

STORIES AS GENERATIONAL BONDING AGENTS

William Lynwood Montell

(Copyright 1999)

A sense of place, or a consciousness of one's physical and cultural surroundings, is a fundamental human experience. It seems especially strong where people in a neighborhood, a community, a city, or region, possess a collective awareness of place and pass it along in various expressive forms.¹ One such expressive medium is represented by the stories people tell.

Were it not for word of mouth transmission, the bulk of historical information about gender and ethnic groups, ancestral family members, and their life and times, would be forever lost.

Generally, the only formal information we have about these people are names found only on tax rolls, church records, pension lists, and census records.

Even census records and other formal documents are sometimes in error. Two examples relative to my research in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland area across the years should illustrate this point. The first example involves three Haile [pseudonym] families that lived in southern Wayne County, Kentucky, almost astraddle the Kentucky-Tennessee state line.

Neither of these families appeared on the 1900 federal census roll for Wayne County. Nor were these three isolated families listed on the adjacent Pickett County, Tennessee, roster for that year. I know that they lived along the state line at that time, as numerous persons whom I interviewed about homicidal behavior in this sub-regional area provided an abundance of information that corroborated the presence of these families there in 1900. Additionally, I saw the decayed foundations of all three cabin-homes while researching the area in the 1980s.

Given the fact that members of these three families had killed some local residents, or had themselves been killed, I could only assume that the federal census taker was afraid to go back there for fear of being put into a life-threatening situation.

On the other hand, the census taker may not have known that there were any residents living in this totally isolated section of the county. Whatever the answer, the Hailes were not listed on the 1900 census roll.

The second example relative to incorrect census data involves an elderly woman who helped me in so many ways in providing information for three of my books about the bi-state Upper Cumberland area. This Pickett County, Tennessee person, who shall be listed here as Ona Baxter, was born in 1901 to her unmarried mother. The two of them lived with the mother's parents throughout Ona's teenage years. I knew this but I never knew that Ona was born out of wedlock.

One day while searching through the 1910 Pickett County census for a totally different reason, I saw the census entry for Ona's grandparents. It listed the grandfather by name, his date and place of birth, along with his occupation. The same information was provided for his spouse, listing her relationship to the head of the household as "Wife." Likewise the same data was provided for their daughter (Ona's mother), and she was listed as "Daughter" of the head of the household.

Then I saw Ona's name. The slot asking for her relationship to the head of the household contained the word "Boarder." Little Ona was listed not as a "granddaughter," which would admit illegitimacy to those who knew. She was listed as a "Boarder," thus implying to any anonymous researcher that the head of the household had taken her in as a community orphan child.

Indeed, sometimes it takes stories to clarify formal records. Oral narratives often offer historical information that is not recorded in formal documents, and these stories also provide us with perspectives on people who were silenced by the absence of written records.

For those of us who grew up in Appalachia and other parts of the Upper South, the place where we were born and/or grew up, and the people who were present at that time, were and are one and inseparable. We are still wedded to the place, at least in memory, and the place holds powerful memories. Country singer Joe Diffie sings a fantastic song that bears the title "Home," a song that brings back powerful memories to those persons who grew up in rural settings during the pre-World War II days. The song mentions swimming holes, fishing poles, and the feel of a muddy road between one's toes. The lyrics also bring back memories of back porch swings, easy chairs, and the smell of Sunday suppers on the stove. Diffie's song ends with the words, "My footsteps carry me away, but in my mind, I'm always going home."²

As I perceive it, there are three major cultural factors that bind people together, especially families, race and ethnic groups, and communities, and tie them to the place where they grew up.

The first of these three factors are the meaningful historical ties they maintain with their ancestors and with the old family homeplace(s). Many older Appalachian residents are

well-acquainted with dead family ancestors whom they never knew personally. They heard parents and grandparents talk and tell stories about these older generations to the extent they feel that they know the ancestral dead as well as the living.

I have seen family photographs in which someone is holding the picture of a deceased family member. They are saying to the viewer, "My sweet husband/wife/child/father/mother/or whomever is portrayed in the picture, is deceased, but she/he is still very much a part of this family, and always will be."

