

APPALACHIAN FREE PRESS



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Director's Note

Hello again, and if you are a first-time reader, welcome!

When we started this project, we didn't realize how necessary it would become. However, even in the short time that we have been a publication, we have learned

We need to work together, and I feel as though this newspaper has the ability to help us do that. In specific, we hope to build a community that can speak amicably and work together to solve the problems that each of us has today-- and the problems that we might face in the future.

All of us must travel the paths we can find, although those paths might lead us away from what is familiar. Starting out in life, we know nothing of the people who will become our neighbors or friends. We are oblivious to the hardships we will endure and the ills that might break our bodies.

As we, uninitiated, charge into the world, we all have our options. We can decide what we bring along with us, what to hold onto for the duration of our stay on earth, and where we shall plant the flag of our lives.

Appalachia has deep roots. Thousands of years have seen people searching for a better life in this region, and, through community, some people have found what they were looking for. These communities, which can bring support, stories, friendship, and education to us all are an integral part of what makes Appalachia so unique.

As we, at the Appalachian Free Press attempt to fortify these communities, we will struggle with ourselves and the demons that hide around us.

We will be here for you, like our ancestor the Appalachian Movement Press, and we will carry on the tradition of storytelling that has long served as a foundation for the communities of this beautiful area.

So, thank you for being a part of this project. Thank you for reading. Thank you for all of your submissions, your warm welcomes to our inquiries and interviews, and thank you to each mayor, clerk, secretary, and answering machine for enduring my barrage of calls and questions.

We are currently looking to fill our Board of Directors so that we can grow to a 501(c) 3 organization- let us know if you are interested! We would love to have you on the board.

My Sincerest Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zebe Streetman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

I COME FROM

Written by Manda Wallace
Also Known As ~banjo~

I come from rags, not riches.
From moonshine!
From the Gospels,
Matthew, Mark, Luke & John!

I am from the wet washboard,
hanging on the rugged front porch!
The Rhododendrons
and the Devil's Paint Brush.

I am from Fisherman and Hunters,
Farmers & Coal-miners.
Mamaw's and Momma's and
"we'll hav-ta make do."

From my In-laws and Outlaws, Preachers and Sinners.
I am from "the tried and the true," the justified, "hard as nails" mountain folk.
The "nail-bitters." From "eat it or go without" to "go outside and get a hickory switch."

I am from "Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name."
I am from the hills and the hollers.
From the Beauty Spot to Possum Creek, Monkey's Eyebrow and
over yonder and in between.

No cities, but towns with,
"he ain't from around here"
committees
always on the scene.

I'm from calloused hands and blisters,
lightning bugs, bare feet, and creeks.
From wood stoves and gravel roads
to the smokehouse or the cellar underneath.

From Dobro's and Banjo's, Guitars and Fiddles.
Carrying a tune in the bucket to
carrying water up from
the Spring and Creek.

Georgia! and all the way up to Maine.
From clogging and buck-dancing
not quite the same thing.
If you're not an Appalachian, you won't know what I mean.

I'm from the backyard. And Ginseng
Tree-house building, playin' hide and seek.
Friends with many a moonshiner,
even Ewok from over on Carson Creek.

To the poverty I was raised in,
to the richness of that life.
The hand me downs and Winter's new shoes to
The Hatfield's and the McCoy's big feud.

Picking and picking and pick some more
beans, berries, and fights.
From the coal mines, electric fences,
property rights, voting rights, and chicken fights.

Birthrights and snake bites to
Football on a Friday night.
Lickin' the Iron skillet.
Sevin dust summers, fightin' the blight.

I am Appalachian and proud to be!
I got that hillbilly bone deep inside of me.
Grateful God gave me all he did and set me free.
Those mountains, hills & hollers, my great jubilee!



