

Volume 44, Issue 2, Fall 2021

# GRADUATE HUMANITIES

A multidisciplinary program bringing together students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds to collaboratively explore the interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

## *Everyone has a story*

This newsletter issue originated when we reached out to a former student to find out how she was doing with COVID-19. Then we selected three stories from a 2019 ethnomusicology seminar, a 2nd place winner of the 2020 West Virginia Fiction Competition, and a news release on the 2021 Weatherford Award for Best Books about Appalachia. The first two had been on my calendar to use in earlier issues, but they hadn't fit in. And the third just occurred this spring. No hint of their commonality factored into our decision to include them this time, other than they deserved to see the light of day. But as I worked with the four stories, a theme emerged that spread itself across the years: resilience. Never has a newsletter in its entirety seemed more timely and poignant than this one, highlighting stories of individual *and* community resilience. I hope you take away some comfort and inspiration to bolster your journey as we all make our way through this pandemic.

– Trish

## *Reflections on this past year* **Nothing at all / Everything at once**



**Guest contributor**  
**Kaitlyn (Rhodes) Rheel ('19)**

I thought a lot about how to start this. Should I try to make it funny? Perhaps attach a meme of a burning dumpster? Should I focus on one aspect of my pandemic experience? I can tell you this— I never thought I'd have to write about my experiences after surviving a year like we did.

Time is an illusion and this past year certainly proved that point. I feel like I did nothing at all and everything, all at once. I tried roller skating, and then I sold the skates. I made new friends, and I let old friendships go. I played a lot of Animal Crossing (yes, my island is five stars). I returned to (virtual) therapy and realized again just how inaccessible mental health resources are in this country. I walked around my neighborhood so many times that I started noticing minute details of landscaping. I started writing poetry again; I sold my first poetry book. My screen time notification was incredibly alarming most weeks, but I'm thankful for the connection and entertainment screens provided. I was very, very privileged to stay employed remotely throughout this time. I read a multitude of books. I educated myself more fully on what diverse representation would look like in all forms of media, and how I might be positioned to help achieve this.

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I now research all of the authors of books I want to read and am much more conscious of the media I choose to consume, literature included. I want to make sure that the stories I am reading are being represented as authentically as possible. Of course, this is a nuanced and complex topic and researching authors and reading a diverse selection of books is just barely scratching the surface. I leaned hard into YA contemporary and fantasy over the past year; I needed the familiarity and comfort. If that's your cuppa too, then I would highly recommend checking out the following authors: Elizabeth Acevedo, Aiden Thomas, Tahereh Mafi, Mason Deaver, Tomi Adeyemi, and Adam Silvera.

when I was forced to do nothing within the same four walls, what choice was there? I grappled with every existential thought. I sat with my privilege, my identity, my priorities. I had tough conversations with loved ones; some of them didn't hear me. I keep trying. I asked myself tough questions and learned a lot about what fulfills me, what my needs are, how to ask for what I need, and how to set firm boundaries. The biggest lesson that I learned about myself internally was how tightly I grip to things. How unwilling I often am to let go. I have always struggled to walk away, and these past 15 months taught me to loosen my grip, to breathe, to stop trying to impose control on the uncontrollable. To focus my time and energy on the few things I am able to control.

## **SURRENDER** *Written by Kaitlyn Rhebel during pandemic*

*What would it feel like to let go?*

*Would I feel free?*

*Would I stop agonizing about who you are in relation to me?*

*To surrender, to lay it down*

*When all I've done my whole life is wear the burden like a crown*

*Who would I even be?*

*Without the knots of worry*

*Without feeling like I always need to be in a hurry*

*In a flurry of emotion, all of it interwoven*

*I guess it's time to cut the ties that bind*

*It's time for me to find*

*Who I am when at peace, filled with ease*

*It's time, it's time; I release*

But mostly? Mostly I sat at home, grappling with my shadow self. I was given the rare and privileged opportunity to stay at home, so I opted to reflect on myself and my life. Sitting without distraction to your own thoughts and feelings is an intense experience, and I felt proud and brave for choosing to show up for myself. I did my best to give myself space to grieve the cancelled plans, the loss; there was and is so much to grieve. When I had read all I could read, when I had revisited every hobby from my youth,

We all changed, of course. Collectively, and in a million different individual ways. I returned to myself. I not only discovered more of who I am, but I made space for her to continue to unfold. I knew I wanted to move away from West Virginia for years before I finally did, but it took me a long time to feel ready to leave. I don't do well with leaving. This past year I finally feel I was able to heal my relationship with where I come from and forgive myself for moving away. We all know the shame that we can carry about being Appalachian, and at age 30 I feel I have laid that to rest for good. I taught my coworkers what a "buggy" is. I even got an opossum tattoo with a cowboy hat on my leg to make me smile and to always remember those holler roots.

