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Jim Wayne Miller

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Loyal, I want to join with your other friends and colleagues in congratulating you on the occasion of your richly deserved retirement. While I realize that you will continue to write, speak, edit, and consult, you can certainly look back at the accomplishments of your professional life with great satisfaction.

As Executive Director of the Council of the Southern Mountains and of the Appalachian Center at Berea College, you have touched the lives of thousands of people with your good sense, humor, and humanity.

I am one of those whose lives are richer for having been associated with you. By involving me in the summer workshops and institutes you held at Berea, you helped focus my work both as a writer and as a teacher. I am grateful.

I shall never forget that time when you were working on your biography of Bascom Lamar Lunsford, and you asked me to inquire around in the Leicester, North Carolina, community, among my neighbors and relatives there, for some local perceptions of Bascom. In the course of my inquiries I asked my father and my Uncle Leonard for recollections of Bascom. At first, my father was vague and general in his remarks, but my Uncle Leonard insisted my father at one time had “practically lived” at Bascom’s house. It turned out that my father had courted one of the Lunsford girls and when my Uncle Leonard brought out a Lunsford family photo, my father looked at it, pointed to one of the Lunsford daughters and said to me, “That one like to have been

Jim Wayne Miller, lecturer, writer, poet, teaches at Western Kentucky University. His second novel, His First, Best Country, was reviewed in the Spring 1994 issue of Appalachian Heritage.

your Mama.” If it hadn’t been for your sending me out into my own community, Loyal, on a little errand for you, I would never have known that!

I suppose my point is that you have focused me professionally and enlightened me personally—and I am only one of many you have touched in similar ways.

I’ve been looking back through the index of *Appalachian Journal*, and at back numbers of *Appalachian Heritage*, surveying your dozens of contributions to these publications, and rereading one of your best-known essays on “Appalachian Values”—and thinking how you are the embodiment of those values you find in Appalachian people generally—modesty, a belief in equality, independence, self-reliance, and affection for place and family.

If I can borrow from the title of a monograph Cratis Williams wrote in tribute to a mentor, I’ll say you are “a better man than I ever wanted to be!”