

# THE APPALACHIAN FREE PRESS



July 2023 - VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

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*Cover Photo by Kiesa Kay. Kiesa Kay, poet and playwright, is learning to play old-time fiddle on the porch of her cabin in the woods with a panoramic view of the Black Mountains in wintertime.*

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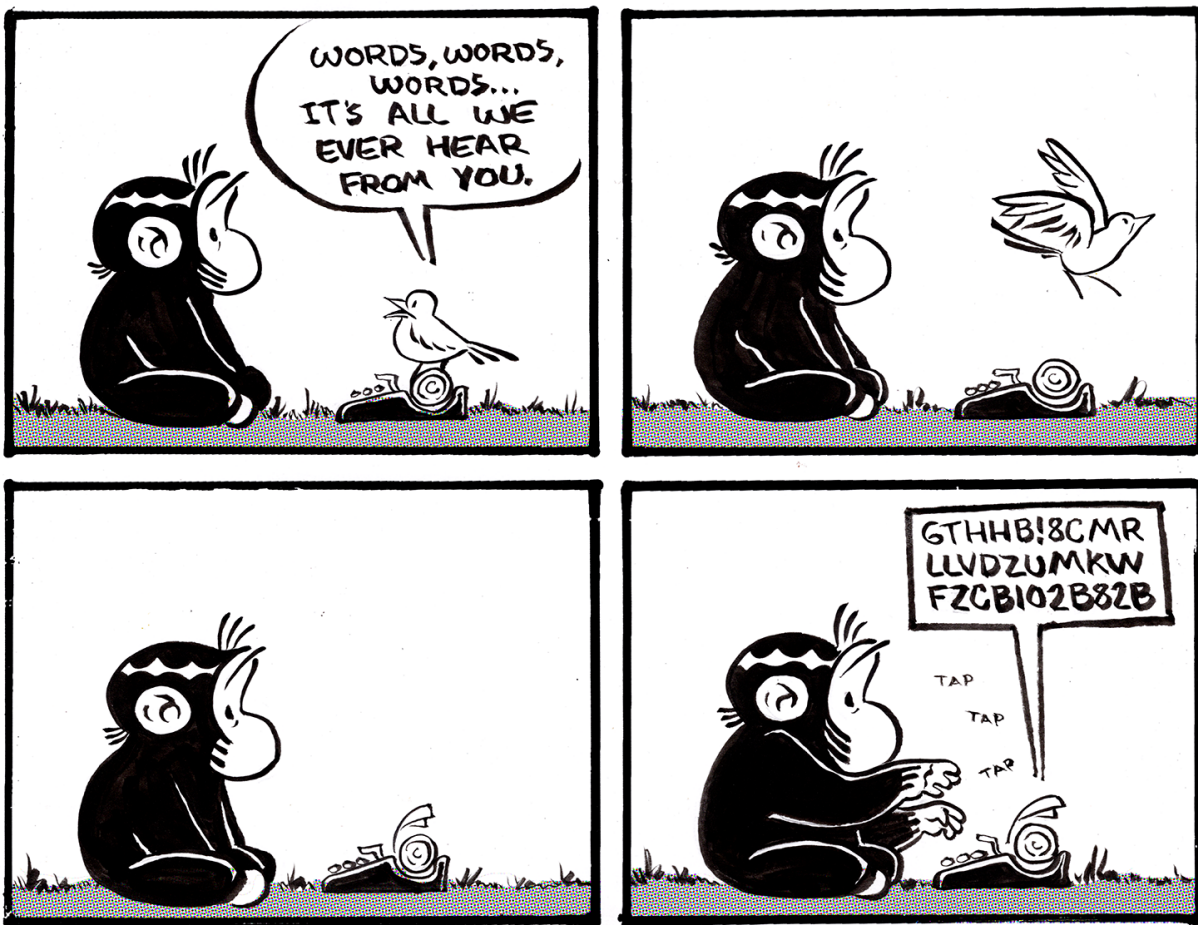
# Gubbins

Howdy friends,

Log here from the Museum of Infinite Outcomes.

For the past several years, I've been writing and drawing a comic series called Gubbins. Gubbins is a Sunday-funnies-style comic that follows our main character, Gubbins, through the landscape. Émile Borel's Infinite Monkey Theorem states that if you give a monkey a typewriter and an infinite amount of time, they will eventually type the works of Shakespeare – everything else is just Gubbins.

