

# THE APPALACHIAN FREE PRESS



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## Folklore in Love!

written by Manda Wallace AKA ~banjo~

Remember picking off flower petals and reciting, "He loves me. He loves me not". Or have you ever stood and hoped (or hoped not) to catch a bridal bouquet? With the month of February being upon us, I thought how appropriate to share with you some love folklore and old wives tales in honor of Valentine's Day 2024! Here is some wedding folklore:

If a dog lies with his head in his master's doorway, it is a sign that a new member is going to be added to the household. If a butterfly comes into the house, someone will come into the family. If it rains on the wedding day, the groom will die first. If it snows on a bride, she will be a widow. A bride must not see herself full length in a mirror on her wedding day, dressed in her wedding garments. If she does this she will die within two years. When a couple is kneeling on pillows in church during the marriage ceremony, the one whose candle burns lowest will be the first to die. The first to leave the altar (bride or groom) is the first to die. After the marriage ceremony, the first one of the couple to sit down will be the first to die. It is bad luck to the bride for the wedding party to meet a funeral procession. To dream of a marriage is a sign of a funeral. Shew-wee. Can you imagine tryin' to do all these lore's, even remembering them?

Lawd, today, we be locked up for being "not right in the head". Now, if'n all that isn't enough about love, let me tell you about Appalachian Dumb Suppers! The purpose of a dumb supper is for a young, unmarried woman to see the 'spirit' of the man that she is going to marry. The meal is prepared in complete silence~no talking (dumb) whatsoever. Most people believed that you had to walk backwards while cooking and serving the dumb supper. When the dinner is done, an extra place is set at the table and the young girl (or girls if done in a group), open all the windows and doors and take their place at the table and bow their head. Sometimes all the lights are blown out, as well. The 'phantom' husbands are supposed to enter in silence. Each girl should be able to recognize the 'husband' that sits down beside her. If no one appears, it means that she will never marry.

If only a dark blob appears, it means she will die within the year. There are quite a few versions of this 'supper'. Some involve making the dinner using thimblefuls for ingredients instead of spoons and cups. In some versions, they see the 'reflection' of their husband's face in their empty plates.

The things we do for love! I'd like to thank Tipper of Blind Pig and the Acorn for the info posted on their webpage about Blind Suppers from which I got this information. Three

times throw oaken ashes in the air. Three times sit still in an old arm chair ; Three times three ties a true-love's knot, And say he will or he will not. Happy Saint Valentine's Day!

## Pastor Joseph and Old Uncle Andy

Good morning. Welcome to Jo Ann's Virtual Cafe 2024. Come on in and help yourself to a breakfast beverage. Let's talk.

Joe has a story about a storyteller. It is one of his favorites that is worth reading. It has Pastor Joseph in it. He's one of your favorite characters. It may bring a tear to your eye.

Old Uncle Andy was a kind man. Everyone around liked to hear his stories around the old pot belly stove in the local general store. Now, he could tell a story better than most. It is said that if people saw his old pickup at the store, they would stop just to hear him talk or play a game of checkers with him.

For two weeks Old Uncle Andy didn't stop by the store at all. This got people worried. They asked Pastor Joseph to go out to Uncle Andy's farm to check on him. Well, Pastor Joseph was worried too. It was not like Uncle Andy to not be at church service either. So, Pastor Joseph got in his old Model T Ford and headed out to Uncle Andy's small farm.

When Pastor Joseph got to Uncle Andy's farm, he noticed that something was not right. The farm seemed run down and not at all like it was a year ago. Pastor Joseph knocked on the door to the farmhouse. Soon, Uncle Andy opened the door. Pastor Joseph knew something was wrong right away.

Uncle Andy invited Pastor Joseph in and made some coffee on his old cook stove. They both sat at the kitchen table. "I wondered when they would send someone to check on me. You see, I have been sick a while with cancer. The old doc said I had only a year to live. It has finally caught up with me. I can hardly get around these days. I guess I don't have much time left. I sold all my farm animals and tools to pay for my medicine and bills. I have finally run out of money. I will not sell my farm. I would like to leave it to your church, Pastor Joseph, being a member and all. All of you were so kind to my wife, Rosie, before she passed. It's all I have left to give anyone," said Uncle Andy sadly.

