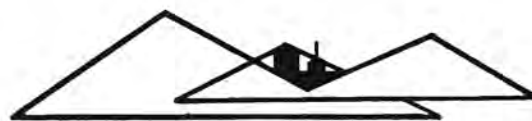


# NEWS

# LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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## Coal Strike Story Weatherford Winner

*We Be Here When the Morning Comes*, a graphic and moving inside view of the 1973-74 strike at the Brookside and Highsplint coal mines in Harlan County (Ky.), was honored as the winning work in the 1975 W. D. Weatherford Award Competition at a luncheon held in Berea on May 1. The award is given annually for outstanding and effective published writing about Appalachia, in memory of the late W. D. Weatherford, Sr., a long-time pioneer in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations.

Bryan Woolley, Louisville *Courier-Journal* staff writer, was on hand to receive the \$500 prize on behalf of himself and Louisville *Times* photographer Ford Reid. Also recognized was Jesse Stuart, who was presented with a Special Weatherford Award for "his lasting contribution to the national understanding of Appalachian culture through his fiction and poetry." His award carried a prize of \$200. The prizes are donated by Alfred H. Perrin of Berea.

In creating their prize-winning book, Woolley and Reid lived with a miner's family during the climactic weeks of the strike in the summer of 1974; with tape recorder and camera they explored and recorded the thoughts and feelings and surroundings of the strikers.

In 1975, the year for which the awards were made, Jesse Stuart published an anthology of poetry, *The World of Jesse Stuart*. The award was not given simply for this one book, however.

For the first time in the six-year history of the Weatherford Awards, which are jointly sponsored by the Appalachian Center and Berea's Hutchins Library, works were given honorable mention. Two books were so honored - *The Border South States*, by Neal R. Peirce, and *Mountain Measure*, by Francis Pledger Hulme. Peirce's book is a sharp-eyed study, in the John Gunther tradition, of people and politics in five states of the Border South. *Mountain Measure* is an "Appalachian verse notebook" and includes photos by Robert Amberg.

Previous winners of the Weatherford Award were Ben A. Franklin of the New York *Times*, for his coverage of issues related to the coal mining industry in Appalachia; David H. Looff, M. D., for his book *Appalachia's Children*; Eliot Wigginton and the student editors of *Foxfire* magazine; and the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. No award was made for 1974. Previous



Award donor Alfred Perrin, Bryan Woolley, Jesse Stuart

recipients of Special Awards were Robert Coles and Wilma Dykeman.

Here and in the following columns we present excerpts from each of the four books honored at this year's luncheon. We hope that the selections are long enough to allow you to compare your own opinions with the conclusions of the judges; in any case, they should convey something of the flavor of these prize-winning works.

### From

*We Be Here When the Morning Comes*

(Copyright © 1975 by the University Press of Kentucky)

### ON THE HIGHSPLINT PICKET LINE

The Union meeting that Sunday afternoon at the Evarts Multipurpose Center was tense. The big meeting room was hot and stuffy, and miners looked longingly

out the windows at children splashing in the swimming pool that Great Society money had built. Many of the men who had stopped by Deaton's Grocery earlier in the day were there, and perhaps a hundred more. Their tempers were still smouldering. Mickey Messer, the crew-cut, bearish president of the infant Brookside local, confiscated a reporter's tape recorder and placed it on the table beside him. "We don't want no recordings of our conversation today," he said.

It was a special meeting, called to ponder the shooting of Lawrence Jones, to vent grief and anger, and to think of what to do next. "I thought this was 1974, not 1931," Messer told his union brothers, "but it looks like I was wrong."

A retired miner rose and counseled an eye for an eye. "We've been shot at and beat up and arrested," he said, "and we ain't done nothing. It's time we commenced to do something. There's lots of trees and bushes on these hills alongside this road. They'll hide a lot of men. We oughta get some good men with high-powered rifles up there, and pick off these gun thugs when they drive by. There wouldn't be nothing to it at all."

The union organizers rose and pleaded for patience. That's just the kind of thing the company wants to happen, they said. They're just waiting for somebody to lose patience and blow up the tippie. Then it will all be over. No, don't be provoked. The picket line is the place to show your colors. Show up at Highsplint in the morning, they said, and bring a carload of friends with you.

In the pre-dawn morning, Louie hunched over his kitchen table. He sipped at his strong black coffee, then poured it into another big cup on the table, sipped again, then poured it back into the first cup. "Coffee cools faster that way," he said, and he hated to be late to the picket line. . . .

He left the cups one-third full on the table and put on a tan sweater. He lifted his single-shot twelve-gauge from its corner by the door, opened the breech, and removed the shell he had placed there before he went to bed. From the top of the television he picked up the five shells he had bought the day before at Deaton's Grocery and stuffed them into his pocket. He switched out the light and stepped into the darkness toward the old Volkswagen parked just beyond the border of marigolds and zinnias. With care he laid the shotgun across the back seat.

