

MIKE ROSE

Possible Lives

THE PROMISE
OF
PUBLIC EDUCATION
IN AMERICA



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON • NEW YORK
1995

Copyright © 1995 by Mike Rose
All rights reserved

For information about permission to reproduce selections from
this book, write to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Company,
215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rose, Mike.

Possible lives : the promise of public education in
America / Mike Rose.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-395-74546-2

1. Public schools — United States — Case Studies. I. Title

LA217.2.B7 1995 95-30461

371'.01'0973—dc20 CIP

Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Robert Overholtzer

MP 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

On the Pulse of the Morning by Maya Angelou. Copyright © 1993
by Maya Angelou. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.
"Chattahoochee" by Alan Jackson and Jim McBride. Copyright ©
1992 SONY CROSS KEYS Publishing Co., Inc., Seventh Son Music,
and Mattie Ruth Music. All rights on behalf of SONY CROSS KEYS
Publishing Co., Inc., 8 Music Square West, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.
All rights reserved. Used by permission. "The World Is a Rainbow"
by Greg Scelsa. Copyright © 1978 Little House Music and Gregorian
Chance Music. Used by permission. "Boa Constrictor" by Shel
Silverstein. Copyright © 1962 (renewed), 1968, and 1969 by Hollis
Music, Inc., New York, N.Y. Used by permission. *A Breeze Swept
Through* by Luci Tapahonso. Copyright © 1987 by Luci Tapahonso.
Reprinted by permission of West End Press.

For information about this and other Houghton Mifflin trade
and reference books and multimedia products, visit
The Bookstore at Houghton Mifflin on the World Wide Web
at <http://www.hmco.com/trade/>.

Berea and Wheelwright, Kentucky

I THE LETTER ran to eight pages, eloquent, impassioned, in the ornate script of the last century:

... God being my helper I shall renew the battle every day. And I trust that ere our tongues shall be palsied in death we shall witness the reign of universal emancipation.

It was written from Berea, Madison County, Kentucky, on November 5, 1857, signed by John G. Fee, one of the founders of Berea College. The Reverend Fee and a few others had settled in a stretch of half-cleared wilderness — a brush-covered ridge near the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains — in the early 1850s in order to create a community free of slavery, an abolitionist exemplar. (The settlers named Berea after the city in Macedonia where the apostle Paul found a people who were devout and open to scriptural truth — the new Bereans' hope for themselves.) Fee and his companions inaugurated a one-room schoolhouse in 1855; in 1859 they drafted the constitution for a college that would be "under an influence strictly Christian, and as such opposed to sectarianism, slave holding, caste, and every other wrong institution or practice." It was to be a moral place and a place of social change.

Fee was a small man, "sandy complexioned" with a "kindly face," and was a tireless advocate for a radically egalitarian, nondenominational Christianity. Fee was a Kentuckian himself and had been profoundly influenced by the revivalist movements of his time, which, in various ways, advocated emancipation, free speech (his Christianity blended with Enlightenment rationality and the Bill of Rights), feminism, social reform (Berea College would be "Anti-slavery, Anti-caste, Anti-secret societies, Anti-rum, Anti-sin"), moral purity and human perfectibility, and the dignity of labor. From the beginning, students

worked at the college to defray expenses — “those who have energy enough to work their way through college will develop energy of character.” The Reverend Fee wanted a college that would “not merely . . . make students acquainted with science but also . . . educate their hearts and develop their consciences.” For this, for the stand on slavery particularly, he and the other settlers were threatened, mobbed, and, finally, confronted by a band of armed men who exiled them from Kentucky in a drizzling rain. But Fee and his companions persisted. “Do right, trust God, hold on, and you will see the Red Sea divide before you.” Berea College opened its doors in 1866, the only biracial educational institution in all the slaveholding states.

I sat, on the second day of my visit to the college, in the basement archive of the library with a box of Fee's documents spread out before me. I read letters to newspaper editors in Kentucky and Ohio defending and clarifying the settlers' motives, letters to missionary organizations and philanthropists requesting assistance, and pamphlets and sermons on topics ranging from the evils of Freemasonry to the evils of alcohol. Fee was a country preacher, a man with an unbending sense of right and wrong. As one modern, and sympathetic, commentator observed of Fee and the other Bereans, if they were to “step out of the pictures” on the walls of the college chapel, we would probably find them to be “too ‘religious,’ or too dogmatic, too absolutist, too narrow-minded, and too old-fashioned” for contemporary taste. Undoubtedly so. But as I held the yellowed letters to the light, following Fee's faded script and picturing him intent over the page, I found myself moved in ways I wouldn't have predicted by his courage and by the strength with which his memory still animated the college.

Modern-day Berea has become a regional center for Appalachian crafts and folk art. Car loads, bus loads of tourists come in on the weekends for the music and craft fairs, for the museum with its spinning wheels, muzzle-loading rifles, and little dolls and “play pretties,” and for the small shops along Main Street: eighty-year-old soft-white wood constructions that sell dulcimers, brooms, quilts, ceramics, and toys made of wood and textile. Berea College sits right across the street — FOR MOUNTAIN YOUTH, a Historical Society sign announces — and tours of the campus are available year round. The campus is lovely. One hundred and forty acres of oak, maple, hickory, and magnolia, flowering shrubbery, clusters of geraniums, petunias, mums, and bluebonnets, endless leaves dappling the wood and red brick of buildings from the turn of the century.

But for some faculty, the college may have become a bit too lovely. They came to Berea to teach because its history had special meaning to them. While a few Berea faculty believe that the institution should be

politically neutral and others try to urge Berea in the direction of the elite liberal arts colleges of the East, a number of the professoriate continually try to reclaim the school's origins. There is something unique about the place — the more religious among the activist faculty use the word *prophetic* — and to teach there is to honor the principles of the founders, to articulate those principles daily and to resist the kind of settling, the complacency, that comes with growth and establishment.

One group of such faculty are those in the Department of Education. Berea College has been training teachers for the region from the beginning. As early as 1858, three years after the opening of the elementary school, Fee wrote to a friend that "the interests of truth and humanity now require a school of a higher grade — one that shall prepare young men and young ladies to go out as teachers." In 1867 a "normal course" — that is, a pre-baccalaureate teacher-preparation program — was established. By 1907, the Normal Department had a faculty of its own who would go on to produce books for rural teachers: *Teaching a District School, Rural Arithmetic, Reading and Composition for Rural Schools*. In 1931, in compliance with changing Kentucky law, teacher education was upgraded to a four-year degree program, with the hope that broader coursework in humanities and social sciences would create a teaching force who would, as one trustee put it, feel "less keenly the tinsel of civilization" and be "sustained by real vision." And starting in the 1940s, and continuing to this day, the Education Department has assisted teachers in rural, mostly public, schools with goods, workshops, and supervision — following a much older Berea tradition of sending traveling teachers and libraries by horseback into the hollows of Appalachia. It is a department built on basic commitments, codified in the *Manual of Policies and Procedures*, "to serving promising students who are economically disadvantaged; to education of high quality founded in the liberal arts; to the Christian ethic and to service; to the dignity of labor; to community democracy, interracial education, and gender equality; to simple living and concern for the welfare of others; and to service of the Appalachian region."

I had come to Berea because I wanted to get a sense of how such humanistic and democratic principles would play out in the practice of teacher education. During my stay, I observed one of the faculty work with young people preparing for careers in education and talked at length with some of them. Then, following the trail of so many earlier teachers from Berea, I traveled far into the Appalachian Mountains to visit with people who had been teaching in the local schools for a long time. The journey revealed much about the way tradition and innovation can play off each other and the interrelation of hope, risk, vocation, and faith, many kinds of faith, in good teaching.

The Education Department was in Knapp Hall, an old brick building on the southwest corner of the campus, weatherworn, clean, wood and high windows on the inside. Professor Janet Fortune took the stairs in a quick fluid step that was half-shuffle, half-skip, lightly touching the banister, telling me a story over her shoulder about her grandmother, late of Crooked Creek in the Blue Ridge Mountains: "... and as she got sicker, poor soul, she would sing rather than talk — she would sing what she was going to do, you know, like 'I'm go-ing to close the window.'" Janet related the tale in an accent that reached its way back to southeast Mississippi and wound through Alabama and the Carolinas. The stairs, wood covered with tile, creaked under our step. "Well, wouldn't you know, the kids in the family started singing back to her! And pretty soon, the adults would just leave the room, and there they'd be, singing to each other and fussing over imaginary guests, moving a chair, fixing an imaginary hem..." She stopped on the landing to the second floor, where the faculty offices were located, and turned quickly to me. "The adults *had* to leave, don't you see" — she laughed, hand to her chest. "The room was getting just too crowded!"

A casual conversation with Janet Fortune slid around in mirth and gravity. She laughed often and fully — head back, eyes closed — the kind of laughter that made you feel part of the story... and terrifically funny yourself. But she was possessed of a deep seriousness, a trace melancholic, and at the turn of a phrase you found yourself pondering something that a moment before was flitting about in idle speech — or laughing about something that would normally quiet you down. She was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her father, who went on to become the chancellor of the University of Mississippi, came from "the hollows of North Carolina," his family "dirt poor, the one that always got the Christmas basket from the neighbors." Somehow that poverty left its mark on Janet's consciousness. She received her B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, taught for years, fifth grade through high school, from Pascagoula, Mississippi, on the Gulf Coast, to Simsbury, Connecticut. She went back to school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for her doctorate, reading widely in philosophy, feminist theology, and education, and when it came time to apply for jobs found Berea College to be the place for her. "The call was really to work with mountain kids." So five years ago she moved to Berea, Kentucky, with her son and bought a house on Cherry Road.

We walked through the double doors from the stairwell onto the second floor: a wave of heat, hardwood, high ceilings, lots of windows, the comfortable smell of old wood. "I'm the luckiest damned person in the world," Janet mused. We were heading toward her office, where she was to meet with several of the student teachers she was supervising.

"Teaching is a wonder — and I get to help people become a part of it." The faculty offices opened out onto a small reception area that held a worn couch and some stuffed chairs. I flopped down in one to wait for Janet while she held her conferences. She would then be teaching a course on language arts for middle school and, later in the day, be observing one of her student teachers. Across the hall, a newer cohort of education students began drifting into a large room for an introductory-level course. Most looked to be in their late teens, though a few were in their thirties or forties. The ratio of women to men was about four to one. I read the jackets and T-shirts: *Kentucky Basketball*, *Berea College Country Dancers*, *Guns 'n' Roses*, *Christ Is My Life*, *Hard Rock Café*, *BAMA*, *Chill Out* — this admonition scripted over two palm trees bent toward a setting sun.

There are about fifteen hundred students at Berea College, 80 percent of them from Kentucky and the southern Appalachian Mountains. So, sitting back and listening, you'd hear a wonderful sampling of midland and Southern speech: Alabama, Georgia, east Tennessee, West Virginia, and the different sounds of Kentucky itself: the Bluegrass, the eastern mountains. What all these students had in common was that they came from families of modest means — the college would, with rare exception, accept no other — and to help with the cost, they worked ten to fifteen hours a week at jobs ranging from janitorial and maintenance, to farming and weaving, to tutoring and community service. One of the most popular majors was education.

Students entering the major had to take a set of introductory courses, and then their record was reviewed by the faculty to determine entrance to the teacher-education program. It is hard to generalize about any group of college students, but my conversations with the education majors at Berea kept revealing a high level of idealism. (As Kristi, a second-year student, put it, "Teaching requires that you go that extra mile; if a teacher doesn't do that, then her dreams are just gone.") And, of course, at a Christian college many students expressed religious values, though within the Christian population here, there was quite a range of beliefs. There were fundamentalist students and students questioning their faith in the most fundamental way. There were those who, as another student, Yolanda, put it, "used religion as a weapon" and others who advocated an inclusive Christianity geared toward social justice. Most of the students could be located on a wide and complex middle ground. What struck me was the way Berea, true to its origins, created a place where both religious commitment and free speech were honored, and that seemed to generate in the students an unusual sweep and reflectiveness. Kristi spoke in the same few sentences about God's blessings, *Moll Flanders*, and Marge Piercy. About three quarters of these students

would stay in some part of Kentucky or Appalachia to teach, primarily in public schools.

After students were accepted into the teacher-education program, they took further courses to develop an area of expertise. (Janet taught a number of courses related to middle school.) And as the prospective educators approached their senior year, they applied for student teaching, to be supervised by one of Berea's faculty. Over my stay, I would get the opportunity to talk with these advanced students, about where they came from, what brought them into teaching, what lay ahead — their hopes and fears.

**Ashley Isaacs, twenty-three,
Millersburg, Bourbon County, Kentucky**

I've always wanted to be a teacher. My aunt's a teacher. I played teacher since I was about seven years old. I've always loved school. My mother always taught us, if you see anybody who's hurting, you help them. You don't just say, "Oh, that's sad" — you go out and do something about it. Mom's always taught me to be a doer.

I'm student teaching now. Kindergarten. I'm just so geared toward kindergarten. It's their first big time in school, and it's wonderful to watch the development. After a week or so, the kids will say, "Oh, that word has two e's in it!" You get to watch this; you have a part in it. You think, "This is so great; this is what I've been going through all these classes for, to get in *this* classroom with *these* kids." You get to help these little people.