Pastor Joseph looked at Uncle Andy. He didn't say anything until they both finish their coffee. Finally, Pastor Andy spoke, "Now Andy that's what friends and neighbors are for. You have given so much to others in all these years. I don't know anyone better than you. You were always there to help. Why everyone comes far and wide just to hear your

wonderful stories down at the general store. I have even used them in some of my sermons. Don't you worry, we will work something out for you to keep your place until the end of your days," said Pastor Joseph.

"Now, I don't mean not to be polite, but I never want to be a charity case for you or the church. I have only my pride left. I don't even have any money to have anyone take care of me," replied Uncle Andy. Pastor Joseph smiled. "By the way, the General Store manager, Old George, has your grocery order in the back of my car. He said it's on the house for you helping him every time you stopped there," Pastor Joseph laughed.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I never did any work for him at the store," replied Uncle Andy. "Now Uncle Andy you should know better. Old George knows better. He wants you to come back as soon as possible. He sent me here to take you back to his store. He said that the last two weeks without you had cost him money."

Old Uncle Andy said, "What do you mean by costing him money?" Pastor Joseph answered his question, "Old George says that when people see that you are at his store, they stop by to just listen to your stories and play checkers with you. Now when they stop, they buy things like drinks, candy and other stuff. Without you there, they go out to that fancy store down the street. You see like it or not you are what they call a "celebrity" around here. People can't get enough of your warmth and humor. Why most people I know said to drag you back to town. They miss you and want you around them. Old George said that he owes you a lot of money for coming to his store. He will help you with your money and his wife will take care of you, but you will have to live with them. They have a spare room in the back of the store all set up for you. What do you say Old Uncle Andy? That's what they call you around these parts?"

Old Uncle Andy replied, "And all I have to do is tell stories and play checkers. My wife said I was always a blow hard telling my stories down there. When I get to see her soon in heaven, I guess I will have the last laugh." Pastor Joseph said, "No, your wrong. Who do you do think set this up with Old George and his wife? Rosie knew that one day someone would need to take care of you without her around. That's why she let you spend so much time in town."

Old Andy got up from the kitchen table. He went over to a kitchen drawer. He took out some papers and handed it to Pastor Joseph. "Here's the deed to our farm. I won't be needing it anymore. It's from me and Rosie." Old Andy lived a few years longer than expected. Everyone still remembers Old Uncle Andy. There's still a rocking chair by that old pot belly stove that says on it, "Old Uncle Andy's Rocking Chair, anyone who sits in it must tell a story." They say that on some stormy nights if you are very quiet, the old rocking chair will move, and you can hear him tell one of his funny stories.

Having said that, let's share a beverage and a Native American Proverb. The Proverb of today goes like this, "The Great Creator said, "Do not waste your talents. They were given to you and for your tribe." Thanks for coming.

Enjoy your gift of today. Have a great day! We look forward to seeing you next time!

## My Better Half

By Jacob Wilkinson

I talked with myself in the moldy mirror

He frankly and intensely reminded me of my insecurities

but I nod, knowing I remind him of them too.

He gave me the answer key to the work I was stuck on

and I laughed, he found every solution so easily.

He told me about knowing my moldy friends,

and the conversations they have,

the ones we want to have.

He cried and I rushed to help but he laughed and said

tears of joy, which confused me.

I must speak with the moldy mirror again soon.

# Reflections on Appalachian English

By Luke Godsey

The Appalachian region, stretching from New York to Alabama is one of the most culturally diverse areas within the United States. This is not surprising as the Appalachian region is a part of 13 states, with a population of [26.1 million as of 2020](#). Due to its large size, Appalachia is subdivided into 5 regions. These are [North, North-Central, Central, South Central, and South](#). The majority of this book will focus on the linguistic features of the North Central, Central, and South Central regions. Particular states of interest are Kentucky, West Virginia, and the Carolinas. These regions have the most robust and diverse linguistic features of Appalachia and are often the focal point of many formal studies.