Log



## Jo Ann's Corner: Bobby & Olivia

By Jo Ann Bullard



Good morning. Welcome to Jo Ann's Virtual Café 2023. Come on in and help yourself to a breakfast beverage. Let's talk. Joe has a story.

One day, a little boy was playing in a small town park. He looked up and saw a big balloon flying by, high in the air. The little boy decided he would follow the balloon.

Soon, that balloon was flying out of the park, and the little boy was told not to wander off too far. However, the boy couldn't help it. He had to try to get the balloon before it landed somewhere.

The boy kept following the balloon, going farther away from the Park. Finally, he saw it land by a big fancy house. There was a fence around the big house. The little boy didn't let that stop him. He climbed over the fence and ran to the big balloon.

As he started picking up the balloon, a little girl and her father approached him. "What are you doing in our yard?" said the father.

“My name is Bobby. I was following this balloon. It flew by the Park where I was playing. I followed it here. I thought I just might take it home with me,” he said.

“Well, my name is Henry. This is my daughter Olivia. We live here. You shouldn’t go over private fences onto property you don’t own,” said Henry.

“I didn’t mean to get into trouble. I am sorry. I better go home,” said Bobby.

Olivia asked, “Where is home?”

Bobby looked around, “I don’t know. I was watching the balloon and didn’t keep track of where I was going. I am lost. How do I get to the Park from here?”

Henry said, “I will take you back to the town Park. Your mother must be worried. I will have my Chauffeur take you back there with us. Didn’t your mother tell you not to go getting yourself in trouble?” Bobby started to cry.

“Why are you crying?” asked Olivia.

“Because I don’t have a mother. I live at the County Home with others that don’t have parents. I wish I had a beautiful home like yours and a sister to play with. I do need to get back before I get into any more trouble,” he said. Henry and Olivia got into the car with Bobby. The Chauffeur drove them to the Park.

The County’s Home Supervisor was waiting for Bobby. When Bobby got out of the car, the Supervisor started to yell at the boy for leaving the Park. Henry told the Supervisor not to be hard on Bobby.

He was just a kid following a big balloon.

The Supervisor told Bobby to get on the bus and stay there. The Supervisor apologized for Bobby being on Henry’s property. “Don’t worry about that! Can my daughter and I come to see Bobby and take him out to our home to play with my daughter sometime?” asked Henry.

The County Home Supervisor answered, “Yes, you can. Everyone in town knows who you are. All you need to do is sign him out and sign some papers. It would be good for Bobby. He doesn’t have any friends. He’s kind of a special boy. He’s very

smart but looks at things differently than other kids. You will have to be very careful, or he will just take off," said the Supervisor.

After the County Home's bus left with Bobby, Olivia asked, "Did you really mean we could have Bobby visit us?" Henry nodded, "Yes, I did. We will get him next Saturday, and he can come and play with you. Would you like that?" Olivia nodded her head and smiled.

When Bobby got back to the County Home, he told everyone about the big house and car with a chauffeur. All the other kids laughed at him when he said they were coming back to sign him out. Bobby couldn't wait for the next Saturday to come, but Henry and Olivia didn't show up. Bobby got kidding by the rest of the County Home's kids. He was so upset and depressed. The next week all he did was stay to himself.

Two Saturdays later, a big black car pulled up to the County Home. All the kids inside looked at the big car. A man got out with a little girl and entered the County home. They were going to sign out Bobby, but he was nowhere to be found. He had run away. They looked for Bobby all night.

Henry had all his employees look for Bobby, but they simply couldn't find him. The Sheriff said, "We will keep an eye out for him."

Henry told Olivia that they couldn't find Bobby. She was so sad. Two nights later, Olivia looked out her window. Standing there was little Bobby. She ran to the back door. She let Bobby into the back kitchen door. "Where have you been, Bobby?" she whispered to him.

"I thought you would never come to get me. I just had to find out why. You and your father were so nice to me. Why did you not come? Everyone made fun of me. I just couldn't stay in that County Home anymore," said Bobby.

"You can stay in our guest house if you want. I will sneak out food for you. We can play together while my Dad is at work. We can have lots of fun," said Olivia.