I hope I can carry out all my ideas. I hope I won't someday turn around and say [snarling], "Oh, it's all the family's fault!" I hope I won't become that blaming person. Sure, it's hard when you're faced with problems every day. You'll get your heart broken. I hope I'll know how to handle it. Teachers tend to forget that something is *causing* a kid's problems. We don't look behind the behavior. We don't ask ourselves, "Now, why is he doing that?" There's a reason behind everything a child does. It's not about blame. I hope I get very good at understanding that.

Eef Fontanez, twenty-two, Clarksburg, West Virginia

I had one horrible teacher in high school — a journalism teacher — who would give an assignment and then read the newspaper. If we had questions, she'd act as if we were bothering her. And I knew that was wrong; I *knew* that was not how you taught. I was about to go to college and wanted to do something with my life, and teaching just sort of came to me. It wasn't like a vision, or anything [laughs]. I always played school. I always helped my younger brothers and sisters — even when I was in the fourth and fifth grades. But when it came down to my senior year in high

school, I was, like, what do I *really* want to do with my life? And it's odd, isn't it, the way that teacher helped me make my decision. Seeing the things she could have done differently made me see that I might have a shot at being a teacher.

While I was in high school, I went to an Upward Bound program at Salem College. That's where underprivileged kids prepare for college. I was in it for three summers, and it helped me a lot, let me tell you. Looking back on it, it's so clear to me. My study skills were poor. I didn't know how to study. But at Upward Bound I learned how. I was taking college classes: a math class, an English class, a history class. Just being in that kind of college atmosphere — you know, with *Doctor So-and-so* — that was amazing for me. Here I was, this Puerto Rican West Virginian [laughs], this Appalachian kid. It really helped me. I wanted to prove I could do it.

During my freshman year at Berea, I took a seminar called Guns or Butter, taught by one of the best professors on this campus. He would sit down with you, no matter how late it was, and help you improve your paper. He wrote notes, individual notes on the computer, and handed them back to you with your paper. And he'd encourage you to rewrite the paper. He helped me so much to see the bigger picture — the class was about Central America and U.S. intervention — and those critical thinking skills have stayed with me. It's not unpatriotic to question your government. In fact, it's very American to say "This is not right." I cannot tell you how it helped me, academically, intellectually, to consider different points of view. I come from a very conservative part of the country, and I'm still trying to resolve the conflict. Granted, Berea has its problems, but it *is* different here. I go home and feel really isolated sometimes. I hear things that are so racist. It saddens me. I haven't resolved it. It's been hard. You hear all this stuff.

Sheila Robinson, twenty-two, Jonesville, Virginia

I was born in Rochester, New York. We lived there until I was fourteen. Then we moved to Jonesville, in the southwestern region of Virginia, and that's where my family is now. Jonesville is all White. My family is the only Black family in the whole town. It's a small town, nice, smaller than Berea. My father is the pastor in a Pentecostal church. His congregation is all White. We moved to Jonesville because my father wanted to get us out of Rochester and come back home — he's from Harlan, Kentucky. We kids were getting to the age where we were very impressionable, and my father didn't want us to turn out bad. He wanted us to be safe. The crime was terrible. I'm glad we moved, though at first I was devastated. The only Black family in a small Southern town? But now I hate to go back to Rochester. Really. It's like there's a cloud over the city,

and everyone's in this tight box, and they don't know where to go and don't know what to do. It's hard to go back.

My mom, she told me once, "Sheila, I always knew that whatever you did when you got older, you were going to work with people — you're a people person." I, I don't know. I guess it's just that I care. I would like to work with African-American youngsters and make a difference. I want to go everywhere and help everybody [laughs], but I know that's not possible. So I'll work with those where the need is greatest. Wherever I'm needed most, I'll go. They say teaching is a calling. I really like that. A calling.

In the class where I'm student teaching now, the kids are great. You know that fear I had when we moved to Virginia? It came back when I anticipated my student teaching. The schools in this area are predominantly White, and here I come, I'm going to teach them, and I imagine them thinking, "Humph, this Black lady, how's she think she's going to teach us anything?" But they've been really good, so I'm kind of relaxed now. Janet told me, "You're not going to have any problems." But, still . . . you can say that, but you don't know. It's hard at times. You still get hurt.

Spanish and math are my areas of emphasis. And in the class I'm in now, the kids are so excited. They want to learn Spanish. Most of them never had it before, probably never heard it before, except on TV. When we lived in Rochester, I had a lot of Puerto Rican friends, and I wanted to relate to them better. One day I realized that a lot of prejudices come from not knowing other cultures, and I realized that taking Spanish meant a lot more than learning words. You have to learn about their heritage and their culture. It's not just learning the language itself, but much more. So when my students learn Spanish, I hope it helps get rid of the prejudices they might have, some of the stereotypes they pick up from TV.

I guess I want my students to learn to love something — Spanish, math, whatever — and to be able to use it in their lives, to take it and make their lives better. I want them to have the opportunities I've had because I had an education, to know that they can do what they want to do.

Kathy Walsh, twenty-two, Warsaw, Gallatin County, Kentucky

When I see a teacher who is enthusiastic and excited and loves what she's teaching, that makes me feel excited, too — that it's something important because she feels it's important. I was thinking about this the other day during my student teaching, thinking about Professor Fortune, how her enthusiasm carries over. Sometimes you don't realize how much you're learning. I don't know what it is she does exactly, but she

can give you a whole new perspective on things. She has helped me see things that were always there that I never noticed. And, you know, I've seen her change *her* whole point of view, right in class. She'll say, "Hmm, I really need to think about that." She listens to what her students say, and I think that's very important. Her classes have helped me grow. I mean it's not just in the classroom that you get more reflective, but in your life, with your family, with your friends. I've just grown so much.

I love children. They're just a joy to be with. And I guess I feel I can give something back; teaching is something worthwhile. I wouldn't be happy doing something that's just for me. I need to give something, to teach, to show, to help guide students. But I worry that I won't know enough. Sometimes I feel I don't know anything. I had a lot of science in high school, and I want to bring that into my classroom. But I don't have a lot of knowledge of history, so during the summer I try to learn as much as I can. People say to me, "Oh, well, you're naïve. You're young. When you've been teaching as long as I have . . ." I'm sure I'll get discouraged. I'll have my bad days. But if that drive to teach ever goes away, well . . . I'd be doing more harm than good. And the kids can tell. They know.

My family and I travel around a lot, and some of the best teachers I have ever seen are here in eastern Kentucky. Some of them are working with *no* materials, and yet they're teaching something worthwhile, something valuable. You hear so much about the kids and poverty — that they're poor and stupid and they can't learn — but I've seen such gifted children. When I go home and I hear people in northern Kentucky — which is wealthier than here — when I hear them complaining because they don't have this or that, I just think, "If you could only see . . ." I want to teach here in eastern Kentucky. The teachers have so much less to work with, but they have so much more inside.

Janet opened her class, Reading and Language Arts for the Middle Grades, by raising some fundamental questions about literacy. She asked her students to "take fifteen or twenty minutes and jot down what comes to your mind when you think about literacy. How would you define it? In our society, who gets to define it? What are your personal associations to literacy?" This wouldn't be evaluated; students could write it any way they wanted. It was a warm-up. Central to Janet's pedagogy was the desire to promote a reflective cast of mind, a willingness to consider the habitual ways we think about curriculum, about learning, about children. "Why am I doing this?" was the basic question she wanted her student teachers to ask. "Why am I thinking this way?" I was sitting on the floor next to a cordial, sandy-haired man named Dwayne Satterfield who let me look over his shoulder as he wrote:

We are quick to rubber-stamp individuals as illiterate before coming to understand the "why" of this person's present situation. My father was a millwright in a factory for 35 years. He knew his work inside and out; however, with increased technology he became more illiterate year by year. . . .

This was a tiny class, the smallest Janet had ever taught, so she held it in her office. It was all male — another first. Janet sat in a rocking chair by her computer; the rest of us sat around the room, in chairs, cross-legged on rugs, or backs against the wall. A fiddle-leaf philodendron curled close around the old silver radiator; red and brown shawls hung over the backs of gray metal chairs; and a full, hanging fern dropped its leaves on a stack of books on language arts. The books themselves, packed into cases along three of the four walls, looked like a multi-colored patchwork: blue spines and yellow, orange and black, tan and white. There were whole sections on the philosophy of language, on feminist theology, on adolescent literature — as well as all the books on education. Looking around the room, I could see Robert Coles's *The Call of Stories* and Sharon Welch's *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, and, over my shoulder, a row of books on phenomenology and critical theory: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Max Horkheimer. And novels — from *The Idiot* to Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* — were interspersed everywhere. By the window, a poster for the Children's Defense Fund made its appeal in pastel yellows, blues, and grays. Next to the fern, an advertisement from the Crazy Ladies Bookstore featured a flower erupting in violet and fiery red.

After twenty minutes or so, Janet told the class to wind up what they were doing, but to keep in mind what they wrote as the rest of the day progressed. Janet was a working philosopher, trying continually to convert her academic study of philosophy, theology, and language to the practice of teaching. One way she did this was through the use of art and literature. Last semester, for example, she asked students in an introductory course to represent with construction paper, Magic Markers, scissors, and glue what they thought about when they thought about school. One student made an eye, another made a short row of desks, and Janet urged them to talk out the beliefs that led to these constructions — school was for seeing, school was for order — and the different kinds of classrooms that would emerge from such beliefs. Her hope was that through the use of analogy, through the use of a range of media, she could encourage a shift in perspective, could spark reflection. Today she was going to rely on a story by Tillie Olsen called "I Stand Here Ironing" to forward her discussion of literacy. She reached into her bag and pulled out a book. "I want you to think about school while I read this," Janet said. "See what you think."

"I Stand Here Ironing" is a brief, first-person story, an agitated monologue filled with recollection, directed to a teacher who had phoned asking the narrator to come see her about her daughter. The request has upset the speaker — "what you asked me moves tormented back and forth with the iron" — and triggers a tale of Depression-era poverty. The speaker recounts, with pain, the way she had to let others raise her oldest daughter, Emily — the subject of the phone call — so that she could work, the effect this had on Emily — the vulnerability, the sadness — and the bringing of Emily back into the family, but only after the girl had absorbed the loss, too late to make things whole again. The speaker tells of Emily's uncertain growth in school, but of the strange development of a gift for mimicry, a talent, her mother observes, that leaves her "as imprisoned in her difference as she had been in anonymity." The monologue ends, as it began, with the mother ironing, appealing finally to the teacher to "help [Emily] to know — help make it so there is cause for her to know — that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron."

As she read the story, Janet let her face register sadness, pleasure, anger, and peace, her cadenced voice transferring the pain and longing from the story's San Francisco setting to the farms and mountains and coalfields her students knew. Dwayne was resting his chin on his folded hands. Larry, a tiny guitar dangling from his neck, was leaning forward, elbows on thighs. Rodney, tall, glasses, black hair parted in the middle, leaned back against a filing cabinet, hugging his knees to his chest. Billy, rangy and powerful, was watching Janet and absentmindedly tapping a pencil on his shoe. "What does this story tell us about school," Janet asked, looking slowly around the room. "They don't understand," Rodney said, under his breath. "Understand?" Janet prompted. "Understand all the girl has gone through," Rodney replied, releasing his knees and bringing his chair forward. There were some leaves and trees sketched, in ballpoint pen, on the legs of his jeans. "Here," said Dwayne — at twenty-nine, the oldest of the lot — "here, I wrote a quote down while you were reading." He flipped back a page in his notebook: "Running out to that huge school where she was one, she was lost, she was a drop . . ." That describes a lot of kids, I reckon. Big . . . impersonal . . . school just loses them."

The discussion continued; then Janet said, "I want to tie this story back to the writing you did about literacy. What does this story convey — and to whom? Or, let me put it another way: What about this story would make it part of someone's literacy?"

Dwayne scooted around from his position on the rug. "It describes the struggle for existence — and in a language that can be understood by working people." He paused, picking at a piece of lint in the rug. "The

experiences speak to me; they surely do. My family's experiences are similar."

"Why are those experiences important?" Janet asked.

"Simple," Dwayne replied. "They're the kinds of experiences a lot of folks have had."

"So?" Janet prodded.

"So," Dwayne answered back, "they're inviting . . . engaging. Something pulls at me."

"Inviting," Janet repeated. "Interesting word, Dwayne." It seems that "invitation" had been the focus of another discussion a few weeks back, Janet framing the word in a theological context as a calling-together, a summoning into the life of the sacred.

"Rodney," she asked, "can you recall our discussion of the word *invitation*?"

Rodney opened the cover of his notebook. "We spoke," he said, "about *invitation* as being summoned, being called."

Janet paused for a moment. "Dwayne said that some of the experiences in 'I Stand Here Ironing' are *invitational*. Do they call to us? Invite us?"

"They call to me," said Dwayne. "I know those people. They interest me."

"What is the narrator's concern?" asked Janet.

"Providing for her family," said Larry, looking down at the floor.

"How is that presented to us?" Janet asked in return.

Larry looked up, the guitar coming to rest on his breastbone. "Through moving . . . or sad rec . . . recollections."

"Recollections," Janet repeated. "Memory."

Larry, a quiet young man, began talking more fully about some reading he was doing for his psychology class. "A smell or a sound," he explained, "a voice, too. It . . . they can trigger all this memory. And that's what's happening in the story. What the teacher said to the mother stimulated all these memories."