I finally accepted that it's okay if my priorities are different from my peers. The most important things in my life are the people that I love and love me back, and the connections that I foster. The people that

showed up for me during quarantine really meant a lot to me. The loved ones that made space to hold my grief and uncertainty and sadness. The loved ones that sent care packages, and FaceTimed to check in.

I have made a commitment to myself to reserve time and energy in my schedule even after things become busy again to stay present and connected in their lives. I want to maintain an open heart and crash into the people, places and things that I love with all I have. I hope at the true end of my life's

journey to be remembered for the way I love, the way I keep showing up, rather than any accomplishment I will ever achieve.

If all you feel that you did was survive, I hope you know that will always be enough.

Kaitlyn Rhebel ('19) lives in San Pedro, California, and is a Senior Photo Editor and Story Manager in the entertainment industry who believes in the power of storytelling and connection. She received her MA in the Humanities from Marshall University. You can find Kaitlyn at [k8canrelate.com](http://k8canrelate.com).



## Excerpt from “A Killing Time” by Cat Pleska

<It was plain to me that Poppaw had been out drinking again. A hangover, Mommaw called it. He drank all the time. If it wasn't beer, it was Old Crow. If it was payday, he splurged on Jim Beam whiskey. Sometimes I found Mason jars of clear moonshine in the refrigerator door, which I was told never to touch. But she would not be this upset if it was only his drinking.

He smiled at me. “Hey, Stinker.” He lit a cigarette with his Camel lighter.

“Hey Poppaw.” Before either of us spoke again, the door opened and Daddy walked in, followed by Mommy. I knew something real bad had happened to bring my parents here so soon.

Mommy had what grownups call “high color.” I didn't know what that meant, but it was cold outside, and her face was red. Maybe from that. She was wearing a pair of green plaid pants and an orange sweater under her wool coat. She wore black loafers and no socks. Her curly blonde hair was uncombed. Mommy never left the house without looking “fresh as a daisy,” she'd say. Daddy apparently hadn't had time to Brylcreem his dark hair, but his tan work shirt and pants matched. Mommy kissed me then moved toward the stove and the coffee pot.

“Dad,” my daddy said as he sat down, “Is there anything left to do? Are they through with the questioning?” His fists were clenched as he placed them on the table. I couldn't see his face because it was turned away, but I noticed a muscle jerking in his jaw.

*Congratulations, Cat!*

Faculty member Cat Pleska, MFA, won Second Place for “A Killing Time,” in the 2020 West Virginia Fiction Competition held by Shepherd University's Center for Appalachian Studies and Communities.

Cat teaches Expository Writing and Appalachian Culture classes for the Graduate Humanities Program and is a full time instructor in the English Department with Marshall.

Cat's memoir, *Riding on Comets*, was published in 2015 by WVU Press. She is a 7th generation West Virginian, a former book reviewer and radio essayist, and is currently working on a collection of travel/personal essays, *The I's Have It: Travels in Ireland and Iceland*.

Mommy was pouring coffee from the silver pot for daddy and herself. I let my legs swing as I listened, but she frowned at me because my legs were thumping against the chair rungs.

"It's over. She's not pressing charges. The police ain't. She backed me up. As far as I know, that's it." Poppaw offered his cup for Mommy to refill.

"Damn, Dad, I hope they're through. How in the Hell did this happen?"

Poppaw rubbed a hand over his face and shook his head, making his cheek jowls jiggle. Mommy handed a coffee cup to Dad and then turned to me.

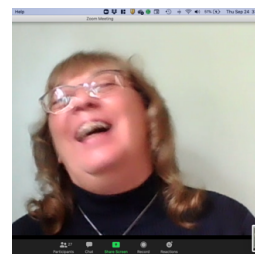
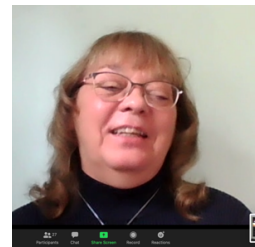
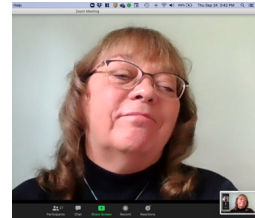
"You'd better go get dressed," Mommy said.

"What?"

"Go on."

"Where's Mommaw?" I asked, hoping she'd give up and leave me alone.

