood homeplace, stopping to chat briefly with several of his relatives and friends remaining there. Junior had traveled with one to post-Katrina Louisiana where they'd got "up close and personal" with flooded swamps and alligators, and "fast money" to throw around.

Junior's Jonesborough-native family of 15 brothers and sisters by one father and his first and second wives include a locally popular country musician who performs on guitar and sings the regional circuit, including a popularly nearby riverpark cabaret, with a long-time male companion.

"Holiday Home"

Asheville NC -- The two-hour Christmas Parade begins a little after 11 a.m. as scheduled. Leading is a police honor guard of four men and a woman all hoisting flags of the United States, North Carolina, and that city, followed by a horse-drawn Biltmore Estate carriage driven by a girl and carrying men in tails and black top hats. Workers for the Humane Society wearing reindeer antlers atop their heads trail walking dogs of all description dressed for holidays and draped in signs saying "Adopt me." Small wrapped festive candies are thrown out to the children and adults sitting up front on the curbs or chairs. Artists with the Center for Performing Arts appear in black with white shirts and top hats, and one cradling a sleeping baby, appear. Next are the Cub Scouts, a little rough-looking in comparison. There are entrants from 105.9 "The Mountain," 96.5 rock radio, Bojangles, Grace

United Methodist Church float and members giving out cards with a penny affixed to each for the kids, and live musicians drawn in a wagon from Gift of Music. Then come members of a children's school all attired in tie-dyed t-shirts and a bus full of children waving from Frances Delaney "creating social activists" New School. The Lighthouse Baptist Church has adults dressed in white robes and a large cross with reference to John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.").

Children in the cast of "Sleeping Beauty" represent the Asheville Arts Center. Live musicians perform. Super puppets and the Teacher of the Year appear. The Blue Ridge Roller Girls skate by and the Tech College blares out rock 'n' roll. The King of Glory Church in Swannanoa presents their children with the peace sign followed by little girls dancing to the tune of "We will rock you." Fire engines precede the Enka Jets Marching Band playing religious music like "O Come, Let Us Adore Him," as they follow their troupe of baton twirlers. Flag dancers appear and Berea Baptist Church, with the insignia "Jesus is the reason for the season," pulls a wagon saying, "God's little creation" with a living creche atop. The sounds of "All My Rowdy Friends" approach with members of A Dance Theatre jazz-dancing along. The blonde Miss Asheville and Outstanding Teen drive by followed by CARE Partners. The Erwin Marching Band with "good wishes to our troops" is playing "Hark The Herald Angels Sing," and, my favorite, a lot of variously instrumented drummers falls in behind them.

The Christian Action Kids, Adventure Education TAASC Sport for Kids, many motorcycle riders, Miss North Carolina International, Ingles, 570 radio with blues being played on an electric guitar, Parrot Head Club, the Downtown Alliance, Family Church, Tai Kwan Do, the Arts Center performers, and a good-size clown troupe go by. Etcetera. You get the idea. There are costumed ballerinas dancing in soft shoe and on point, unicyclists, more

marching bands, the City Chickens, singers and actors, hoola hoopers, biodeisel vehicles, bicyclists, more single and band musicians. The man standing beside me and I tap, clap and dance as they all pass, then smile and thank each other for being good street neighbors as the last floats pass. The huge crowd of all ages and descriptions massed along blocks of sidewalks on both sides of Patton Avenue begins to drift off and disperse into restaurants, side streets, galleries and shops.

I've stopped, as ever, at Malaprops Bookstore earlier for a breakfast pastry and choose to walk downhill to the Used Bookstore for browsing through their phenomenal array of worldwide magazines, books, regional hardcopy, and a bin of some giveaway books. On my way back to the parking lot, it occurs to me on passing that I've never seen the inside of the antique mart. It turns out to be a huge interior with many and diverse booths and merchandise. There's an excellent sale table way in the back, so I leave with a bag full of treasures like a covered and fluted milkglass dish with hand-painted flowers on top for three dollars and a tallish narrow candle holder containing colored and delicate sand art of desert, cactus, mountains, rainbow, and eagle flying for a dollar and a half. Earlier, the Kress Emporium, which is like a two-story museum of innovatively modern to antique to homespun art planet-wide but concentrating on that region, has left me with a few affordable gifts also for carrying and giving on Christmas day. Going through the parking garage from an unfamiliar entranceway, I get lost on the elevator trying to find my car. A man who joins me laughs and suggests the third floor when I offer the street name, and I find my car there.

Fortunately, there's a space right in front of the Haen Gallery so I'm able easily to enjoy the exhibit/reception of work by G. C. Myers and compliment the owner on his consistent choices of excellently unusual, break-out art and artists who are always in attendance too. This time, Mr. Myers presents an introductory lecture and dialogue after which red and white wine, crackers

and cheeses, small desserts, bakery breads and spreads are served buffet-style. With the handout of Myers' statement and background that I pick up on the way out, there is a printing of his poem dated November 2008 and entitled "Now..."

Now is a powerful time.

Now is a time for action, to move ahead with all intent.

We cannot stop on our chosen path now and peer back into the mist behind and try to retrace our steps -- the past tells us only how we came to this point. Now.

Nor can we pause on our way and look to some far and distant point ahead of us. That lies too far in the future and is nothing without our action. Now.

We have charted our course and we must focus on the path immediately before us, to make each step with all determination because now is a time for action.

This is what I see in much of this work, moments caught just as a decision is made to proceed ahead. I see a lot of determination in this work, perhaps shaped by the time in which most of this work was created, a time of renewed political spirit among many who have decided that this was indeed a time for action, a time to stand up and be heard.

The time is now.

The drive home is uneventful and it seems fairly soon that I'm back sleepily in Jonesborough after nearly ten hours "on the road."

Elizabethton TN -- Milligan College has advertised widely and well its "Yuletide Jazz" concert and the parking lot is full when I arrive, but fortunately there's a space left on the side street leading up to it. Up to it is

right too. It's quite a hike in a circle winding upwards onto a hilltop to get to the front doors of Seeger Chapel, the institution's beautiful site for many performances with an ample stage and large audience sections, including a balcony on three sides, and all graced by artfully famous, storied stained glass windows. There turns out to be an overflow crowd for the free performance by the Jazz Ensemble featuring Dave Morgan, whose wife is an alumni and former professor of the College, on vibraphone and vocals. You really haven't lived until you've heard and seen excellent jazz played on a vibraphone. I didn't know that previously, but I do now. Mr. Morgan might be considered an elderly gentlemen by some just passing but ... he's really in his prime and a total joy to watch and hear musically. It also turns out that the band director, Rick Simerly, plays a mean trombone. I've not before particularly liked or appreciated that instrument, but his mastery is ... soooooo oooo unusual and good that I have a whole new perspective on it. And, of course, his ability to keep the musicians together during their pieces with enthusiasm and comraderie is also excellent.

At the very beginning of the concert, all the lights go out, the crowd hushes, and we begin to hear brass playing individually from different places in the auditorium, including the balcony where I am sitting in the middle. Then percussion comes in from the stage. And finally lights come on as the electric guitarists start playing. I never heard jazz on that instrument before either and also enjoy that experience. The acoustic and electric pianist is Mark Thie, the same marvelous one who played at the Blue Plum Festival so entertainingly. Finally, the rest of the brass comes on stage and everyone in the ensemble plays. The group is all male and wearing black suits with white shirts. Despite being completely Caucasian, no one anywhere could deny honestly and knowledgeably that they have a lotta soul. Rick Simerly explains during a pause that they started practicing for their first concert of that type after eight years of other jazz work together in August 2008. They all felt it to be a strange but necessary time of year to be playing Christmas carols and met every Monday night thereafter for at least two to three hours

to create the musical event gratis, but with donations requested without any hard-sell, that we are so fortunate to witness and enjoy this evening. Everyone in the audience loves it all with frequent and enthusiastic applause and cheers, and a standing ovation at the end. We file back to our cars and out through the seasonally lighted stone entrance/exit back onto Milligan Highway.

Johnson City TN -- Ballet being a somewhat esoteric taste and skill, the beautiful old Veterans Administration Memorial Theatre on the ETSU campus with its semi-circular balcony boxes is only about three-quarters full with an audience variously attired, including a few little girls in long holiday dresses and shiny black patent leather shoes. As part of his introduction, the wonderfully talented middle-aged man (David Clinkscales), who plays Scrooge to a humorous and antic "T," explains mime to the children and assures them their hearing has not become impaired upon its appearance on stage. Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is presented in four colorfully and diversely costumed scenes by dancers of the City Youth Ballet of Johnson City, which includes six athletic and graceful teenage men and a few younger boys. The performing even includes some tumbling acrobatics by two girls particularly and three superb and outstanding ballerinas (Christa Rockney, Hannah Dunbar, and Edith Dunbar) en pointe representing the spirits of Christmas past, present and future in white, green, and black. There is a fair division between toe and soft shoes throughout. The sets include swirling smoke where appropriate and the dancers stay in sync when needed in duos to ensemble, receiving an enthusiastic and long standing ovation before the curtain comes down.

On my way back to the car, I notice another with bumper stickers reading, "Marine Corps," "Korean Vet," and "Bark less, wag more." Further along, one sports "COEXIST" spelled out in symbols of the world's major religions (with a cross for the "T" for instance) and "Support Individuality." Mine can be

located among the many other red compacts of various make by the Asheville-originated sticker with a lotus and saying, "May respect and tolerance increase," and one from the Appalachian Fair reading, "Peace Corps." Finding my way out of the labyrinth that is the VA complex of many roads and builings, the grace of form, dress and expertise lingers in my mind as I pass lighted Christmas decorations on houses and yards along the old and curving two-lane Jonesborough Highway. Nearly losing control as the car skids and swerves suddenly, I snap to attention thinking it's developed a flat tire, but it turns out to be ice over a flat bridge after that snowy day. Before settling in to home, I save a lot of money at 24-hour Ingles grocery store by purchasing nearly everything on sale at half-price or less, more than compensating for the \$10 ballet ticket price and not even taking into account savings that afternoon from art gathered at the GoodWill Store for fifty percent off their original low prices and including a matted cross painted a few decades ago with delicate innovation on dark blue silk by an orphaned Czech teenager, now glassed, framed and hanging near the multiply-decorated and festively diverse Christmas tree. I turn on the little mini-stereo to start seasonal "praise music" playing and fall asleep soon thereafter to a kaleidoscope of holiday sounds and scenes now, in memory, and yet-to-be here on planet Earth, the third one from our particular sun in a very crowded galaxy amidst a magically populous and universal mystery.