Jo Anne's Corner

Written by Jo Ann Bullard
September 10th, 2021

Good morning. Welcome to Jo Ann's Virtual Café 2021. Come on in and help yourself to a breakfast beverage. Let's talk. We have a treat for you today.

We're featuring pumpkin spice. We have pumpkin spice bagels, bread, cookies, and coffee. Miss Josie is making her famous pumpkin spice lattes. Now let me tell you a little about pumpkin spice.

The interesting fact is it might not contain any pumpkin at all. It is a mixture of cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves. Some places throw pumpkin in, but most do not.

The earliest written mention of pumpkin spice was in a recipe published by the Washington Post for Pumpkin Spice Cake in 1936. The McCormick Company blended those four spices together and labeled it Pumpkin Pie Spice in the 1950s.

The company changed its label to Pumpkin Spice in the 1960s. For you Starbucks lovers, Starbucks began including pumpkin in their pumpkin spice lattes in 2015.

Lord have mercy, when we hear that pumpkin spice lattes are available at Starbucks, we know that it's football time in Tennessee, filled with tailgating everything that goes with that. We know that the cool mornings of fall are coming.

Are you ready for some football? We have been waiting for this all year. Now I guarantee Miss Josie's Pumpkin Latte is just as good as Starbucks and a whole lot cheaper. For you pumpkin spice lovers, you're at the right place today.

Sometimes you don't always know how good something is until you get older. Today, we are thankful for the beautiful mountains we have here in Eastern Tennessee. When I was young many of us would go back of our house and play in the nearest mountain.

We would run and play tag. We didn't need any trails up the mountains because we were the ones making them. I think my mom would have had a heart attack if she saw us free climbing up the big rocks and cliffs.

We didn't think anything about that. We were young and free.

There's nothing prettier than looking down at Powell Valley from a mountaintop. We must have been natural woodsmen because we never got lost. Nowadays, people are still playing in the mountains.

They hike, camp, and fish, and just explore as we did. There's nothing better than wading in a cold mountain stream during the heat of a summer day or watching the sunset on an autumn day.

We get a special treat in the fall, watching the colorful fall leaves start their parade down the mountains. In winter, we watch the snow do the same thing.

In spring, we watch the green leaves start their parade up to the mountaintop to start the cycle again. I remember living for a while in Nashville. I quickly realized that *something* was missing there for me.

Like *where* are my friends?

When I got on the bus to come back to La Follette, I got excited at the sight of the first tall hill. Then I saw the mountains in the background.

I knew right away what I was missing. I was coming home to my friends what I had missed. The mountains were welcoming me home once again.

So today, take a little hike or just drive up one of our beautiful mountains and feel the peace that they can bring to you. We are Thankful for those mountains that I call home. Having said that, let's share a breakfast beverage and some Native American Proverbs.

The Proverbs of today go like this,

“Mother Earth provides enough for every man’s needs, but not enough for every man's greed.”

“Mountains are one place where what used to be still is.”

Thanks for coming! Enjoy your gift of today. Have a great day!



Self-Defined Faith: What Religion Says About Appalachian Cultural Identity

Aimée LaFon
September 10, 2021

The Appalachian region, rooted in millennia of unique and divergent folklore and religion, carries on the tradition of individualistic faith today.

In our last issue, one question that loomed above all others was: “What makes Appalachia unique, and does this ‘otherness’ prevent Appalachia from reaching its fullest potential?”

Yet, this question is far from new. From a religious approach, Appalachia is indeed unique. Whether this ethos of religious freedom works in the best interest of the regional peoples is up to the people themselves.

When it comes to the facts, Appalachia has the [largest](#) number of regional religious traditions in the whole of the United States, as seen in the Folk Religions, Independent Holiness Traditions, and Ancient faiths that still separate the area from the rest of the country.

We live in a time that gives us the freedom to search. What we choose to search for is up to each of us. During this time, regionally unique religions have been given more attention by worshippers, practitioners, and scholars alike.

