Future Faulkners of America: Writing from the Rural Sites

by

STUDENTS FROM THE RURAL SITES

When Ann Dobie, National Writing Project Rural Sites director and guest editor of our rural sites column, addressed the Project's national meeting in Orlando, Florida last November, she presented two portraits of rural life. One was of "tilled fields full of waving corn ... a horizon dotted with neat white houses outlined by green hedges," the other of "unpainted shotgun dwellings with tin roofs, sagging porches and dirt roads that lead to a mail box." Neither view, said Dobie, is quite true. "Rural America is as diverse as any other segment of our society." As the following examples demonstrate, however, when rural students write they are able to explore situations and describe settings unknown to most city folk.

From Harrison County: Home of the Refined "Hillbilly" by Mike McWhorter, Grade 12 Bridgeport High School, Bridgeport, West Virginia

Just mention "West Virginia" in such places as New York or any other large metropolitan area and the response you get is, "That state has nothing but hillbillies." People figure if they're going to move to West Virginia, it's time to trade in the Honda for a truck, trade in the cellular phone for a shotgun, and give up such conveniences as running water and indoor bathrooms....

But even though Harrison County [is more modern than this], it still retains the rural essence that makes it a true West Virginia county. There are not many places in big metropolises where you can go just two or three miles out of town and be completely isolated from city noise and lights and be in a tranquil pasture or on a peaceful hillside smelling the fresh air or gazing at the brilliant stars. It is nice to be able to walk outside and see miles of woods and forests all around.

This rural quality is what makes West Virginia so special. So, congratulations on becoming a "Hillbilly," or as we would prefer, a "Mountaineer," and welcome to the wild, wonderful Harrison County, West Virginia.

From "Airhole" Escapades by Erin Kalbaugh, Grade 8, Keyser Middle School, Keyser, West Virginia

As dad and I drive up the winding road that ascends the Allegheny Mountains, my excitement grows. Every summer I look forward to spending a few days with my Grandma Kalbaugh and my Aunt Amie. They live on a large farm outside the small town of Elk Garden. The farm is comprised of two shallow ponds, a garden that produces a variety of fruits and vegetables, and rock gardens with a multitude of wild flowers. No longer do their own animals exist on the farm, but a neighbor's cows graze in the meadows of their land.

As we travel, I recall when I was a young child playing in what I call the "airholes." The "airholes" are forma-
tions created when the coal has been mined, and then the earth sinks into the cavity. They remind me of big egg cartons. My thoughts reconstruct the sights and smells of the area; the odors were of foul dung left there by cows several days before. I remember the well worn path along the edge of the crevices made by the sheep that used to be there. My body twinges as I visualize the blackberry briars that pricked me as I went running by. This image stands out in my mind because I got pricked and scratched my fair share that summer. I recall sitting on the split tree trunk that was stretched across one "airhole." As I sat, I would listen to the sounds of the birds singing and the flies buzzing.

From Grandpa's Girl, by Leann Bennett, Grade 6 Clay County Middle School, Clay, West Virginia

My grandfather lived in Jackson, Mississippi, about twelve hours from Springfield, where we lived. It was only on holidays and summer vacations that we got a chance to visit him....

There was always something to do on his farm. We would ride around on the tractor and in the evenings, we would gather eggs in a big basket. It seemed like those chickens always knew when Grandpa opened the door because they became rowdy as though they were speaking to him. Later, we would go milk the cow, Miss Sally. Grandpa tried to teach me to milk, but Miss Sally had a bad habit of swatting me in the face with her tail. Grandpa always said she would settle down once she got used to me, but she never did.

The Hollerer by Tiffany Danelle Arthur, Grade 12 Woodrow Wilson High School, Beckley, West Virginia

It was Sunday mornin' and I had just gotten in trouble ... again! But this time it wasn't my fault—I swear! It was his fault, you know, the "Hollerer." Now don't tell me you've never heard of the "Hollerer." Oh, come on!

He's this man who sits in the back of our little ol' country church. I think he sits all the way back there so no one knows when he's gonna, gonna ... SHOUT! Yup, it don't matter if the Preacher's preachin', the choir's singin', or even if we're a prayin' he yells "AMEN!" Sometimes he even adds "Praise God!" to give us little kids an extra scare.

Back to how the "Hollerer" had gotten me in trouble. First our church ain't got any fans — so it's hot. Sometimes I think it could be as hot as that place Preacher Pudge (we call him that 'cause he's fat) talks about, yep, the Devil's Home. Anyway I started to fan myself with my dress. I was bein' real good — not makin' any noise but my mamma hits me upside the head. "Sarah Beth that ain't lady like!" Lady like! Ooo— that's gross! I don't wanna be no lady! They got to talk to boys-n-stuff! Yuck, I don't wanna be no lady!

So I sat there sweatin' like a pig. The only thing I could think of to do was sleep. I was sleepin' all good but then he did it. He yelled "AMEN!" and I screamed and fell out of the pew! Preacher Pudge stopped preachin' and everyone looked at me. I knew I was in trouble when my mamma yanked me up by my ears. Ooo— I'd like to get that "Hollerer!"

Well, I guess the Lord does hear my prayers, 'cause while my mamma was correctin' me out in the cloak room I heard someone yell, "The Hollerer's dead!" I couldn't help but smile.

It seems that the "Hollerer" had gotten into one of his fits. He does it now 'n then. He screams "AMEN" about twenty times in a row 'n his face gets all red 'n he looks like he's gonna explode. Ha-Ha!!! He'd done it this time! He finally popped! "AMEN," I said.

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