Elizabethton TN -- The following evening, Sunday, Milligan College's Music Department puts on yet another well-rehearsed and coordinated blow-out performance, which entitled altogether "A Milligan College Community Christmas." The suggested donation of five dollars goes to 13-year-old Small Miracles, "a therapeutic horseback riding center.... Of their current 50 clients about two thirds... have some form of disability. The other third is comprised of young people with behavioral issues...." Seeger Chapel, with its beautifully-storied stained glass windows and near-wraparound balcony, is nearly full, so the collection is probably substantial, as some of the audience contributes quite a bit more and there are probably some who have nothing

to give this year too. Dr. David Runner on the organ opens the program and then the full orchestra conducted by Dr. Kellie Brown joins in. The awesomely talented Rick Simerly again leads the brass ensemble prior to a procession up each of two aisles by the choir dressed in black suits for men and long black dresses for women all singing to accompaniment, "O Come, All Ye Faithful." After a few more chorals and carols, the audience is invited to stand and sing a medley of familiar songs which we all do with gusto led by Dr. Brown who turns to face the deep pews. Dr. Donald Jeanes reads the Christmas story from Luke and, as the choir sings and orchestra plays, ushers provide light for the medium-sized white candles with their little paper drip-catchers we've all been given. The audience rises to sing "Silent Night" and then the choir, mostly smiling and grinning, files out again to everyone loudly singing "Joy to the World." The man beside me helps me on with my politically-correct fake fur jacket, and we all amble toward the lobby where the singers are standing to receive and give thanks and praise.

Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery, watercolor by Nancy Earnest

Graphic: Steve and Tava Cook's Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery, watercolor by Nancy Earnest

Johnson City TN -- The City's "Holiday on Main Street ... A Taste of the Season" coincides with its monthly First Friday downtown art exhibitions and receptions. Featuring fifteen shops and businesses which provide gourmet treats for those who buy a \$15 ticket, proceeds benefit the Downtown Alliance which schedules and coordinates regular street festivals among other events during the year. Blown-up old photographs of Johnson City are featured on walls and portray the dress and manners of a bygone black and white era when department stores advertised sale of the latest in "bloomers," "silk stockings," "hankies," and "frocks." Steve Cook's unusual neon and glass art is on display prominently within the new Arts Council

rooms, and another favorite I discover is the work of Lydia Ann Wilson. There are hors d'oeuvres like baklava and little fruit-sweetened cheesecakes, crackers and chicken liver, and punch and wine in the lobby with plenty of people milling around and some vendors with display tables. Four women playing flutes entertain with Christmas carols followed by three older women singers who sound wonderful. At the Nelson Gallery, Val Lyle's multi-media explorations and Bill Lea's photographs are knock-outs for me, but there are many worth mentioning whose artistry is on display there. The owner is offering fig and champagne jams to go with the crackers in baskets and other delicacies and delights. There are couches and tables set off for relaxing and angled stands of various media. As ever, First Friday is a joy and a pleasure in learning, remembrance, and people met.

"Sing joyfully to God, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Praise His Name for the Lord is gracious. Alleluia!" -- Jubilate Deo by Mozart

multimedia collage by jH:Creation Greeneville TN -- I've been curious about the Niswonger Performing Arts Center for quite awhile. The newish building is an architecturally interesting two-story oval brick set back from the street with a flashing neon sign there announcing its current and coming attractions, which include internationally popular singers and musicians. On Thursday evening, they host "Coming Home for Christmas," presented by the Greeneville High School Choral Department. The two-hour presentation is free to the public with donations accepted but not pushed. After the easy half-hour drive from home on a rainy night, I find the public parking areas full, even though I'm twenty minutes early. There's space left on the side streets, though, and I end up walking a block down hill to the wide, glassed entrance area. Two tastefully decorated trees flank the doors, and a woman in the lobby proffers a five-page listing of hymns and carols scheduled, which includes some lyric translations, names of those appearing, and sponsors from individual to organizational to corporate.

There are five choirs totaling 187 singers altogether, performing singly and in groups: Women's Show (11), Mixed Show (28), and Advanced (64), the Vocal Jazz Ensemble (10), and the Chorale (84). I'm fortunate to find a seat mid-center below the balcony and behind an awesome-looking sound system run by a young woman in black shirt and pants with a blonde ponytail. A middle-aged man with a gray one nearly reaching to his waist is ready behind a camera stand to begin filming and talking meanwhile with those who are obviously acquaintances and friends. A very humorous recording announces the usual admonitions about cell phones, pagers, and the location of emergency exits, and a new one about crying babies. I notice a small red-headed one a few rows in front of me, but he's quietly enthralled by the near-capacity crowd and two white-lighted trees on stage left and right composed of long angular limbs. Later perhaps the mosaics, abstract spheres of the universe, and oversized snowflakes projected onto the walls also distract him.

The Mixed Show Choir files in from behind the opened curtains to arrange themselves on four tiered steps and Whitney Ball takes her place at the grand piano mid-stage up front. Conductor Kathryn May raises her arms and the sounds of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" fill the auditorium increasingly as The Chorale walks, also carrying battery-lighted white candles, in from side doors to arrange themselves on the aisles and steps. I'm fortunate again to have a superbly-ranged soprano standing to my left and overriding, to my ears, the symphonic sound of God's natural musical instrument tuned, trained and harmonized by so many gifted practitioners. They are all wearing long, black satin-type dresses with low bodices and straps for women and black suits with white shirts for the men. Of course, the lights have dimmed and the invitation is irresistible. Fifteen unusual songs -- including Strommen's "Bring a torch, Jeannette, Isabella!" -- follow by variously numbered arrangements of the singers. Two are accompanied by percussion and one by two

guitarists. The final "Magnificent Horses" features bells and is a virtuoso voice piece performed with joyous perfection.

Following intermission, The Show Choirs, dressed colorfully in changing informal clothes, sing, dance and mime delightful versions of familiar seasonal songs. My favorites are "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)," sometimes hilariously off-key by the women, and "White Christmas" by the Men's Show Choir, which manages to be nearly sexy in its delivery. The finale of "Joy To The World" with kettle drums, trumpets and trombones involves all of the singers in their black and white plus alumni from the audience on stage in a somewhat tumultuous reunion and celebration before the lights come back up and we, the appreciative crowd, having offered a long standing ovation, file out ourselves and back to our vehicles. A woman during the break with a wonderfully pronounced backcountry accent has told me, before leaving to join three younger black men who are apparently friends, that two to four inches of snow is forecast but flakes haven't yet started falling, so the drive home with choirs and chorale mind-echoing is pleasant and a bit dreamy.

At sunrise, I discover the predicted snow has apparently bypassed our area.

As all of the above events mean to say and convey,

HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND MERRY NEW YEAR!

"Loose Change"

Tennessee -- Veteran and acolyte activists from Tri-Cities, Knoxville, Nashville, Chattanooga and Memphis locals convened on the Cumberland plateau's Standing Stone State Park, Friday through Sunday (June 1-3), for the first annual meeting of the Green Party of Tennessee. Katey Culver, guiding spirit and (along with Joshua Low) ASGP (Association of State Green Parties) representative to the national party, organized accommodations, food, entertainment, speakers and plenary sessions. Through sharing group cabins, meals and music, formal and informal discussions, disparate members found consensus on some issues and tabled others for future resolution. Local chairpersons detailed their experiences in working toward a real and virtual bio-regionalism energized by informed citizenry. With state headquarters located in Nashville, the Green Party has ready access for lobbying state legislators on behalf of those who feel disenfranchised by the two major parties. Additionally, there is a Campus Green USA affiliate concentrating on issues of particular interest to students.

A significant proportion of members indicated their affiliation with the Democratic Party. They expressed feelings of dismay and disgust, however, with corporatism entrenched in both parties at the expense of quality of life for citizens in this country and around the world. TGPT plenary sessions -- opened with original "working song" lyrics and guitar by Howard Switzer -- were guided by principles of consensus whereby any member who could or would not "stand aside" on a principle or issue resolution being discussed had absolute veto power. As a result, By-laws for the state party were retired to committee for re-presentation later this year. Special sessions held on Party Building, Strategies for Outreach to the African-American Community, Running a Campaign, Election Reform, and State Platform Development elicited grassroots

experiences and insights to build upon.

Saturday evening "Loose Change," an unusually artistic soul group (Debby Beaver electric violin and vocals, Jeff Poppen and Dan Rossman guitar and vocals, Rich Zeller bass and Lloyd Tewksbury percussion) entertained as members talked and danced to a near-full moon.

[Editorial note: Along with Scott Banbury of the Memphis local, the author is co-chair of the Green Party of Tennessee and a member of the TriCities local. They, representatives from the five Green locals, a student and a college rep, and four at-large members constitute the State Coordinating Committee.]

"Loss"

August 21, 2001 -- A few days ago, Sylva NC's City Lights Bookstore held a reception for its founder, Gary Carden, in honor of his Mason Jars in the Flood receiving AWA's Book of the Year Award. The perfect excuse, I think, for an "altitude adjustment" and what better place than the Smokies. For all their problems with air pollution and assaults on habitat, there is nothing like winding through the top of the world with mountains and mist forever, or so it seems. The traffic is light except around major cities like Asheville, and "rivers run through it."

Amidst a warren of rooms and shelves to the ceiling and less, with books new and old, a back reception area offers buffet-style specialties, as Gary

attends that names and interests are shared and conversation flows with the wine. Sculptress Collene Karcher discusses a sample of her work on display. Poet Kay Byer comments on experiences in publishing and promotion. Recently retired author John Quinnett shares haikus and recent explorations on the West Coast. A note on one table reads: "Since Gary is hearing impaired, you may wish to write him a note," inviting visitors to leave personal messages in a box of colored papers.

Gratefully I accept an offer to spend some time on Gary's three- acre homestead of gardens and forest break. Again he is piling me with books and quotes and photos and "Don't you know....?" Jack, an incorrigible (according to three trainers) replacement companion for the departed Teddie, eats (the left) one of my two favorite black suede high heel shoes. The ones with the cute little strap in the back which he enjoyed particularly if destruction is a measure. The corner of a book. A CD. We are continuing the course on Appalachia, consciousness, psychic life as thunder and lightning rage on the side porch now covered helpfully with a screen tent. Jack likes coffee and I cover mine with a hand before it goes the way of my shoe. Breakfast at a local hangout by the river is continued disultory and literary dissection, including on a local article reviewing Gary's work.