Janet talked a bit about an association of her own, the way the smell of hand lotion still called up a memory of her mother kissing her good night; then she pulled herself up in the rocker and said: "If I'm in your middle-grade classroom, I'll need to hear stories, to read stories that can sit inside me. There needs to be a relationship between what children read and their own life experience." She paused. "I am *not* saying we shouldn't make kids stretch, but there should be a basic connection. You have to figure out what they know — and engage it. Invite it . . . and middle-school kids know a lot, they truly know a lot."

We took a break, and when we returned, Janet had the group do two more activities that would push them to reflect on the connections be-

tween literacy and experience. She sat down in the middle of the floor and spread out a boxful of cartoons she had clipped from magazines, newspapers, and calendars: political cartoons, cocktail party cartoons from *The New Yorker*, Gary Larson cartoons with garrulous cows and urbane cockroaches. She asked us to notice which cartoons clicked with us immediately — which ones raised a quick laugh — and which lost us, fell flat, left us with no basis for connection. For about twenty minutes we sat around, sifting through cartoons, chuckling, snorting, wincing at the sick ones — Billy's deep *heh-heh*, Janet's soaring, fingers-to-lips *haw, haw, haw* — the laughter mixing with free-ranging talk about what we found funny and why, probing our own memories for connections.

As a final activity, Janet called up an assignment she had given to the class during their previous meeting: each student had to bring in a piece of writing that was especially meaningful to him. Dwayne, Rodney, and company poked around in their knapsacks, and the final thirty minutes or so of Janet's class was spent listening to and reacting to print that had deep personal value. Larry read some poems written by his sister, Missy, who had graduated from Berea the year before. Billy read from Genesis, which he described as the bedrock of his faith. Rodney read a prose poem he had written about daybreak: "The birds find their voice again . . . the sun floats higher . . . the clouds tumble across the sky." And Dwayne read two things — a section from James Agee's *A Death in the Family* and an elegy he had written for his father:

"He's gone," Mama had said. Found dead, his purple hand still grasping the ignition switch of his truck. A faint grin, a smirk. "It's natural, I didn't do a thing," said the mortician — as if to say, "I've just done something, you guess what." Now all things are new . . .

The passages held significance for each reader, and Janet closed the class by asking the men to think about what it was that these pieces of writing revealed about their own uses of literacy, what value literacy had in each of their lives.

The class was typical of the way Janet liked to work. She did not tell prospective teachers that they had to be reflective; she created the circumstances that spark reflection. The purpose of the course, as stated in its title, was to provide instruction in reading and language arts for middle-grade students. But before Janet could impart techniques, she believed, she had to get her students to consider the nature and motive of their own use of written language. On the issue of pedagogical technique itself, Janet also believed that instruction in either procedures or the theories behind them would be premature without some sense of

what it felt like to engage language fully. So during the first three or four weeks of the class, Janet did not tell her students how to run a classroom, but gave them the experience of writing, reading, speaking, and responding to each other across a range of activities — the kind of rich language use she would eventually help them re-create in their own classrooms.

Later that day, after Janet had finished with her committee meetings and student conferences, she took a break, and we walked down to Brushy Fork, a creek behind Berea's intramural field. We walked under maple trees and oaks, down some old stone steps, shuffling through leaves and acorns, twigs and strips of bark. "I think it's especially important," she said, "that these students have someplace where they can try things out and say what comes to mind. In some of the communities around here, what men can do and women can do is pretty much set in stone. These students are curious and so alive. They have a lot going on inside, but just getting some of the men to talk in class can be a real achievement." When we got to the creek, Janet looked around and saw a felled tree extending along dry ground. We sat down. The sun came in streaks through the trees; there was the smell of leaves matted into earth and water.

"You know," she continued, "I take a lot of chances with this stuff. Many of our students come wanting us to teach them how to teach. Right away. Now, there are places in this state where you can go in and sit with a basal reader or be walked through the social studies manual. But that . . . that's not what we're about." She picked up a stick and started splashing the water lightly. "What I'm going to say is sappy, and I'm sorry, but I don't know how else to talk about it. . . . You can't be around children for long without seeing . . . without figuring out that there's this . . . there's what the Quakers call this light that binds us, person to person . . . and that who you're dealing with are incredible, beautiful human beings." She laughed. "Look, I've had a kid pull a knife on me. I'm not naïve. But no one could have told me what to do in that situation. That's difficult for our students to hear at first. Hell, we could practice, we could role-play, but there's always going to be that instant in which you'll have to respond. And what I want . . ." Janet swished the stick more fully in the water now ". . . what I want is for them to respond from the core of understanding children and from a solid belief as to who we are as human beings. What you do at any given moment in a classroom reveals your basic philosophy about kids. These young teachers need technique, yes, but what counts more is what underlies technique. What counts . . . what really counts is sweeping aside the veils that keep us from seeing kids in all their richness."

Dwayne Satterfield, twenty-nine, Dandridge, Tennessee

It was my mother who encouraged me to think about teaching as a career — she's been a teacher's aide for about fifteen years — so I started taking introductory education classes at the community college I was at in Tennessee. One of those had a practicum in the fourth grade — and I enjoyed being with the kids, enjoyed interacting with them. This gave me a few scares [laughs] but also gave me a way to look at kids and know that I would like to be part of their development. To see a child come to a realization, to work a math problem and feel the excitement of doing it right.

I'm big on motives. Why do we do the things we do? I believe — now, this is a belief, I'm stating beliefs here — I believe we're equipped for things. I've been through certain experiences which have equipped me — not predestined me; I'm not a believer in that — to do some things better than others. And I believe that teaching requires an examination of motives, of our experiences. I'm *not* saying that a person has to be in touch with a deity to be a good teacher, goodness no, but for *me* the way to examine motives is through prayer and study and meditation — they all fit in together for me.

I think religion has to be connected to helping people. That's the heart of the matter. Otherwise, *religion* is an empty word. Faith should be something that urges us forward to give ourselves away. I'm wary of political activists in the religious realm. A guy like Randall Terry scares me. He's a driven man. In the church I attend there's great diversity of ideas. They're mostly country people, and they come together to study the Bible. And they ask questions that you'd never dream could be asked in a setting like that. And the pastor loves it. He's not scared of these questions. And this is what we need more of — to work on the big questions together. The image I have of Christ is of someone who comes to people in need. I want to help people find out who they are and how they can fit into the world. The idea of faith is to reach out to my fellow human beings. Can I be of assistance?

**Mindy Botts, twenty-two,
Denniston, Menifee County, Kentucky**

My mother is a teacher, and she does such fantastic things. We disagree, but not on the big questions: the *why*, what's exciting about learning, why we need to learn. We agree on these. Still, our discussions get pretty intense. I worry that what I teach is important — and I'm constantly questioning that. "Why am I doing this? What makes it valuable? Will it matter in the scheme of things?" One of my big concerns is being able to look at the big picture. It's easy to lose that perspective.

I went to high school about one and a half hours from here in Menifee County. It was a very small school — there were sixty in my graduating

class. I didn't come to Berea for religious reasons. To be honest, I didn't want to go to school *anywhere*. I mean, I wanted to learn, but I was tired of school. I wanted to go into teaching right then. Right then! Let me out now! I figured I would learn along the way. My first two years at Berea, I hated it. I didn't like all the restrictions. I was rebelling against everything. I just didn't want to be here. I was going to go to class. I was going to do a good job. But [laughing] I wasn't going to *like* it.

I remember a Philosophy for Children class. It dealt with questioning and how asking the questions may be more important than getting the right answer. I ended up with half my stuff being questions rather than answers — and that used to be very disturbing to me — but I'm becoming a little more comfortable with it. It's funny, at first I didn't like the class — remember, in those days I was all bristled up — but many of the things I don't like end up teaching me more than the things I do like. And they become a part of me.

Last year, I went to Germany with the Kentucky Institute for International Study. We spent five weeks in Munich, and I was in a classroom that would be the equivalent of our second or third grade. The teacher was remarkable. The children were reading stories together, acting them out, writing — everything was integrated, even dance and math! It was amazing, just amazing. Over the entrance to the school was a motto. It said, "We learn not for the school, but we learn for our life." I don't think I'll ever forget that.

Tracy Payne Williams, twenty-two, Jacksonville, Alabama

I always played teacher when I was young, but what really got me was when I would watch my friends who came from pretty bad homes — it was their teachers who encouraged them; the teachers seemed to be the only route . . . When I entered high school, my best friend and I started taking different courses. I went off into algebra and she took consumer math and such. And from that point, she decided, "Well, I'm not going to college." And I'd always say, "Hey, go to college with me. Let's go to college together!" We were really close. But she'd say, "I can't do it. I just can't do it!" Well, we had this English teacher, and she would say to us, "Anybody can go to college if you just try." So she started encouraging this girl, and, you know, that girl went on to state college back home and became an English major. Yes, she did!

My aunt went to Berea, and she always told me about it. I guess I was interested in Berea because of what it did for people, the way it took in students who came from poor families and had to strive extra hard, who needed an extra push. Just someone to say "you can do it" and build their confidence. And Berea seemed like the place that gave those people a chance, people like me.

I'm a religious person. But, you know, all my beliefs came from other

people — family members, preachers, pastors, church — they came from other people, not something I drew for myself. When I came to Berea, I learned there were different perspectives. You meet people with very different beliefs; you can't just say someone's right and someone's wrong. I learned for myself what I believe. It became truly my own . . . I've always been good at biology and math. I love science. I can't wait to teach it. Now, I've had many conversations about this. I believe the Bible and science can go together. Darwin has some interesting theories that seem right on. And I'm fascinated with genetics. But I believe in the Bible too. What the Bible tells us and what science tells us are different kinds of things. I just think they can all connect. I hope I'm open-minded enough to accept both.

My supervising teacher told me something; she said, "Tracy, it's easy to start talking about students and labeling them, so be sure not to listen to everything you hear about a student." When you hear bad things about a kid, you start looking for the bad. You do! There's this one child in class who every teacher has said something bad about. And I never noticed anything about her because, at that point, I didn't know all the students' names. To me, this student was a joy. She was nice and friendly and seemed like she was always paying attention. But they'd all labeled her this way. So the next time I went to class, I tried looking at her *that* way, and I did see those things, I *did*, because I was looking for them. Do you know what I mean? Before, I'd not even noticed. I think we should look for the good in our students. And I just hope I can continue to do that. Try to see the good things about them.

After Brushy Fork, Janet and I rushed to observe Tracy Williams teach a practice lesson in a sixth-grade class at Foley Middle School. Red Foley, the star of "Ozark Jubilee" and "Grand Ole Opry," was a Berea alumnus, and the school named after him was only a mile away from the campus. Though we were there in a few left turns and a straight roadway, we were late, and as we came through the door we almost stepped on the ankle of a boy who was lying on his side. His head was propped on one hand as he and the other students counted what looked like a pile of poker chips. We shifted quickly — a few students looking up at us, Tracy waving "hi" — and high-stepped over bodies to two chairs in the corner. Kids were sitting cross-legged, kneeling butts to heels, or lying belly-down on the linoleum; the desks were pushed back against the walls. Yellow, red, green, and blue bottle caps — we saw finally that they were bottle caps — were spread all across the floor, and students were clustered around game boards in groups of five or six. It took a moment to get a fix on the game. The boards were simple poster board,

laminated, lined to make four wide columns, each column identified with a color: red, green, blue, and yellow. The students were animatedly talking and pointing to columns on the boards, and stacking bottle caps in those columns, then, in various negotiated transactions, counting caps of one color and, in some kind of trade, replacing them with a single cap of another color in an adjacent column. "Gosh, almighty!" exclaimed one girl to her colleagues by our chairs, "we've gotta move all these blue chips over!" After the momentary stir of our entrance, Janet and I were forgotten.

Tracy was standing in the front of the room; the problem the students were solving was on the board behind her:

Imagine you are in Base Four Land, and you have four yellow, six blue, three green, and two red chips on your board. If you traded up, how many red chips would you have?

Tracy was wearing faded overalls and a lace blouse, a full, colorful ribbon — gold flowers on velvet black — in her long brown hair. She was watching the activity closely, a little pensive, and whenever a student looked up with a question or comment, her face broke into a full smile, and she walked quickly to that part of the room, leaning into the group, getting at eye level, complimenting them and thanking them for their diligence. And soon the hands started shooting up. Tracy called on a girl in the back with wildly teased hair. She got up on her knees and said, "You'd end up with three red chips." "All right!" said Tracy. "Very good, Joy. You're absolutely right. Thank you." Joy nodded, very cool, but stayed on her knees a few moments longer. Then she smiled faintly and stretched back out on the floor.

"This is a lesson," Tracy had written in her lesson plan, "to give students an understanding of our base 10 system by working with other base systems." To achieve this, Tracy had the students imagine that they lived in alternate mathematical universes (Base Four Land, Base Six Land) and play that numerical life out on the board games spread around the room. Here's how it worked: Each column on the board represented a power of the base, with the left-most column (red) being the highest, and the right-hand column (yellow) being the lowest. So, for example, if students were in Base Ten Land, and had ten chips in the yellow column, they could "trade up" to a single chip that would go into the next column, the blue one. That would give them 1 chip in the blue column and 0 chips in the yellow column: 1 - 0. 10. Base Ten Land.