Kentucky is of particular interest because I grew up in the mountains of Pulaski County surrounded by Appalachian English. The Eastern part of Kentucky, specifically from Edmondson to Pike County, is part of the central region of Appalachia. For someone who grew up in the heartland of the mountains, it may be surprising to hear that for most of my life, I did not identify as Appalachian. In fact, it was a part of myself that I worked to hide. It wasn't until I moved to Philadelphia to attend university that I fully understood what I left behind. It took leaving my homeland to realize its beauty.

Appalachia is one of the most stigmatized regions within the United States. Many people from my region are considered incestuous and unintelligent hicks. The way we speak is looked down upon and is often deemed lesser than. Appalachian English, similar to many other non-standard varieties of English, is seen as something that needs to be fixed. I fell victim to this ideology and trained myself to speak only Standard American English (SAE) from a young age.

I have lost much of the Appalachian lexicon among other things. Now that I love my Appalachian heritage, I deeply regret hiding away my natural language. This is why I have decided to write this book. Appalachian English continues to be stigmatized. It is important to explore the rich history of this language and the complex set of linguistic rules that distinguish this language from a vernacular.

## Chapter 2: Lexicon

“What the hell did you just say?” As the days pass since my move to Philadelphia,

hearing these dreaded words has become much too common. Almost daily I run into this same interaction while having a conversation with someone from outside Appalachia. Even sometimes with people from Appalachia, which is a rare occurrence in Philadelphia. My distraught conversation partner understands that I am speaking English. It's not that they cannot understand the sounds coming out of my mouth, but that they have no clue what the words I use mean. In other words, they are unfamiliar with my lexicon. A lexicon can be simply defined as the words or vocabulary that is used in a particular language. For example, the words we use in English are different from the words used in French, so these languages have unique lexicons.

This is a relatively easy concept to understand, but what may surprise many people is that lexicon varies between dialects as well. For example, people who speak African American English (AAE) may use the word whip (a term for car) which is part of the unique AAE lexicon. This is the same with Appalachian English. Before continuing, it is important to address a blaring question about Appalachian English. What is it? Is it a dialect or language?

I have used the terms interchangeably so far, so it is important to shed light on this linguistic quandary. Linguists have still not come to a consensus on the language status of Appalachian English. Linguists often fall into two categories on the matter. Appalachian English is either a dialect or a language.

The part of this conflict in which I reside is the thought that Appalachian English is a language. Linguists, including myself, believe that there are many linguistic features that constitute the distinction of Appalachian English as a language. The language of the Appalachian region has a distinct oral history that has been isolated from the rest of the United States, unique phonology, a diverse and distinct lexicon, and much more. All of which will be discussed in detail in the upcoming chapters. The argument for the dialect is pretty simple.

These features of Appalachian English are not distinct enough for the distinction of language. For this reason, the majority of this text will refer to Appalachian English as a language but will use the dialect distinction for example purposes. As can be seen with the comparison to AAE above. Returning to lexicon, Appalachians are widely known for their unusual nouns. More specifically, Appalachian English has a wide variety of words referring to the natural world. The natural world being plants, animals, weather, and the like. A famous example of interesting Appalachian lexicon is the ever-endearing coon dog, which as the name suggests is a dog that hunts raccoons. This naming convention is an example of folk taxonomy. [This is the replacement of more complicated words with words that are more familiar.](#)

All cultures have folk-specific taxa, but it is especially present in the Appalachian mountains. Without access to higher education and major cross-cultural interactions, Appalachians began to name the things around them by using observable traits.

Take, for example, [water maple which is a noun that is used chiefly in Appalachia. The scientific name for this tree is \*Acer saccharinum\*](#); which, similar to today, was not widely known. Instead, Appalachians used observable traits of the plant to form its name with simpler and widely known words. The water maple refers to many maple varieties that grow in swamps or wet climates, also defined chiefly as the sugar maple which in itself is a folk taxa. As will be seen many times throughout this book, Appalachian English has many folk taxa of folk taxa. This is one of the reasons why this language is infamously hard to understand. [Another example of this principle is feverweed whose scientific name is \*Eryngium aquaticum\*. This is a wild perennial plant that grows in the Appalachian Mountains](#). The source of its naming comes from the practice of using the roots of the plant to make a tea that reduces fever. An example from my personal experience is the term sourgrass.