For the next week, Olivia and Bobby played together every day in the guest house. She would bring some food from the kitchen for him to eat. One day, one of the help saw her taking food to the guest house. She followed Olivia and looked through the guest house's window. She saw Olivia and Bobby having such a good time. She went back and called Henry and told him what she saw.

Henry came home. He went straight back to the guest house. He looked in the window. He couldn't believe how well Olivia and Bobby were playing with each other. They were putting puzzles together and playing board games. Henry couldn't believe his eyes. Olivia never played with any other kids. She was a special child that didn't have any friends. Henry tried to have other kids over, but she just would not play with them.

Henry opened the door. "I see you found Bobby, Olivia. How long have you two been doing this?"

Olivia said, "For four days, Bobby stayed here at night. I love playing with him. He understands me. He is like me, Daddy. Can Bobby stay with us?"

Henry replied, "I will ask your mother tonight. She will be home from her visit with Grandma. We will see what she says."

That night, Henry told his wife about Bobby and Olivia. Olivia asked her mother if Bobby could stay with them. Her mother asked if she could talk to Bobby alone. Bobby came into the room, and everyone left.

"I understand you ran away from the County Home a few days ago. Why did you do that?" asked Olivia's mother. Bobby had a hard time finding the words. "I was following a balloon and found my way here. When I met Olivia, I just knew that she was like me. I just knew that we could be like brother and sister. She talks like me and likes the same things. The balloon seemed to be taking me here. I have been praying to have someone adopt me that had a kid like me. Nobody ever adopted me because I am different. That's why I had to run away from the County Home. I knew this was my only chance to have a family. Henry is so nice. Please let me stay," cried Bobby.

Olivia's Mother replied, "Yes, you can. I have been checking you out. You are like my daughter. She says that you understand her. We have been watching you two. I agree. We will take you back to the Home tomorrow. It will take a month to do the adoption paperwork. I will see if you can stay here until everything is finalized."

Olivia had a new friend and brother. They were good for each other. They were one happy family. Who would have known that a large balloon floating high in the sky would lead two kids to a life full of happiness? Sometimes you just got to believe.

Having said that, let's share a breakfast beverage and a Native American Proverb. The Proverb of today goes like this, "Only leave footsteps on your path that you would like to follow."

Thanks for coming! Enjoy your gift of today. Have a great day! We look forward to seeing you tomorrow!



## THARE IS GOLD IN "EM THARE HILLS! : Some Old Tales of Gold Nuggets and Lost Silver Mines

Seems there are always stories of lost gold and lost silver mines in our beautiful mountains. Tales that, if true, would make someone very rich. Enjoy these old, old stories.

Several of these tales are way over one hundred and fifty years old.

On an old farm located on the side of a mountain in the backwoods, not far from the North Carolina-Tennessee state line, a man plowed up an old pot containing over \$500 in gold and silver coins. This event caused considerable excitement at the time, and there were many guesses about when and by whom it was hidden.

However, the mystery was cleared up by an old man who was an official in the bank at Elizabethton, Tennessee.

An account of the finding of the pot of coins was published in the local paper. The following is, in essence, the story as published in the paper:

It appears that this old farm was once owned by an old man who lived on it all alone. He was known to have quite a sum of money, and his friends cautioned him about being alone with so much money in the house. They told him that he might be murdered for his gold.

Since his friends so often warned him, he finally decided to put it in a bank for safekeeping. So he took the money to the bank and informed the officials that he had some money he wanted them to take care of for him.

The cashier counted the money, which was all in gold and silver coins, and as he counted it, he placed the coins in little stacks near his window. Then, he gave the old man a receipt for it.

Now, the old man, being ignorant of the workings of a bank, continued to watch his money in the little piles the cashier had made. As time passed, it seemed to him that the bankers had made no effort to put his money in some safe place, as he had requested the bank to do. He became restless and uneasy.

About this time, a customer came in and presented a check to be cashed. The cashier took the check, looked it over, and immediately began to count off the necessary cash from the old man's pile of coins. This action was the last straw for the worried old man. He could stand this foolishness no longer.

They were using his money to cash checks when he had asked them to put it in a safe place! So he promptly walked up to the cashier and demanded his money.