People who live close to the land, as the Appalachians always have, are now left with the alone time to explore their identities and delve into the religions surrounding their homes.

With this time, Appalachians have changed, reviving some of the older ways that their forebears practiced their faiths.

How Did We Get Here?: Appalachian Religion and the “Culture of Poverty”

Individual identity has always been a critical component of Appalachian religion.



Driving down the road in any Appalachian town, glance at all the denominations and sects touted on the frequent church signs.

You will find an even vaster spectrum of faiths, officials, and members within those places of worship.

Yet, the peoples who practice their faith away from these urban street-front churches are more significant in number. They may hold beliefs passed down from their forebears, they may find their religion in doing mundane tasks, or they may practice imported and ancient varieties of religion, selecting the religious principles that align with their unique worldviews.

Although this variety is characteristic of most American states, the history behind the “homemade” and regional types of Appalachian faiths speaks to a much larger theory in the field of Appalachian religion and folklore: the stereotypical belief that Appalachian mountain people are uncultured, uneducated, poor, and isolated from greater communities.

Deborah McCauley, in a deconstruction of the imagined ‘culture of poverty’ of the Appalachian region, wrote that “the power of self-definition for individuals within their church communities, as well as for individual church communities and the church traditions of which they are a part, directly contradicts interpretations of Appalachian mountain religion rooted in functionalist notions of compensation for alienation and powerlessness.”¹

So much to say, Appalachians disprove the theory that the mountain region is characterized by poverty and isolation. Their unique spiritual beliefs and theological wisdom reveal that Appalachia is a distinct region populated by peoples who reject and accept religious beliefs on their own terms regardless of governmental interference.

Appalachian religious groups and individual practitioners of diverse faiths were never isolated from other religions. In fact, the beliefs that continue to make Appalachia unique and diverse still stand in opposition to the Protestant faiths that were imposed upon the people in the 1900s.

Although Protestant home missions had a prominent presence in Appalachia before the 1960s, when the Commission of Religion in Appalachia (CORA) was founded in 1965, the region saw a massive influx of Protestant Home Missions.

CORA worked with communities to provide the Appalachian region with infrastructure and governmental support. However, CORA’s founders stressed that “mission work was needed by emphasizing the economic conditions and isolation in rural Appalachia.”² They saw the Appalachians as backward, poor, and in need of help.

¹ McCauley, Deborah Vansau. *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*: “Mountain Religiosity.”

² [Spiker, Joseph. 2014. “The Commission on Religion in Appalachia and the Twentieth-Century Emphasis on Rural Identity.” Diss. East Tennessee State University.](#)

These supposed conditions neglected the reality of Appalachia, and they belittled the people who had already developed their own religious practices and beliefs. Later scholars such as Loyal Jones and Howard Dorgan “concluded that Appalachians exhibited signs of theological intelligence that many missionaries did not attribute to them.”³

CORA’s interference neglected the concept that many Appalachians wanted to preserve the culture and sovereignty that they had developed independently.

In addition, CORA’s methodologies were condescending at best, which ultimately led many Appalachian peoples to resist the Protestant Missionaries and continue to live their lives the way they always had.

And so, in the aftermath of this rejection, Appalachia has held onto its roots and the uniqueness that separates it from the rest of the USA.

Religions such as Appalachian Folk Religion, Granny Magic, Southern Baptist Christianity, and Independent Holiness Traditions continue to thrive, despite the largely uninvited Protestant Home Missions sent to “civilize” and “improve” the mountain regions in Appalachia in conjunction with the War on Poverty.

But this opposition was never rooted in Appalachians’ desires to react rebelliously to the religions imposed upon them.

Instead, the unique religious culture of Appalachia had existed before CORA and other religiopolitical missions came in. The regional faiths of Appalachia continue to thrive on their own, regardless of the Protestant interference sent to save the supposedly poor and uneducated people of the Appalachian mountains starting in the early 1900s.