This was big stuff, I could tell. I watched Jerry outsmart Tom again.>



"When I found out my story had garnered second place in the Fiction Anthology Contest, it was a wonderful honor. But the best part was to Zoom with the extraordinary author and contest judge, Dorothy Allison. During her Master Class, participants had the privilege of learning Dorothy's writing wisdom. I'm grateful to Shepherd University, West Virginia Center for the Book, and the West Virginia Humanities Council for sponsoring the contest."

Click here to view information on the [Center for Appalachian Studies West Virginia Fiction Competition.](#)



## Ethnomusicology Report

### *The Tygart Valley Homesteaders*

Sitting across from me as she commented on her video was MU professor and MA Humanities student Peggy Proudfoot Harman. Most students summarize their final projects through a presentation supported with handouts and PowerPoint slides, so I was surprised in Dr. Lassiter's "Song Tradition & Musical Experience" seminar to see a project presentation in multimedia form.

Because the Humanities program is open to lifelong learners and professionals in all fields, it's not surprising to learn that Peggy's main work is Director of the

Marshall University's Master of Social Work program. She initially just wanted the Appalachian Certificate but has continued with the program because "it's just very enjoyable and a good break from the technical writing all the time." She's found the courses she's taken in the Humanities Program to "enhance everything" she does. Since Peggy and her husband and business partner, Jason Harman, operate a multimedia company focused on making video documentaries of West Virginia stories, it was fitting for her to use their combined skills of research, story-telling, and videography for her "Ethnomusicology Report of the Tygart Valley Homesteaders."

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The following excerpts are taken from two interviews and her video. They have been altered and shortened for purposes of this newsletter. Unfortunately, we can't include the music that played throughout the video. Hopefully, Peggy and Jason will be able to finish the video and make it available publicly.

**Trish Hatfield: Peggy, I had the pleasure of viewing your draft video, "Ethnomusicology Report of the Tygart Valley Homesteaders." Let's begin with your motivation for putting it together.**

Peggy Proudfoot Harman: The reason I was inspired to do this video is that my mother, born in 1926, grew up in a coal camp called Scotts Run, near Morgantown.

**TH: Was coal mining still going on in the area?**

PPH: Not much because it was the depression. . . . They had been mining coal seriously since about 1917 and a lot of those mines were mined out anyway. There were about ten mines where my mom grew up in a three-square-mile area. And all these people, thousands of them, ended up getting stranded. In 1933, a reporter, Lorena Hickock, visited Scotts Run, West Virginia, and was appalled. She was so alarmed—she was afraid it was the decline of civilization. So, she called her friend, Eleanor Roosevelt, who went to Scotts Run. Her visit would

lead to some of the most important legislative changes in the history of the United States.

**TH: What was included in this legislation that interested you?**

PPH: Near Scotts Run, The Tygart Valley Homestead was developed by the Subsistence Homestead Division. Rural rehabilitation focused on helping individual families regain their ability to sustain themselves and to develop a group

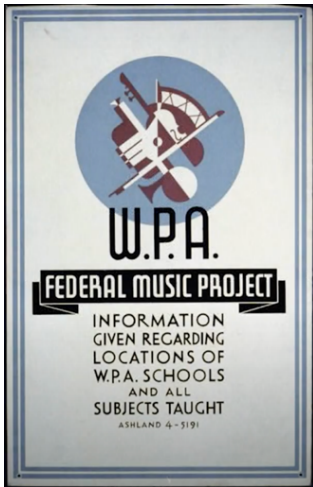


*This view of the Dailey and East Dailey homestead houses was photographed in October, 1936, looking to the east toward Cheat Mountain. The site for the Trade Center Building is to the right of the couple. The caption for a similar picture which appeared in a Pittsburgh newspaper on October 25, 1936 stated that "for thousands of persons over the United States, life was really begun - in 1936. Their parents and their parents before them had been victims of 'company towns'. They lived in houses that needed*

identity based on socioeconomic class as the "worthy poor," their place in the historical political movement known as the New Deal, and through the folk music that helped them through difficult situations representing every aspect of their lives from birth to death.

**TH: You mention folk music. This sounds like a leap of imagination to include folk music in the rehabilitation of a depressed area.**

PPH: The reason I chose this topic for my project was because of the New Deal's Federal Music Program, . . . created to alleviate poverty by providing employment in many areas including the arts. This was conceived as a lifeline for the most impoverished and disenfranchised victims of the great depression. To further its goals of promoting solidarity, cooperation, and recovery among displaced farmers and workers, the agency had developed a recreational music



program led by Charles Seeger. My Great-Uncle Addison Boserman was one of those musicians and is heard on the documentary singing a song that he wrote about coal mining "The West Virginia Coal and Coke Line."