He carried it back to his old home on the side of the mountain and buried it. There it was, plowed up some fifty-odd years after his death. I have heard stories from my grandparents about how people didn't trust banks and, back in the day, it was common for folks to bury their money.

## The Crazy Prospector

This is the story of an old prospector who roamed the hills of Western North Carolina many years ago. It seems that he always had his pockets full of rocks and ores, which he delighted in showing to his friends.

On one of his trips to Boone, he showed some of his samples of ores to a lawyer with whom he was acquainted and asked him to send them to an assayer and have them inspected to ascertain the value.

The lawyer happened to think of an assayer with whom he was acquainted, so



he sent them to him. For some reason, the lawyer did not hear from the assayer. Possibly the ore was of no value, so the lawyer forgot all about the matter. In the meantime, this assayer had hired a new assistant.

While cleaning up the place, the new assistant found the little bag of ore the lawyer had sent where it had been unnoticed for months. The ore must have looked somewhat promising, so he took it upon himself to assay it. When through with the process, he found the ore very rich. Its gold content he estimated to be \$2,000 or more per ton of ore.

After this discovery, he immediately looked up the address of the lawyer who had sent the ore and headed out to visit him. When he reached his destination, he hunted up the lawyer and stated his business. The lawyer could not tell him anything regarding the whereabouts of the old prospector.

After searching all over the territory where the old prospector was supposed to have lived, they finally found that he had gone insane and was in the State Hospital for the Insane at Morganton. As soon as possible, they made a trip to the insane hospital and inquired about the old man.

The doctor in charge informed them of the hopeless condition of the old man and stated that, in his opinion, the patient would never have another sane moment in which he could be questioned. Disappointed, the two men returned to their respective homes. Soon afterward, it was reported that the old man had died.

With his death, the whereabouts of the gold mine were lost forever.

## Gold Nuggets of the Valley

From the earliest times in the history of North Carolina, gold nuggets and other traces of gold have been found in various places and at various times. Many holes and shafts still exist and stand as mute evidence of efforts spent searching for this coveted gold.

The finding of gold in such a large scope of territory along the Yadkin River and its tributaries would seem to indicate that somewhere up in the Blue Ridge, a mother lode must exist at the head of some of these streams, still hidden from the eye of man.



A good many years ago, a very rich pocket of gold was found along one of these watercourses, although the area was never developed. As the story tells it, an old lady in the community was the discoverer of this gold. She was a former resident of North Carolina, and after spending many years in the far West, she returned to her native state, where she spent the rest of her life.

The story as she told it: According to her statement, she was a young woman at the beginning of the Civil War. She had one brother who seemed to be somewhat of a prospector. On his return from one of his prospecting trips, he told his sister that he had found a gold mine that he thought was

very rich.

But, as the mine was located on land belonging to some other people, and as they did not want the owners to get wise to it, they decided to make further investigations under cover of darkness. He told his sister to get ready, and he looked up a trusted Negro manservant to go along with them. With the approach of darkness, they loaded up their tools and started on their quest.

Arriving at the spot, the girl held the torch, the manservant did the digging, and the brother, who knew all about panning for gold, did the washing. The very first few pannings proved to be very rich in gold. Nuggets the size of wheat grains were plentiful, and flakes like wheat bran were numerous.

After satisfying themselves with its richness, they carefully covered up the spot and took an oath never to reveal the location to a living soul as long as they lived. The brother began immediately to arrange to acquire the property. Still, before he accomplished this, he was conscripted into the Rebel Army and had to leave immediately for the war front.

Bidding his sister goodbye, he and the servant left at once. But before leaving, he again charged his sister not to reveal the location of the mine to anyone and promised that on his return from the war, they would buy the property and share alike in the mine. Years passed, the war ended, and the trusting sister had received no word from her brother. Nor was there any record of his being killed in action.

The sister was still hopeful that her brother would return, but as the years rolled by and news of either her brother or the servant failed to turn up, she married, and she and her husband decided to go West. Very likely, she had hoped that she might find her brother among some of the gold diggers of the West.

After a long sojourn in the far West, her husband died, and she returned to her native State, North Carolina, but she was still hopeful that her brother would return someday. She was now getting old but had plenty of "pep" and business ability. She said that she tried many times to buy the property on which the gold mine was located, but the party always refused to sell at any price.