Some time later, I find myself driving the Main Street of Cherokee, Qualla Boundary -- past Western Steer, brightly dyed red feathers, Pizza Hut, Best Western and Hardee's -- looking for one real thing. The first night's motel room has a window on the river; the second night's is less expensive and perfect -- sliding doors to a balcony by chortling riffles and a man casting and catching trout all evening from the next balcony over.

I leaf through my addiction, piles of pamphlets and newspapers and brochures picked up along my travels. The sliding glass doors stay open. Stars drift in. Checking out, I nod to the tattooed fisherman and his blonde companion. "Do you eat the fish?" "I'd love to," he says, "but there's nowhere to cook it."

There must be a non-franchise restaurant somewhere. I've become obsessed with the search and finally settle on one that specializes in cinnamon buns. In questioning the manager on duty as to the freshness and variety of breakfast offerings, I learn the cafe is a Canadian franchise. I buy that morning's specialty, a creme-filled croissant, and allow it to dribble down my blouse as I sit on a tastefully-constructed front deck overlooking the four-lane highway.

The night before, awaiting takeout from Pizza Hut, I'd stumbled across a shuttered, privately-owned Heritage Museum of the Cherokee and head in the direction of Saunooke Village. Dr. and Mrs. Abrams have a collection that would cover 50,000 square feet if that were available. The shop and gallery's 2,000 hold indescribable beauty -- paintings, sculptures, artifacts whose history is explained by the self-guided tour's audio. I believe I will stay forever, but nicotine (Tahoe is the locally-produced brand) calls and I have a visit to the Casino planned.

There's a shuttle from the generous public parking area to the slots and a tall, luxurious hotel is going up beside them. My only experience with one-armed bandits being from movies, I expect glazed and crazed fanatics mindlessly pulling levers amidst flashing lights and yells and fights and smoke rising everywhere.

This is not the East Coast. The Cherokee Casino is a friendly, relatively quiet place, at least on a weekday afternoon. Slots flash decorously and I feel that their attendees are local people on break from work, as well as visitors, families and single folk. Having discovered years ago that I enjoy the watching part of gambling much more than the losing part, I wander and sit unobtrusively through the rows and rows of cloverleaves and apples and other inventive cryptographs whirring and popping up. Each machine has a lot of buttons and looks like it might be more complicated than my computer. There is a learning slot at the front but I never get around to it.

Eating I don't have a learning curve on and the Fresh Market buffets beckon. There are chef's specialties from Italy, Mexico, China, America Southern, America not-Southern, salads, breads. Sampling each, I discover near the checkout counter an unforgivable dessert bar of artistically displayed and decorated pastries, baked or boiled, as well as gourmet ice cream with choice of toppings.

"the 'nam war ended in 1975 btw, and there was alot more to it than the US bombing / mining hanoi. as for the rest about how the price of freedom is the blood of non-liberals, well, lots of liberals die in your wars. its called the draft. thank you for killing us for your ideology. we really appreciate being forced to die in your holy wars against commies, "ay rabs", and all your other delusional paranoias. liberals are fully able to die on their own without your help, from martin luther king to the west virginia coal field wars to the

pro-labor people who died fighting to feed their families, to the woman voting rights people killed for asking to vote." -- anonymous messageboard post, Netslaves

Click for Netslaves website

I will have just one small cake. And then I will have just one more small other piece, with a tiny scoop of butter pecan ice cream on top, and a spoonful of strawberries, and a few chopped nuts. And I will just have a stomach ache but will not double over and will walk straight, knowing that I saved meal money for the next day or so of the trip, past all the blinking slots begging for quarters, for the shuttle bus to my car, where I may throw up.

Qualla Boundary is as confusing to exit for me as Asheville. Detours and wrong roads are interesting though and after several forays in the wrong direction I find a back road to Bryson City, a town name recognizable as being in the general direction of Junaluska where Gary is conducting elderhostels this week. It turns out later that I've driven the wrong way off the main highway and, despite meticulously drawn directions, end up at the Performing Arts Center in Waynesville, which is closed.

I do know the way to Asheville though.

Days Inn has a fifth floor room with balcony overlooking a monumental scarlet-colored sculpture. Malaprops has espresso and scones, chapbooks, magazines, newspapers, unusual greeting cards, volumes of good and different literature, and little tables on the sidewalk to listen and watch the City in the Sky's gabbing polyglot. Blue Spiral displays a magnificent retrospective of Will Henry Stevens and the most extraordinary animal construction embedded of glistening found silver and gold objets d'arts.

Abandoning Biltmore and Greenville plans, I drive home. I want to start a collection of silver and gold to make a dog that won't tear or eat or bark.

Forgiving, Gary pronounces it "astounding" that I missed a place so well marked. I promise to find Junaluska on my next trip up.

"Perspectives"

Gary Carden, as people who know him at all know, lives now in the home he was raised in, coming to terms perhaps with the forces that shaped his life and with everyday adjustments to his increasing deafness and diabetes-related visual impairment. It's interesting, but not always to the person afflicted and challenged, what specific disabilities artists in particular are called upon to confront. A painter going blind, a teacher unable to converse, share ideas and images verbally, the passions of a life diminished by fate and fury. Time enrages us. This is not what we wanted in our later years. Calamities have been unkind.

Paint on the old farmhouse peels, reveals gray stubborn boards of its birth. Two cats curl on one of Gary's new joys, a comfortably gliding wooden chair. Bookshelves, formal and connived, line every wall not taken by electronics, some discovered at yard sales to be resuscitated by clever friends -- televisions monumental and suburban, VCRs, CD players, DVD consoles, a computer of course, speakers. Newspapers pile and spill over a couch in the

front room.

Teddie This morning the fireplace is filled with logs and lit, its frame and mantle painted in the bold mountain colors of country, primary blues and reds. Gary fixes a late breakfast -- scrambled eggs, salted ham, muffins, potatoes. Leonard Cohen's *Everybody Knows* is playing through the speakers and one of many sets of earphones. Teddie, the rat terrier, having done his aging best to help in the war against rats, now tunneling beneath corn feedings in the barn, sleeps on a quilt, dreaming perhaps of his next ride in the commodious van Gary's bought for traversing the Smokies to readings and tellings. His name, his fame are spreading but he has no idea how *Encyclopaedia Britannica* happened to find and choose one of his earlier books (*Belled Buzzards, Hucksters & Grieving Spectres*) as a luminary on aspects of regional divination and the occult. His writing and oral stories are so palpable, we can't tell what's real from what exists only in his mind. Surely that's the mark of a master and we won't ask if the line between fact and fiction is clear to him, or if it matters whether creation exists in a linear field we can more or less agree upon or if reality is as infinite as the universe of galaxies and the void might be.

painting, *The Last Brunch*, and rooster The hot tub's filled with warm water now and the jets are on. From the platform, facing west, undulations of mountain crests he's focused on since childhood stretch between a frame of leaves and sky. A killing frost the night before has left mimosa pods fallen, circling a nearby tree. Come here, he beckons casually, and I walk barefooted, earphones on, toward the barn. The old farm's nearly hidden by generational foliage still hanging on. How many places are left in the world where one can dance freely to the beat of change under an autumn sun. Between red roosters and a pair of game chickens, a room's been cleared. Gary's made a small workspace for painting and the gourds he grows. "*The Last Brunch*," a parable in oil depicting Christ and his disciples at the table of

an unidentified 20th century fraternal order, similar to Kiwanis or Lions Club, leans against fragile boards near a sawhorse holding the dried vegetable hollowed out and painted as Santa Claus. His artistic style is modern primitive, two-dimensional. If he sells a favorite piece, he'll recreate it slightly differently.

Billboard performance poster for play, *The Raindrop Waltz* We're sitting on the side porch with our coffees and reading, of course. With his hearing loss, books and captioned movies have progressed from lifetime interest to requisite obsession. Gary says the deafness shuts him out, accuses me of being in my own, alienated world and I say: it's difficult to converse. We try harder. I speak more slowly, distinctly; he watches my face and gestures intently. And finally we are talking back and forth about our experiences on earth, from birth, our devotions, emotional callings for people, places and things, how we and others convert trauma to endeavor, spirit and creativity. Deafness becomes a background, like the mountains, we hardly notice in an exploration of who we and others are, where we came from and where we might be headed. Of course, nothing is settled. We drift on: Gary to his stories and musings, accommodations for a world of interior, garbled sound and me to peaks of the Qualla Boundary where my memory, inflating and collapsing like bellows over a fire, mimics the "blue mist" forming and breaking where an elder tells me black panthers (known as painters here) greet special souls if they'll sit quietly at that highest crest of the highest mountain peak, right over there, just like the dreams of childhood.

"Quick Vacations"

It's a dreary day, rainy and gray, and I've done my errands and work and still have time to play. Suddenly I remember a friend telling me of an exhibit in Greeneville at the General Morgan Inn. Members of the community have recreated carefully gowns of all the First Ladies. That is some enticement for one not overly interested in couture, unless it's something unusual like dresses made of cranberries or something really unique, but the General Morgan.... That's something else.

It's a very old hotel, built in the late 1700s and restored well, with very high ceilings handpainted in flowers and wall-to-wall rugs that look like inlay. The walls and molding are inset and carved elaborately. There are chandeliers and halls with art, including a large mosaic that on close examination turns out, marvellously, to be crewelwork.

The drive from Jonesborough on Route 11E is peace-inducing, a four-lane with low traffic and fields and mountain ranges on either side. Today clouds hover on the distant shades of their blue and purple peaks. It's about half an hour to the crush of familiar fast food restaurants and chain stores and then an easy-to-miss left onto a two-lane toward the old downtown.

As ever, I am soon lost, on the wrong lane for a left turn and heading toward suburbia. It's possible I was meant today to dine and shop in an outer edge designer mall instead, but there's a turn for downtown too and, it turns out, a downtown mall. I note the Mexican restaurant there but opt for Main Street galleries, and maybe a cafe, first.

It turns out only the General Morgan is available for food, but not at this hour, so I just amble through its lobbies and backyard patio. The dress exhibit has closed last week and there is none in its place. I aim after all for the Mexican restaurant, peering briefly through shop windows at paintings

and antiques. It's only a three-block walk.