Tracy turned back to the board and began writing out another problem, this time placing the students in Base Three Land:

If I have 2 chips in my pocket worth 18 yellow chips, what color are my chips?

And, again, the *tip-tap* of bottle caps, the shifting of positions around the boards, the cooperative haggling — “Hey, you guys, count ‘em out.” “OK, OK, now trade for blue” — and hands were waving in the air. Tracy called on a group close to the front this time, and a boy whose T-shirt read “Every Knee Shall Bend” stood up and said, “You would have two green chips.” “That’s great,” said Tracy. “You all are just great.” Then she paused, looking down as if to collect her thoughts, the students watching her. “You know” — she looked up, serious — “you may think, ‘Well, this was fun, but, gee, Mrs. Williams didn’t teach us anything about real mathematics — about place value and borrowing and carrying.’ Well” — another pause, then a big smile — “Well, I’m fixin’ to show you what you learned about those concepts.” She was pulling the arithmetical rabbit out of the hat, and seemed to have the students caught up in the show. I couldn’t know what each was thinking, but I didn’t see one kid looking out the window or doodling or nodding out. Sixth grade. Border territory. Some girls still in ponytails, others with big hair; before long the boys’ voices would undergo a major shift in pitch. A time of desire and self-consciousness, of flirtations with rebellion and the first stirring dreams of release. And they watched Tracy as she began explaining how the columns on their game boards were really powers of the base.

“They should have had this long ago,” Tracy would tell me later. “They were getting through math by memorizing how to do things, but because they didn’t understand what they were doing, none of it would stick. So every year they had to start all over again.” The problem became clear to Tracy after a few days of observing from the back of the class; she watched as the students moved into a section of their workbooks where they had to think about what numbers represented, basic number theory. Many of them were soon adrift. “They had no idea,” Tracy said, “that .1 was less than 1. They didn’t understand how decimals worked, or concepts like place value . . . or equivalence . . . or what it meant to have a base ten system.” So Tracy spoke with Janet, and Janet encouraged her to talk to her supervising teacher, to explain that she had had a lot of math (she had taken eight mathematics courses at Berea) and would like to try something different. The teacher was receptive, and Tracy began developing a lesson from some old New Math materials.

And, so, on the day of our visit, Tracy stood before the board, asking the students questions about place value and equivalence and trading up and trading down. And David explained how trading up and down

could be done by multiplication and division, and Joy saw equivalence, and Typhanie pointed out a computational error, and Jessica came up to the board, and Amy said that this stuff wasn't so hard after all.

As the final step in the lesson, Tracy passed out a sheet with three questions on it:

1. How would you explain, in your own words, how to play the chip-trading game to someone?
2. What did this game teach you about place value, borrowing, and carrying?
3. Did you come to any understanding of base-number systems? What does it mean to say that someone uses a base 10 number system?

She went through the questions, encouraging the class to do as well as they could, but said it would be OK if the answers were a little messy. The writing would help them further understand the mathematical concepts. Typhanie asked if they could use drawings with their writing, and Tracy said they sure could. "That would be great, Typhanie, writing and illustrations together, you bet." The students got to work, writing, erasing, raising a hand now and then, and Janet sat next to me, writing intently, her forehead cradled in her hand, the pen moving quickly across her ruled notebook.

The bell rang, and the students scribbled some last little something and headed for the door. Tracy came over and dropped into an empty chair. "Was that OK?"

Janet began by asking Tracy what she thought went well. Tracy was pleased with the attention the students gave her and with the way they worked in groups. "They were doing a lot together, taking turns, discovering things on their own." She had the sense that they were learning mathematical concepts — she was excited about that — and as we sat there, she started flipping through their papers, seeing evidence of comprehension. "They say 'I hate writing' but look at this; they seemed to care about this. I wanted a way to get them to write about mathematics. They never get to do that. Oh, I hope this works." There were tiny beads of sweat on her upper lip, and as she read quickly through the sheets, she slid down a little in the chair, relaxing into the success of the lesson. "The math," said Janet, "was beautiful."

Janet gave her a minute or so, watching her, and then began to talk. "Tracy, your students, the girls especially, are very interested in who you are. The little girl in front couldn't take her eyes off you. It's quite a power you have, and you treat it, and them, with respect." Janet's voice was gaining force, quiet and intense. She looked at Tracy or down at her

notes. Other people came in and out of the room, an announcement about cheerleading practice was read over the PA system, but Janet's focus didn't break. "When you move around the room, Tracy, that dance you do, you go right to where the children are. You bend down or kneel down. That says to them, 'You are important.'" Again, Janet looked at her notes; Tracy sat, her head down a little, watching Janet. "You have the incredible ability to be right on top of what you say and do. You recall who answered last. You connect one answer to another question. You think ahead to where you're going and formulate questions to get you there. It's just wonderful to watch you teach."

|| WHEELWRIGHT lies about a hundred and fifty miles southeast of Berea, in Floyd County, deep in Kentucky coal country. King Coal. Extending for roughly two miles along a fork of Left Beaver Creek, a tributary of the Big Sandy River, the town was originally a settlement called Otter Creek, had just a few houses, and survived on farming and through participation in Kentucky's once-robust, if ravaging, timber industry: oak, hickory, ash, walnut. As railroads began to open up Floyd County, mining companies moved in, buying mineral rights, and in 1916 the Elkhorn Coal Corporation established a town at Otter Creek and christened it after an executive named Wheelwright. During the early period, Wheelwright was an unruly place — moonshining, gunfights — little more, really, than a mining camp, where the only sidewalk was an uneven stretch of wooden planks extending down the main street. But by the mid-1920s, as coal continued to boom, Elkhorn had built a decent town: row houses, company stores, a recreation hall, and a theater. It was in 1931, though, when the Inland Steel Corporation of Chicago bought Wheelwright, that the town was developed into what most of the old-timers recall as a "real good place to live." Inland refurbished Elkhorn's buildings — supplying Colonial façades to some — added a swimming pool and golf course and built a library. The company store was well stocked, and prices were reasonable. The population grew to three thousand. WHEELWRIGHT, the frame on a license plate read, THE MODERN COAL TOWN.

Coal markets began their decline in the early 1950s, but Wheelwright continued to do well through the decade. Inland started reducing its work force in the early 1960s, and by 1966 was employing half the number of miners it had had on its payroll during the war boom. In 1966, with little public notice, it sold Wheelwright to another company, which continued operating the mines but began selling off houses, supermarket, library, hospital, the theater — even the streetlights and sidewalks. Finally, the town was purchased by the Kentucky Housing

Corporation and homes were sold to individual families. These days, a little coal is still mined, deep-mined and strip-mined, but Wheelwright is an abandoned company town. The two-story Colonial recreation hall is gutted; the library is dismantled and overgrown with kudzu; a brief walk will take you by houses that are empty and store fronts long boarded up. People drive thirty-three miles north to Prestonsburg, the county seat, to see a movie.

Long before my arrival in Berea, Janet had talked about taking me to Wheelwright. Company towns were such an important part of the lives of the people in eastern Kentucky, and Wheelwright, she said, was "a place with real history." Whenever she could, she brought her students there — because of "the sociology, the memory," and because there were some fine teachers working in the local schools. One of these teachers was a man named Bud Reynolds. So on a drizzling Sunday morning, Janet and I headed east on the Daniel Boone Parkway to Floyd County, where Bud had been teaching for twenty years.

It was about a two-and-a-half-hour drive, and it took us along a dramatic change in terrain, from the farmland of the Bluegrass through the dark, chiseled rock of the Daniel Boone National Forest — a roadway blasted through the mountains, sycamore, pine, oak, and elm growing in thick clusters up and back from the traffic — from there onto 80 East and the clear loss of level ground. Ancient streams had cut deep valleys in the land, and all around us were hollows sloping to narrow V bottoms, some with house trailers nestled in the crevices and shrubbery. We passed a series of hamlets with the kinds of names that charmed William Least Heat-Moon's ear as he drove the nation's blue highways: Pigeonroost, Dwarf, Rowdy — this last named for the Rowdy Branch of Troublesome Creek.

Janet recalled her first visit to Wheelwright, the effect the town had on her: standing at the entrance to the closed Inland mine, walking through the remains of the bath house where miners had washed the coal from their skin — the old pipes leaking overhead, the sun shining through broken windows onto bare tile. And she talked about Bud, about the first time she met him. "I had heard about this guy, this social studies teacher in middle school. He was a real character, they said, something special. But sitting in his classroom, I'll tell you . . . Kids were all over the place, talking, working with maps, finding places they were reading about, doing geography, leaving the room to go to the library down the hall, coming back with books. And almost everything in the room, a lot of it anyway, was stuff the kids had made — reports on world events, maps, flags of different nations — all this stuff. And there was Bud, walking around the room, talking, goading, coaching,

asking questions, giving advice. The place just felt so damned comfortable."

Bud Reynolds lived in Martin, Kentucky, about a half-hour of winding road from Wheelwright. He usually taught seventh- and eighth-grade social studies, but during the year of my visit was team-teaching an experimental eleventh-grade course at Wheelwright High School with a veteran teacher there named Delores Woody. The Commonwealth of Kentucky had recently passed comprehensive school reform legislation — one of the most ambitious reform bills in the nation — that, among its many mandates, called for a fundamental revision of curriculum to enhance creative, active learning, problem solving and the application of knowledge, and the development of the ability to communicate and collaborate. Bud and Delores were responding to the legislation by combining their specialties — social studies and English — to produce an American Studies curriculum rich in research, writing, and collaborative student projects. Their classroom was also one of the sites in the Kentucky Telecommunications Project, the brainchild of another local teacher, Carol Stumbo, who solicited funding from a foundation in New York to establish a computer network among five classrooms of different grade levels in different regions of the state. Students at each site were to develop projects related to local concerns and, via electronic mail, share questions and findings about their work, shaping their writing to different audiences, ideally developing a network of writers that transcended local boundaries. So fifth-graders in Paducah, in the far west of Kentucky, would pose questions about, say, the environment to the eleventh-graders at Wheelwright, and the students at Wheelwright would explain the economy of the Eastern Coal Field to seniors in Louisville.

Well along Route 80, Janet and I passed an abandoned tipple — a plant where coal was screened and loaded — a sign for Alice Lloyd College, "a light onto the mountains," at Pippa Passes, Kentucky; an occasional house tucked down in the trees and shrubbery, with the sun, fresh from the clouds, glinting sharply off a half-hidden window; the Loose Caboose Café; the Mountain Christian Academy School; a sign announcing Floyd County; then off the highway and a bumpy turn into Martin. PEACE ON EARTH was painted in big red letters on the side of the first building we saw as we entered town.

Martin developed in the first decade of this century as tracks for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad were laid through the area, opening a line that would carry tens of millions of tons of coal out of places like Wheelwright. Martin became a hub for the C & O and flourished through the war years, but when both coal and rail power went into de-

cline, Martin did as well. There were lots of retired folks in Martin, and most of the younger people worked in what mining and railroad jobs remained, and in the fast-food chains and mini-marts that have opened on the outskirts of town, by Route 80. Five hundred or so people now live in and around Martin.

Janet drove down Main Street past the hospital — where a marquee announced painting classes — past the five-and-dime, past a hardware store, past some old fellows, whittling, who puzzled at the strange car, and soon we found ourselves on the outskirts of town, looking up at the broadcasting tower of a radio station, WMDJ. We hurried to find it on our dial; the DJ was just introducing "Bubba Shot the Juke Box Last Night." "All right, Bubba," Janet hooted and admitted we were lost. "Just ask for Bud Reynolds's house," Bud's sister, Patty, had told Janet by phone the day before. So we turned around and pulled up to a house where a lady sat rocking on a porch swing. She regarded us. Then we asked for Bud, and her face brightened. "Oh, Bud Reynolds! Why sure . . ." It seemed we had missed the first left by the police station. "Right there, just over the creek."

Bud and Patty's house was a converted general store, about twenty-five feet from the railroad tracks. We knocked and Bud opened the door with a bear hug for Janet and a "Howdy, Mike buddy," for me, though we had never met before. He was a barrel-chested man, about five foot eight, in his mid-forties, Clark Gable handsome, mustache, wavy hair graying at the temples, friendly as a country politician. His family had been in Martin for generations. I would be staying there, at his house. Of course I would. Of course. Bud wouldn't have it any other way.

That night Bud took me to the one place in town where the locals gathered to have a drink and relax and, occasionally, hear music: the AmVets Club. The outside of the building was tan brick; the windows were sealed over with gray wood. DANCE SAT NITE, a sign announced, DJ FREE ADM. Bud led the way, telling me the names of some of the men I'd most likely meet, and the name of the bartender, Tad, a retired miner. "Coal and railroad," Bud said as he closed the door behind us; "that's what's around the bar."

AmVets Post 27 was one large room, dark, spare, with booths along two walls, a linoleum floor, and a large flag of the United States on the wall. In a dim corner to the right of the door, a neon *Bud* sign glowed blue above a simple stage. That, Bud explained, was where the band would set up — when they had one. At the far end of the room, straight ahead of us, was a big oval bar, a few lights hanging overhead, seven or eight men, about three women, a layer of smoke drifting from their heads up into the lights. Behind the bar a wide screen was flashing pic-

tures of Michael Milken, Leona Helmsley, and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker — the video images of Travis Tritt's "Lord Have Mercy on the Working Man." We pulled out two stools and Bud introduced me to Tad, who set two cans of beer on the bar. *Tink. Tink. NOTICE*, read a sign over his shoulder. AS OF FEB. 20, ALL BEER \$1.25.