The owners may have had some clue that it was not for the farm alone that she was so persistent in her efforts to acquire the property. When they refused to sell at any price, the old lady was determined that the gold mine would never benefit the owners. She refused to divulge its location to anyone, even her only son. She said that she had taken a solemn oath not to reveal the location to anyone and that she could not break her oath; besides, her brother might return some day.

However, there was one thing she made clear about the location of the Mine. She said it was located on a farm on one of the tributaries of the Yadkin River in Wilkes County.

A few years later, she was taken with a sickness from which she never recovered, and with her death, the secret of the gold nuggets of the valley passed into oblivion. I believe there is GOLD in them there hills! Do you? Hope you enjoyed the stories!

Good luck prospecting!

## To Cupid and His Sisters

By Aimee LaFon

When time moves slow, sleeping between  
Every thought, as viscous and adhesive

As pine pitch, I know that my  
Subconscious is preparing a

Sacrifice - a pyre to inflame  
The panoply of ancestors

Residing between each synapse  
In my soul. A full belly. A

Shrouded sight. A squint In the skin.  
All evidence of homecoming.

But who will recognize the hero  
Troubled by visions of the future,

One-eyed tired-resisas with a  
New texture, sunken senses left

Right in the flood? Who will see the  
Contrast in the Indifference?

Who will know me when my one flaw  
Is unpredictable? I will

Be a traveler, unwilling-  
ly pushed from plow and predestined

To offend you. My metamor-  
phosis intransient, but that's



All immaterial anyway.

When I leave you, have the mercy  
To light One final flame. Tell

Argos I've never left. And give  
Me one last fight before I

Surrender to my broken  
Spine.



## Origins of a Movement

By Cameron Brooks



I started my life as an activist back in 1996. It was then that I arrived at the University of Tennessee to attend school, and that fall, I volunteered in the re-election campaign of President Clinton.

It was that fall that my mind began to open up to the myriad ways to get involved in your community. One issue that began to impact my conscience was homelessness. That fall, the National Coalition for the Homeless had a presentation at the university that opened my mind. And that spring, I and a group of students formed the Alliance for Hope, a student advocacy group for the homeless.

One of the issues we worked on was the issue of voting rights for homeless people. Because of obstacles in the voting laws with residency and address requirements, many homeless people were unable to exercise their right to vote. Congressman

John Lewis, a civil rights icon from Georgia, introduced a bill that would give homeless people the right to vote. The only thing is that it was missing a senate sponsor.

My mind is a bit fuzzy looking back on when exactly this next event happened, I think probably in the fall of 1997 during our fall break, but student activists from the Alliance and myself traveled to Washington to lobby our legislators on this bill to get cosponsors and a senate sponsor.

We met with many congressmen, most notably Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr, but the highlight of our trip was meeting with Senator Paul Wellstone from Minnesota.

We had been told that Senator Wellstone would be unable to meet with us because of scheduling conflicts and that we would be meeting with his staff people. Senator Wellstone had been someone I admired for the coalition he had built among unions, farmers, the poor, and environmentalists, among other groups that enabled him to unseat a well-entrenched, well-funded incumbent, I believe in 1990. Wellstone was a champion of working people and was considered one of the most progressive legislators in the Senate.

So I was a bit disappointed when we were told he couldn't meet with us. We arrived at his Senate office and were escorted into a conference room, where we waited to meet with his staff.

Several minutes went by, and you could feel the energy in the area change as scurrying went on outside the conference room in the adjoining hall. Then, Senator Wellstone entered the room, urging us to come back to his office.

He met with us for a good bit and was incredibly charismatic. He listened to our concerns, shared his, and agreed to be the senate sponsor of the legislation. Wellstone had been rumored to be a candidate for president in 2000, as folks in the media had written stories about similarities between him and the late Senator Robert Kennedy. As we left the room, I shook his hand and told him I hoped he would run in 2000. He gave me a wink and a smile in response.

Senator Wellstone was killed in a plane crash right before the 2002 midterm elections, and one could wonder what American politics would look like if he had lived.

The work of Alliance for Hope continued into 1999 and broadened its focus to include issues of poverty and the living wage. Back then, there was a living wage campaign going on in the city of Knoxville, which Alliance participated in. That effort failed when the city council voted it down. I asked the question- if a living wage campaign could be done for city workers, why couldn't it be done for University of Tennessee workers?