I used to spend hours outside in the garden with my Nan during the summers. I vividly remember her picking grass for both of us to chew on as we worked. She called it sourgrass because, well, it was grass and it was sour. It wasn't until my first linguistics course at university that I learned that, like water maple, this was an Appalachian folk taxon. [In fact, sourgrass refers to up to eight species of plants in which most aren't grasses](#). In the case of sourgrass, this folk taxa covers eight unique folk-specific taxa that are more widely used across the United States which can lead to great confusion.

As will be seen many times throughout this book, many linguistic features of Appalachian English have ties with religion, specifically Christianity and Catholicism. [A more common example of this is St. John's Wort which is a medicinal plant named after the biblical St. John](#). These flowers usually bloom around the feast of St. John in late June. Another plant named after a religious figure is Jacob's Ladder or *Polemonium caeruleum*. [The climbing nature and ladder-like foliage of this plant are reminiscent of the biblical story of Jacob's dream of the ladder to heaven](#). A testament to the uniqueness of Appalachian English is these next two examples of plants with religious names.

Prior to research, I assumed that the term Easter flower was a common colloquial name for the daffodil. I was correct, but not entirely. I am correct in saying that Easter flower is among the more common colloquial names, but it is in reference to a species of spring lily. I remember picking Easter flowers with my mother before church services and they were the wild daffodil. In fact, my mother is a florist and often calls the wild daffodil by the

name Easter flower. In my research, I have not found a record of the term Easter flower being used for the wild daffodil anywhere, but my community in Appalachia has been using it for decades. An example similar to this is Devil's Darning Needle which to my community is *Yucca filamentosa*. The reason for this odd naming is because the *Yucca* plant has many sharp, needle-like leaves with string-like fibers present on each leaf. I remember my Nan telling me that the devil used the leaves of the plant to sew shut the mouths of sinners. As per usual with the Appalachian lexicon, upon further research, I discovered that there is no record of Devil's Darning Needle referring to the *Yucca* plant. [Colloquial names for \*Yucca filamentosa\* include Adam's Needle and Our Lord's Candle](#), but no mention of the devil. Devil's Darning Needle seems to be a colloquial name for a variety of dragonflies (think Darner dragonflies) as well as some vining plants. The purpose of providing so many unique examples of the lexicon of Appalachian English is not only to define the Appalachian region as distinct from the rest of the United States but to also dissuade the notion that Appalachia is a homologous region.

Like with many other regions across the United States, outsiders often believe that the people of Appalachia share one culture that is consistent among all of the citizens. As the Easter flower and Devil's Darning Needle show, there is a wide variety of colloquial terms that are unique to certain regions of Appalachia. In fact, Appalachia may be one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the U.S. Communities in the region are isolated from one another by vast mountain ranges.

Two communities situated on opposite sides of a mountain may go decades without contact. This is how the unique lexicon forms; isolated pockets of communities make up Appalachia and each pocket has its own unique lexicon.

### Chapter 3: Figurative Language

If I had to choose my favorite Appalachian saying it would definitely have to be "If the Lord's willin' and the creek don't rise". Used as a confirmation of invitation, even I as an Appalachian giggle at this string of words.

This almost outdated saying is typically reserved for the older generation and although it is used seriously, people my age can't help but find it humorous. From a linguistic standpoint, however, this saying is an example of Appalachian English's deep reservoir of figurative language. For centuries speakers of all languages have been using figurative

language to express complex and abstract ideas that are difficult to understand in normal language and Appalachian English is no different.

Speakers are able to use figurative language to make nuanced comparisons that add emphasis to observations. Take for example trying to express how hot it is outside. One can easily say “It’s hot”, but what if it's really hot and you want to complain to your friend without pulling up the weather app? It would be helpful to employ a simile and groan “It’s hot as...”, but what? What is it as hot as? This is where the cultural part of figurative language comes in. What we use as a comparison for our similes and other figurative language comes from our culture and our beliefs.