The dead may leave us but they don't go too far away, do they? As a matter of fact, on occasion some previous residents of my study area, the Upper Cumberland of Kentucky-Tennessee are still brought "home" for burial. They want to be interred alongside other members of the family. A man from California wrote to me in 1996 relative to the books I have written about the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland. His letter contained the words, "I have not been home now for approximately forty years, but one of these days I'll be coming home for good. I want to be buried in the Mt. Gilead Cemetery, where several generations of my people ahead of me are buried."

The second factor that binds people together, especially rural residents, is the fact that until the post-World War II era people lived in harmony with nature and the natural environment. Back then, many families relied almost completely on agricultural self-sufficiency. That is to say, they grew what they ate and ate what they grew. When I was a child in the Appalachian foothills, the fields were small in size. And they were hilly and rocky, just full of sassafras bushes--sassafras bushes that had to be grubbed out of the ground each year! And believe me, you haven't felt pain until you've been slapped across the face by a sassafras bush on a hot August day!

Back at that time, we had very few medical doctors and virtually no licensed veterinarians to turn to during emergencies. I shall never forget the time when my father and I went to a bloodstopper, Old Man John Humes, to see if he could stop bleeding in animals. The four male members of our immediate family had just castrated a mule, and it was bleeding profusely. Just as we left, my father said to my grandfather and brother, "It'll take me and Lynwood about three minutes to get over to John Humes' house. It'll likely take him two-three minutes to stop the bleeding, if he can stop it at all. So, watch and see if the bleeding stops in 5-6 minutes."

My father and I drove over to the Humes place. The very moment we pulled into the yard, Humes walked out and asked, "What's wrong Willie?"

My father told him what had happened, and that we had come over to see if he could stop the mule from bleeding to death.

"Yep, I believe I can," Humes responded, as he turned to walk alone behind his log cabin home.

In less than two minutes, he had walked the circle around his cabin, performing the necessary secret ritual as he walked alone around the house. When he came around the structure, he looked at my father and stated, "Go on back home. Your little mule is all right now."

When we returned to the barn, the mule had indeed stopped bleeding. Grandfather said, "You won't believe this, but in about exactly five and one-half minutes that mule suddenly stopped bleeding."

It is said that John Humes passed along his hidden bloodstopping secret to his daughter, who then passed it along to her son. The secret for doing this had to be passed along to the opposite gender, and once this was done, the person who transmitted the information lost his/her ability to continue being a bloodstopper.

Until the advent of World War Two, for recreation people played with toys that were crafted at home. Some of these toys would kill you; some wouldn't. There were still others that would make you wish you were dead if you got hit with one of them. Have you ever been hit on the side of your head by a big, fat, juicy corncob--a corncob that was wet because it was picked up from the driveway of the barn where cow manure and urine had soaked it good?

The third factor that binds people together consists of the social relationships known and practiced by local people, then and now. Some examples include sitting up with the dead and dying, and telling stories about them; or loafing by the men and boys at the community grocery store in earlier times. Some of the older women also hung out at the local store on occasion when I was a mere lad.

I shall never forget Sarah Susan Baxter [pseudonym], who was typically present at the store every Saturday morning. One morning, all those present were talking about dipping snuff and chewing tobacco. Sarah Susan, who always talked with hillbilly dialect, chimed in with commentary about her two granddaughters, Norma and Alta Pearl [psuedonyms], who also had chewed tobacco at one time in their early lives. Sarah Susan stated, "You know, that Normy was only three yars [years] old when she larndt [learned] how to chow tobaccy. But that Alty Pearl, she was almost five yars old before she larndt how to chow."

Social relationships also include the storytelling that took place when people came together, especially in one of their

homes. They told scary stories, stories about local characters, and they talked about people who had been dead for decades. I'll come back to storytelling in just a moment.