From outside the Monterrey Restaurante Mexicano appears clean and somewhat uninspiring, just plain tables and no particularly special decor. Once inside, it turns out the decor is the human ambiance and the food. This restaurant is truly Mexican. There is no translator so the waiters and I good-naturedly make do.

The menu is basically in American English. The televisions, three that I saw, are tuned to a Spanish cable people's court kind of show. I decide to learn Spanish, based on the three years of Latin I took years ago, by watching expressions and putting together announcements that appear now and then. A woman in an interesting maroon-beaded kind of hat is obviously upset and the judge seems to be very mad. He bangs his gavel and tells her where to go, or something like that.

I am sitting at the bar and have negotiated requesting a marguerita. There are quite a few kinds and qualities of tequila, it turns out, and I examine the bottles as they're held up to choose the best by the prettiest label on the most interestingly shaped vessel. Do I want chips and salsa with the quesadilla spinach? Are they extra, I ask. There follows a great deal of confusion and a man comes out of the kitchen to straighten that out. No, they are not extra. They go with the quesadilla if you want them. Okay, I say. I want anything, almost, that's free.

The marguerita is perfect, frozen with a little straw and its cap still on and a lime cut to sit on the rim. I pick it up to squeeze and instead drop it in. That's what I meant to do. The quesadilla arrives, all fresh sauteed vegetables and melted cheese in a soft, on-the-premise kitchen-made taco. I use a fork and knife to cut a piece and wonder as I swallow if I'm supposed to pick it up with

my hands instead. No, it's a little too wander-y for that, and it tastes sublime. Especially with the marguerita which is Texas-sized.

That's what it's called. Marguerita, regular or Texan, which means extra-large. I think. You can ask them, or try to, as I did, when you stop by. It might be that both are the same size but they're made with different quality brands because there's a dollar-and-a-half difference. When I ordered finally the Texan they asked if I wanted regular or large, and we never quite straightened that out on the menu but I chose the glass I wanted and all three waiters seemed relieved and I felt satisfied with what I got, whether it was regular or large, Texan or otherwise.

Thinking about it now and the total of the bill,... I'm still not sure, but it was a lovely place, like a trip to Mexico, and I pretty much forgot about roads or cars or traffic or even Jonesborough for maybe an hour or so. That's a good quick vacation, and I'm looking forward to trying the spinach fajitas next time I decide to go to the town next west of home.

At the checkout, I asked the waiter if they had an internet connection. He looked at me suspiciously and said no, no internet. It didn't seem to be a good or interesting thing to him, and perhaps it isn't compared to the restaurant. I don't know, or if I'll remember to tell them that, cybernetically speaking, they are there now too. But I wouldn't miss the real thing for anything in the world.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Fun Fair"

This year's theme for Gray TN's Appalachian Fair is, appropriately, "Embracing the Past.... Flying into the Future." As ever, there are commercial exhibits in four long, one-story extant buildings, including free giveaways variously. My favorite has to be those of regional 4-H Club members, which include everything from baked goods to traditional stitchery crafts, decorations and paintings standard to abstract, with ribbons carefully affixed to winners in each category. Another favorite is the Barnyard Nursery, also very popular naturally with children who can buy corn and seeds from feeders for the babies. There is again the totally delightful duckling slide which causes them to stream around in near-endless circles, under a cave-like covering, and onto a platform from which to jump and dive into a pool for their swimming, quacking, waddling and shaking their feathers all the while. There are open-sided livestock barns for judging domestic cows, sheep, and pigs, and the Wildlife Building with its pools, streams and aquariums of regional sport fishes along with a few native snakes amidst natural greeneries. There's the Museum with a collection of local antique conveyances from buggies to motoring along with early farm implements, and its outdoor stage, which is displaying the Little Miss Contest as I pass by in their tiny formal gowns and hairdress, each led by a grown-up in tutoring on the fine arts of modeling and smiling pleasantly while waving to the crowd turn by turn. At the Arena there is motocross racing as a dispersed audience sits on the hillside looking down while youngsters on miniature bikes race around, flying through the air without tumbling from hills to vales, making a curve and nearly touching the dirt but not completely falling down, followed by young adults on wheels of regular size. The outdoor Main Stage features excellent headline musical performers singly and in bands. I'm fortunate to hear and witness the night I'm there Walker Hayes on guitar playing and singing his own great -- funny, sexy and scintillating -- songs, and then the Eli Young Band, which will gitcha on yer feet like nothin' else can. They rock. I haven't tried any of the many neon-flashing, screaming, bumping and sliding amalgamation of rides for young folk -- and some hardy elders no doubt -- which take up about half of the total Fair landspace but watch grinning for awhile on my way out to all the sounds of surprise and delight.

The material vendors, although fascinating, don't claim my attention this year, perhaps because I've more than I can store as it is back home where in the darkening night I need now to be. My nearby parking space has cost just \$3 and the entrance ticket for all \$8. Thursday is half-price for seniors also.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Community Eats"

Joe, an older resident who's struggling with pancreatic cancer, suggests to a few neighbors and to owner/managers Angel and Dave Utz, who've previously expressed their interest in "encouraging a sense of community," that the apartment complex might organize a Labor Day barbecue and children's play areas and equipments to help and cheer all in an economy where many may not have funds for the usual travel elsewhere, including their original homes perhaps. After some checking for enthusiasm and participation, the occasion is a go, planned for Sunday at 2p.m. of that weekend, and formal one-page invitations are delivered to each apartment. Apparently we are all very fashionable, as the eatery does not exactly get itself going until around 4p.m. with lots of delicious and unusual homemade dishes showing up finally on the three tables, generous grilling of hamburgers and hotdogs, and supplies of cold drinks in a temporarily-stationed refrigerator in the parking lot. Next year, there's talking of inviting musicians to play also, but this year it was pop music radio from the front porch of one resident's speakers booming out and over into the clear and comfortable weather that day. Although goodies were delivered to him, Joe himself was too ill to attend and we hope that he'll be with us in the interim and at the next community event.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "The Town Meets"

Locating the site is: three tries and you get it right. Okay, maybe four. Or five. Liberty Bell School. Follow the signs indicating Little Theatre and you've got it made. Everyone is helpful as possible and polite. ROTC cadets man the doors and open them as the crowd straggles and then surges through over a period of an hour or so prior to the "Health Care Town Hall Meeting" scheduled for 5 p.m. Once inside, waiting folks are talking about personal medical experiences, what they have of insurance or don't now, and what they'd like and oppose. One woman is manic/depressive, one of her medications costs a little less than \$400 a month, and she works full-time. She's concerned about what her situation and that of her husband will be when she retires in seven years. Official-looking men in suits and ties appear on the stage and soon thereafter so does Rep. Dr. Phil Roe of Tennessee's First Congressional District which includes Johnson City, where we are at the moment, and Jonesborough.

Rep. Roe is introduced warmly by a woman who worked with him in local government. The minister of Munsey Baptist Church is introduced and offers a fairly prolonged prayer of peace and progress for us to share and all add our "amen." Then we are asked to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance while a large replica -- obscured by the shadows of those standing -- is displayed on a wall behind the stage. As we retake our seats, Rep Roe then introduces a policeman who has been on the city force for 31 years and also a member of our National Guard for the same amount of time and honors him with a flag that has flown over the Capitol building in D.C. Then he introduces the principal of Liberty Bell Middle School, recounting its remarkable recent renovation for \$18 million, all funds provided locally with

no federal assistance. Mrs. Roe and her daughter are asked to stand in the audience and thanked and applauded and his mother, in her 80s, is lauded also.

To begin his introductory remarks, Rep. Roe tells a story about first arriving in Washington early January to be inaugurated into his new office. A young boy who has followed Dr. Roe's career has managed to get himself also to the site of the proceedings-to-be and is hanging out in the halls of Congress a day or two prior. The boy, Dr. Roe adds, is a "photo op" in the making for his demeanor and looks. As President Obama and Speaker of the House Pelosi appear from upstairs, a media cameraman takes the group picture as our President-elect stops at the landing to ask Roe's boy what he's doing there, to which he very firmly proclaims, "I came to see Dr. Roe inaugurated into Congress." And that becomes the lead picture and quote on the front page of the D.C. newspapers the next day. Unfortunately, the boy became ill and had to leave before the swearing-in ceremonies for his Tennessee home. Our representative then adds that, not to miss a photo op of his (Republican) own, he stopped later by the boy's Rogersville home with local media to get one or a few and no doubt to the joy and gratitude of his constituent.

Health Care Reform Sign On a more serious note, Rep. Roe asks all the veterans (of whom he is one, during our Korean War) in the audience to stand and there are an astounding number of them, who receive heartfelt applause from the crowd of around 1000 gathered in Little Theatre (known as Science Hill Auditorium to some, but not to be confused with the one actually so-named and part physically of the Science Hill High School complex of structures). Following his introductory remarks, which cover veterans' concerns particularly and an illustration of the massiveness of federal legislation -- one bill displayed in toto on a long table before him -- with which he and others must deal, and very quickly sometimes also, he takes questions from a growing queue of citizens who line up before a microphone

in the middle aisle to express their experiences and concerns.

Some participants refer to 'Rep. Dr. Roe,' in respect for his education, skills and service -- now in Washington DC and previously as a local government elected official -- and others thanked him for his work, community communications and bipartisan efforts to address citizen issues and relief/resolution. During my attendance -- which ended at 7 p.m. as the meeting was also intended to do and due to my exhaustion from the day -- only one out of the thousand or so there spoke stridently and somewhat insultingly, but that was an exception. Maybe it's 'in the eye of the beholder,' but to me the audience seemed energetic, involved, lively and eager to express and debate/discuss health care issues and current and future options for a more viable, humane and sane approach for all to generally inevitable medical need, illness and accident.

Rep. Roe had noted previously, as many there knew, that he had worked as an obstetrician for many years in private practice. He related a story of a Congressional aide asking if the late hours in governance upset and bothered him, to which he replied that babies need delivering and mothers tending at all hours of the day and night, so it didn't really seem very much different to him, and actually quite a bit easier in that regard most of the time.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Revolutionary Reenactment"

Reenactors from the regional Sons of the American Revolution and their friends, aided in organization by the DAR, followed on foot, in

historically-accurate cool and damp weather, the trail of our original Overmountain Men as they mustered and marched toward King's Mountain to engage the British there, meeting and greeting on their way classroom school children, including at the Jonesborough Veterans Memorial Park on Friday morning and Sycamore Shoals on Saturday where today's Reverend Samuel Witherspoon Doak (founder of Tusculum Academy) delivered again his famous, assuringly inspirational sermon.