The summer of 1999 was hot and tiring, but a coalition was being formed in its infancy to do just that- create a campaign to raise University employees' salaries to a living wage. Several professors and students worked on a wage study at the university to understand how impoverished UT employees were.

The launch of the UT Living Wage Campaign was to occur in March of 2000, with a teach-in on labor and human rights that would last two days, March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. In the late winter of 2000, David Mcilwaine, a United Food and Commercial Workers Organizer, and I began reaching out to UT employees about the campaign, which was met with much excitement. The group of workers most interested were members of the UT Department of Housing.

I remember one day when we were doing outreach around Melrose Hall, I saw a custodian cleaning the common area. The door was locked, so I knocked on it, and a woman named Sandy Hicks emerged. Sandy became the first UT employee to get involved in the living wage campaign. She talked to us about the backbreaking work they did, the little respect they received from management, and the poor pay. Sandy and I instantly struck up a friendship that continues to this day.

March 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2000 was a big day, as several hundred UT employees, students, and community members gathered on the plaza at the University Center for a rally that then AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Richard Trumka led.

We marched from the University Center to Circle Park and right up to Andy Holt Tower, where a delegation delivered petitions for a living wage to then-UT President Wade Gilley.

The university initially agreed to meet with the group but used stall tactics and excuses to ignore the pleas. That fall, more workers began to organize on the campus with the help of the Progressive Student Alliance, which had been the Alliance for Hope (the group changed the name). They formed United Campus Workers, which became an independent union. Other issues were taken on besides

poverty wages, including two issues the union won on: free hepatitis vaccinations for Department of Housing workers and an end to forced overtime.

I graduated in the spring of 2001 and continued to be involved with the organizing efforts of UCW. After graduating, I decided to work at the university and be a member of the UCW. I was eventually hired to work in the Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (SWORPS) shortly after 9-11.

I worked as a rank-and-file union member building the ranks of UCW for the next several years. UCW eventually became a local of the Communications Workers of America in 2003. In July of that year, I left the university and took a job as an organizer for UCW-CWA, a position I would hold until 2013.

There is much more to this story that I could write, as the struggle took on many different forms and directions over the next decade. I think what is most important, though, is that UCW grew from just a handful of several dozen members in 2003 to surpassing well over 1000 by 2008, and it expanded to every single university and college campus across the state.

Today UCW-CWA still exists, having chapters throughout the southeast and other areas of the country.

I think it illustrates that when a small handful of people come together to work for change, mountains can be moved, eventually. Change doesn't happen overnight, and the struggle is a process that doesn't take days, weeks, or years but sometimes decades. The most important thing is for folks to take the first step in the journey and get started.

Cameron Brooks is a former UCW-CWA organizer, Democratic party activist, and a candidate for Knoxville City Council at large seat A.

## Guns: An Appalachian Love Story

By Amanda Collins

*TW: Suicide, gun violence, mental distress.*

“Uncle Ricky is dead.”

I could tell by her face that my mom was working to control her emotions as I stood processing her words.

“Dead?” I asked, as if I was trying to understand the word. But at age 9, I was only trying to understand *why* he was dead. Ricky was my dad’s younger brother, in his early 30s—too young to die, but then again, his mother (my Nana Sue) had also died too young just a few weeks prior, in her early 50s. What the heck was going on?



My mother nodded, so I clarified:

“What did he die *from*?” Is there a family curse someone (me) needed to start investigating?

Her eyes shifted up and looked past the hallway, past the walls, past the yard, and farther, as she chose her words carefully.

“He has been sick for a long time.”

Ah, I understood that. Young folks don’t just up and die, but sick ones sure do...until over the next few days I realized that the answer was unsatisfactory and didn’t rule out a curse.

So as we were loading up in our cars after Ricky's graveside service, I asked an older relative, "What was Ricky sick from?"

"Sick?" she said, confused.

"Yeah, that he died from."

She scoffed loudly. "Ricky wasn't sick. He put a gun to his head and blew his brains out."

...

Guns were ubiquitous throughout my family and childhood, but not in the ways that people often assume when I say that I grew up in Alabama. Nobody was big on hunting, at least not in my lifetime, though I did hear stories of past exploits for my Granddaddy Wayne, both with a shotgun and slingshot; he even had several photographs posed with his shotgun.