The themes present throughout a majority of Appalachian figurative language are religion and nature which make sense when analyzing the Appalachian region. With the majority of the Appalachian region being within the Bible Belt, the mountains are a hotbed for Christianity. As for nature, the Appalachian Mountains host thousands of small rural communities that are at the whims of the natural world. Thousands of citizens survive and make a living from farming and Foraging.

This brings us back to the example from earlier. If the Lord’s willin’ and the creek don’t rise can be broken down into two parts with the former being more obvious in meaning. Religion is clearly represented with the Lord’s will determining if your Nan is able to make it to this week’s quilting circle. As for the creek rising, this is surprisingly rooted in a very real part of Appalachian life.

[Much of Central and Southern Appalachia floods in the late winter and early spring months frequently causing widespread destruction of property.](#) This is to say that the original use of wishing the creek don’t rise was most likely literal in its original use and while meaning has shifted to figurative with the progression of technology; there remains some reality to this saying. Another example, although less obvious, of this duality between nature and religion is the simile lower than a snake’s belly.

This saying can not be easily broken down into two parts as in the previous example. This simile means that something or someone is of very low moral standing. First, the connection to nature is clear as there are many snakes that live in the Appalachian region and their bellies are, in fact, low to the ground just as morals can be low in value. The connection to religion would not be clear to someone not familiar with Christian iconography.

The snake may be the most notorious symbol in The Bible, representing Satan and immorality. So not just the belly of the snake sliding along the ground represents

immorality, but the snake itself as a piece of iconography. To expand on the concept that Appalachian similes are based on nature; it is more accurate to say that many similes are based on activities such as hunting and farming. These practices were integral to communal success in Appalachia and still today many communities are entirely self-sufficient out of necessity.

The figurative language used by Appalachian folk can range from clear comparison to more out there points of reference. Some more clear examples include [fatter than a hog; frisky as a colt; and frost so heavy that you could track a rabbit](#). These similes are reasonably clear to a general audience and do not require much explanation. These following examples would most likely not go over well with an interlocutor (that being the person you talk to) who does not speak Appalachian English. These similes require further explanation.

First, is the phrase [useless as teats on a boar hog](#). This phrase is used to describe someone or something as useless which is clear in the language, but to outsiders, it is probably unclear how a boar hog fits into the situation. A boar hog is male which means that its teats would produce no milk, rendering them useless. Second, the phrase [slick as a butter bean](#) is used to describe something as physically slick, like a floor or a fish. What makes this phrase confusing is the term butter bean. [This is simply a colloquial name for the lima bean which is used primarily in Appalachia and the greater Inland South](#). Third, is the [phrase pretty as a speckled pup which is used to describe a person as pretty or cute, usually a crush or a loved one](#).

While this may seem self-explanatory, puppies are widely known to be cute. There is a connection to Appalachian culture that would not be salient to someone not from the region. Speckled dogs such as the Bluetick Coonhound are staple companions for hunting which is most likely why they are a subject of this simile. To put this in perspective, imagine why the phrase isn't pretty as a corgi pup. This is because the Corgi isn't important to Appalachian culture.

What these examples of figurative language go to show is that culture and tradition run deep through the heart of Appalachia. Many people have the "if it's not broke, don't fix it" mentality and this applies to their language as well. These similes have served our ancestors and continue to serve Appalachians in the modern day. In a more technical sense, Appalachian English is a highly conservative language. Specifically, AE conserves many linguistic features of late Middle English.

# Ghost

By Jacob Wilkinson

Ooooooh how I'd like to be a ghost

I haunt my place where I best am

I look my most me for all time

And act as I was most known to

The imperception attracts, of course,

But the noticing attracts more,

Haunting others, letting them take notice of me,

Build mythos, stories of me and my places

There's something so comforting about unfinished business

Knowing why you are corporeal

perhaps my unfinished business is to become a ghost