"...O in Thy infinite mercy, save us from the cruel hand of the savage, and of the Tyrant. Save the unprotected homes while fathers and husbands and sons are far away fighting for freedom and helping the oppressed. Thou, who promised to protect the Sparrow in its flight, keep ceaseless watch, by day and by night, over our loved ones. The helpless women and little children, we commit to Thy care. Thou wilt not leave them or forsake them in times of loneliness and anxiety and terror. O God of Battle, Arise in thy might. Avenge the slaughter of thy people. Confound those who plot for our destruction. Crown this mighty effort with victory, and smite those who would exalt themselves against Liberty and Justice and Truth. Help us as good soldiers to wield the SWORD OF THE LORD AND GIDEON." -- Rev. Samuel Doak, 9/26/1780

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "And The Bands Play On"

ETSU's professor/conductor and student musicians performed fabulously during their free Fall Band Concert in the Martha Culp Auditorium -- perhaps three-quarters full when all had finally taken theirs of the terraced seats -- on October 15, 2009, in the process of presenting quite a few unusual orchestral

pieces. One of my favorites was "Song for Lyndsay (2005)" by Andrew Boysen, Jr. (b. 1968), written for a composer's wife. I'm quite sure that heaven will sound very similar and, as the conductor noted in his introduction, which he gave for every piece variously, it could be to any loved one really. The following composition by Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987) even the Conductor Zembower referenced as "difficult" to appreciate. I found that to be true and cogent advice, although it was evident how "Symphony for Band (No. 6) (1956) stretched the abilities of musical composition and its players and instruments. It is also heavy on percussion which Dr. Christian Zembower explained "carries the tune." Another personal favorite was "Two for the British!" by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) which the extensive program notes introduced by saying: "Although its popularity has now increased over the years, the piece is still not performed frequently because of its heavy polyphonic nature and difficulty level, which tend to scare conductors and bands away from this masterpiece. Considered a contrapuntal tour-de-force in the compositional style of Buxtehude and J.S. Bach, the piece resolves around the three-note motive (same pitches and intervals from Flourish for Wind Band, 1971, which preceded it) heard at the beginning and its two-measure main melody (first stated by low brass and low woodwinds). Because of its juxtaposed character, the successful performance of the work is dependent on both rhythmic accuracy and melodic clarity. Heavy polyphony permeates the piece, although in the middle section of the work, Vaughan Williams supplies the listener and performers slight relief by including a 'folksong-like', though original, legato melody for some variety and refreshment. Demands on every instrument and performer are present, with every instrument playing in all registers, and the articulations from the most detached staccato and marcato to the most connected legato and sostenuto." The Wind Ensemble's final piece introduced me to the concept of conductor-as-dancer -- leading by emotion, form, beat and force. Dr. Zembower threw himself into that composition and... brought it all home, baby! "Danza No. 2 (2003)" by Bruce Yurko (b. 1951) was completely excellent and rousing. A great finale for which he and the musicians received standing ovations. Lobby ushers had

ran out of the printed six-page narrowly-spaced programs considerably before the Concert Band opened with its the scheduled pieces, but fortunately my seat neighbor gave me hers, saying in explanation that her husband sitting elsewhere -- or maybe it was her son playing in one or both of the bands -- had one anyway as a family memento. Those sheets included listing of all band members by instrument, but not the conductor's name! All were dressed in black with white shirts and blouses and the evening was free for the crowd of appreciative on-lookers. As is fairly common, Dr. Zembower thanked us a few times for our attendance, leaving the impression that classical music may be a hard-sell for the uninitiated sometimes but it was a totally wonderful and worthwhile evening.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Art Is Forever"

The First Annual Fine Art in the Park -- brain-child of Tami Moore, yet another Mountain Empire wonder/woman, artist herself and co-owner/operator of the much awarded, restored and revived Main Street Blair-Moore House bed & breakfast, and who recruited and organized its multiple volunteers and sponsors in carrying that original idea to stunning fruition -- is a great success according to all word-of-mouth and personal experience. The man behind me as I'm leaving says to his companion. "It's a nice town. Quaint." A Milligan arts student asks to take photographs of me for an assignment as I'm taking a break on a bench in the Storytelling Center's front plaza. I think it's the Tanya Tucker hat, but it could be the deep blue velour pants. With open-toed sandals. Seasonal weather changes can be confounding to wardrobe selections. The early drizzle has cleared but it's still a little chilly. Five local concessioniers have given samples of local vineyard wines, handmade chocolates and goat cheeses. Artists from TN's Knoxville, Bluff City, Telford, Erwin, Blountville, Greeneville, Jonesborough and Johnson City, and NC's Winston-Salem, Candler, Pineola, and Weaverville display their

wares under tents amidst back courtyard greenery with pleasantly informative conversations from 10a.m. to 4p.m. while Knoxville's singer/songwriter Dustin Overbeek plays original and mainstay folk and country music as crowds linger and pass on by. From uniquely designed and highly polished wood furnishings and furniture to miniature paintings as jewelry we're entranced by the diversities of media and expression. A six-page 8x11-1/2 brochure -- cover flower design a print from one of Tami's many lucent watercolors -- lists and describes the artists on display, their work and native workspace, along with thanking by name all of the sponsors and FAP's volunteers -- including of course the intrepid Doris Dean, many years retired from ETSU, widow of its past Museum Director, creator of Friends of the Jonesborough/Washington County Museum organization (now part of the non-profit umbrella Heritage Alliance), and invaluable mainstay for all town events. Of the roundly outstanding and frequently astounding artworks on display, perhaps my favorites are those of Peasant and Raven (Jeffrey Foster and Becky M. Thomas), Simply Unique (Heather Raimo), and Fireworx Glass Studio (Shannon Norris & Erin Cartee) -- but I wouldn't want to have to choose, as judges did, who finally won Platinum, Silver and Bronze awards. The first, "Best In Show, received accommodations for one week anywhere in the world, from an anonymous donor; the second and third prize monies were \$150 and \$75 respectively, raised through several fund-raising rummage sales held prior to the event. Sponsors included William and Barbara Stout, Marcy Hawley of the vintage and highly-ranked Hawley House B&B, the ever-endearing and enduring Schubert Club, major aspects of the "history" in "historic Jonesborough" Dr. William and Virginia Kennedy, NETA (Northeast Tennessee Artisans) and The Rander family in memory of Beverly C. Williams. All the parking spaces and parking lots are full as I pull in and out of nature's fall colors from heritage bushes and trees, grateful for the miniature splendors of Tennessee's oldest town. As Tami noted later, "It was absolutely done in Jonesborough style, everyone lending a hand..." in creating a memorable event to relish, cherish, and look forward to again.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Heroes and Heroines"

There are so many who fight for freedom, their own and others, and struggle to be their best while bringing that out in others also. The majority don't receive medals, awards, or public recognition for their efforts and accomplishments that, taken together, create a fascinating and inspiring, liveable world. An example of that is Brenda. She's not had good use of her legs since birth and her vision is dysfunctionally blurred so she's not able to write her own accounts, although she knows them very clearly in her mind and memory. Through operations and handicaps, she's made for herself and others an interactionally interesting, meaningful, mobile and worthwhile life despite it all. One of twelve siblings related by blood and/or marriage, she rented her own first house at 20 and managed to take care of it and herself independently. Near forty years old, she chose to have one healthy child, disregarding advice to the contrary, and raised her daughter with faith, love, forgiveness, encouragement, forbearance and generosity while opening her homes also along the way to needy friends and family. In the two years or so we've known each other fairly closely, I've never heard her express any kind of self-pity in a world that hasn't always been kind or accommodating for the handicapped. Instead, her determination and pride in accomplishment is very evident. Although relatively unschooled, she's a perceptive observer and participant in community and country life, not easily fooled by errant propaganda or blandishments meant to entice the unaware, perhaps because she's really tried and generally succeeded, knows the roadblocks and obstacles by experience, and has made of her life and that of others one worth knowing, experiencing and holding in remembrance for her positive

endeavors and attitudes. With government assistance for necessities since her disabilities together preclude remunerative employment, she's concentrated on Now, doing and being her best within it. "There are heroes in the seaweed," as Leonard Cohen penned and sings, and Brenda is certainly one of them -- a delight to encounter and a light shining bright from an unconquerable soul. A good citizen.

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Boo!"

To assure a safe and entertaining All Saints Day night (All Hallows Eve), Historic Jonesborough provides costumed treats all day and into the evening, from the morning Dante's Ninth Circle, click for reference Farmer's Market with live music as ever to downtown at dusk with merchants' child goodies, prizes for best made and got up, and the Jonesborough Novelty Band playing before the Courthouse. Main Street's blocked off again so artfully coiffed and attired revelers from infants to employees to pets to residents and revisters can enjoy the sights, smells and sounds of yet another memorable small town night in manners and means expanded upon those of past generations. There are 22 treat stops and ten game stops with two contests and five special attractions altogether. Storyteller Linda Poland (creator/owner of Postive Solutions and former Town Tourism Director), still recovering from a stroke that left her temporarily disabled of language and mobility, and fortune teller Jean Smith are amongst the latter. Palmist Heide Ehle reads my right hand and reports that my palm has a strong heart line, deep mind line, two life lines which is unusual and difficult to interpret, and fingers indicating a hard worker who digs in where needed. The Rambling Rose Band -- electric fiddle, guitar, dulcimer and acoustic guitar -- set up, tune and play inside Cranberry Thistle to decked-out and laughing employees and revelers

of all ages. Looking up from my cinnamon hot cocoa and freshly-baked apple scone, I notice a framed color photograph before me on the wall amongst numerous others. It's Joe -- drawing of Joe Grindstaff, historic preservation expert and craftsman, by Charlie Dyer one of many college-era friends in the area and a native of mountainous Butler, long since swallowed but still visible under TVA waters. A Vietnam Army medic, he brought my Goddaughter as an infant to Richmond so I could dance with her in my arms too many decades ago, moved all my furnishings to Jonesborough eleven years ago, and he's caught now forever restoring bricks on the back facade of my last apartment here -- gone in body but not in spirit, the caretaker, the one you could always depend upon. As a little sadness and nostalgia creep around me suddenly Whiskers, another friend and "town fixture" enshrined on the wall, jumps up from a table with his tall spangled red pointed hat and bib overalls to keep a foot and hand beat for two costumed older women doing a very funny line dance in the aisle. By the time that song's over, I'm laughing so hard I have to say out loud, "Tennessee has got to be the craziest state in the Union. And that's why I love it so much." Down the street, multi-ethnic and golden Madison has nearly recovered from Vanderbilt University skull surgery two months previous and has fallen asleep on her back in her monkey suit with the hat with the yellow banana on top. At only nine months she already speaks a few words and laughs uproariously when amused. We have not been dissuaded or disheartened by drizzles and hard rain coming down, but there have been some mid-air umbrella collisions. As I leave, a nearly two-year-old decorated in the blacks and whites of Minnie Mouse converses in fascination from the sidewalk with two also decoratively dressed toddlers in strollers amidst the now-thinning street crowd. The "Halloween Haunts & Happenings Chaperone's Guide" lists 42 business and organizational sponsors of the event and also thanks its volunteers of time and money at the end. And we are safe from the spooks and goblins and werewolves yet once again. Until next year....