The fourth factor that bound rural community residents together were the rural/urban relationships in the form of radios, automobiles, and telephones that affected us all as children. All through the Depression years of the 1930s, most families had no radio. Until the late 1930s, the only radios in my home community were owned by two men who were veterans of WWI. Every Saturday night, families for two miles or so in all directions would gather at one of the two homes to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. I always dreamed on the time when I would be able to stay awake until the Opry signed off the air at midnight. Actually, I never made it past 9 o'clock!

After my family got our first radio in 1938, I ran home from school every day in time to listen to "Ann Ford, A Woman Looks At the News," "Stella Dallas," and "Portia Faces Life."

I was a real soapy! My afternoons concluded with the programs "Just Plain Bill" at 4:30, and "The Lone Ranger" at 5:00. Then it was chore time.

As for automobiles, I grew up so accustomed to mudholes that I honestly thought that Dodge automobiles were made to dodge mudholes. A fellow from a county adjacent to the one in which I grew up, told me in 1993 that he not only thought the exact same thing about Dodge cars, he also thought that Ford cars were built to ford creeks.

To reiterate what I have stated thus far, I deem oral narratives as the strongest force in creating and maintaining a strong sense of identification with state, region, community, and homeplace that many of us know, appreciate, and understand.

Most people in the southern Appalachian region typically utilize four kinds of stories in talking about the present and the past. These are personal stories, family stories, community stories or legends, and region-wide stories.³

The contents of these four kinds of stories will vary from one part of the country to another, depending largely on local culture and historical background, but these four narrative categories are actually appropriate to people in all parts of the United States, regardless of gender, race, or ethnic identification.

From this point forward, my presentation will define and illustrate these four narrative categories, then end by commenting on the way in which personal and oral traditional stories may function in people's personal lives.

Personal narratives will be the first to be defined and illustrated. A personal narrative or story is one that says, in essence, "I was there, I heard, or saw, or personally experienced the action, and this is the way I remember what took place." When we frequently tell of things that happened to us personally, these events become bonafide stories as we re-tell them; and they typically remind us of the places where the events occurred.

Let me illustrate by describing my first personal encounter with racism and prejudice against black people. It took place at the Visitors Center atop Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga, Tennessee. My parents, along with several other parental couples in northcentral Monroe County, Kentucky, chartered a bus back in the late-1930s, when I was a mere lad, to take us to the Great Smoky Mountains, then to Lookout Mountain.

When we pulled into the parking lot at the Visitors Center on Lookout Mountain, we got off the bus and went inside the center. The first thing that caught my eye was a water fountain located across the lobby. Having grown up in a time and place when houses did not have running water, I was thrilled to see this water fountain and went running across the lobby to gulp down some of that wonderful stuff. Just as I began drinking from the fountain, a white custodian came running over, yelling out to me, "Boy, ain't you got a lick of sense? Can't you read nothing?"

He pointed to a sign located above the water fountain, then proceeded to shove me so hard that my head literally banged against the floor. Finally, I raised up and saw the sign to which he referred, a sign that had the word "Colored" imprinted on it.

Knowing that only black people were to drink at that fountain, I didn't go back to it. That episode made me keenly aware that whites and blacks were not supposed to mix and mingle in certain places. Until then I had no knowledge of racism. This is a story that I typically relate to my students, both black and white, when I ask them to recall their first encounter with racism.

Sharon Burkeybile, who is liaison between Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, recalled in 1994, for the Kohn-Montell book, Always A People, what racism was like during her early childhood years:

"When I was a child at the Whitebird School in Picher, Oklahoma, my cousins moved over from Quapaw.

They were Quapaw and Miami--full-blooded. Some of the other [white] kids called them "Niggers." I was ready to take on the whole elementary school when

they'd say that. I can remember saying, "If they are, I am, too! Don't you say that." 4

In that same book is found a life history of Grace Thorpe, daughter of football All-American Jim Thorpe. Here's what she had to say regarding some childhood memories of her famous father:

"Some of my special memories of childhood have to do with my father because he was an athlete. A very special memory goes back to the time I was at Haskell Institute. I remember Dad kicking a football from center field there in Haskell Stadium over one goal post, then turning around and doing it the other way.

So that's one of my very first memories. Dad was in his middle thirties when I was born. So he was forty by then.