The engine groaned like an old dog rudely awakened,  
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From

*The World of Jesse Stuart*

Copyright © 1975 by Jesse Stuart

### I NEVER TRIED TO WRITE A BOOK

No, Sir, I never tried to write a book,  
My pencil traced the sounds of high winds blowing  
And sketched a willow-aggravated brook  
And made some pictures of the green grass growing.  
Word-drew a peddler in a thread-bare suit.  
Word-drew a new moon piece of cleared ground,  
It pictured oak-brown leaves and red plum fruit,

White windy skies and water's lonely sound.  
The hand that touched the pencil and the brain  
That told the hand to shove the pencil on  
Did not write this for profit, loss, and gain.  
They wrote before my body's food was gone,  
For words are slow to buy a poet bread.  
Sometimes his words will sell when he is dead.

### SING OUT, WILD HEART

Sing out, wild heart! Sing in your windy mood!  
Sing to the playful wind. Sing your gay song.  
Sing out, wild blood! Sing songs of your wild blood!  
Sing loud! Sing gay! Sing! Sing! Go sing your song!  
This is your life. This is your native land.  
These are your hills, your rivers, and your bottoms.  
Sing out your songs, your people, and your land,  
Through winters, springs, the summers and the  
autumns.  
Sing! Sing of ox carts, wagon wheels, and plows!  
Sing of the little world where you belong.  
The round-log shacks, cornfields, mules, and spotted  
cows.  
Sing, poet! Sing! Sing wildly wild your song!  
Remember song was in you from beginning,  
Back in your sires in drinking and in sinning.

From

*Mountain Measure*

Copyright © 1975 by Francis Pledger Hulme

### DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

The old fox is finally run to earth,  
Who for dim, musky years retraced his tracks,  
Baffled the hounds and had his nightly will  
In chicken yard and turkey pen, slipping  
Before the screaming feist through the dark woods  
Until he vanished into the morning mist.  
Now breath is enemy to lungs and heart.  
His bloody gasping fills the shallow cave  
They drove him to and where he finds escape  
Blocked by the rock and mud piled at the rear.  
The hounds and hunters circle him and yell.  
The feist cannot reach him under the bank,  
But lifts his leg and fouls the snarling face.  
The farmer says, By God, we've got him now.  
He's eaten his last hen at our expense.  
Stand at the sides—he can't get out the back.  
His sons, big raw red bulls of men, bring picks  
And shovels, batter the muddy bank, and call  
And whistle to whining hounds and frantic feist  
Whose little feet fling gravel like a stream.  
His coat stinking with burrs and beggars-lice,  
His tail a rope that beats his legs, the fox—  
Merciless eyes glare at merciless eyes—  
Shatters his teeth against the shovel. The hounds  
Spring in and savage him, tear out his throat,  
And toss him like a sack into the ditch.  
The farmer slices off his tail, the sons  
Gather the tools and collar the hounds. The feist,  
Shrieking, escapes their hands and shakes the fur.  
Thin rain begins to sift through the dark woods.



At the award luncheon, Berea President Willis Weatherford, Jr., (l.) and Mrs. Weatherford talk with John ("Junior") Deaton and Darrell Deaton, union men featured in prize-winning book.



Buddy Presley

From

*The Border South States*

Copyright © 1975 by Neal R. Peirce

There is probably little hope for West Virginia until its politics undergo radical and complete reform. Just as extractive industry dominates the economy, an appallingly large number of state's politicians have learned to be extractive—to take out of the system far more than they put in. Theodore H. White in his *The Making of the President: 1960*, put West Virginia in "that Jukes family of American politics" where politics are "the most squalid, corrupt, and despicable." (The other states White included then were Indiana, Massachusetts, and Texas; today one would certainly delete Massachusetts from the list but quickly add New Jersey and Maryland. In 1960 it was not yet clear how quickly suburban-type political corruption would rise to compete with the old rural form symbolized by West Virginia.)

Sheer greed has a lot to do with the state's corrupt politics; one is hard put to find another reason why William Wallace Barron, West Virginia's Governor in the early '60s, was only one of a dozen Democratic officials and hangers-on who went to jail for bribery, tax evasion, or, in Barron's case, paying a \$25,000 bribe to the foreman of a jury when he was on trial for collecting more than \$200,000 in kickbacks from companies receiving state contracts. Barron pleaded guilty to the jury-tampering charge and was sentenced to 25 years in federal prison. The "Statehouse Gang" he led in the 1961-65 period fleeced West Virginians of millions of dollars—all in addition to the longstanding

and legal system of "voluntary" monthly contributions from state employees to the "flower fund," otherwise known as the Democratic State Committee. Even Republican Governor Moore, elected in 1968 on a pledge to restore "honesty and integrity in the governmental affairs of West Virginia," was alleged to have omitted many thousands of dollars of taxable income from his federal tax returns.