Tanasi: The Spirit of Freedom-- -- "Back To The Future"

Our affable, humorous and multi-talented long-time Town Administrator Bob Browning opens the public meeting with a background introduction of the why, how and wherefore related to creating a professional plan for future development of Jonesborough in visitations and revenue before presenting Ralph Appelbaum himself to an auditorium maybe three-quarters full in the rows of seats before a large projection screen managed through a laptop in the center aisle. He is a smallish, gray-haired and softly-spoken New York gentleman who expresses thereafter his interest in establishing a comfortable fit between citizens, history and vision that preserves the town's "quaintness," "charm," "authenticity," "friendliness," "liveability," and integration of history with present and tourism through cultural and educational entertainments and offerings that present and enhance what is near-universally treasured now by residents, visitors, and award designators variously. There is no intent to replicate the explosion of commerce and construction represented by areas like Gatlinburg or Pigeon Forge but rather, as he puts it, a careful development analogically of the caterpillar that turned into a butterfly without damaging its wings or ability to fly. Color slides of text, photographs and diagrams drawn from the design architects' 60-page proposal (with copies available for check-out from the Town Administrator's Office) dramatize his explications and anecdotes for nearly an hour. There follows a 20 minute or so question and answer period between citizens, Appelbaum and Browning, and very brief closing remarks from the latter. In response to one question and comment Jimmy Neil Smith notes that Storytelling originated informally as straw bales before the Courthouse, from the heart, in and for the Town of Jonesborough. Over the following nearly forty years concentration has shifted to "growing it," including design and construction of the Center building and park by nationally famous architects, Smithsonian affiliation and international

appeal through the Horizon Project and tellers-in-residence from around the world. It has always and increasingly generated substantial regional revenue and employment, as well as education and entertainment, but will attend, Smith says, even more now to integration and alliance with town citizens also, upon whose volunteers the famous Festival still depends in part for operation and profit in expensing fees and salaries.

Street Music!

One of my favorite Music On The Square performance so far has been the unusual beats and rhythms of Americana as presented by Marci Salyer & Midnite Flyer, but I also loved the Mudbugs playing a great variety of upbeat songs from Fats Domino and other jazzy classics to which the crowd foot-tapped, laughed, smiled, clapped, cheered, and danced, including women with men and adults with children and toddlers even. Patients from Greene Valley are moved to the street in their wheelchairs. An ambulatory, very short man dances joyfully with a CNA who holds his hands and sways, laughing. He pulls her up again later because he wants to dance again, and does. One young man boogies down the sidewalk with his little son's right hand in his, the child also dancing somewhat uncoordinatedly but happily by his side. Sam Burke on bass and harmonies, an ETSU computer professor with shoulder-length curly white hair, mustache and short beard who also plays with the legendary Jonesborough Novelty Band, opens for the Mudbugs with, "Okay, folks. It's Friday night in America!" During a later Friday evening presentation Steve Cook, 1998 founder and organizer of MOTS, has just given away some \$10 t-shirts to those in the crowd who'd traveled furthest to be there: Holland, Ireland, Florida, and Chicago. Then, he asks, "How many people know what The Crooked Road is?" and some of us raise our hands, knowing it to be an established traditional Appalachian music trail in Southwest Virginia. Suddenly Steve laughs, points to someone

in the audience, and says, "Give that man a t-shirt!" as he goes on to relate, "That man just answered, 'The road to the White House.'" The crowd laughs, the man get his t-shirt, and Asheville singer/songwriter Chuck Brodsky, who has played for the Baseball Hall of Fame and has quite a repertoire of CDs, walks toward the microphone with his guitar. After playing one humorous satirical song, he recounts how he and his father argued daily over breakfast that he wanted to be a lawyer, while his father kept insisting that he be a guitar player. The song had been about how every minor accident could be the subject of a lawsuit for monetary damages, alluding particularly to the true story of a woman who spilled hot coffee on herself and received a very large settlement thereafter from the fast food franchise selling it through her lawyers. After the next funny lyrics after littering, he explains that the words are irony and reads an e-mail from a Virginia woman who took them literally. When hearing them on a CD by a Virginia band to whom the letter is addressed and forwarded to him, she protests their lack of environmental awareness, saying she'd throw away the CD if the rest of it wasn't so good and suggesting that they not perform that song before audiences containing children due to their social irresponsibility. "Irony," Brodsky repeats. "The lyrics are irony." Perhaps the MOTS highlight to date has been Dr. Joseph Sobol, Chair of ETSU's Storytelling Masters Degree program, playing a difficult and beautiful Bach sonata on his antique harp-guitar, although there are so many extraordinarily excellent performances -- from Jill Smith singing, accompanied by her acoustic guitar, original songs including "Are You The Next One?" to the all female Polecat Creek singing harmony and playing strings (fiddle, guitar, banjo and bass) for their original folksy classic tunes -- that it's nearly unfair to single out any one performance.

"That Home Town Taste"

The Town's business of renting a room and serving a morning meal to out-of-town visitors began with the original Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast, a College Street booking agency which took reservations and located amenable citizens who owned historic homes. For a reasonable commission, the agency handled bookkeeping and tax records until transferring ownership and location to the Bledsoes, current owners of Woodrow Avenue's Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast. As interest and demand for this type of lodging grew, the Town's innkeepers, including the Bledsoes, established separate business enterprises and the Visitors Center became one of several centralized sources for information on booking and reservations.

The concept of letting out rooms within private homes, particularly in more rural areas and especially for fairs and festivals, became formalized throughout America over the past several decades with the licensed establishment of "bed and breakfast" inns. Their unique appeal to travelers is local ambiance -- immersion, however brief, in the real flavor and folklore which distinguish one town and region from the next, this family's talents and ancestral traditions from another's. Like the many gourmet varieties of coffee available now, each of the Jonesborough bed-and-breakfast inns has a fascinating personality all its own, a memorable zeitgeist that causes the prospective visitor to linger over an enticing array of choices before choosing just one.

Bugaboo Bed & Breakfast offers the world-weary guest 15 acres of secluded, wooded privacy just over a mile from the historic streets of downtown Jonesborough. Well-behaved children are welcome to enjoy with others the homey comfort and cheer offered for nearly a decade by innkeepers Lee and Nancy Hallberg. View north between Jonesborough and Greeneville TN Their

Old English contemporary home features a second floor of two bedrooms, each with private bath, and a sitting hall overlooking the living area with its woodstove and a large original stained glass by area artisan Kit Monger. Restoration furniture by Curtis Buchanan enlivens bright and spacious rooms which afford a view of cows and horses pastured in neighboring fields. Cut under the sheltering canopy of tall native trees, hiking paths clear a trail from mountain vistas to secluded benches and a pond. For relaxing under Appalachian stars, a hot tub on Bugaboo's deck eases sore muscles and tired feet from a day's adventure in nearby towns. Morning meal service includes fresh produce, fruit and vegetable, from house gardens; the variety of "fixings from scratch" depend on seasonal availability.

The antique elegance and gourmet service of Blair-Moore House overlay its foundation of friendly convenience for Town visitors. A two-room street-level suite with private bath, and accommodating up to three persons, allows easy access to sidewalk treats of Jonesborough for handicapped guests. Two upstairs rooms complete accommodations, all of which include separate porches and unique decor, including clawfoot bathtubs, pedestal commodes and European-style showers. The educated, enthusiastic interest of innkeepers Jack and Tami Moore in displaying collections of unusual antiques is evident in formal service for visitors to their home and in the decoration of each room. In fact, the Moores labored in plaster and paint for nearly six years to restore architectural integrity to a building originally constructed in the 1830s and its 20th century additions. During some of that time, its downstairs west wing, now the suite, served as their antique shop. An unusual plantation pie, or milk, safe finds practical purpose at the turn of the 21st century in Blair-Moore's dining room. National Storytelling Festival 1998, Jonesborough TN Three-course epicurean breakfasts served there and afternoon teas in the parlor reveal Tami's years of expertise in her family's catering business and have become a source of complimentary astonishment and referral, as has the Moore's attention to luxury detail in entertaining visitors to their home.

The Old Yellow Vic earned its name from an early and frequent guest. Jimmy Lewis, a Southern gentleman referred by the Town's original booking agency, College Street's Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast, became a repeat visitor and a personal acquaintance of the Stacy family, who commemorated their friendship when licensing the house as a bed-and-breakfast business. Victorian linens, crystal, china and artwork fascinate travelers resting in the comfort of innkeeper Sonya Stacy's home. Entering the Old Yellow Vic from its circling front porch, guests may check their slippers, or shoes, in the low mirror of a "petticoat table," one of numerous unusual antique furnishings. In addition to period pieces, each room displays an extraordinary aspect of the innkeeper's family flair for art and personal creativity. A three-panel screen in one of three upstairs guest bedrooms was painted entrancingly in oil years ago by her father, Jerry Ross. Professional chalk sketches of his profile and of her mother's, before marriage and family and at the time her parents attended college in Indiana, adorn an upstairs hall. "Unmade Bed," a sketch by the innkeeper, decorates another bedroom wall. Recent award-winning needlework, and the dining room's formal painting and original oil wall border, showcase her mother's varied and current talent. Sonya Stacy creates full formal breakfasts, including unusual foods and accommodating special tastes, for guests in her home. In addition, she owns Pig 'N Slipper, a popular Main Street shop of antique vendor spaces, including her own Victorian Splendor.