"I recall that it was always fun to see him. He traveled a lot, so he wasn't around the house all the time. So I remember how glad I was to see him. I'd run, and he'd pick me up and throw me up about ten feet in the air and catch me. So I remember how big and strong he was and what kind of fun it was." 5

Ed Napier, native of Floyd County, Kentucky, located in the Appalachian area, told me of the time when he first learned that the United States and Japan were at war:

I was born in 1935 over in Floyd County. We didn't get a daily, even weekly, newspaper. We didn't have electricity, and we didn't even have a battery-powered radio when I was a little boy. So when the U.S. got into war with Japan, it was two months before we learned about it.

What happened was this. My granddaddy went out one weekend to see his brother who lived in an adjacent county. When he came home, Granddaddy told us that we were at war with Japan. Then, he went on to say, "I don't know why in the world the U. S. government had to fit a war over some woman named Pearl Harbor."

I'll swear, he really said that. 6

Not only do first-person accounts describe sensational events that took place when we were children, first person narratives are also used to describe the process of growing up, and perhaps what it was and is like to receive proper recognition from parents upon reaching adulthood. In 1982, Ward Curtis, an elderly white male in southcentral Kentucky, told me

that it was common up until the World War I era for some fathers in the neighborhood in which he grew up to set their sons free when they turned 21. When I asked him to elaborate, he told me that indeed his father had set him free, but that he was set free on his 18th birthday, not his 21st. What it amounted to, he commented, was that in the poor families of the area, sons were expected to leave home and work on their own when they turned 21. If they remained at home, they were expected to help purchase needed food and other items for the household. 7

I included Curtis' account of being set free by his father in my book, Upper Cumberland Country, published in 1993. Not long after the book was published, a woman from Texas wrote to me stating that until she read my book she had always wondered what the story in her family was all about by claiming that her great grandfather was set free by his father when he turned 21.

The woman went on to say, "I knew that my great grandfather was not black; he was not a slave. And yet, it was only black people who were set free. What was that story all about, I wondered, as I knew that we were white, not black. After reading your book, I understood what whites being set free meant."

Back in the days when steamboats ran the Cumberland River, in addition to the major landings that lined the river, virtually every farmer who owned property bordering the river had a private landing. If a farmer had a quantity of corn or other farm produce he wished to sell, he would flag down a passing steamboat by waving his hands and yelling aloud so that the captain or deckhands could hear him. The boat would then dock and pick up his agricultural products. In like fashion, if the farmer or his wife had ordered goods from a distant merchant, the boat would stop to deliver these items. Lena Howell Martin of Jackson County, Tennessee recalled for me the time her little daughter playfully signaled for a boat to land:

"When my second daughter was four or five years old, she and a friend were out playing. My daughter said, "There's a steamboat coming. Let's flag it down!!"

"Well, she went to waving and flagging down, and the captain went to blowing his whistle for the landing. Like to have scared my little daughter to death. She ran to the back of the house where it wasn't underpinned, and she crawled back under the floor of the house.

"Well, my little girl didn't know it, but I had ordered a bed for her, and the boat was stopping to put the bed off here at the landing. But she thought she's the one that flagged the boat down. Like to have scared her to death!" 8

The second variety of narratives comes under the category of family stories (or second-hand stories). These are the accounts that say, "I wasn't there personally, but my grandmother was, or my great-grandfather was, and here's how my parents recalled hearing them tell what happened." In other words, you are now telling someone else the story as it was told to you.

Second-hand, or family, stories help people who moved away and reside elsewhere to retain identity with family and community members in or around the old homeplace, as well as members of the family now deceased. Sometimes, even, family or second-hand stories recall to mind certain ancestors three, four, or five generations removed in time. Some people are notorious for claiming kinship with anything that has two legs, and for hanging onto the past as though it were a part of the present. For example, in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland region a fifth cousin is often referred to as a third cousin twice removed.

Persons referred to in family narratives may possess certain positive attributes that we may secretly wish to emulate. My paternal great grandmother, Granny Harris Witty, was such a person. I recall hearing her tell of the time during the Civil War when she was confronted by some members of a guerrilla outfit when she was only five years old. It had been her job each afternoon to go into the pasture field to find the cows and drive them to the barn to be milked.

