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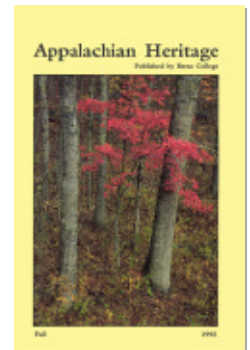
This Side of the Mountain

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Appalachian Heritage, Volume 23, Number 4, Fall 1995, p. 3 (Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aph.1995.0029>



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This Side of the Mountain

Sidney Saylor Farr

People have asked why mountain women are writing and publishing poetry in unprecedented numbers. While pioneer women found expression through their necessary work—making quilts, spreads, clothes, tablecloths, and baskets—when the family no longer depended on quilts for warmth and baskets for carrying, and clothes were purchased ready-made at Walmart, there was need for other creative outlets. Through poetry, modern mountain women are finding voices with which to be heard. Rather shyly at first, beginning in the 1960s, mountain women began writing and reading their work at meetings and conferences. Their poems spoke about their struggles, their loves and hates, their way of life, just as good poetry has done since Chaucer and Shakespeare.

While poetry has been prominent in Appalachia for the last twenty or thirty years in individual writings, classes, anthologies, and small magazines, it may surprise some to hear that recently poetry has been making a comeback throughout the United States. “It’s the biggest literary renaissance in the United States since the Beat movement of the 1950s and 60s,” Bill Moyers writes in his new book, *The Language of Life*. “An enormous range of voices are now getting heard . . .”

I think of poetry as water in my life. Water was important to me growing up in Southeastern Kentucky in the 1940s. I loved the times when it rained for a day or two and little springs gushed out from the hillsides, out of old crawdad holes, from underneath rocks, and down little gullies. I spent hours climbing to look at the springs, channeling one little stream into another until I had larger streams running together before reaching level ground. Playing in water, and looking for new springs, became symbolic to me of poetry. I found that more and more as I grew up and wrote poems, I was expressing life as I knew it in terms of nature. Mountain women use poetry to express things too painful or too joyful to talk about.

In this issue, Ginny Carney writes about the Multicultural Heritage of Appalachia Institute which was sponsored by the Berea College Appalachian Center this past summer.

Included with Carney’s report are some poems written by women about their identity, religion, and heritage, asking questions important to women everywhere: Where are we? Where are we going? How do we get there? ■