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UPCOMING THEMES & DEADLINES

Nuevo Appalachia
By February 29, 2012

Global Appalachia
By August 31, 2012

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NOW & THEN
THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

Changed

Randy Sanders

"On May 11, 2002, at 2:58 a.m. I died. I mean, they [the doctors] brought me back, but our lives changed in the blink of an eye on that morning."

Lisa Casteel is describing the early morning head-on collision that neither she nor her husband Boyd remembers.

"I remember getting him [Boyd] up; fixing coffee. My mom was living with us at the time, and for some reason she didn't go with us that day. I remember leaving the house. After that, the only thing I remember was waking up in the hospital."

Boyd and Lisa were, as they describe it, living the American Dream. They owned two homes—one of which they rented to supplement an already ample household income.

"We didn't want for much," Boyd adds. "We worked hard. We could go out to eat if we wanted to. We could go to Gatlinburg if we wanted to. We had cash in our pockets. When you cut that off, when it stops like that [he snaps his fingers], when you can't provide for your family, it makes you feel about two inches tall. It makes you feel less human than you can possibly believe."

Boyd, who had worked as a Carter County, Tennessee, deputy sheriff, had seen his share of traffic accidents involving drunk drivers. On May 11, 2002, he and Lisa came face-to-face with such a driver. They were on their way to pick up *Johnson City Press* newspapers that Lisa was to deliver as one of her two jobs.

Today, Boyd can walk—not well and not for long, but he is mobile. His right foot is held together with metal pins. Lisa now lives most of her life in a wheelchair. Surgeons used more than twenty metal rods and pins to piece her body together. The x-rays of her pelvis look like an internal erector set project. The other driver sustained a broken nose.

Boyd and Lisa Casteel with ASP staff Torey Davenport and Mike Milero. Photo courtesy Appalachia Service Project.

Eloise

Fred Sauceman

Tuesday mornings at 9 a.m. sharp, Eloise Swain tees off at Pine Oaks Golf Course in Johnson City, Tennessee. Friday nights she presides over karaoke at her family's neighborhood bar, The Cottage. Eloise turned eighty-five years old on September 16, 2011.

Her long and active life has ranged from the sugar plantations of her native Hawaii to the bingo halls of southwest Virginia. Whether answering the telephone at the Bank of Hawaii or learning to fry milk-soaked chicken and hefty cheeseburgers in The Cottage's kitchen, she has always worn a flower in her hair. It's part of her go-to-work attire and a remembrance of life on the islands.

Most Friday nights at The Cottage, you'll find her in a muumuu. She has a closet full. And on one particular Friday night every year, a muumuu is mandatory. It's the Friday in June that falls closest to the birthday of King Kamehameha, who united the Hawaiian islands. The Cottage karaoke party ramps up that night, often spilling out into the parking lot.

The party reminds Eloise of her days as a schoolgirl back on the "big island" of Hawaii when hula competitions were held in the schools, in memory of the king, "the Napoleon of the Pacific," who died in 1819.

All the old dance moves come back to her on this special Friday night—the flowing arms, the graceful fingers, the gently swaying hips, all telling a story.

Amid the raucousness of beer-fueled karaoke, when Eloise steps out from behind the bar and Theresa Greer cues up "Lovely Hula Hands," The Cottage crowd gets totally quiet. For three minutes, Eloise, smiling broadly and lithe as a teenager, is the center of attention.

With pineapples as door prizes and leis around every neck, for one night, this bar in the uplands of East Tennessee turns tropical. Although the owners of The Cottage love the mountains and, as Eloise says, love "being able to drive from one state to another," Hawaii is never far from their minds. Eloise's sister, the late Ellenmerle Heigis, owned the bar for many years with her husband, Don. When Ellenmerle died in late 2010, the family requested that visitors to the funeral home wear Hawaiian shirts, and the funeral parlor was a festival of flowers.

Eloise's first job in Hawaii was driving a tractor between rows of sugar cane at the Hutchinson Sugar

Eloise Swain dances the hula during the 2011 King Kamehameha birthday party at The Cottage. Photo by Fred Sauceman.

Exotic Dancing and the Odds for a Happily Ever After

Edwina Pendarvis

Lady Godiva's Gentleman's Club in Barboursville, West Virginia, shuts down in the daytime. Even at night, lively though the place is, it looks a little fusty and old-fashioned, with hand-painted knights on either side of the front door. The life-size, plastic-looking statue of a white horse that used to stand in the parking lot is gone now. This club is one of a half-dozen or so gentleman's clubs in the area. They open for awhile and then close down, to be replaced by other bars serving up drinks and exotic dancing. Whatever these controversial establishments mean to others, they remind me—Lady Godiva's especially, with its knights-and-ladies theme—of why I'm so sick of the princess fad. Disney princesses, Barbie princesses, princess costumes, and clothing with "Princess" written on them are products of an industry I hope is winding down.

I know parents don't mean any harm when they proclaim their daughters' princesshood, buy them tiaras, and deck them out in princess clothing. Telling girls they're princesses is a way of saying, "You're precious to me." But so *much* attention to princess fantasies may suggest to little girls from better-off families that privilege is their due, and that it's just too bad about those other, *less* precious, girls—including girls who may grow up to find jobs like exotic dancing their best bet for making a decent living.

Not that exotic dancing rules out chances for a "happily ever after." Lots of successful women have made a living that way for a time. Popular actress Goldie Hawn is one example. And, in fact, one of West Virginia's most famous "Cinderella" tales is the life story of Fannie Belle Fleming, better known as Blaze Starr.