On this particular day during the Civil War, Granny had gone to get the cows. She stopped to rest for a moment under a very large white oak tree. Some of the tree roots were above ground, making a natural seat. Granny sat down on one of the big roots. She threw her head back and began to sing at the top of her voice. She thought that only the cows would hear her!

Suddenly, a bunch of guerrillas stepped out of the bushes.

"Sing that song again, little girl," one of them commanded her.

She was scared to death, but did sing as she was told to do. Then she watched as they headed out across the field to rob her parents' smokehouse.

Another story told by Granny Harris Witty has to do with her husband, Lindsey Bird Witty, who was born October 7, 1855.

Bird Witty came down with an illness that continues to make Granny a real heroine in my family tradition.

Bird Witty and Granny were married in the late 1870s and became the parents of Ella, Edgar, and Benton Witty. About 1890, perhaps earlier, Bird was diagnosed as having consumption

[tuberculosis]. Back at that time, it was commonly believed that the fresh air on the Great Plains would cure just about any ailment. So Granny hooked up a team of horses to a covered wagon, loaded her sick husband and three children in the wagon, and headed for Kansas.

She drove the horses all the way, never allowing her sick husband or young children to take turns at driving. Her account claims that after a few days of rest there in Kansas, she took her sick husband to a doctor. The doctor examined him, called her aside, then whispered in her ears, "Lady, does your husband want to be buried in Kentucky?" "Wh-h-y-y-y, yes!," she responded in a broken voice, "Why do you ask?"

"Well, you'd better get started home soon," he told her.

"He isn't going to live very much longer."

After three weeks of additional rest, Granny once again hooked up the team, loaded her sick husband and children in the wagon, and headed home for Kentucky. They arrived during mid-summer. Great Granddaddy Witty lived for an additional three months, then died at age 38.

To further illustrate family narratives, I'd like to include a family legend, contained in Always A People, told by Don Greenfeather, Tribal Chairman of the Loyal Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma:

I've got an aunt, Lois Greenfeather, in Miami, Oklahoma, who tells the stories of long ago when our people left Ohio and lived in Kansas and on down to the present. The way she tells them always makes you feel proud, makes you respect the past.

One thing that always stuck in my mind is one of our elderly members who was in the removal from Kansas to Oklahoma. His name was Henry Greenfeather. When he left, the only thing that he was allowed to take [with him] was a young shoat, a young hog, and everything else was left behind. He carried that young pig almost all the way to Oklahoma. When he got to Ft. Scott, Kansas, he died before he came on into Oklahoma, and he's buried there in Kansas. As I heard my aunt Lois tell that story, she would elaborate on it and put in a lot of details. I often wondered how it was when he was told, "You're going to have to leave again." I wondered how it was to decide if you were going to try to take anything. He wanted that young shoat." 9

African Americans also have an endless trove of family narratives that need to be recorded. Kate Anders Tooley,

African American resident of Monroe County, Kentucky, told in 1961 about her mother growing up during slavery times on a local plantation. According to Tooley, the white man who owned her mother was cruel to his slaves. In Kate Tooley's words:

The way he done them when they was working in the field, he'd build himself a scaffold about middle ways of the field, and he'd get up on that with a big whip. He'd put them [slaves] in the field to working where he could see them from one end of the field to another.

If they didn't work just like fightin' fire, when they'd come back to the middle of the field where he was at, he'd shout, "Hey, you niggers, you ain't doing nothing." He'd walk over and just cut the blood out of them.

They'd tell him they's going as fast as they could go, but he'd make 'um just get under the lash and go on. 10

Community stories or legends comprise the third variety of oral narratives that people often recount. Such stories may be first person accounts told by someone about events within their lifetime, or they can be descriptions of something that occurred 200 years ago. Community legends exist because many people in the area know them and recount them at every opportunity as part and parcel of shared history. Many of these stories are based in fact; others are unverifiable hearsay. But whether true, or simply believed to be true, such stories provide people with a strong sense of belonging to a particular community, or to a specific race or ethnic group within the area.