The Appalachian cultural identity, then, “shifts the locus of power in religious self-definition directly into the hands of mountain people themselves, creating a status order that embodies a different system of values (and moral obligations) and a different worldview from that of the nation’s dominant religious culture and its prevailing power structure.”⁴

So, one factor that makes Appalachia different from the rest of the United States is its historical resistance to Protestant and Governmental influence.

Because the Appalachian peoples resisted this interference, they still cling to the religious roots that have always made the mountain region diverse and divergent from the prevalent morals and beliefs of other areas on the East Coast.

In addition, Appalachia has **not** lost its self-definition, which continues to make it a distinct region today.

³ [Spiker, Joseph. Ibid.](#)

⁴ McCauley. Ibid.

Religious Self-Definition Today: Appalachia's Diverse Religiosity

Although all regional Appalachian religions can be grouped into one category for ease of study, Appalachian self-definition and status power dictate that the faiths from the area are highly diverse.

Historically, this self-definition may have resulted in the creation of Baptist Revival and Independent Holiness Traditions, but today, it shows itself in a varied and fully fleshed color.

Nowadays, Appalachians have the resources to discover and share their foreign, ancient, and seemingly forgotten religions in a way that prevents social rejection.

Using the uniqueness of Appalachian self-definition, these religions have found a more permanent home in the mountains as technology has provided Appalachian people more access to larger communities.

Such religions include many that seem foreign to America at first glance, but many practitioners see their faiths as inherently tied to the land and its inhabitants.

These religions have taken on local and regional hues that represent the individuality of their practitioners.

Practitioners of these religions may not advertise their religious beliefs to others from their localities for fear of discrimination. Still, their solitary practice is only a characteristic of their unique self-definition and determination to be true to their faiths.

Some practitioners of these more solitary and seldom publicly recognized traditions, such as Clyde, a practicing Roman Polytheist, use their religion to honor their American ancestors.

Clyde shared that he devotes offerings such as incense, wine, or whiskey to his forebears, such as “the Confederates, Texas Rangers, American Revolution soldiers, and the ancestors that came over on the Mayflower.”

But Clyde is not the only one who uses his religion to pay respect to his forebears.

Destiny, a 4th generation Celtic Pagan from West Virginia, also pays respect to her forebears through her religion since her ancestors were among the Scotto-Irish who settled in the Appalachian Mountains.

“I wanted to get closer to the roots that tie me to this area,” she told me. “I may not feel like I can tell people about my religion, because I live in the bible belt after all, but that’s okay because I know my ancestors practiced this religion here many years ago, and I’m carrying on the family tradition.”

Clyde and Destiny see their religions as distinctly American, and the ways they practice their faiths are directly related to their American heritage.

Other people create sacred spaces in rural areas where people from various traditions can meet and connect with each other.

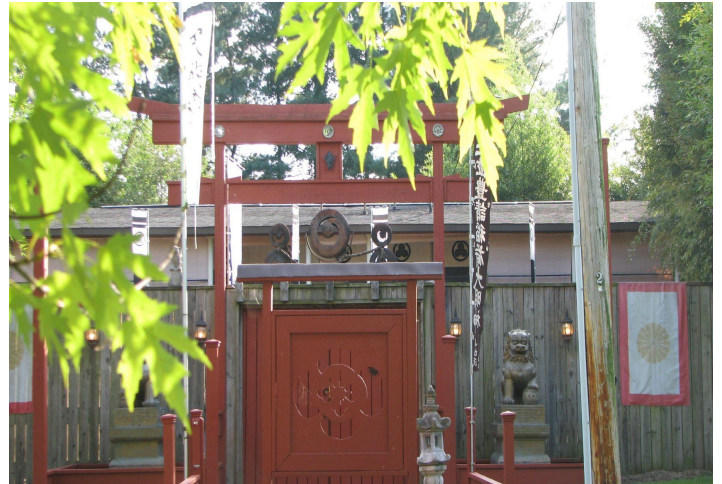
One spectacular example of these religious gatekeepers of Appalachian communities is Rick Bunn, the builder and caretaker of the Ura Shrine in Tennessee.