As the night progressed, the residents of Martin came and went. A few couples took booths and talked. Two miners arrived straight from work "to wash down the coal dust," their faces so covered with grime and soot, I had to strain to see features beyond eyes and teeth. Bud and I spent most of the evening talking with Tad and with two of Bud's high school buddies, Tim Allen and Bobby Sherman Dingas, both of whom worked for CSX, the remaining railroad in Martin. Bud had taught all their kids.

Tad told me about the mines, explaining how you position yourself when you're working in a narrow space, how you lie on your back and pick across your body at the coal seam or settle in low on your haunches, bracing your back against the roof of the mine to keep from tilting over when your shovel is full. A fellow sitting on the other side of me said, "Hell, Tad's worked a twenty-seven-inch seam. Right, Tad?" and Tad nodded. It took me a while to realize what that meant, that Tad had spent days crouched or supine in a space tighter than most adults could crawl through without mishap. The fellow by me repeated the number with clear respect. These were the badges of honor developed deep within the earth.

Bobby Sherman and Tim or Timmy (or, as Bobby Sherman tended to pronounce it, "Shit, Tim" or "Goddammit, Timmy") were combatively tight, the closeness bred of mutual close calls, one a pragmatist, the other philosophical in bent. Our topics of conversation were those I would hear repeatedly during my stay in Floyd County: local politics ("politics is real big around here"), the treatment eastern Kentucky receives from the balance of the commonwealth ("Sometimes I think the rest of the state, the Bluegrass and all, would like to see us disappear, drop off into West Virginia."), and coal — the complicated, bitter, wistful, begrudging, dependent, grateful attitudes the locals have toward coal.

For a while I talked to Bobby Sherman alone — Tim was busy watching Bud lose money at a video slot machine. He told me about his history with Bud (they were third cousins, actually), an upcoming City Council election, the way an English teacher got him to read books "other than sports books" (he read history and politics now), a chemistry teacher "we could never stump" (and whom he still sought out), and his anger about the stereotyped portrayals of eastern Kentucky: "There's some damned intelligent people here." Then Bud and Tim,

drained of dollar bills, rejoined us, and the conversation got more raucous. At one point, Bud tossed a match into kindling by asking, "Why don't you boys tell Mike what you think about strip mining?"

Tim shook his head. "I don't like it, but what can we do? It ain't so bad, maybe, if they try to replant . . ."

Bobby Sherman stubbed out his cigarette. "Goddammit, Tim, you know nothing comes back. That shit they plant just goes right into the rock."

Tim took his hands out of his overalls. "Bobby" — he poked the air in front of Bobby Sherman's chest — "do you want coal to leave? Do you? You and me would be out picking up cans to survive."

Bobby Sherman dropped his foot from the rung on his stool. "Timmy, do you think I don't know that? I *know* that, goddammit. But they're still ruining the mountains."

And so the argument went. I would hear variations of it in Wheelwright.

Somewhere around midnight Bud reminded himself that tomorrow was a school day. The miners had left; the couples, too; Bud had given in to the seductions of the video game for the last time; and Timmy and Bobby Sherman were hot at it on another topic — hands waving, upper bodies whipping around in barstool disbelief. Bud managed to excuse us, taking a gracious raincheck on the round Timmy was about to buy. We shook hands all around, again resisting the invitation of that one last beer, and headed out onto Main Street. Empty, now. Quiet. Dim lights in the display windows of a few shops. One window was filled with homecoming memorabilia for the high school reunion, just past. "Welcome Home Purple Flashes." We stopped, and Bud guided me through the faded photographs and open yearbooks; then we walked slowly up one block and over the bridge toward the tracks.

When coal prospered, the trains came through Martin with great frequency, day and night. Now Bud's house shook only once every hour or two. Sometime during the middle of the night, I got up, restless, and heard it: at first, a soft hiss, strange and distant, becoming, quickly, something closer to a rumble, but far off still. The warning bells at the railroad crossing started up, and I threw on some clothes and went outside. The tracks were on a gravel embankment, and I walked up to see the headlight of the engine, a hundred or so yards down the line. A single miner, Tad had told me, could load ten to fifteen tons of coal in a day; one high-volume freight car could carry 125 tons. I couldn't imagine such numbers, but I was beginning to feel the sheer force of them at my feet. I bent over and laid my hand on the ground. Except for the diesel's headlight, everything was dark. I could hear the squeals and clanks of the individual cars now, and, sooner than I expected, the train

was right above me, four to five feet up the grade, swift and rhythmic, *clack, clack, clack*, powerful, metal on metal, all compression and force. What promise this once held, spawning communities on hill-sides, in valleys. I thought of Tad, shoulders against rock, steadying himself, and began counting the cars. There would be eighty in all. Freight and coal. Coal. Burrowing deep into the mountains of Floyd County, then bulldozing the tops off them. Timmy and Bobby Sherman. Tad shifting his weight, his lamp illuminating the darkness.

Monday morning and off to Wheelwright. The sun, hazy behind the perennial early fog of the area — lifting off the rivers and myriad streams — sat, fat and comfortable, in a crook in the mountains. Route 122 South, passing Drift, Minnie, McDowell, and Hi Hat ("The Church of God the Prophecy Welcomes You to Hi Hat, Kentucky"), passing Ted's Welding (boarded up), passing the Moonlight Bar (closed, boarded up), passing abandoned cars, a rusted school bus (angling up from a ditch), kudzu creeping up over the hoods, the roofs. The road curved and curved, the fog hanging in the air, up through the trees, car lights winding out of the mist on the other side of the road. Bud explained how some of these towns, once developed because of coal or a railroad route or the construction of a highway, grew to local prominence (Hi Hat was named after the top hat on the logo of the Elkhorn Mining Company; Drift once had a semipro baseball team), only to fade, almost away, when a mine went dry or a rail line closed or a new interstate routed traffic away.

We came up behind a coal truck — for some of the remaining mines, Bud said, the highway was the only way left to get coal out — and slowed down to twenty. On the old railroad tracks along the side of the road a dog, in a combination of leap and trot, was shaking the life out of a big piece of butcher paper. LOWER BURTON — COMMUNITY WITH PRIDE a hand-lettered sign announced, and down in a little hollow there was a row of company houses, kept up, painted, some flowers and shrubs around them. Bud started talking about the blessing he felt this assignment at Wheelwright to be. He had been caught up for several years in some enervating union battles — he was past president of the Floyd County chapter — and had done about all he could do with social studies at his school in Martin. "I think I was doing good work, but in some ways I was just going through the motions." He was feeling stale, burned out. "It's so hard to change," he said, "and there is such pressure toward conformity in our schools. You go along to get along. But I had to take a chance, Mike. And I am so glad I did."

It was at the sign for Bypro Junction that we turned off Route 122, over a bridge, past a post office, and down the brief main street of Bypro

to the high school, a half mile away, built on the outskirts of Wheelwright fifty-five years ago. It was built, Bud said, on a baseball diamond donated by Inland Steel, outside the town, in a wide field surrounded by trees to give it the feel of a campus. We pulled into the parking lot, a mix of grass and gravel now, and found a space by the gym, the newest of the school's three buildings, built in 1951. I could hear the hard squeak of rubber soles, the excited slap and thump of basketball. "Every boy in eastern Kentucky" — Bud chuckled — "has a hoop on the side of the barn. They listen to the Kentucky games on the radio and fantasize about playing for the Wildcats." Especially in the rural parts of the state, high school basketball was at the center of a town's winter life — scores, predictions, the chatter about the game brought people a little closer. And for those gifted players, the possibility of a state tournament and maybe a college scholarship hung like a dream just above the net.

The main building of the high school was faded red brick, air-conditioning units jutting, almost hanging, from some of the windows, the panes of three or four windows painted over from the inside. "Hey, Bud," I said as we walked toward the entrance, "tell me about this teacher you're working with." "Ho! Delores!" he answered. "She's something else, Mike. She was born here, you know. Just up the way at Weeksbury. Her daddy worked in the mines his whole life. She went to school right here at Wheelwright. Hell, she taught some of the parents of the kids she's teaching now." Bud stopped to hand me some of the books he was carrying. "I am so damned lucky to be with Delores Woody. She's due to retire next year, so there was no reason in the world for her to do something out of the ordinary. But do you know what she said to me? Listen to this, buddy — she said, 'I want to do something exciting. I don't want to go quietly into the sunset.'" Bud laughed. "Isn't that wild?" And he opened the front door and led me up a flight of wooden stairs.

The stairs were worn and sagging in the middle, and they gave a little under my step. The hallways were light blue and decorated with pine trees, butterflies, flowers, and a full sun, but most of the sun had peeled away. Some lockers were punched in, some bent outward, almost torn from the hinges — "Marty loves Missy" was written neatly inside one without any door at all. This was a school with no money for repairs. A musty smell hung in the air, decades of water seeping into plaster, into wood beneath the buckled linoleum. The bell rang harsh and loud — no temper to the metal — and we took a quick turn into Mrs. Woody's classroom.

The students were milling around, talking, returning books to cabinets and bookcases, getting things organized. It was loud but not disorderly. The girls tended toward jeans and blouses or inscribed sweat-

shirts, make-up and bountiful hair. The boys wore jeans, athletic shoes, and T-shirts. There were lots of University of Kentucky logos. The ratio of girls to boys was about two to one. Delores Woody sat at her desk: bright rose jacket, pearls, glasses, head cocked sideways, going over a paper with a student. The bell rang again, and the class went to their seats. This was the beginning of the fourth week of instruction.

Bud walked over to a student named Sherry — blond, dressed in black skirt and sweater — and asked her to bring in her group's storyboard. Sherry signaled to four other students, and they left for the Computer Lab down the hall, just as the public address system began crackling its announcements. Bud introduced me to Delores, the three of us talking quickly through the morning news. A minute later Sherry and her colleagues rolled and wrestled through the door what looked like a metal clothes rack on wheels, a long bar on which old maps of the United States were fastened with rings, easy to flip over. Across one large map, the students had taped white paper and sketched out a series of frames, each representing a segment of the video about Wheelwright their classmates had elected them to plan and shoot over the next few weeks. The video would be their way of introducing Wheelwright High School to the students at the four other schools involved in the Kentucky Telecommunications Project: a sixth-grade class in Lexington, in the center of the Bluegrass region; an eleventh- and-twelfth-grade class in Louisville, the financial hub of the commonwealth; an eighth-grade class in Covington, way to the north, just this side of Cincinnati; and a fifth-grade class in Paducah, the westernmost node in the electronic mail network.

Sherry said a few words about the group's progress, then turned the floor over to another student, Mary Rose, who took us through the storyboard, frame by frame. "We thought we'd begin by introducing the class" — she pointed to the first frame, labeled *Introduction*. "That's you," she said, extending her hand, palm outward, toward us. "Then we want to explain about how we're learning both social studies and English together," and here she pointed to the next frame, labeled *American Studies*. "You know," she continued, "what it is we're doing in this class — like all our projects and stuff." She paused and looked at Sherry, smiling. "Then comes a commercial break," and the class laughed. Bud waited for a moment to let the group savor the idea, then asked whether anyone had suggestions. Rhonda, poker-faced in the back of the room, recommended "Visit Wheelwright, the Garden Spot of Kentucky." Laughter. Angie, sitting a few desks away from Rhonda, leaned in and suggested that "we show some of us lying on the rocks by the mine, sunning ourselves." Mary Rose continued, pointing to the next frame. "We thought we needed a news center, you know, someplace where a

newscaster would give news about Wheelwright — the way it was, and the way it is now." "Mary Rose," Delores said from her desk, "I've got some old photographs that you might be able to use. Remind me to show you when we go to the Computer Lab." "OK," said Mary Rose, "I will," and she took the class through the remaining frames: Wheelwright High School, the closed Inland mine, a view of the town from the top of 79 Hill, and so on.

Bud stepped forward and congratulated the team on their work. "You know, many of the students in the Telecommunications Project will not be familiar with the other sites. For that fact, neither will the teachers — heck, I've never been to Paducah! This video will be a great opportunity to introduce Wheelwright." Bud took a few steps further into the middle of the desks. "You'll be showing people where you live through *your* eyes, showing them how times have changed the town — and, well, what things look like now. This is fantastic. Way to go!" Delores agreed with Bud and raised a question — to him but not really to him. "Mr. Reynolds, let me ask you something. Do you think the fifth- and sixth-graders in the Telecommunications Project would be interested in seeing the same things as the eleventh- and twelfth-graders?" "Well, Mrs. Woody," Bud replied, "I wonder. I hadn't thought about that." He fell silent, letting the question sit.