By way of illustration, there are numerous buried or lost treasure legends that tell of the return of Native Americans to portions of the Appalachian uplands to claim their ancestral treasure. These Indians cannot find the treasure, however, as stream courses have changed, or rock ledges have caved in and the entrances to former caves are no longer discernable.

There are also countless eccentric character stories that describe, for example (1) the ugliest man or woman who ever lived in the community, (2) the stingiest person (3) the meanest person that ever walked on two legs, or (4) the sweetest little old lady who ever lived. Some of these accounts are true; others are apocryphal. In the latter connection, I am reminded of a woman in Hurricane, West Virginia, who could never say anything bad about anyone. Well, finally, the town drunk died.

Two local fellows decided to go to this sweet little lady and see whether she had anything at all good to say about the

deceased reprobate. She thought and she thought and finally said, "Well, he sure could whistle good."

Just as first-person and family stories often portray racial and ethnic prejudice, so, too, do community and region-wide stories. A story that is told in Putnam County, Tennessee, and perhaps other places as well, points out how English people in Colonial times looked down their noses at people of Irish nativity. The story tells that this hoity-toity Englishman walked alone down along a woods-trail for two miles or so. When he got to where he was going, he reached into his pocket to get his pocket watch, a watch that makes a "tick, tick, tick, tick," sound that can be heard rather easily by people standing or sitting close by. He couldn't find his watch; he had lost it.

The English fellow then began retracing his steps back through the woods. As he walked along, he met these two Arshmen [slang for Irish] walking down the trail that he had just traversed. He stopped in front of them and asked in a hoity tone of voice, "Oh, I say, my dear fellows, by chance did either of you see anything of a pocket watch as you walked along the trail down through the woods?"

One of the Irishmen responded, "Nope, nope, didn't see no pocket watch, but we stomped the hell out of the biggest tick you ever did see." 11

Of all the various types of region-wide stories, those about the Civil War are the most prominent in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland, which is my study area. This is no wonder, as there are numerous accounts that tell of brother fighting against brother during the war, father fighting against son, and nephew against uncle. Champ Ferguson, rebel guerrilla from Clinton County, Kentucky, learned that his brother, Cap't. James Ferguson, a Union soldier, had been wounded in a battle in or near Emery, Virginia. It is told that Champ Ferguson rode a horse at gallop speed all the way to Virginia and shot and ended the life of his brother, who lay dying in a make-shift military hospital on the campus of Emery and Henry College. The story says that Champ went to his brother's bedside, took out his gun and aimed it at his brother's head. His brother begged him, "My God, Champ, don't shoot me. Can't you see that I'm dying anyway?"

"Then I'll help the process along," Champ responded, as he shot his brother twice in the head. 12

This Confederate Civil War renegade Champ Ferguson is known across the Upper Cumberland region, and stories about him are still being told rather prolifically. The following oral narrative account of Ferguson's tactics was provided in 1992 by

Hattie Edwards, native of southwestern Wayne County, Kentucky, where much guerrilla warfare took place:

My parents and grandparents sat around and told stories all the time, for there was nothing else to entertain them. My grandparents talked about the old times and about the Civil War, because they both grew up during the Civil War.

What had happened was all they had to talk about.

They had no way to look forward to anything, and all they knew about was something that had happened.

My Grandma was raised up over here in Tennessee, and the Civil War guerrillas was taking everything that they had. They was starving them to death.

Well, this Fount Frost was one of Champ's men. And he owned a farm up in Jennings Holler. And he told my Grandma's parents if they would move over here to his farm, the soldiers wouldn't bother them no more.

So they did. And there at the school house in the forks of the road is where Fount's father lived, Fletch Frost.

So Fount was over on the Three Forks of the Wolf and he got killed. Tinker Dave Beatty's men killed him. And this old Kentucky man that lived over here [in the Edwards house in the field] took a cart with a straw bed in it and a yoke of oxen and brought him home.

My grandmother said that the girls come down there after they got him home and just shouted and carried on all around the house because he was killed.