Rick's largely Shintoist shrine is a sacred hub for religious communities that oft have no other place of worship. Such visitors include Cherokee groups, Wiccans, Witches, Druids, Nordics, Necromancers, Vodouists, Hoodouists, paranormal research teams, Catholics, and many more.

This unique space is a place where people of self-defined religions and those that diverge from the national and local mainstream can go and find community.

However, each church in Appalachia functions this way too, but Rick's shrine is exceptional in the diversity of its visitors.

As a host, Rick is charismatic and accepting of people from various faiths. People like Rick are hard to find in rural Appalachian communities since most practitioners of non-Christian religions in Appalachia are not generally accepted in society.



However, you might be surprised by how many people you meet day-to-day are practitioners of self-defined faiths that diverge from the popular mainstream, especially in this region of the country.

Whether we choose to accept and nurture the religious diversity of the Appalachian region or choose to tailor it to national standards is ultimately up to each of us.

However, religious differences and variety have long given Appalachia a distinct cultural identity that expresses its peoples' determination, independence, diversity, and wisdom. Encouraging the long-lived self-definition of the region will continue to keep Appalachia different from the rest of the nation.

Mayoral Leadership Study Results

By Ezekiel “Zeke” Streetman
September 14th, 2021

How do we define prosperity? Is it the inscrutable point of the stock exchange? Is it the national wealth through the gross domestic product? Perhaps, however, these metrics rarely take into consideration how individual communities are doing.

So, since the beginning of August, I have been calling township leaders from New York to Mississippi to see how everybody is doing.

Methods

The first step was to select the candidates. This was done in relative proportionality from state to state, determined by the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#)'s representation of the Appalachian region. I then used the internet to collect email addresses and phone numbers for city and county offices, I called 110 in total with 5 dysfunctional lines. I accepted responses from Mayors as well as city clerks.

Each leader was asked the following 4 Questions:

- 1. What does your community currently need?**
- 2. How do you think your community will change in the next ten years?**
- 3. What should everyone know about your town?**
- 4. Who in your community do you take the most pride in serving?**

27 leaders responded, and one refused.

Selected Responses

The ten pages of responses are quite difficult to consume, if you would like to [read all 108 responses](#), [click here!](#) Reproduced below are examples that were representational and emotionally impactful. These responses were mostly transcribed over the phone.

1. What Does Your Community Currently Need?

Robert Halfacer of Clemson, SC

We need everybody to work together, we need to work together when COVID hit, we came together and partnered together to keep people safe. It's crucial to work together through this difficult challenging time. We need to work together to get through this and to do the right thing.

Bob Scott of Franklin, NC

A massive infusion of money for infrastructure repairs. We also need the north con legislature to realize that the entire state is not rural, we have municipalities as well, there's a deep rural/ urban divide growing every day. I could spend 5 million on streets, sidewalks, water, and upgrades.

Sam North of Dahlonoga, GA

We need a grocery store. 32,000, and we're still trying to entice a major grocery store to serve us. That's the community's most sought-after development.

Mackenzie Spencer of Charleston, WV

There isn't a city or town in the State of West Virginia that doesn't need improvements to its infrastructure. We have a priority list of projects that need maintenance or replacements over the next several years. We are working with our congressional delegation to receive federal monies to work on these projects.

Harold E Slone of Louisa, KY

We need more jobs, more opportunities, more well-paying jobs that can keep families together. We're fortunate to have a hospital, we've become a medical hub. It's contributing to our growth in the medical field. We need the infrastructure to support that. We need housing the most. If we don't have housing we can't grow anymore. We have no housing available.