Born in 1932 near Twelve Pole Creek in Wayne County, Blaze Starr parlayed her good looks and audacity into national celebrity and a lot more money than she could've made waitressing at places like the bar and grill where she began work at fourteen. At sixteen, she left home to find a better job. She ended up in Washington, D.C., where she worked in a donut shop until a nightclub owner recruited her for his burlesque show. By the time she was seventeen, she'd moved to

Entrance to Lady Godiva's Gentleman's Club. Photo courtesy Edwina Pendarvis.

Good Dog

Thomas Alan Holmes

These seven years, you taught
our little girl to watch
a water bowl and keep
it full, to listen for
a whine beside a door,
to cup a face with love
without a word. Good dog.

You helped our house feel full.
What if you sat too close
or licked more than we liked?
You wagged from shoulder back
and nosed our palms and watched
us live, reminding us
routine is blessed. Good dog.

Tonight, as our house sets,
I yearn to hear your claws
click down the hall and wait
for you to nose each door
ajar. Your bowl is dry,
but that end of the couch
is still your place. Good dog.

Thomas Alan Holmes is a member of the English faculty at East Tennessee State University. His work has appeared in *Appalachian Journal*, *Florida Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *and The Southern Poetry Anthology Volume III: Contemporary Appalachia*.

Books in Brief

Edwina Pendarvis

Ash: Poems from Norse Mythology
Jeff Mann (Rebel Satori Press, 2011)

The characters and events in Jeff Mann's poetic interpretations of ancient legends are taken from Norse mythology, but his re-imagining of these tales combines the contemporary with this olden time. The poem "Gnawing" moves from warriors hearing the world weakening as the serpent Nidhogg gnaws the ash tree (a giant tree that, in these myths, supports the entire universe) to modern Appalachians hearing their world weaken: "We hear it accelerated, the gnawing, over our keyboards, our steering wheels, our bourbons. . . . Rhododendrons / are shaking softly under chemical-scented rain. . . . Somewhere in the coalfields, streams run bright orange." With this collection, Mann reminds readers of the strong connections among Norse, Gaelic, and Celtic cultures and the culture of Appalachia. The poems in the book are more artistically decorous than the cover suggests. Sexuality is a strong presence in this work. It typically is in Mann's poetry, but the sexuality is less domestic here, in keeping with the violent, romantic spirit of Norse myth. ❖

Beech Mountain Man: Memoirs of Ronda Lee Hicks
Thomas Burton (University of Tennessee Press, 2009)

The memoirs of Ronda Lee Hicks, as told to Thomas Burton, present a collaborative portrayal of a western North Carolina "mountain man" of the sort often depicted in stereotypes on television and in the movies. From two families of storytellers, including Ray Hicks (Ronda's cousin, known for his Jack tales), Ronda reflects on his ties to home, made stronger by stints outside the mountains. He makes observations about relatives, romances, escapades, crimes, and jobs. The book is organized into sections: Beech Mountain, Army, Prison, Men and Women, Back to the Mountains, Wrong Place at the Wrong Time, and Reflections. Burton offers brief introductions to stories within these sections. One of those introductions illustrates the nature of some of the anecdotes as well as the understated approach Burton takes as editor: "Ronda had trouble with a number of men associated with the woman from New York, several of whom were her present or former husbands." ❖

The Last Mountain Weaves Powerful Message about the Controversial Hunt for Coal in West Virginia

Brad Lifford

About midway through a screening of *The Last Mountain*, it occurred to me that the DVD player and the surround-sound system that enabled and enriched my viewing experience were powered by the industry being denounced by the documentary playing on the flat-screen television.

I considered the DVD itself. Chances are it was created by an electronics device that was powered by electricity coming from coal, too—a notion that could at least be assumed for most of the other DVDs in my extensive collection.

Then I took the room in fully. There was a lamp ablaze. The overhead light fixture sported four incandescent bulbs.

What is a person concerned about energy consumption to do? That troubling question became so distracting that I lost focus on the film. At one point I had to tap the rewind button to ensure that a statistic trumpeted by the filmmakers—that there are more U.S. workers employed by the wind farming industry than there are coal miners—was actually something I saw. And it was.

That two-minute snippet of personal viewing experience is somewhat microcosmic of *The Last Mountain* itself. The subject matter, mountaintop removal mining—a term that essentially encapsulates blowing the top off mountains to get at hidden coal seams—is more than a little vexing. Documentarian Bill Haney is well-meaning, but as the narrative churns along, the film becomes so sprawling that it loses focus, determined to connect so many dots that it sucks away some of the power in its message.

The Last Mountain is most effective when it stays close to its epicenter of Coal River Mountain in southern West Virginia. The film reports that mountaintop removal mining has destroyed 500 Appalachian mountains. In the film, Massey Energy, at that time the largest coal mining company in West Virginia (Massey has since been bought by Alpha Natural Resources), plans to strip-mine a large swath of Coal River Mountain.

Massey's plans are met with fierce resistance, from a mixture of local people who live near the mountain and some concerned individuals from

Maria Gunnoe at a mountaintop removal site. Photograph courtesy Uncommon Productions.

Signing Off

Photo courtesy Larry Smith. Logo courtesy Pal's Sudden Service.

Pal Barger opened the first Pal's Sudden Service in Kingsport, Tennessee in 1956, and today the company operates twenty-three locations, all within a 60-mile radius of the original restaurant. The phrase "sudden service" is more than just a part of the company's logo; it's an essential part of the philosophy that has made Pal's a success. According to CEO Thom Crosby, Pal's has the fastest service time in the industry. He says that a Pal's restaurant could wait on 1,500 cars in eight and a half hours while the company's closest competitor would take thirty hours to serve the same number of patrons.