On the other side of my family, my PawPaw Bill was a farmer, dairy man, tractor salesman, and horse trainer. *Of course* he had guns; when you have a barn or small business, there are always unsavory critters looking to sneak in and plunder. Plus, sometimes horses and cows get injured in ways that can't be fixed, and one of the toughest jobs of their caretakers is to kindly put them out of their misery.

What I didn't expect was that one day in my early teens, while PawPaw and I were running errands downtown, "in the city," in his fancy long car (not the farm truck), that when I put my hand underneath the front passenger seat to retrieve my fallen purse, I instead came up with a handgun.

I was so shocked that I was inadvertently waving it around, visible to God, passersby, other drivers, and any cops who might be looking. Meanwhile, he was trying to wave me to put it back, not wanting to actually grab it lest it go off, and not wanting to draw attention to the young teenager and old guy "fighting" over a gun in a fancy car downtown.

He finally spit out “Put it BACK!” in a way that broke through my confusion. As I apologized over and over, I started processing again: I think this is his gun, and he knew it was there! But there aren't any sick animals or sneaking critters here...

“PawPaw, why do you have that in the car today?”

He was driving, but his eyes looked past the road, past the buildings, past the horizon, and farther, as he chose his words carefully.

“You just never know.”

...

Well, I really didn't know, but I knew enough to understand that was the end of the conversation. Later in life, PawPaw became a talker and wanted to have the hard conversations, but while I was growing up, he had too much on his mind for that.

And maybe that's why he gifted my Uncle Eli a gun when he was 11 and I was 16. That, plus Eli helped out at home and rode his four-wheeler all over the countryside, so him having his own protection from wildcats and the occasional hostile deer was pretty wise. Shortly thereafter, he took me out to his makeshift target range on his four-wheeler and taught me about his new gun, including how to handle it safely, load and unload, hold it, and clean it. I did not retain much, but I sure did enjoy target practice.

As much as PawPaw believed in “you just never know” and arming responsible 11-year-olds, he did not believe that a gun in every hand was wise. In fact, it was his son (my dad) hitting up a close family friend for a gun—“But *why* do you need a gun, David?”--that finally signaled to PawPaw and others what my mother had been trying to warn folks about.

My dad was in a car accident at age 17, resulting in a significant traumatic brain injury. He was in a coma for six weeks, and when he woke, he was not the same. He couldn't do many things he had before, in the same ways, and he had some noticeable differences in demeanor. In many ways, he was stuck at age 17, but that

wasn't quite as noticeable at 20, or even 25, as it became later. My dad was 24 when he married my mom, and then they lived up north for a couple of years, until I was born and they moved back home, eventually settling into the house my dad had grown up in. A year later, my brother was born, and then things...became concerning.

Over time, loved ones noticed more of my dad's behaviors, as he seemed to become suspicious and irrational, especially when it came to my mom. He worked and she stayed home with us, and they would have friends over for food and games, but now back home in Alabama with her family and old friends, my mom would occasionally socialize with them in the evenings, while he stayed home with us. Or like on one memorable occasion, got his toddlers out of bed to go with him to the skating rink and verify where my mom was, who she was with, and what she was doing. I was maybe only 3 but sure did know how awkward all of that was. But neither I nor anyone else really knew how bad it was for my mom, even though she had been trying to tell others that something wasn't right.

It finally took my dad seeking a weapon to get other people to see how serious things were. Again, everybody was too busy with their own trials and tribulations, but thankfully that was a big enough red flag that people took action. The family friend did not give my dad any weapon, but he did alert my PawPaw and my mother. Very soon after, my mom, brother, and I were whisked off with some of our stuff back up to the city, to my grandparents house. Everybody worked together to keep us safe and to get my dad help, such as it was in the early 1980s.

...

I did not learn all of these details until I was older, in college. But one piece of family lore had been shared many times and was a favorite, and it was about my Granddaddy Wayne's mother, Mamie.

Somewhere in the early 1920s—my granddad might not have even been born yet—she was home alone with the children with my great-grandfather was working a night shift in town. They lived in a house about half-a-mile from neighbors, but



many of their neighbors were relatives, so even though it was a bit remote, they were not isolated.