2. How Do You Think Your Community Will Change in the Next 10 Years?

Jerry Barilla of Steubenville, OH

Hopefully, we can see a positive change in employment. Once the steel industry left, we were devastated. We've relied more heavily on the medical and education systems for jobs. We are looking for more small-scale manufacturing. Giving people a job instills pride and self-worth, and that helps our community prosper. We need to focus on job creation.

Mackenzie Spencer of Charleston, WV

Charleston is receiving \$36.8 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding that must be spent by the end of 2024. This is the largest sum of federal money that the city has seen at one time. It can, and will, change the landscape of Charleston dramatically not just in the short term, but long term as well. When we found out we would be receiving this money we began a community listening tour to hear ideas directly from citizens in every corner of Charleston.

The ideas varied greatly – from infrastructure improvements to additional social services to youth activities. My office is working directly with Charleston City Council to create an action plan and priority list for funding that will ensure lasting change for our Capital City

W. T. Daniels of Greenville, TN

I certainly hope it's for the better. 12 years ago, we changed the form of our government from a weak mayor to a city administrator.

The change to a city administrator who works for the city council and is elected by the people helps. Representational democracy has been a positive change, and it has provided downtown revitalization and economic development. We've been using the extra tax money for education and refocusing on what we should be doing to educate our kids.

3. What Should Everyone Know About Your Town?

Allen Joines of Winston-Salem, NC

We are a city that has rebuilt our economy based on knowledge-based industries and most recently based on innovation and rapid change. We tied with Austin, Texas as the highest percentage of new business start-ups.

Bob Page of Hamilton, AL

We laid our senior center leader to rest recently, and we've got a lot of respect for our older leaders here, and we've built a new center for elder recreation, we've had to close it for COVID, but we're excited to recruit new people into the senior's program.

I'm trying to find ways to retain our smart young talent.

We cater to our graduating seniors and college graduates, so they can stay home and make a living. So my goal is to bring high-tech jobs to our industrial park. We have 500 acres of beautiful land for good jobs for the young. We're working hard with an eager young council, they see the future as bright in Hamilton.

Randy Datsko/Danea Coss of Edensburg, PA

It's a great place to live, work, and play. We've been constructing our Rails to Trails system. We're at the top end of the Ghost town trail, and a lot of people are coming in to ride the trail. We have the Bethlehem Indiana Railroad and the Pennsylvania Trail, too. We have a professional tennis center, a lake, a swimming pool, and two natural reservoirs.

Sandy Magiera of Salamanca, NY

It's the only city that's almost entirely sitting on a native American reservation. It used to be a railroad city, but now it's a nice place to live since it's next to the largest state parks in New York.

4. Who In Your Community Do You Take The Most Pride In Serving?

Allen Joines of Winston-Salem, NC

We work to ensure that all of our services are available to all segments of our population. However, special emphasis is placed on citizens who need help with housing, job training, and other programs to help move them out of poverty.

Marilyn Parker of Tellico Plains, TN

We have a service heart. We have a few organizations in town that try to help visitors and welcome new residents. We have lots of motorcyclists come through for the Dragon's Den, and I like helping them. I take pride in the people here that have a service heart.

Evan Hellenga of Toccoa, GA

I like being able to help people get to the right people-- be it electric, public works-- we are very attentive. As soon as we heard about a dead tree in the park, we got it down very quickly. I serve on the Humane shelter board, and as mayor, I like developing and bringing industry to our town and county. It's fulfilling to know I'm helping people now and in the future.

Charlie Hudson of Wellston, OH

I take pride in serving those folks that can't see into the future or who don't think that things can be better. I believe the pathway to improving the quality of life in our town is to give everyone hope. Each person's hope may be different, but it is the most important thing we can instill. Everyone needs a reason to get up in the morning.