After about twenty seconds, Terry, the fellow who had been designated the group's cameraman and who, up until then, hadn't said much, started thinking out loud. "Maybe we oughta include the grammar school," he said. "You know, show where the high school students came from. Fifth-graders might want to see that." "Where would that shot go?" asked Bud, rubbing his chin. Terry moved in front of the storyboard and studied it for a moment. "How about here?" He pointed to the space just before the frame of the high school. "How about putting it right before the high school?" "That might work," Mrs. Woody speculated. "That might be nice." She walked over to Terry. "What we're talking about, Terry, is audience, isn't it?" "Yes, ma'am," he said. "Who would want to watch it?" "Yes," she agreed, "who would want to watch it. And why. When you're thinking about your shots, you need to be thinking about your viewers, too." Terry wondered if there might be other places in the video where they could appeal to the fifth- and sixth-graders, and Bud suggested they talk that over the next time they met.

The curriculum Bud and Delores developed — or, more accurately, were developing, for it was very much in process — required a degree of intellectual self-sufficiency that was traditionally not the norm in many Kentucky classrooms, especially those in poorer districts. This active, problem-solving orientation was central to the Kentucky Educa-

tion Reform Act, or KERA, as everyone called it, and it drove Bud and Delores's experimental course of study. There were three fundamental components of this curriculum, and during my visit I would get to see the students engage in all three, both effectively and with complications.

There was the American Studies component, an attempt to cross disciplinary lines — fusing social studies and English — to encourage students to think and write about historical and social issues in a more original and creative way than is usually done in the standard curriculum. The general theme Bud and Delores chose for this component was "The Struggle for Freedom," and, over the year, this theme would be further broken out into units on which students would spend four to five weeks. Bud and Delores posed the first unit, "The American Revolution," but the remainder would be determined jointly by the teachers and their students. (They would, for example, eventually work on the civil rights movement and the passing of the cold war.) Students worked in groups on topics related to these units — what were the reasons behind the desire for colonial independence, who were the great civil rights leaders before Martin Luther King, Jr. — deciding, with Bud and Delores's help, how to research a topic, how best to present it, and how to divide labor and schedule time to carry out the work.

The second component emerged from the Kentucky Telecommunications Project. Here, the students, again in groups, were to develop, over the entire year, a community-based project; it was this ongoing project that would provide the foundation for their communication with the students in Lexington, Louisville, Covington, and Paducah. As it would turn out, Bud and Delores's students would develop a recycling project, establish a tutoring service for the students at the elementary school, survey the needs of the local senior citizens, and explore the question: Is there a future in Wheelwright? Such endeavors would require that they use writing in a number of ways, for a number of purposes: field notes, rough, preliminary reports, letters to county, state, and federal agencies (the recycling group, for example, would write to the EPA), letters to the editor, position papers, and so on. The teachers' hope was that the projects would stimulate the development of both a local community of writers — groups of students at Wheelwright using writing around shared concerns — and a community that extended beyond the boundaries of Floyd County. And such broader community-building, in fact, did begin once the students mastered the technology: those students working on the recycling project would ask the students at other sites about recycling efforts in their neighborhoods, and those pondering the future of Wheelwright would gather unemployment statistics from across the commonwealth. Students would do work that

was rich in local meaning even as they sought assistance and audience well beyond the local.

The third component involved the development, by each student, of a portfolio of writing reflecting a range of genres: personal narrative, book review, critical analysis, story, poem, and so on. The writing, for the most part, would come from the American Studies curriculum or the Telecommunications Project, and though there would be due dates for the papers, the students could, as their skills improved, revise them throughout the year or substitute a new piece of a particular genre for an old one.

During the week of my visit, the students were working on an editorial for their portfolios and, in groups, researching an issue related to the struggle for freedom in the American Revolution. They had not yet determined their projects for the Telecommunications Project, but were hard at work on their video introducing Wheelwright and were learning the ways and means of electronic mail and FAX machines in the Computer Lab.

After Sherry, Mary Rose, Terry, and the others had presented their video storyboard to the class, Bud and Delores broke the students into groups to pursue their work on the American Revolution. They had been at this for a little over a week and, predictably, were having some trouble striking out on their own. "Remember," Bud told them once they had reconfigured into clusters of four and five, "there are some basic questions you want to keep asking yourselves. What were the economic conditions in the colonies and in England? What were the differences in the colonies themselves — economic differences, political differences, differences in geography? What were the motives driving some Colonists to break away? Can you relate to any of those motives? Put yourselves in their shoes. And how about the Loyalists? Why did they resist revolution? See if you can put yourselves in their shoes, too."

Over the course of my stay, I would come to know two groups. One was trying to compile information on specific Revolutionary War figures — what led each of them to take extraordinary action. The other was struggling to find a way to convey to the class what it felt like to be a Loyalist in the colonies. "You don't want to just stand in front of the class and read a paper," Mr. Reynolds had said. "Make it lively." Bud and Delores had been coaching the groups, sitting with them and playing out options, making suggestions, recommending sources, retrieving materials from places beyond the school's library, which was terribly outdated and understocked. But the students still had to plan and execute academic work in a way that was unfamiliar to them.

There were some things they could do well. Some were pretty re-

sourceful at scouting around for materials. One girl had gone to Morehead State College, three counties away, and checked out from the library a set of slides of posters and broadsides decrying the Stamp Act and the Quartering Act and the other British actions that sparked Colonial outrage. These created a big stir in her group. Most students, from what I could tell, were also willing to help each other out. There were religious and social traditions in eastern Kentucky that probably set the stage for mutual assistance, and Bud and Delores's students took to collaboration. A student in one of the groups had photocopied some pages from a history book and, as she was reading a passage from them to her colleagues, she came across the name Roger Sherman. "Who was he?" she asked. No one knew — nor did I — so she turned to another group and asked them. And a girl in that group said she knew how to find out real quick, went over to the bookcase by the door, and ran her finger through the index of an old edition of Samuel Eliot Morrison's *The History of the American Republic*. "Here," she said coming back with the book open. "He was one of the guys who signed the Constitution," and she handed the book to her classmate.

But, overall, this curriculum was proving to be a significant challenge for them. And for Bud and Delores as well.

For some time, Bud had run a pretty open classroom, rich with student projects — that was what had attracted Janet Fortune to him in the first place. And since the mid-1980s, Delores, along with Carol Stumbo — the creator of the Telecommunications Project — had been supervising a student-produced magazine called *Mantrip*, a compilation of interviews with local people about the economic, cultural, and political history of the region. These teachers believed in the capacities of their students for independent work and also had an experimental bent. But so much was new here: the cross-disciplinary American Studies curriculum; the eschewing of textbook instruction — with very limited materials to put in its place; the number of unknowns in the Telecommunications Project; the first-time use of the portfolio method for compiling and evaluating student writing; the pressures and expectations of the new school-reform legislation. As I got to know Bud and Delores, I became convinced that Carol — on leave herself to help the local schools implement the state's reforms — had recommended them quite deliberately for this experiment. Bud was tapped because of his willingness to try new things, his pedagogical restlessness. He had a high tolerance for ambiguity, could throw himself into the middle of things and ride them out. And Carol knew that he was in desperate need of something fresh. Delores was chosen because she was rock solid, had roots here that went back generations, had taught kids and their kids — yet, as well, possessed a streak of antitraditionalism, valued her students

tremendously, and liked to set them loose. Yet, like their students, the teachers were setting forth on new terrain, and they were bound to misstep. How much or how little should they guide the students? What degree of structure was paradoxically necessary to foster self-sufficiency? With so much new going on, some blunders would be inevitable, and how in God's name were successful teachers supposed to get used to failure — and then pick up the pieces, recalibrate, and start again? Was this *really* the way Delores wanted to end a fine career? Between them, Bud and Delores had spent over fifty years in the classroom, and they were launching into a curriculum more complex and uncertain than anything in their experience.

And the students. It was, of course, exciting to be part of something so new. In a town that technology had left behind, the prospect of playing with so much technology — of having your own electronic connection to Lexington and Louisville — well, from the beginning that carried a jolt. But these were also students who had succeeded in the traditional curriculum, who knew how to mine a textbook, take multiple choice tests, and recast a lecture in an essay exam. A lot was riding on those skills. Many of the students hoped to attend a technical school or go to Prestonsburg Community College, at the county seat. Becoming certified in, say, computer or medical technology could mean the difference between a life of hard labor — or, worse, unemployment (Wheelwright's unemployment rate was an unbelievable 70 percent) — and a life of relative choice and possibility. And some of the class hoped to attend a four-year college or university: Morehead State, or Pikeville, a Methodist college in the adjoining county, or Eastern Kentucky University (Bud's alma mater), or Alice Lloyd, a remarkable school where, as with Berea, tuition could be defrayed through work (Delores had gone there), or Berea (Carol Stumbo's alma mater). A handful of students might leave the state: West Virginia, Tennessee. It would be hard to overstate the importance of these hopes to the eleventh-graders at Wheelwright . . . or to their families. Imagine their anxiety when they found that the rules of the game had changed.

The students trusted Bud and Delores — that was clear. They sought their help. But even with their teachers' guidance, they went down blind alleys, felt uncertain, couldn't find sources. Nor were they always sure when they were on beam — all the traditional benchmarks had been removed: textbook units, quiz grades, the reliable daily routines. And the signs of frustration were growing: the week before, a science teacher stopped Bud in the parking lot to tell him that a student they both admired had been complaining about feeling overwhelmed; the parent of another girl had called Delores and asked why they couldn't return to "the old way." "After all," the mother said, "it worked just

fine for her brother," who was now off at college. But the frustration hit its peak right at the time of my visit, and I couldn't help being caught up in it.

The first incident arose with the group trying to convey the motives and feelings of the Loyalists. Sherry, who had introduced the Wheelwright video, was in this group, as was Rhonda, a quick-witted girl with curly brown hair, and Angie, a serious student who politely spoke her mind. They had just about had it, trying to figure out a creative way to present the things they were finding—and they were stymied and starting to shut down. Bud was trying to revive their energies, and I was listening in. He suggested they write an editorial, but they rejected that because they were already working on an editorial for their portfolios. He suggested they do something with transparencies, but Angie said that students find them boring. He suggested they do a broadside, something that could be taped to the classroom wall. Naw, nobody would find that interesting. OK, Bud said. How about dressing up as Loyalists and making your case to the class? They looked at him as if he was nuts. "Why, Rhonda here," he said, "could get a red coat and dress up as George the Third." "Oh, Mr. Reynolds," she replied, "you must be kidding! Red's not my color." *Heh, heh.* She curled her lip. As they slumped down in their seats or looked at the tops of their desks, their responses became briefer, softer.

Then Bud went at it another way. "Well," he said, shifting toward Sherry, who hadn't said much, "let me ask you this: Do any Americans today show interest in royalty? Do we feel any connection to it at all?" "Sure," Sherry answered. "Yeah, Lady Di," added Rhonda. "Well," Bud asked, "is there anything we could do with that?" Some stirring then, some changes of posture. "Yeah," Angie joked. "We could bring in *The National Enquirer*." A bit more exchange, getting more animated, and I looked at Bud, got the OK, and leaned over to Angie and wondered whether the group could do a 1770s version of *The National Enquirer*, focusing on the Loyalists. Rhonda and Sherry laughed and sat up; Angie got excited. She liked the idea a lot, she said, and complimented me. I reminded her that it was her idea—with a twist. All I did was point it out. "Well, thank you," she said, "for bringing my idea forward." Then Bud found a sheet of paper and began jotting down their ideas for producing a Loyalist tabloid.

The second incident, one with a messier trajectory, involved the group investigating the motives of key Revolutionary colonials. This group included Candi, who wrote well, Alena, also a writer with promise, and Krystal, a reflective, strong-willed girl. During the week before my visit they had begun work on an idea that had fizzled out, and they felt it was time wasted. Now, I was sitting in on their group, and as they

tried to develop a new project, their discontent surfaced. One complained about the time that was lost. Another said it was hard to figure out what to do next. I asked them what might help. "If they'd give us a schedule," one snapped. "It just seems like we're spending a lot of time getting nowhere," another said. Others added, "All of a sudden, they're throwing all this new stuff at us." "We want to do this right, but how can we when we've never done a presentation before?" Nothing I said did much good; in fact, the more we talked about it, the angrier they got. From class we all went to the Computer Lab, where Carol Stumbo was checking in on the Telecommunications Project. The students knew Carol and told her about their frustrations. Carol pulled Bud and Delores into the conversation and encouraged the students to talk to them directly. By the time the lunch bell rang, a lot of feeling had been expressed, but little was resolved. Learning was shutting down. Krystal, Alena, and company felt adrift and, I thought, in some way betrayed.

Delores, Bud, Carol, and I walked up one brief flight of stairs to the tiny faculty lounge. It was only seven steps above the main hallway, so we talked against the din of slamming lockers, high-decibel greetings and insults, heavy feet stampeding across linoleum and wood. We sat around the corner of the table; birds and flowers and red schoolhouses were printed on the plastic covering.

"This is not good, Delores," Bud said, cradling a Styrofoam cup of the morning's coffee. "Alena is fit to be tied." I told them what had happened in the group, and agreed that things had reached a critical level. It was possible that Bud and Delores would lose the good will of some of their best students. They had misjudged the difficulty of the changes they were making in the curriculum. "We're going to have to give them more help than we have been," Delores said, looking out into the middle of the room. "I didn't know they were so frustrated."

Then Carol spoke up. She was a woman of notable integrity. Glasses, hair in a bun, old wool jacket; when she spoke, she looked right at you with understanding and force. "Well, we need to listen to them . . . carefully. They know what they need. And what they're saying has merit." She reached into her jacket pocket and took out a cigarette, and thought for a moment. "Well, Bud," she said, "can you live with the criticism and still believe in the program?"