A two-story porch running the breadth of Rees-Hawley House affords its visitors an inviting view from the hill of historic streets and steeples. Built in the late 1700s, the log-and-stone structure itself sits on Lot #1 of the Town's original plat, enabled by an act of the North Carolina Assembly in 1779. In May 1793, Solicitor for Washington County James Rees began construction of the ground floor kitchen and second floor parlor. In the 19th century, an east side addition doubled the size of the original house. Extensive restorations

and careful remodeling in this century include addition of a new kitchen and three guest bedrooms, each with separate bath, by current innkeepers R.I.C. and Marcy Hawley. Their personal touch in service and furnishings compliments the museum-quality age and renovation of Jonesborough's oldest extant building. Its distinctive features have attracted coverage in Southern Living, Blue Ridge Country, USA Today, and many other regional and national publications. Music at the Courthouse, Jonesborough TN Interior designer Marcy Hawley also supervised period restoration of several local structures, including Jonesborough's Chester Inn. The Hawleys serve a full candlelit breakfast to suit the time and taste of guests in their spacious 19th century dining room. For visitors intrigued by the legends of Town ghosts, it is noted occasionally over the years by male guests that women can be heard giggling and laughing at night in the hallways of Rees-Hawley House.

No article or photograph will convey the cumulative wealth of items and personalities that altogether make up Jonesborough's unique lodgings. Each bed-and-breakfast inn contains numerous details of interest and enchantment. Current innkeepers maintain an educated care for their homes and public rooms, adjusting service and menus to accommodate the special needs of individual guests. They share knowledge of local history and provide assistance in exploring the treasures of Tennessee's Tri-Cities region. All request advance reservations to provide the best of traveler experience. Additional information, including brochures and rates, is available from each bed-and-breakfast inn and at the Jonesborough Visitors Center.

Thumbin' Free

In 60s and 70s, it was still considered safe generally and was legal to hitchhike, which I did sometimes to or from work at different offices, really just for the fun of it and people I might meet and talk with along the way. The pickup that stands out most in my memory was a van with a few young casually-dressed men in the spaciouly-clear back that was colorfully accoutered with good music playing on speakers, and I believe they may have been traveling through Richmond, Virginia, from California. The ride itself was reminiscent most particularly of the days Bob and I had hitchhiked down Pacific Highway to Los Angeles and Laguna Beach courtesy of cordial strangers from a cheerfully enthusiastic older woman who declared her love and admiration for "hippies," as being the hope of the coming generations, to another large van that took us into the City of the Angels for a Hollywood tour and viewing of the volcanically stupendous "Karakatoa, East of Java." Other times I walked or used public transportation, buses that ran conveniently and comfortably throughout the city.

Some years earlier, we had meandered down the Pacific Coast from San Francisco to a musical gathering where Bay-based Jefferson Airplane, among many other famous bands, played to a huge crowd surrounded by heavily armed officers and members of the Hell's Angels gang all decked out in chains and black leather on their out-sized motorcycles and assuring the hippies that they were there to protect them.

In my backpack hitchhiking with Bob down Pacific Highway, camping in public parks along the way to what turned out to be a somewhat desolate and dust-dry commune off Laguna Beach with a stopover in downtown Los Angeles, I'd stored two place settings of the family sterling so we wouldn't be wanting anything in terms of stylish dining along the way. I'd misplaced my grandmother's 22k monogrammed gold thimble amidst prior communal arrangements back east. In those times in California, and elsewhere, hitchhiking was considered an acceptable "norm," an adventurously friendly

transport-outreach within cities and between towns with their avocado trees and other indigenous exotics; we had little trouble garnering rides with interesting companions from elderly ones to 20-somethings for congenial conversation in conveniences ranging from an antique car to a fully-loaded psychedelic van.

"Travelin'"

Within two days, I learned:

Ten states border Tennessee

The Smoky Mountains are not on the way from Nashville to Johnson City

Neither is Alabama

Just say no to unidentified roads

After 30 miles of unmarked pavement, any route sign is comforting, even if it's wrong

Binary probability theory doesn't work in choosing a correct exit lane

The pretty symbol over route designations isn't a gift from the State Art Council; it means "scenic," defined as "original one-and-a-half lane mountain byway with unmarked killer curves and six-inch high pre-civil-war stone guard rails"

If it seems like the wrong road, turning off it arbitrarily will probably not be right either

Never drive into a setting sun, especially if you're traveling East

If you're higher than 2,000 feet in the dark, stop

Unless one finds interstates boring, the eighteen-hour, two-day trip including an overnight stay atop the Appalachians between Nashville and Johnson City will take approximately six hours.

Wiser now.

Wheelies!

Throughout the mid-1950s, my grandmother and I with our matching luggage packed always boarded for our vacations of various lengths there a train to and from Manhattan's Grand Central Station, that marvellous historic adventure in architecture, exploration and teeming assorted populace, leaving the organ grinders with their trained monkeys behind on Boston streets for Fifth Avenue vendors of fresh, hot-roasted chestnuts and a taxi to the Barbizon Plaza on Central Park South, her only chosen residence in the City. Cocktails were in the afternoon at The Plaza to the accompaniment of classical pianists on their deeply shiny and darkly grained grand with peanuts and liveried service on linen and china, crystal glasses twinkling under chandeliers the same. With her usual eclectic taste, Macy's was my grandmother's favorite department store. I don't remember our ever shopping at Saks Fifth Avenue or Bergdorf-Goodman's, and dinners were almost invariably and conveniently at the Barbizon hotel. Breakfast was delivered, my favorite of treats, to our room with twin beds on whatever floor we'd gotten that time around to accommodate differing window views. The Park's Tavern On The Green was acceptable for lunches as was a mid-town coin-operated cafeteria famous at the time whose name I've since forgotten. Carnegie Hall had a charming and cozy restaurant also, and we frequented movies in the afternoons as well as smaller shops, galleries and napping, a regular part of any routine anywhere. "People watching" in the Park and elsewhere was also a favored activity. We boarded buses and subways also occasionally. Once in the Barbizon's very formal underground dining room, I ordered Roquefort cheese salad dressing and the waiter brought something pinkish with beige and green-looking lumps instead. Objecting, he explained from his elevated position that that was the way real French Roquefort was prepared. Unconvinced and unimpressed, I demanded my creamy white with chunks of blue-streaked crumbles which he did return to serve, having scraped negligently somewhat the previous profferment from the leaves of various bite-sized greens. In the best restaurants then, waiters and the maitre d' ruled and patrons fell in line or paid for rebellion in learning to behave properly the next time.

My grandmother and mother loved to travel, visiting new and familiar places mostly in neighboring states of New Hampshire, Vermont, New York and Connecticut where my grandfather's relatives lived in and around Hartford. In addition to annual trips to Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Manhattan and Rockport Massachusetts art colony, we once spent a week in Canada at Quebec's Chateau Frontenac along the Saint Lawrence Seaway with its islands, trawlers and smaller ships, and in the bustling, cosmopolitan city of Montreal. Closeby Cape Cod, Provincetown, Kennebunkport, Nantucket Island, Martha's Vineyard and Plymouth Rock were other occasional haunts where we stayed in excellent lodgings and explored historic sites along with mostly seafood restaurant fare and decor. Our neighbors across the street in Newton Centre were the Pearsons with their two daughters and two older sons. I was in love with Teddy, the second oldest, as was nearly every young girl for his dark and manly good looks, humorously friendly personality and sex appeal, but I had a special "in" as our families were close friends and his sisters my regular playmates. The Pearsons owned a rustic summer home amidst forest greenery and near creeks and river in the backwoods of New Hampshire which we visited for extended overnights off and on. On one expedition there, we girls tried fly fishing and I messed up some of Teddy's precious and carefully stored tackle equipment nearly irretrievably -- a true measure of affection and admiration, at that age anyway. His, and their mother, Jessie, was my ideal for that role -- a generously-sized and buxom woman with not much seeming structure to her life and days but lots of warmth and joy and humanity, particularly in her enfolding hugs and the softly inviting bosom that exuded love and comfort to children especially.

Driving away one evening many winters later from Virginia's Emory and Henry College, after a performance there by the Harlem Choir, on a narrow two lane road leading toward Route 81, my little Grand Am suddenly lost power nearly completely and the battery and oil lights came on. I pulled over

as best I could onto the grass and turned the engine off. Then I stopped the first car that came by. It had a youngish country boy and woman in it. They didn't know anyone I could call from the cell, sort of grudgingly said they would get help for me and drove off. Another car stopped in a few minutes, and I told that man that help was supposedly on the way. Quite a few minutes later, yet another nice-looking, middle-aged man stopped, with a woman in his car. He insisted on pushing my vehicle completely out of the road with me steering, somewhat confusedly. When it finally got completely onto the grass, I told him that had been "exciting." He wanted me to get in their car to warm up, but I told him I was fine. He said it was only 15 degrees, and I couldn't stay there like that, brought me a blanket from his car. He looked at the engine lights, said maybe it was the alternator, which would be trouble since it was Sunday and tomorrow would be a holiday, Martin Luther King Jr Day, and he didn't have his tools with him.

He looked at the gas gauge, which was nearly empty, on one-eighth, and said he'd be back in five minutes with a can of gasoline. While he was gone, I contemplated freezing to death, saw my life flash before my eyes and decided that I was content and satisfied with what I knew, that I was tired, and that it was okay if I died at that time. But I knew that man wasn't going to let me get away with it. He was too concerned with saving me. I wondered if the \$14 cash I had with me would be enough to pay him. He returned with two gallons of gas from his house, because the station didn't have a carrying can, and put that in. My car purred and started up like a happy kitten. He wouldn't let me give him any money for the gas or his time, so I asked his name. He said it was Tony. I thanked him and said I'd pray for him. He looked very serious and said, "Thanks. I'd appreciate that." He told me to stop in Abingdon for more gasoline because I wouldn't make it to Jonesborough on what I had. As I was driving down Route 81, I noticed that his blanket was still in the car.

A few days later, I had dinner with friends at an Indian restaurant in Johnson City. I told them all about Tony, his generosity of time, labor, and materials, and all of us prayed gratefully for him.

Wild Waters

One fall after a very heavy rain, some friends and I rented canoes and, despite warnings that the Shenandoah River was high and dangerous, paddled down its South Fork from Page Valley Estates toward Overall. The waters were muddy and traveled like ocean waves in a storm. At Compton Rapids, a Class III, we capsized, all wearing life jackets. Contents dumped and widely spewed, the canoes crashed bottoms up against outcroppings as they drifted swiftly away downstream and out of sight. A few of us ended up standing on or clinging to sheer rock ledges on the far east side, while others emerged in the center here and there, heads bobbing up from the roiling wet turmoil. We all got rides with other canoers and managed to retrieve our boats, but not most of our belongings, dispersed against muck-and-stone shores to arrive at the pickup point where we returned in the Outfitters' bus roundabout and to our cars.