Camp Toccoa and Its Dazzling Legacy

Written by Jay Zimbabwe
September 10th, 2021

This gate is a welcoming glimpse of the Camp Toccoa at Currahee Project, a mission started about 10 years ago to memorialize the 5,000 “Toccoa Men” who trained at this base 5 miles outside of Toccoa, GA, for the famous D Day invasion of WWII.

“It seemed fitting that Currahee was the name of the mountain at Camp Toccoa as it is an Indian word for ‘Stands Alone.’”



Camp Toccoa was built in the 1930s under FDR’s administration⁵. In 1942, 5000 men were sent to the base to train as paratroopers⁶. According to the [project website](#), the camp housed “17,000 soldiers from 501st, 506th, 511th, and 517th Parachute Infantry Division; the 295th Ordnance Heavy Maintenance and the 38th Signal Construction Battalion” who trained for deployment in WWII, and then afterwards became a German POW camp⁷ before finally closing at the end of WWII.

The base was “virtually erased”⁸ when it closed, except for one single building which stands alone.

Today, the base is owned by the Stephens County Historical Society⁹, and it’s more recognizable as the same Camp Toccoa depicted in the 2001 HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*.

Volunteers from Toccoa have completed phase 1 of an ambitious restoration project, involving recreating the camp gate, bathhouse, barracks, building a pavilion, restoring the last remaining original base building, and creating a display for an [actual C-47 aircraft](#), a plane model used by the Toccoa Men on D Day¹⁰.

⁵ [HISTORY OF CAMP TOCCOA | camptoccoaatcurrahee](#)

⁶ [HISTORY OF CAMP TOCCOA | camptoccoaatcurrahee](#)

⁷ [TIMELINE | camptoccoaatcurrahee](#)

⁸ [Camp Toccoa to live on: Historical society to preserve 506th birthplace | Article | The United States Army](#)

⁹ [TIMELINE | camptoccoaatcurrahee](#)

¹⁰ [CAMP TOCCOA TODAY | camptoccoaatcurrahee](#)

If you stop by the base now, you might see veteran gatherings, visiting reenactors, or active military groups staying on-site.

The base is open on weekends for visitors to hike/run up Currahee, take a guided tour, and explore the Camp Toccoa Museum in the Regimental Headquarters. It's also available [via request](#) for weekday visits or a variety of special events.

As impressive and inspiring as this work is, these volunteers have even greater things planned, and they would welcome [any contributions](#).



What It's Like Living With Cancer In Appalachia

Written by Rudy Fischmann

September 11, 2021

Imagine hiking in the mountains alone and there's an accident no one anticipated. A random dead tree falls and hits you, sending you down a brushy slope. You are very badly injured, bloodied and there's no one around to help you. There is no cell reception, and there is no simple way to contact the outside world. Maybe a few well-intentioned folks come by, but they are not really equipped to help you either.

Do you bleed out and wait to die? Do you ask the strangers who encountered you to risk making your situation even worse by dragging you and your broken bones to safer ground?

That is essentially my story. That's because I have brain cancer and I live in the Appalachian region of Eastern Tennessee. Cancer will more than likely kill me in the next few years, and I am largely without any quality medical care nearby to deal with many of the long-term deficits that come with it.