Bud bummed a cigarette and sat quietly. This was a Bud I hadn't seen. He was pensive, glum. We sat in silence. Some time passed. Then he stubbed out the cigarette and looked up at us. His face started to relax. Carol had cut into the paralysis. "We're doing the right thing," he said, "we just gotta change how we do it." And the three of them spent the rest of the hour talking about how to provide more structure and guidance without compromising the goals of the curriculum. They

would share with the students the material from the commissioner of education's office that spelled out KERA's new performance standards, talk with them about — spark discussion about — these new "learning goals and valued outcomes" so that they could consider, firsthand, the thinking behind this new approach. They would draw up time-management schedules for the students and help them figure out how to allocate their resources to their various projects.

"You people are right," Delores said to the class the next morning. "We made a mistake. Sometimes people need boundaries in order to use their time effectively." She and Bud would keep closer tabs on the students' developing projects, at least for a while, and direct their work a little more than they had up until then.

A few days later Krystal found me in the Computer Lab. She was carrying an open notebook at her side, almost swinging it, pages flapping. She stopped on a squeak, still bouncing on the balls of her feet, and told me that she and Alena and the others had come up with a great idea, a really great idea. They would do a panel. Like on "Nightline." The important Revolutionary War figures would talk among themselves about their reasons for wanting independence. They would take questions from the audience, too. And what did I think about that?

III THE COMPUTER LAB was right down the hall from Mrs. Woody's classroom, so it was easy for students to go back and forth, splitting their time as they needed to. And though they were scheduled for the lab for one hour a day (the second of their two hours with Bud and Delores), they soon began coming in at lunch and during their free period and after school. The lab was about the size of a classroom, roughly twenty-five by forty feet, and was decorated with a pastiche of textbook publishers' promotional posters — including a brightly illustrated timeline of United States history that covered a large bulletin board — by posters of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Bill of Rights, and by Native American artifacts. There were prints of old Kentucky over one wall, and the entire wall opposite was covered with a forest scene: trees and fallen logs and leaves and grazing deer. Dictionaries were stacked here and there on ledges by the windows; by the entrance was a desk with a neat row of frayed reference books. In one corner sat the rack on which Sherry and Mary Rose's video storyboard was taped; next to it was an open metal cabinet stocked with computer disks and ribbons and paper. The middle of the room was taken up with two big tables and mismatched chairs, and computer terminals extended along three walls. Carol Stumbo had gotten most of them through grants and cagey deals and her own pocketbook. By the desk with the

reference books sat a brand-new FAX machine, and it was beeping, delivering a letter from the sixth-graders in Lexington.

Bud asked Terry, the cameraman for the video project, whether he wanted to respond to the letter, and looked around for someone to be his partner. A fellow with short brown hair and a pleasant face was laying his knapsack down in the corner by the door, and Bud nabbed him. "Have you sent a message on e-mail yet?" He hadn't. "Well, come on, John-boy, let's do it."

John sat at the keyboard of a terminal, Terry on a chair next to him. They began with a greeting to Lexington and a word of thanks for the letter. Terry would try a sentence out loud, John typing it in but raising a question about it, then the two reconsidering what to do. "The eleventh-graders in our class," they wrote, "are making a video about Wheelwright, and we can't wait to show it to you." "Now what?" asked John. Terry sat back and thought for a moment. "How about this? 'As we get further and further into the project, it is becoming more exciting and challenging.'" John typed the sentence in and read it. "Do we say 'further and further,'" he mused, "or 'farther and farther.'" They decided on "farther and farther," and John made the revision. Terry looked at John. "We gotta say something to get their interest. Maybe, uh, 'Throughout the video, we will be showing you how life in the mountains is.'" John typed, but stopped midway. "Maybe we should say 'how we live in the mountains.'" "I like that," said Terry, and John typed it in. John leaned back from the terminal, hands still on the keyboard. "We maybe could say something about sharing information." "Yeah," Terry agreed, "what do we say? Maybe just 'We are looking forward to sharing our information with you.'" Good. OK. And so it went with Terry and John until they were done composing. Then Bud came over and showed them the routine for sending electronic mail.

On this day, rain was splattering against the windows. The heaters were ticking and clanking. It was pleasantly warm, comfortable. Around the room, Rhonda sat on the arm of a chair, showing another girl how to reorganize text on the word processor; Sherry was at the video storyboard, down on her knees, adding some frames along the bottom; Delores sat at the big table in the middle with a girl named Jimmie Lou, offering advice on a piece of writing; Jimmy, a tall, personable boy who was the techno-whiz in the class, was sending a FAX; three girls huddled around a cheerleading sweater, giggling — hearts and boys' names adorning their binders; Candi was helping Mary Rose get the transitions right in her mock editorial about the Boston Massacre; and Krystal was asking me for help in creating "a more snappy opening" for her editorial calling the Colonists to arms, an editorial that, after a little guidance, would begin:

How would you like to have no control in your own home? How would you like for people to impose laws that you had no say about? And how would you like to pay unreasonable taxes on almost everything? How do you decide when enough is enough?

Krystal's father had been a student of Delores's, and, as Delores euphemistically described him, had been a "rather active" boy. A few of his relatives had moved to California, so when Krystal mentioned to him that a teacher from Los Angeles was in her class, he asked to visit. We picked the lunch period of the next day and sat in the corner of the Computer Lab, talking about local history, the economy, and his hopes for his daughter. He was a slim, angular man, cordial, deeply religious, and his people had been here for generations. His ancestors had sold the mineral rights to their property — as had so many of the early inhabitants — for next to nothing, for just over fifteen cents an acre. The profit, of course, went to companies housed in Illinois or Ohio or Pennsylvania — or in other regions of the state. He himself worked in the mines — and was glad to have the work — but, like so many of the people I met in Floyd County, he brooded over the history of that work. "Sometimes I think it would have been better if the companies had never come in . . . if we could have developed on our own . . . you know, kept the money here." There was a weariness to his voice when he talked about the mines. "It's like always, I suppose; the working man serves the rich man. The working man comes home. He's tired. He goes to bed. He gets up and goes on back to work. He don't have time to create something on his own." But when he talked about Krystal, his spirits lifted. "She's a dandy. Did Mrs. Woody tell you she won a contest last year?" (Krystal wrote a slogan, encouraging people to vote, that was judged best in all of the state's high schools.) "I hope she goes on to college. She's got a good mind and she's real studious. She always does a little extra. She'll have some opportunities."

As Bud and I were driving back to Martin that evening, I asked him whether I could visit the old Inland mine, the source of Wheelwright's past prosperity. Sure, he said, "and let's take a few of the kids along." So the next day he recruited the letter-writers Terry and John — who, it turned out, had a free period right after lunch — to escort us. It was a short drive, across town and up 79 Hill, though we took a few detours: past the dilapidated movie theater ("it's a fresh-air theater now," quipped Terry), the miners' bathhouse that Janet had described to me, and a blighted hollow called Muddy Gut, the focus of a "48 Hours" report back in 1989 that Floyd County residents were still mad about. "It showed only the worst part of life here," Terry said. "I swear, when the

producers came to the high school, they asked us to take our shoes off!"

Terry lived with his mother, the third of four children, all boys. His interests ran to the life sciences, anatomy and biology particularly, and he was thinking about going to college, maybe to learn about radiological technology. John, the youngest of three children, thought he might want to go away to college — "to see other places" — but then come back to Floyd County to live. (Terry said he too wanted "to see what the rest of the world is like.") John figured he might major in x-ray technology or pharmacy, work that would be "cool and well paid," not closed in and dangerous. Both John's father and Terry's worked in the deep mines.

The access road to the old Inland mine was brief and bumpy, gravel kicking up under Bud's Toyota, and led to an uneven plateau where we could park. We got out of the car, and behind us were two tunnels into the mountain, closed off with iron gates. SAFETY FIRST was embossed in the concrete face of the mine, but the Inland logo had been blasted off. Someone, in irregular script, had painted MISS BIG over the right tunnel.

"A lot of people used to work here," Terry said. "People still talk about it." I walked up to the entrance and tried to look in, but couldn't see much. Rock and wood and other rubble lay just inside. The darkness began a few feet in, and I could feel, on my cheek, the chill beyond. We walked to the edge of the road, where we could look out over Wheelwright. The town sat at the bottom of a narrow valley, rich green trees rising up all around it. Wheelwright had been carved out of wilderness. "You can see," said Terry, "we got some nice stuff here." "Yep," added John, "but at night it's the deadest place in America."

Bud pointed out across the town to a hill beyond the houses. "That's where the prison's going to be built," he said. "What do you boys think about that?" The conversation that followed reminded me of the one between Tim and Bobby Sherman at the AmVets club in Martin — but without the pyrotechnics. It seemed that a privately operated state prison was to be built in Wheelwright, and it could bring with it up to eighty jobs. Terry and John went back and forth: who wanted a prison in your own back yard? But think of what eighty jobs could mean to Wheelwright. Who wanted a prison? But eighty jobs! Looking down into the town, you could see the stores boarded up and overgrown. Some were old company stores, Terry explained. But you could see the houses, too; most were neat, kept up. A woman stood on her porch, leaning against a post. Shirts fluttered on a clothesline. In a back yard in the distance, a white table sat clean with four empty chairs around it.

When we got back to the high school, I asked Delores if I could see the photographs of old Wheelwright that she had mentioned to Sherry and Mary Rose when they were presenting their storyboard to the class. She took out of the metal cabinets a large, flat box of eight-by-ten and

ten-by-fourteen prints and laid them out on the table in the middle of the room, slowly, edge to edge. There were photos of the golf course and a huge public swimming pool; of a community hall — two stories, pillars, a delicate railing along the balcony of the second floor; photos, too, of a bowling alley, a bright soda fountain, and the front of the movie theater the boys, Bud, and I had passed that day — clean brick, neon, at least a hundred people talking, buying tickets, lining up for *Our Hearts Were Growing Up*, a movie about upper-class girls at Princeton. There was a set of photographs showing a union meeting, held on a Sunday morning in the elementary school; a brand-new coal-preparation plant, the sun glinting off a huge vat of water; and the face of the mine we had stood before that morning, men sitting in coal cars, on barrels, talking, laughing, men walking away from the mine, carrying their gear — power packs, canteens — and men walking in twos and threes toward the entrance, clean, their heads cocked in conversation.

One of the striking things about the photographs was how populated they were with young people: outside the theater a few older men were smoking in the background, but most were couples in their twenties and thirties; the miners were in their thirties, forties, maybe. The demographics of Wheelwright have changed considerably. The population these days is about a fourth the size it was right after the war, and the age distribution tends toward the bipolar: children and adolescents on one end, retirees on the other. All those people in the pictures had retired, moved on, or passed away. Many of their children left to find work. The students Bud and Delores taught were, in many cases, the children, or the children of the children, of those who stayed. What I began to understand, though, was the way the history of those times long past, smoothed out by some — the explosions and falling rock and backbreaking work receding in the reminiscence — still held sway in the collective mind of Wheelwright. Kids heard stories of work and promise from their parents and grandparents. And those kids lived in the midst of the decayed monuments of prosperity — “the shell of better times,” as Delores said — the overgrown library, the stark bathhouse. They knew, as Terry and John knew, that the empty mines had been a source of prosperity — a prosperity they could only imagine. To attain it, they have little choice but to move, perhaps away from the region itself. The per capita annual income of Floyd County is \$10,372.

Some relished flight. “I can’t wait to shake the dust from my feet,” said one boy — for there were many limits here: isolation and provincial morality and the meanness and violence poverty brings. But others did not want to go; they fretted over it — for there were the mountains and forests and streams, the shared history, the closeness of family. “This is my home,” said another boy, “and I love it.” But regardless of

how Bud and Delores's students felt about their home, there were no jobs. "Many of these young people," Delores observed, "have a difficult time just staying in school." More than half the families of the students at Wheelwright High School were on public assistance. "Mrs. Woody," one girl said wistfully, "we certainly would have liked to live in Wheelwright back then." But today many of them would simply have to leave.

Consider, then. How do you help them come to understand this place where they were born — this poor, difficult, intermittently comforting and brutal, familiar, beautiful place that existed before Inland, before Elkhorn — and the people who have worked so hard during its economic ascent and decline? And how, simultaneously, do you help them prepare for the journey beyond this place, keeping one foot within the circle of their birth, and, with the other, stepping outward, to return possibly, possibly not? The more time I spent with Bud and Delores, the more I came to realize that this was the conceptual tension that enriched the use of the Computer Lab.