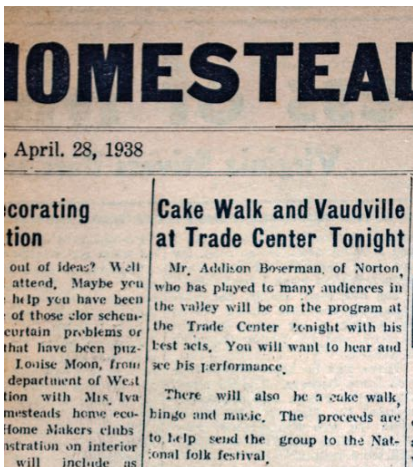
Samantha C. Horn (2016) in her dissertation, "Wayfaring Stranger: Sidney Robertson, American Folk Music,

And The Resettlement Administration, 1936-37," maintained that during the 1930s the United

States government operated a variety of folk music collecting initiatives through New Deal agencies . . . the primary goal was the creation of participatory music projects in each homestead. The residential music programs were run by professional musicians who were known as "field representatives." They moved to the resettlement communities and organized music and dance events based on the residents wants and needs.

Often the most effective music projects involved the creation of music classes at local schools, teaching resident school children to sing folk songs and supplementing their regular curricula with music appreciation lessons. But the field representatives' activities frequently included working in the church with their choirs and organizing community dances as well.

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The following excerpts are from Peggy's interviews with graduates of the Tygart Valley Homestead School: Jo Vanscoy, Bill Daft, Nancy See Swecker, Marguerite Pritt, Gloria Ware Collett, Ethel Marie Welch and her sister, Pauline Mildred Welch, Larry Pnakovich, and Katie Rosencrance Kerns. The comments covered a variety of aspects of their community, however for this article, we selected only personal musical reminiscences experiences.

JV: They had cakewalks . . . and they had these hillbilly shows that came in here from Clarksburg, Wheeling, and Fairmont. . . . Wilma Lee & Stoney Cooper . . .

BD: They had dances here. They used to have a lot of groups that had assembly programs. And we put on class plays, . . . I don't think I was an actor but I was generally in all the plays. [laughter] But, yeah. We had a lot of fun. A lot of things like that happened.



Wilma Lee & Stoney Cooper

NSS: I remember Mrs. Daniels when I was in fifth grade. We had the red song books and we sang. She would take us at every recess time in the gym and she was teaching us how to square dance. It just seemed like there was always things going on.

MP: We always had a Christmas program every year and our parents come to watch that. And then we had a glee club. Arnold Weese was our band director and he also did the choir.



NSS: We set up the chairs. You set this row up but then the next row behind you had to offset them so each row would be able to see. He taught us that. We marched out here [in front of the school]. He taught us to march.

PPH: That must have been great.

NSS: Left face, right face, about face. [laughter]

PPH: You probably loved it.

NSS: I did, I did. Course, he'd been in the military. We'd come even in the summer. It gave us something to do because at least once a week we would practice.



GWC: The May Pole Dance was one of the favorites. It seemed like that was an activity that all the kids could do. Of course, we took turns but everybody was interested. Everybody had a good time and it was fun, fun activity.

NSS: They had ribbons and the whole class had already practiced and they did it by couples, a girl was with a boy ...

MP: You dressed. You bought a real nice fancy dress and your hair all fixed. And they had this big pole in the gym. You went in and out and wrapped the ribbon around that pole.

EMW: When I lived over in East Dailey, I came over for the Maypole Dance and it was held inside and I was really disappointed because it was really nice out there in the field. ...

LP: Each class did a different dance. I think it was either the fifth or sixth graders, they always did the

Maypole Dance, where they went under and over and held onto the strings and wove them down the pole.

PPH: Cool. Did the parents come?

LP: It was a big function. There was big participation in that.

KRK: It was wonderful . . . It was a special time in life to be here.



EMW: When I was in eighth or ninth grade, we were allowed to dance at on our lunch hour.

PMW: I don't remember that.

EMW: Well, there wasn't much dancing. The girls were here [laughter] and the boys were here and the girls danced with each other.



BD: There was a jukebox, and at noon time, when it was bad or you couldn't go outside and play or do anything you could go in the gym and dance. If you didn't have tennis shoes, you took your shoes off and went into the gym with your sock feet. [chuckle] Yeah, it was a lot of fun.

GWC: Oh, yes, that Jukebox was entertainment to be ... none compared. We would always enjoy that after lunch and before school. It seemed like this school was filled with music.