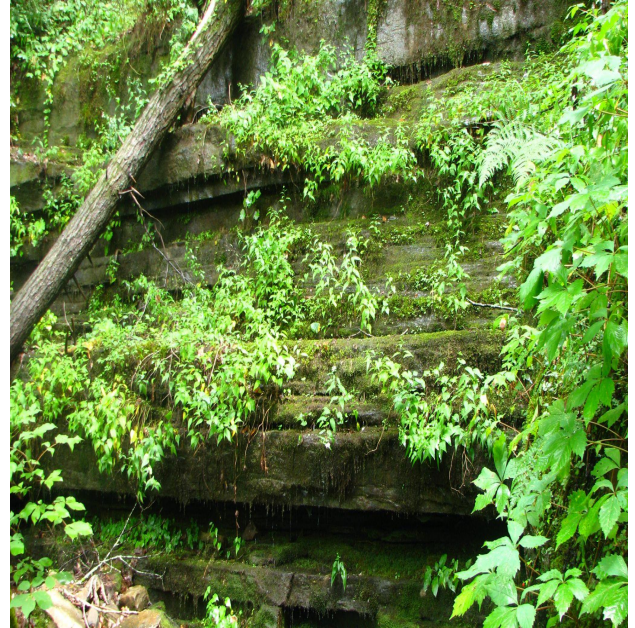
In case you think my analogy is an over-exaggerated hyperbole, know that the closest brain tumor center is at least a three-hour drive away in Nashville (Vanderbilt University). There are local general cancer docs in the greater Knoxville area where I live, but brain cancer, like many other serious diseases, is a very unique and complex beast.

Despite talk of "standard of care," there isn't enough information out there and there aren't enough patients to help a generalist gain enough experience to truly be of help to cancer endurers such as myself.

Initially, I had a local general oncologist for a time. When things got weird with some test results-- as they often do with brain stuff-- I was told to get my affairs in order and anticipate dying within the next year.

So, there I was left bleeding along the proverbial side of the trail with a well-intentioned stranger apologizing that they could not really help me.

That was nearly three years ago.



What changed? I was fortunate enough to have the resources to travel six hours to a hospital in North Carolina that specializes in brain tumors (Duke University). Once you add in gas, hotel, and other travel expenses, a typical trip costs around \$1000, and that expense is not covered by even the best of medical insurance. Every time.

One of the few blessings of the pandemic is that regulations on insurance companies have allowed local oncologists to partner with my out-of-state team, making it easier for me and many other patients in rural areas to work with more appropriate centers far away.

Still, those restrictions on insurance companies expire this month, so back to expensive out-of-pocket trips I go.



As Covid numbers spiral yet again, what about those who are unable to afford those trips? You'll find them bleeding out on the side of the proverbial trail. In fact, many - especially in places like Appalachia - have put off getting those nagging little health oddities checked out, and those symptoms could be an early sign of something very serious.

Even before the pandemic, it took me five years of visiting random doctors and chasing down random symptoms that didn't add up with the many diagnostic guesses I received (pinched nerve, allergies, stress, age, and even "exhaustion").

Eventually, I was diagnosed and had two brain surgeries in Atlanta, even after I had pretty much given up on the medical care available in the area. Many folks are not able or motivated enough to chase down a situation like I was-- or at least be as much of a hypochondriac.

I'm not looking for any help for myself. I'm very fortunate and grateful to be able to navigate this storm due to the assistance and generosity of those around me.

What I would like to see happen is for people to reach out to their elected national officials and request they push through some form of the Telehealth Modernization Act so it is easier for people who live in areas like Appalachia to work with medical professionals not far down the trail from where they are suffering.

I lobbied Congress last May with the National Brain Tumor Society, and it was received very positively. Yet, no actual legislation has passed yet due to other priorities. That is understandable, but I do not think anyone who is still reading this would like to see this very bipartisan issue forgotten. If you need any further motivation, here is a photo of me with my two young children (ages 5 and 7).



Note From the Editor

Thank you so much for joining us for the second issue of the Appalachian Free Press.

This issue has brought us so much closer to other Appalachians, and we hope that it will do the same for you!

Also, another big thanks to the contributors featured in this issue. It has been a true pleasure to work with you, and we sincerely hope that we can publish your work again. We couldn't have done it without you!

If you didn't contribute this time, you can still send us your news articles, essays, poems, pictures, artwork, and more for the next issue!

Please send us your submissions, questions, or criticism to us at appalachianFP@yahoo.com. We want to hear from you!

The submission deadline for the 3rd issue of the Appalachian Free Press is November 11, 2021.

See y'all next time, and stay safe out there!