On this particular night, Mamie and the children were going about their business, when suddenly the locked door handle began to turn and rattle, like someone was trying to open the door. No one answered when they asked who was there, but whatever was on the other side kept rattling and trying to get inside.

Mamie finally got fed up, pulled out her shotgun, and hollered: "I have a gun, and I know how to use it!" She counted down from three and shot through the door. The rattling stopped, but no one dared to open it or even peek outside.

Luckily, various neighbors had heard the shot and were on the scene within 10 minutes. They said that they tracked a blood trail down to the creek and then lost it. No one could determine if it was man or beast, and it remains a mystery.

I loved that story for many reasons, until in my adulthood I learned how Mamie died. Many years later, her husband having already passed, she learned she had cancer in her early 70s. Not wanting to be a burden to her family, Mamie calmly wrote a note, stepped out on her back porch, and shot herself.

Now, I just always wonder if she used the same gun to protect her family from her "burden" that she used to protect her children that night.

Uncle Eli may have had a gun at 11, but I also recently discovered that Granddaddy Wayne had one at 8. And he tried to use it, when he caught his dad embracing a woman who was not his mother in their barn. His older sisters and Mamie tried to calm him down, but the Sheriff ended up having to come out, and took Granddad down to the station.

...

Right now, in Alabama, Tennessee, all of Appalachia, and across the country, states are grappling with finding the right balance between gun *rights* and gun *responsibilities*. Gun law reformers have most commonly proposed Extreme Risk

Protective Orders (ERPOs), safe storage requirements, universal background checks, and closing gun show/private sale loopholes.<sup>1</sup> Many have also proposed prohibiting assault weapons and dangerous hardware.

When I look back at this sample of my family’s gun-related tragedies and near-misses, I see how common sense gun laws could have changed my own history. Ricky and Mamie could have been helped with extreme risk protective orders (ERPO) protections; they were both known to be dealing with depression and grief. My dad was kept from doing harm exactly because he sought a gun, and people who knew him were concerned—an informal red flag intervention, that was actually just luck. Safe storage might have kept me from waving a handgun around in my PawPaw’s car. Probably.

But what you can see from these Appalachian life snapshots are that even while guns wreaked damages across my family tree, we remained so dependent on them. We keep them around for occasional sport but also for bogeymen, tangible and amorphous. Protecting ourselves is front and center—even when we don’t exactly know what threatens us—and despite how easy they make it to hurt even our own selves, we don’t like the idea of not having them handy.

Jon Stewart has made the point that “inconvenience is not infringement,”<sup>2</sup> and this is something that makes sense to me when thinking about how my families view any perceived restrictions on their Second Amendment. The Constitution does not entitle anyone to unfettered access to any weapon, and it calls for regulation. Regulation—though inconvenient—is certainly not infringement of our rights. Those who can not demonstrate that they are “well-regulated” are not entitled to chaotic gun ownership.

The Appalachian approach to guns is that they are necessary—even if we don’t know what for, and even though they can cause more damage than they can help. I have

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<sup>1</sup> ***Everytown recommends these evidence-based solutions. Our research shows that common-sense public safety policies can reduce gun violence and save lives.***

<https://www.everytown.org/solutions/>

<sup>2</sup> ***Jon Stewart Slams GOP's 'Dystopian' Approach To Guns In Viral Video.***

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jon-stewart-gun-control-resurfaced-clip\\_n\\_64250075e4b01284198b2b61](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jon-stewart-gun-control-resurfaced-clip_n_64250075e4b01284198b2b61)

personally never been saved from danger by a gun, and that one story from a hundred years ago is the only one I know of.

But as a common sense weapon reform advocate—even though I’m a gun owner, even though I support a “well-regulated” Second Amendment in laws, even though I have personally been both entertained and harmed by guns—I see loved ones shut down at the mere mention of reform.

They all seem to fear some unnamed, unknown attacker at the door, rattling the handle to get in and forcibly take all weapons from all persons. They fear betrayal, and pain, and heartache that are all somehow held at bay by merely having a firearm. They fear what might happen, if they didn’t have complete control over having a weapon with them, when disturbed and distressed.

And it is exactly those fears—not love—that keeps them locked into a reliance on guns for perceived safety.

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