The ground is covered each fall with the large round green husks of black walnuts fallen from old trees planted and sown by Caroline and Jesse Keyser of the original German farming family who claimed and settled that land and bend of the river in the late 18th or early 19th century. Together with their many progeny, and slaves owned and used to work on it with their own still-maintained separate graveyard, water was drawn from and foods cooled in hand-dug springs and horses were driven or ridden across the river,

iced-over heavily or nearly drawn to a trickle by mid-summer "dog day" heat, for sugar and grist-mill flour from a small store in unincorporated Overall where neighbors gossiped and visited, and to Sunday morning services in the tiny one-room church still standing and sometimes used by families and friends related to a Pentacostal preacher long gone but still fondly remembered there.

That mini-farm had the best beachfront of any acreage for quite a ways in either direction. It was gently sloping down to the river, mostly sand and flat, with huge, old sycamore trees for shade from summer heat. It wasn't at all difficult to drive a jeep or truck or four-wheeler down onto it, or pull in a canoe or kayak and was at the foot of a small, ever rippling, splashing and bubbling riffle so the water was almost always clear, clean, swift-running and cool.

In the backcountry, arrestingly colorful Baltimore Orioles picked all the fruits from black cherry bushes right before they ripened. Peach and pear trees produced dependably, and black walnuts, tall and spreading sturdily, grew wild, as did persimmon. Mild honey bees spread pollen between flowers. Variegated hummingbirds siphoned nectar from hollyhock bushes gone wild. The lilac to the right of the front door expanded to cover the entranceway, so its sweet-scented bulbous blooms had to be pushed aside for entering the house in springtime. The outhouse, grandfathered in as legal and kept painted, was a second, and then third bathroom. Violets and orange daylilies transplanted from other sites landscaped buildings. Birds built individualized and interesting nests in the eaves. Climbing roses twined around deck supports, and peonies sprouted each year to the north of the house in partial shade.

Sliding downhill toward the river, daffodils and tulips, anemones and wild

cactus bloomed. Wild daisies, forsythias and domestic rose bushes scattered, and a wisteria grew and fell near the top of the hill. Unreliable white locust blooms dangled their drunken fragrance by the deck. Red and white delicate wild roses and the snarling vines of wild grapes grew and wandered west of the house, as did osage orange trees with their intriguing large green fruits. Sweet-smelling cedars popped up everywhere. And then there were the entrancing diminutive wildflowers of various design and shade. And the moss. Wild cherry, small, hard pear and apple trees flowered and fruited. Gypsy moths attacked some of the trees but never killed any. Wild blackberry, raspberry and blueberry bushes lined fence rows and mountain paths. Azaleas and mountain laurel bloomed alongside them. By late fall, acorns and dead leaves carpeted higher grounds. Wild chestnuts disappeared long ago.

Nearly all the land, barren to the wild at my purchase of it, had been planted and filled. Children, in particular, loved it, and the domestic animals, and some adults were entranced, too. Robins, finches, sparrows, cardinals abounded, and an occasional indigo bunting in its spectacular glimmering blue, or a bluejay, passed through. Woodpeckers, large and small, pecked at tree trunks. Raptors -- hawks and eagles -- soared on skywaves. At night, owls stared and hooted. Wild geese hung out by the river where mallards glided with their chicks in tow during the summer season. Beaver chopped small trees down and built their community dams. Sometimes woodducks, herons or seagulls would visit. Butterflies and dragonflies particularly enjoyed hovering and dancing in the air or fluttering and mating on multi-nuanced stones of the beach, or around stands of water reeds. Fallfish, helgrammites, minnows, freshwater oysters, clams and mussels, muskie, water snakes, bullfrogs, mudcats and little tomcats hiding snugly under rocks enlivened the ever-moving, rising and receding Shenandoah waters.

In the fields, groundhogs dug deep, and sometimes precarious holes. Small,

glistening, multi-colored lizards crawled and tiny tree frogs hopped on the grounds. Once in a while, a wild turkey hen with her babies would peek out from the borderline forest. Deer and rabbits were common, as were the only North American marsupial, the ugly possum. Red and more plentiful gray fox ran and prowled through fields. A very rare sight was a cougar, bobcat, red or flying squirrel, or skunk. There were rumors of wild boar, but I never saw any. Two good-sized field rats once set up house in an outbuilding, but were trapped and disposed of quickly.

It was a very beautiful, and generally peaceful place -- a wild and domesticated orchestra of nature's bounty crescendoing toward summer annually with a nearly overwhelming explosion of shape and color and movement by breeze or storm or self-directed and empowered.

To begin with the river was not as heavily-trafficked with canoes, kayaks, rafts and rubber dingies as it became later on, so we were relatively free to sit unremarked and undisturbed in the "riffles" where rock ledges created white water of a relatively gentle sort and drink our pina coladas or beers from nearby coolers in usually sun-drenched and wind-tossed peace. We barbecued the usual fare over hibachis and grills and drank our breakfasts of mimosas and Bloody Marys to the trills of songbirds seduced by wildflowers gone truly free as we sunbathed on blankets and lounge chairs, planning and discussing our next foray to the temptations of the Shenandoah unwatched and unbound.

As weather permitted every spring I spent all my free hours alongside and in the river also until chill and frost made that once again uninviting through winter months generally. The Shenandoah, though, initially and for many years teemed with life and promise, truth and ecstasy, beauty and suggestion. From dragonflies hovering low in their iridescence over deep

blue to aquamarine flowings that sometimes ebbed but never ended to guppies nibbling enthusiastically at ankles and toes while pileated woodpeckers landed and knocked in all their brightly-etched splendor on tree trunks of the opposite bank, the river and riverside offered an infinite variety and show of natural delights unsullied by the artificial structures of wo/man and governments, politics and policies. It was truly and profoundly, blessedly free.

Wings!

Throughout the 60s to 80s and regardless of semi-permanent domicile, having carefully chosen after assiduous browsing Yuletide gifts I hoped might be appealing for friends and family, I boarded a then-commodious and pleurably-attended airplane from cacaphonous LaGuardia or Kennedy, later Dulles or Reagan, Atlanta or Baltimore, for the annual holiday visit to Fort Lauderdale -- initially a small, somewhat disorganized and rural airport and now a sprawlingly multi-lingual international hub -- and another ten-day stay in the sun and ocean salt, sea breeze and poolside amenities, Intracoastal elegances and sandland eccentricities with my grandparents, who provided me with roundtrip tickets as long as they lived for that occasion and paid all my expenses while there also. So, it was a real vacation also paid for in part by my unusually beneficent employers. My major goal was to return with a golden tan that would last me until the warmth of springtime renewal "up East." "Nana" and "Grandpa" were inordinately attentive to mealtimes, as all retirees there seemed to be, and ours generally entailed "Early Bird Specials" at favored nearby restaurants in the evenings. Around lunchtime, my grandmother and I went shopping here and there and then stopped most often at her favorite cafe, a beautifully elegant waterside

building with a white and glassed facade and interior, antique French furnishings throughout, and a gift store offering shining jewels for limbs and tables, which it also sold, and she bought me a set of three tiered gold inlaid ones on one visit there along with a set of six slender white china and sterling silver demitasse cups in their own tray, which I still have. But not the tables.

As I was growing up, my grandparents "wintered" each year in Miami, then Fort Lauderdale, for two or three months, staying in various hotels and motels along A1A by the Atlantic Ocean. My mother and I, or sometimes just myself, would fly down once to visit them each year, so I became used to and comfortable with airplanes at a very early age. Back then, coach seats were spacious with just two on each side of the aisle, hot meals were elegant and, along with two cocktails (not that I was old enough for them) and hors d'oeuvres, free. Stewardesses were just that, female, in blue skirts, white blouses, and wearing high heels and performed as waitresses as much as anything. There were, of course, no in-flight movies or television, and travelers read, talked and/or slept instead.

'Trouble-shooting' Assembler Years later, the large picture window of my spacious office for awhile on the third floor of a Roslyn building looked out over the taller Washington monuments, the Potomac River and two of its bridges as well as a small island. When an airplane from Florida crashed into the 14th Street Bridge, visible from my desk chair, and all but two of its passengers drowned, I was traveling pretty much weekly around the country by air to install original and upgrade software for clients, solve run-time problems, and teach classes or tutor individuals, mostly for DEC mini-computers. Along with others performing similar functions countrywide, we developed and shared a kind of gallows humor about flying, as crashes become more salient amongst frequent travelers. We figured the odds diminished the more often we got up there. The joys of driving strange

cars on strange roads in strange cities (rental vehicles on superhighways in unfamiliar metropolises) also cannot be understated.

Once, flying back from a family visit in Fort Lauderdale, having worked in Naples on the Gulf Coast and driven a rental car across Alligator Alley to the widest thoroughfare I'd yet encountered from Miami north, I sat next to a young woman who had never flown before and was holding a small baby on her lap. As the plane swerved out over the Atlantic, it suddenly dropped around five hundred feet. We all caught our breaths and rearranged ourselves and our trays and belongings, as she become somewhat hysterical while clutching the baby closely to her breast. I assured her that I'd flown a lot by plane and everything was perfectly all right, that she shouldn't worry. The pilot's voice came over the intercom also sounding reassuring and eventually she relaxed somewhat. As the airplane struggled to regain its height and stay aloft, groaningly, I repeated Hail Mary's, my refuge over the years in times of extreme peril, silently, along with prayers that we would make it to Atlanta. When we arrived in that Delta hub, the airplane was ditched and those of us continuing on up north boarded another one for the next leg of the trip.

After moving to the Shenandoah Valley, I flew a few times on small commuter planes from Verona to Washington DC or Baltimore and back again on a leg in the chain to and from Fort Lauderdale. Shortly after my last trip, one of those planes crashed into the side of the Blue Ridge Mountains in fog and all aboard were killed. Rescuers who finally made their way to that remote site found bodies and body parts hanging from trees and the scene so grisly that they required psychiatric counseling afterwards. The next time I traveled to The Sunshine State, I took a bus from Harrisonburg, having lost my guts for flying totally for awhile -- until enticed again to our Pacific Coast a decade or so later.

[43 sections: 48,049 words]

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