On the local level, the corruption is just as endemic but probably caused as much by simple hunger as undue avarice. Lucky is the man who can get elected sheriff or county assessor, doubling or tripling his income in the process. School board elections are especially bitter, since they provide countless possibilities for contract favoritism and all sorts of jobs for members' friends and relatives, often the only visible alternative to the dole. The election fraud all this occasions is staggering. As recently as 1968, for instance, graveyard registrations and the like had pushed the number of registered voters higher in number than the total voting-age population in 33 of the 55 counties. In Mingo County in southern West Virginia, there were 29 percent more registered voters in 1964 than the total of the actual adult population. The election day syndrome of West Virginia includes absentee voter abuses, "a swaller and a dollar" (half pints of whiskey and cold cash that encourage citizens to let poll watchers "assist" them in marking their ballots), incredibly long and complex ballots, and finally candidate "slates" endorsed by local machines in exchange for money or favors. The citizen tends to think of the politician as a character who comes around every four years promising to fix his road but never does. Corruption and inept performance in office are accepted fatalistically, a situation in which the expectation becomes father to the fact. ■



## WE BE HERE *from page 2*

then coughed into life. Louie flicked on the headlights, and then the windshield wipers to clear the dew. "If the company's dumb enough to try to work them men today, there'll be killing," he said. "It'll turn into a blood war." . . .

Louie's car sped up the narrow, winding highway, past Deaton's Grocery and the tiny sheet-metal Ages post office, through the formerly company-owned villages of Verda and Kildav and Draper, around a curve near the Multipurpose Center where a miner and three company-paid sheriff's deputies were killed in a labor-trouble shootout in 1931, to Mack's Supermarket in the center of Evarts. The parking lot and roadside were crowded with cars, trucks, and campers, some practically covered with UMWA bumper stickers. Men moved among the vehicles, appearing briefly in headlight beams, then disappearing into the darkness again.

Suddenly the vehicles, almost one hundred of them, filled with armed and angry men, began moving onto the highway again, this time in convoy. They rolled quickly through Coates to the village of Shields, turned off the highway, crossed the L&N tracks, then pulled up in line along a narrow dirt road that ran parallel to the highway, but slightly above it, along the hillside. The parked cars formed a rampart between the highway and the miners. Behind the men was a small corn patch and then the steep mountainside. Its thick second-growth timber and underbrush were slowly greening in the dawn's gray first light. Beyond the rooftops of the village, the still black ridges loomed above their fog-laden hollows like the humps of a gargantuan monster rising out of a misty sea. . . .

The men, some still yawning and rubbing sleep-swollen eyes, crawled out of the cars into the morning and milled into small clusters, exchanging off-color jokes, inquiring about the success of garden crops, bumming cigarettes and coffee from those who had remembered to bring them. Every miner was armed: young men with revolvers holstered and tied to their legs, gunslinger fashion; grizzled, emaciated pensioners with old .45 automatics tucked into their waistbands; squirrel-hunters with shotguns cradled in their arms.

"Hey, buddy, that's a real oldie you got there!"

"Yeh, my daddy carried this back in the thirties. It's a scabgetter from way back."

"Well, it's likely to get another chance today."

Two State Police cars pulled off the highway and parked just down the hillside from the miners. "I hope them boys knows enough to get out of the way when the scabs come," an ancient pensioner said. "I wouldn't want to hurt no state polices."

"I heared that the federal mediator told Duke not to try to work Highsplint till Thursday."

"If they got any sense, they won't try at all."

"Yeh, buddy, but they ain't got no sense."

After a while, the police cars pulled away and disappeared over the hill toward Harlan. The miners remained until seven o'clock, smoking, talking, peering down the highway toward the same hill where the company convoy would appear, if it was to appear. Then, in small groups, they got back into their cars and drove slowly away.

Ruby prepared a breakfast of eggs, biscuits, gravy, sausage, and coffee. Louie ate, then fell asleep on the sofa.

## EYE on Publications

*The Buffalo Creek Disaster*, by Gerald M. Stern (Random House). It was an "act of God," said a spokesman for the Pittston Company after a jerry-built dam of one of the company's subsidiaries collapsed in February 1972, flooding West Virginia's Buffalo Creek Valley with more than 130 million gallons of water and sludge - - which poured through scattered mining camps at speeds up to 30 m.p.h. Weeks after the disaster the 17-mile valley still looked like Berlin after a visit from the Eighth Air Force. Gerald M. Stern, a Washington lawyer whose firm (Arnold & Porter) didn't share the coal company's view of God's complicity, was the chief counsel for the survivors in what grew into one of the biggest lawsuits in American history. The book tells how he went about nailing the coal company.

*The Thread That Runs So True*, by Jesse Stuart, with essays by Thomas D. Clark and Wilma Dykeman (University Press of Kentucky). A reissue of the classic autobiographical story of a young teacher in the Eastern Kentucky hills 40 years and more ago.

*Sayings and Doings*, by Wendell Berry (gnomon). These poems, says the author, "were overheard and learned in my native part of the country."

*Things Appalachian*, edited by William Plumley, Marjorie Warner and Lorena Anderson (MHC Publications -- Morris Harvey College). An anthology of essays, fiction and poetry by and about Appalachians. It's a follow-up to *The Wooden Tower*. Both of these books, which are designed for classroom use, are produced in cooperation with the West Virginia Department of Education, with which two of the editors are associated.

*Merrily Strum: Mountain Dulcimer for Children*, by Mary Catherine McSpadden (Dulcimer Shoppe). A how-to book that starts from absolute scratch; you don't have to know a note.

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