One key element in this tension was represented by the magazine *Mantrip*, founded by Carol and Delores in 1985. *Mantrip* was inspired by the *Foxfire* books — the anthologies of Appalachian lore and practice compiled by high school students in Rabun Gap, Georgia — but whereas *Foxfire* tended toward compilation of traditional methods of building, cooking, healing, and crafting, *Mantrip* contained primarily student interviews with locals about their origins, the work they did (a "mantrip" was the car that carried miners underground), and the history of Wheelwright and its surrounding communities. The focus, then, was more on the mines, unions, immigration, politics, race relations, and religion. So, twice a year, Wheelwright students would set out for the kitchens and living rooms of their neighbors and tape-record stories about the old-time good times and the tunnels that wouldn't hold, about ballroom dances and damaged lungs. They learned about Polish and Hungarian and Italian settlers — frightened, hopeful — and about segregated schools and lunch rooms, and, too, about the brotherhood some felt underground. They learned something about how people can make good decisions — as Carol once put it — when their choices are very limited. They talked to preachers — Old Regular Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Charismatics — about the origins of their ministry. They heard powerful affirmations of God's design and family cohesion and awful stories of abuse. They were led to reflect on the security as well as the social control, the prosperity along with the dependency that came with being Inland Steel's company town. They heard contradictions and had to record them. And they heard exciting tales about legendary bad men ("He killed seven men that he counted — but some he didn't

count!"), about ways to ward off witches (carving a picture into the bark of a tree), and they heard the old songs, sung in the traditional high-onesome style. It all provided a chance, as one student editor put it, to create "a testimonial to the life and people we have come to know."

Creating such a testimonial was crucial, for the region had, for generations, been depicted by outsiders in one-dimensional ways, usually as backward and uncivilized. As early as 1826, the traveler Anne Royall wrote that the midland dialect heard in the mountains was a "mangled and mutilated" English. And once "Appalachia" began to be defined as a distinct American region, that definition emphasized Appalachia's isolation and poverty, sometimes in insulting "local color" portraits, sometimes to raise national consciousness and spark reform. (Even William Frost, Berea's third president and a major force in the creation of Appalachia in the public mind, had a tendency to speak of mountain people as though they were the artifacts of another time.) As Bud was fond of pointing out, this general image of eastern Kentucky still had strong currency *within* the commonwealth itself: a past governor of Kentucky, he told me, once quipped that Route 80 — the highway that took Janet and me into Floyd County — was a road that led "from nowhere to nowhere." So from all sorts of sources, and for a very long time, young people in eastern Kentucky have been subjected to a variety of derogatory portraits of themselves.

It was important to Bud and Delores, therefore, that they established the conditions for their students to observe closely the sadness and joy of mountain life, to listen with a clear ear to the stories emerging from the hollows. "I want them to know about their history," Delores had said, "I want them to take pride in the people who settled the area, who worked hard and wanted the most for their children. I suppose I want them to have a sense of place." A significant amount of the writing done in the Computer Lab — some destined for the students' portfolios, a good deal generated by the Telecommunications Project — was writing that encouraged these young people to think about their daily experience and the place where they lived, to render that reality and, in rendering it, define it.

Thus it was that Sheldon sat before the terminal, his long legs curled back around the legs of the chair, composing a piece for his portfolio, intermittently rhapsodic and comic:

I've lived in the mountains of eastern Kentucky and never once have I wanted any other home. These hills are my protectors. I feel that I am safe and secure from all the troubles the rest of the world holds. These aren't just thoughts that I write on paper; these are feelings straight from my heart.

I love nothing more than waking up in the morning to the tantalizing smell of bacon and eggs and feeling the morning wind roll off the mountain tops as I take a walk after breakfast.

People my age, in their late teens, are constantly talking about how much they want to "get out of here." This is actually very funny to me because it reminds me of a "getting away from home" story that my Uncle Gayle once told me.

At that time in his life, all my uncle wanted to do was to get out of Kentucky. He wanted to hit the big city of Detroit wide open much the same way the teens today want to try their wings, but he was in for a big surprise.

When he got to Detroit, he worked for about a week in a factory — then he lost his job. It was in December, and he spent Christmas Eve on the floor of his non-furnished apartment eating dry crackers and listening to the "Twelve Days of Christmas" being played from a nearby department store. He was kicked out of his apartment the next week . . . To this day my uncle cringes at the tune of "Twelve Days of Christmas," and I just smile and thank God that I live here.

But economic conditions beyond his control may force Sheldon to leave the security of the mountains — for school, for work. And the pedagogy to contribute to his setting forth on that journey was, paradoxically, also present in the Computer Lab. "These young people," Delores pointed out, "need to learn to live in a world driven by technology. If they can take a sense of identity with them, it will help. They'll know who they are and where they're from. And they'll be secure in that knowledge." A sense of place that can help them move beyond place.

The electronic mail itself, of course, enabled the students to forge connections beyond Wheelwright. It had taken some time to get that system going, debugging it, teaching all the eleventh-graders to use it. Bud, a high-tech impresario, helped the teachers at the other sites to master it, and they, in turn, aided their students. The primary purpose of the network was to get students to interact around their formal projects — at Wheelwright, the projects involving recycling, senior citizen care, tutoring, and an exploration of the economic future of the town. And, as Bud later told me, such interaction did develop. But a less formal series of exchanges developed as well. As students became comfortable with the technology, they started communicating about all sorts of topics — basketball, music, and movies — and Bud quickly set things up so that students could establish electronic mailboxes on any topic they wished and go at it.

By the time Bud and Delores's students were entering their second term, their projects were well under way. The recycling group had gone

to the two elementary schools that fed into Wheelwright and put on a skit for the kids, did a lesson for them on the benefits of recycling, and established an environmental-consciousness poster contest. In addition, they prepared an itemized budget for a community-wide recycling project. The group interested in services for the elderly had visited hospitals, nursing homes, and retirement homes in Floyd County (and adjacent counties to make comparisons), and interviewed patients, residents, and staff. Their goal was to write an assessment of the quality of care and produce a pamphlet for senior citizens on the services available to them in the region. "Our seniors," they wrote in their interim report, "are to be treasured, not neglected." Those involved in tutoring elementary school students had been working in the two local schools, recording their experiences in field notes, researching other "cross-age" tutoring programs, and making arrangements to get the fifth-, sixth-, and eighth-graders on-line with their peers in the Telecommunications Project. And the students interested in the economic future of Wheelwright had gone to Prestonsburg to interview the economic director of the county and the owners of local industries — like R & S Truck Body, the site of a hundred and fifty jobs — about the advantages and disadvantages of owning a company in Floyd County, the incentives that might bring in other industry, the opportunities for women, and the outlook for the future. They wanted to prepare a report for other young people on their prospects if they chose to stay close to home.

The Wheelwright students had been reporting on these projects to the students in the electronic network, soliciting information from across the state, and, in turn, learning about and responding to projects originating in the other sites. The eighth-graders in Covington, for example, had gotten involved in the local Habitat for Humanity and were establishing a literacy tutorial for younger children. The projects gave rise to editorials for *The Floyd County Times*, letters to government officials (ranging from county supervisors to state senators to the directors of federal agencies), and reports on findings — all genres that required a recasting of experience and observation into a public voice. *Opening the World Through Writing*, read the logo on the makeshift stationery for the Telecommunications Project. By about the third week of their second term, the students at Wheelwright were preparing interim reports on their projects for the foundation in New York that had been funding them.

Bud was a kind of technological populist, and the power of e-mail, he believed, was that it could, once mastered, lead to spontaneous, unpredictable communication as well as more formal exchange. Students argued back and forth about the Chicago Bulls, trashed or praised current movies, swapped autobiographical portraits, suggested places they

might go if and when they visited each other. Some, like Sheldon, the fellow who wrote the paean to mountain life, soon tired of this loose exchange and sent out word that he would like to see other pieces of creative writing. "Is anybody thinking and writing out there?" he asked, and poems and stories started coming back. Candi wanted to know what others thought about Somalia, and a boy in the sixth-grade class in Lexington asked if others had ever been in the hospital, because he was going to be admitted tomorrow. Some students, using only an initial, tentatively brought up alcoholism. One girl asked whether anyone wanted to talk about rape. These private, agonizing topics found an oddly safe space in this electronic forum. "You can't control this kind of technology," Bud mused. "The glory of it is that students will take it in new directions — and surprise us all." "I think our students need to examine everything that happens to them from different viewpoints," De-lores said. And the Telecommunications Project encouraged the students to shift about in a network of observation, becoming familiar with it, enhancing their own perspectives, considering in new light some of what they'd come to know about economy and society growing up in Wheelwright, Floyd County, Kentucky.

IV THERE IS A WEATHERED BRIDGE over the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River in Prestonsburg — P-burg — site of the school board, the district office, the local chapter of the Kentucky Association of Teachers. Bud and I leaned against a thick concrete pillar — graffiti, the traces of a poster — watching the water flow northward toward the Ohio River. The engineers who plotted the railroad lines that opened up the Eastern Coal Field followed the course of the Big Sandy's many branching tributaries. In the distance, we could see an old access bridge extending over the water, the water moving with a purl, a ripple, brushing the bottom limbs of the trees on the bank, here and there a log breaking the flow. HELL IS UPON US, the big spray-painted letters read, right at our feet. VICTORY IS BELOW. HEAR THE WIND? The trees angled up from the bank, thick, clustered, deep green, rustling in the light breeze. "I have never felt so free in all my life!" Bud exclaimed, putting one foot on the drain pipe that ran along the walkway and leaning out over the Levisa. "We're really pushing on the envelope, Mike. I have never felt this hopeful."

We unwrapped some sandwiches and opened two sodas. And Bud talked. "I came into teaching with a view about changing kids' lives, but then I got into the routine of schooling. The stereotype of good teaching in this area is when the kids are all in straight rows, listening. Well, you get into a rut. And the kids shut down. They get into *their* rut.

I'd get this very guilty feeling, like I wasn't doing my best. And I'd start to think, 'Good God, if this is all there is . . .' I began changing when I got those kids out of their seats. I think I work twice as hard now, but when I see them respond — well, it hits on what made me go into teaching. You see what school can mean to these kids, and you're part of it. But we have just got to take risks. We've got to take chances. It's the perception that nothing can change that's our biggest impediment."

From Prestonsburg we set out for Berea. It was a long, relaxing drive, Bud and I mulling over the last few days while he intermittently checked in on sports radio, and I watched in wonder the moonlight on rockface and trees, then on rows and rows of tobacco and the gray wood siding of curing barns, then on Bluegrass farmland, the fog, pearlish in the moonlight, hanging just above the fields. Whenever I rolled the window down, there was the smell of pine or tobacco or skunk or wet hay, and the resonance of an occasional car, and the chirping of crickets, loud crickets — "Them's Kentucky crickets, boy" — and, somewhere in the distance, the wail of a train whistle. It was well past ten when we pulled into Janet's driveway.

Janet made coffee for Bud — he was continuing on to Lexington for the U.K. game the next day — and we talked a while longer, and then Bud hit the road, with warm farewells at the screen door. I went to the guest room. About half a block up from Cherry Road, the land dropped off to a deep ravine, and freight trains ran west to east along the narrow bottom. I lay in bed, the moonlight angling across the old quilts, thinking and listening to the whistle through the night.

Since she was a little girl, Janet Fortune had been drawn to Appalachia. Her father's lineage compelled her. Shannon Wilson, the archivist at Berea who had guided me through the Reverend Fee's papers, liked to say that mountain people were a people with memory. Janet was influenced by memory that existed before her birth. Little wonder that she entered the tradition at Berea that confirmed service to the mountains, that celebrated teacher education as noble work, God's work, even — though Janet would probably laugh off the ministerial implications. But not the call to serve, and not, at the least, a hint of the sacred. She wanted to foster in her students a sense of the majesty of teaching, a contemplative cast of mind, an awe of what it meant to learn and grow. And these young teachers, many of them, would find their places in public schools in the Eastern Coal Field, in West Virginia, in Tennessee — Dwayne Satterfield and Mindy Botts and Sheila Robinson and Tracy Payne Williams — wanting to change things, to spark a love of learning, to see the good in students, to be of service.

Bud and Carol and Delores shared a pedagogy driven by a belief in the

power of student experience and by a paradoxical urgency to foster both a sense of place and a broadening of horizon. This pedagogy was, of course, enriched by their personal histories and shaped by the demands of their classroom, but it emerged from hopes and values fundamentally similar to those that animated the student teachers: a desire to make a difference, to encourage intellectual excitement and independence, to contribute to social justice and human growth. The fascinating thing was the way the veterans had to continually reconsider old practices, experiment, try new things to realize those values, to reconnect with them. Freedom. The multiple definitions of freedom, the play of freedom through so much of their work: The American Studies curriculum and "The Struggle for Freedom," the freedom provided by the grant from the foundation in New York, the freedom that led, momentarily, to student rebellion — itself, a manifestation of freedom — and then to original, unexpected achievement. As Bud said, they were all pushing on the performance envelope, not to pierce, finally, into some unbounded space, but to re-establish a connection with something deep in the heart.

If the young teachers working with Janet find their way in this profession, their desire to make a contribution will mature, sharpen, will shape the direction of their lives. But as with any value, any article of faith, it will not go unchallenged. I thought of Bud spending himself in union battles, then finding himself — in the middle of this rejuvenating experiment — facing the prospect of failure. "Teaching is fraught with failure," a friend of mine said once. During the ride to Berea, I asked Bud what was going through his mind on that day when everything seemed to be falling in. "All I could think of," he answered, "was 'Am I going to fail? My God, am I going to fail at this?'" What pulled him through, finally, was his long-held belief in what students could do and, I think, his connection to Carol, her ability to reinvigorate his faith. "Can you live with the criticism and still believe in the program?" Those fears the young teachers expressed — Will I know enough? Will I do the right thing? — they will never leave. Good teachers, novice and senior, live their classroom lives, maybe out of necessity, in a domain between principle and uncertainty.