Rural rehabilitation focused on helping individual families regain their ability to sustain themselves and to develop a group identity based on socioeconomic class as the “worthy poor,” their place in the historical political movement known as the New Deal, and through the folk music that helped them through difficult situations representing every aspect of their lives from birth to death.

— Peggy Proudfoot Harman

Music functions to create and represent identity. ... The influence of various kinds of relationships among groups of people—gender issues, power relations, interaction of socio-economic classes, music in political movements, all perhaps relate to the matter of identity—national, ethnic, class, gender, or personal.

—Bruno Nettl, Ethnomusicologist

### **TH: Peggy, how does your video work tie in to social work?**

PPH: The Humanities is the broad category that enables us to not only write but also put together

different kinds of media. It really does, it helps me with narrative and everything.

### **TH: So, are narratives a part of social work?**

PPH: Yes, the narrative is always the key to your assessment. Social workers have questions that need to be answered but the narrative really provides the person who's going to be trying to assist your client with what they need to work with. You have to be a good writer.

I am interested in writing about history and because I'm such a technical writer, I need to relearn how to tell a story using the conventions utilized by historians. The Humanities program has assisted me in changing the way I approach and write history. I still have to go back and forth between APA writing style for social work and the MLA format for the Humanities. It's time consuming to learn them both but I think MLA really enhances everything I do. It has really been fantastic in terms of getting back to my heritage of story-telling.

You know, all this [video] work takes a great deal of time. It's not a hobby because it's what we want to do for a living at some point in time. Right now, it is kind of a hobby and we are learning more skills as we go. I feel like the Graduate Humanities Program helps me to zero in on how to tell a story in writing and in documentary. The program ends up helping both of us because of different things I'm reading and I share with Jason. We're always putting something together.

As for the Scotts Run story, my mother left there when she was 14-years-old. She married my dad who was a WWII combat veteran, and they were married for 47 years at the time of his death. She lived to be 85 years old and never let me forget how fortunate I have been.

For a more complete view of the Tygart Valley Homestead, see Peggy and Jason's “Tygart Valley Homestead Story”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11JBpTHO2rE&t=5s>. Contact Dr. Peggy Proudfoot Harman at [proudfoohar@marshall.edu](mailto:proudfoohar@marshall.edu) for more information.



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## Spring 2021 SCHEDULES

See [Upcoming Seminars](#) on the Graduate Humanities Program website

## Recent GRADUATES

*Diana Bailey '21*

Historical & Cultural Studies,  
Appalachian Studies Certificate

Project Title: "Frances Lee Askew  
Spencer (A Life History)"

*Megan Darby '21*

Appalachian Studies Certificate

Project Title: "Growing Up at 203:  
Our Appalachia"

*Alex Griffith '21*

Historical & Cultural Studies

Project Title: "Archaeology  
Preservation & Management"

*Calisa A. Pierce '21*

Literary & Cultural Studies

Project Title: "Louise McNeill and  
G.D. McNeill: Complementary  
Appalachian Voices"

MU Press Release April 2, 2021

## *I'm Afraid of That Water* wins Weatherford Award best books about Appalachia

*I'm Afraid of That Water: A Collaborative Ethnography of a West Virginia Water Crisis* was a collaboration by Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, a professor of humanities and anthropology and director of the graduate humanities program at

Marshall; Dr. Brian A. Hoey, a professor of anthropology and associate dean of the honors college at Marshall; and Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, former Marshall faculty member and current chair of the department of curriculum and instruction at Appalachian State University.

...Lassiter, Hoey and Campbell led the effort, but as a community-university partnered project, people across various positions in academe and local communities helped with the conceptualization, research and writing. It captures a broad series of stories about the 2014 chemical spill that contaminated the water of 300,000 citizens in a nine-county region, and the response to the emergency, which amplified distrust that was already well seeded in the area.

"This book sets a meaningful example from which community-engaged Appalachian studies scholars will draw much inspiration," the judges said. "Documentation was exceptional in capturing how people felt about the water crisis. A rich collection of short vignettes of people's experiences and how they were affected. The book merged academic perspectives with community-based voices in an Appalachian exchange between folks with similar experiences in a crisis and Appalachian shared living."

The award monies for this prize will be donated to the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, a nonprofit that serves the statewide voice for water-based recreation and clean, drinkable rivers. The book's royalties are also donated to West Virginia Rivers. The organization's executive director, Angie Rosser, wrote the book's afterword.

"This book is remarkable in so many ways," Rosser said. "It does more than authentically document the lived experiences of the water crisis; it carries an empowering effect for the people of Appalachia in seeing that their stories reveal shared struggles for visibility and justice. It reminds us that within our stories is the power to co-create the world we want to live in.">