The feeling was so high through here during that war.

And they buried him out there in the field right across from the schoolhouse.

Through here the feelings were divided between the North and the South. My own people were for the Union. Well, my grandfather was raised a Democrat.

But he said that after the war, he saw how mean the rebel side was, so he changed to Republican.

Noted columnist Byron Crawford commented about the importance of family stories in his article, which bore the title "Unplug TV, Sit Back, Rock, Let The Stories Roll":

Through my parents' stories, I have come to know two grandfathers, many other ancestors and friends of the family whose dim photographs had little meaning

for me until I heard wonderful stories about things they had said or done. Such stories are the footnotes of my childhood. They keep warm my memories, tie my yesterdays to my tomorrows and instill me with a deeper appreciation of my heritage. 13

Legends and stories, such as the ones shared in this presentation, continue to function in the lives of those persons who have their own accounts and continue to recount them with family members and friends. By way of example, here are five ways in which stories continue to have relevance for present-day people:

1. Through repeated re-tellings of personal events, people make stories out of their own life experiences--life experiences that are securely anchored to a specific time and place.

2. Such stories help people create and maintain order in their personal lives.

3. These accounts create an identity for the storytellers--an identity that helps the narrators fit into the larger scheme of things pertaining to family and community matters.

4. Stories teach outsiders something about the culture in which these accounts are or were told, re-shaped, and passed along horizontally within the same generation, and vertically to the younger generations.

5. These are culture-specific stories, thus are told only where their content has meaning. For example, people in West Virginia don't tell stories about kangaroos, hurricanes, or ships at sea. Like people in other cultures, residents here talk, both consciously and unconsciously perhaps, only about those things that have social and historical significance.

Stories told in my family and community, in yours, and in the families and communities across the United States, help all of us to retain identity with family and community members who have moved away from home, or have perhaps died. Stories are thus bonding agents; they give us a sense of generational continuity--ties with our ancestors, who might otherwise be unknown to us in the present and to the generations yet to come.

Country singer Loretta Lynn, native of Butcher Hollow, a coal mining camp in eastern Kentucky, is known for her song that ends the words "nothing lives in Butcher Hollow anymore except the memories of a coal miner's daughter."

If you have family and community stories as part of your cultural and ancestral baggage, then you need not fear the loss of yesterday or of past generations as we approach the end of the twentieth century and move all too rapidly into the twenty-first. Likely, you who hear or read this essay won't be around

when the twenty-first century comes to an end. Just be sure that the stories told about you at that point in time make you worthy of being remembered.

William Lynwood Montell
Emeritus Professor of Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky

NOTES

1. Barbara Allen and Thomas J. Schlereth, Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 1. Various essays in this volume relevant to American regionalism include references to some seminal articles and books that provide background information on many scholars who have written about the concept of place and home.

2. Joe Diffie tape, "A Thousand Winding Roads," issued in 1990 by Bob Montgomery Productions and Johnny Slate Productions. (NOTE: Permission to mention some of the themes contained in this song has not been sought.)

3. Various forms of oral historical narratives are described in Barbara Allen and Lynwood Montell's, From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981). Citations to other scholarly publications that describe these historical narratives are also provided in the Allen-Montell book.

4. Burkeybile's oral testimonial is included in Rita Kohn and Lynwood Montell's, Always A People: Oral Histories of Contemporary Woodland Indians (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 42.

5. Always A People, p. 244

6. Ed Napier, Bowling Green, Kentucky, September 9, 1997.

7. William Lynwood Montell, Upper Cumberland Country (Jackson: University press of Mississippi, 1993), 54.
8. William Lynwood Montell, Don't Go Up Kettle Creek: Verbal Legacy of the Upper Cumberland (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 142-43.
9. Kohn and Montell, Always A People, p. 120.
10. William Lynwood Montell, The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 43.
11. Oplless Walker, Cookeville, Tennessee, October 30, 1992.
12. This version of the Ferguson legend is known and told by numerous persons in the Kentucky Upper Cumberland.
13. Byron Crawford, Louisville Courier-Journal (Date needed, but circa 1996.)