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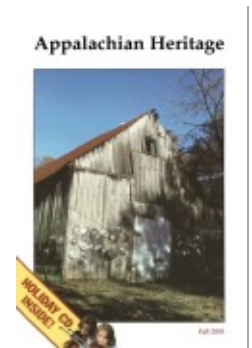
Gold Medal

Barbara Smith

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She said that every summer, they went to his old cabin up on Carr Creek for his birthday party. "You ought to come back for it," she said. I said I would try.

Then on Sunday last, when I was getting ready to drive to Cincinnati to catch my plane back to California, I walked out to the little convenience store near my sister's house to buy a Lexington *Herald-Leader*, and on the front page, left column, I saw "James Still, Appalachian writer, dies."

Yesterday I read to my classes Jim's mountain version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" and that wonderful little story "Mrs. Razor," about the six-year-old girl with an imaginary *triflin'* husband; and then I read them Jim's poem "Heritage," reciting those last two lines—And one with death rising to bloom again, I cannot go. Being of these hills I cannot pass beyond—with a bittersweet new resonance.

As my flight took off for Los Angeles, I put my hand on the window and looked to the hills south. With a smile of reconciliation, I saw the hand of my grandfather, my father, Jim Still – all those men I have watched age and pass from me, and I knew that although I seemed to leave, "Being of these hills" nor can I pass beyond.

Gold Medal

Come here to the window and you tell me, Harry,
How come you don't notice that bloodroot in bloom,
That chipmunk chattering its tail in the sunlight,
You and your touchdowns and left-handed hooks,
You with your head in the TV and sports page.
That's nothing to chickory and poppies and teasel
And Queen Anne's Lace rising proud from the ditch.
Just look at those birds, that bunting with its wings spread,
The gasp of orange on that Baltimore Oriole
There in the cedar.
Think of hawks or a swallow late of an evening
Or one purple thistle out in the field.
Your gymnasts and boxers and racers and such,
They're a wonder all right—for humans.
But Harry, one old buzzard riding the airwaves
Is awesomer even than winning.

—Barbara Smith