

## Becoming Remarkable, Part 2



Weather Cock, Patty Willis, 1936

I should note that these picaresque Appalachian tales (related in [Part 1](#)) are exceptions to what are generally the lives of hard working, God-fearing people. I'll point out that we don't go to see the movie, "Honest, Hardworking Citizens of the Caribbean" in droves. And I wouldn't hear all of these stories, if the people around here didn't enjoy telling them. They're not the whole truth, but they're part of the historical weft and warp.

This brings to mind an observation I have, which is that the culture hereabouts is currently suppressed in lieu of another more burnished, social-climbing narrative managed by the local

Progressives. This is a narrative of hard pressed but resilient communities of proud, honest, resourceful people who are struggling to repair and build their communities through joint projects, unions, and forward looking government in spite of the terrible hardships, calamities and injustices which have befallen or been perpetrated upon them—as victims who nevertheless thrive because of their inbred human tenacity.

What's wrong with that, you say? Nothing, I suppose, except for the glossy sheen of the brochure quality it has and the outsider, boilerplate narrative it peddles—and that it isn't exactly true. When you tilt it on its side you get the shinola of a burnished virtue. Actually the citizens back here have fashioned a morality which is rather worn and grey and casts an unwashed whiff of odor when standing in the wrong breeze—but is more empirical. It has the hard knocks morality of their “since time immemorial” tentative existence. A little theft and embezzlement and chicanery are viewed a bit like cottage industries and squabbled about among bickering clans or, if at all, on the down lo. And they have their empirical reasons for doubting the value of education, also.

### *Appalachian Tune*

*Wake up,  
understanding is a joy.—Ko Un, Korean poet*

It's hard to find a toe-hold in a world  
where your neighbor's wages  
just meet the bare necessities,  
and only fantasies really sell.

In a depressed area,  
where the existing work  
is a game of musical chairs,  
education doesn't produce a job.

If you want your son to stick around,

don't send him to college!  
They'll teach him to leave.

The residents of the West Virginia rural hills and hollers are often quite shy. A friend from Doddridge County noted, that when you phoned they may not answer, and when you visited they might hide out back. The older males often speak with a rather whiney lilt to their mountain rhetoric, but the women might well give you a full bodied laugh.

A moderately new arrival realizes fairly soon that he's still living in an extractive economy where the professional money is made by personal injury and tort lawyers, health care-givers, and funeral homes. It's hard lived, traditional culture from which the most ambitious generally move away. The elderly and inept are often left to stew in the crumbling family home clinging to pensions, insurance claims, court settlements, and governmental entitlements. To view the common lack of design and architectural flair locked into the ongoing construction, you would think the regional motto to be: "We Can Make It Ugly." The few good jobs are in the chemical industries which border the Ohio River because of the ease of transport of bulk product, and the government—because the only thing poor people have to sell is their vote.

There's probably nothing sillier than witnessing a diversity rainbow or 'woke' activity transplanted onto this soil, and wherever it takes, it would appear bizarre excepting for the general poor taste among the populace. So that in a strange way the less adroit youth of the community absorb these bits of post-modern culture like the traditional tribes in Africa sporting plastic gewgaws they've acquired from the overflowing of Western Civilization. Bad taste is continually charting new depths here. Sights, such as young, hirsute males in tattoos and earrings riding kiddy bikes, perhaps while accompanying their girlfriend with child aren't uncommon. The local scene of a cultural event practicing diversity and inclusion and awareness transplanted into one of the least diverse, and bare

boned insensitive places in the country is comical. But the manner in which the locals will succumb to the collective experience is sobering. If it took any less time, it would be spellbinding how quickly the ruggedly independent can succumb to governmentally induced dependence.

So there's that. But still, Appalachia is a little like Afghanistan in that they possess the tools to cripple any sort of do-gooder. Sooner or later the coastal elites will decide there is not all that much public virtue-flogging electoral power in helping the white trash, and Appalachia will be free to ravish itself again.

### *Blessings*

Rather like my dog sniffing the air  
then proceeding on,  
so many things freely given:  
singing birds, hopping frogs,  
speculative bunnies who halt their nibbling.

That God would invite us to view his great estates,  
it would hardly do to dismiss our election.  
But how many are able to be in the world  
and take as great an interest as a dog?

Waking rested makes me thankful each morning.  
Then the cool air and the slanted sun  
during the short walk, pain free, is a larger blessing.  
And then, just to give my good fortune a run for its money,  
I pee in the bushes.

To read the newest journals, newspaper and Chamber of Commerce effusions and listen to the brouhaha of events and pageants and parties and charity events and drug and family education programs—is to be the recipient of a flood of stuff which passes over my own placid neighborhood likewise. A neighborhood which touts four different felons living in four different homes within a block of us, sprinkled among the

nurses, builders, security guards, clerks, cops, teachers, interior designers, etc., plus the retired, the disabled and the unemployed. And here again it's like the muddy Ohio, where below the glistening surface, the normal flow and activities of the river still occur, the huge carp and catfish lurk in the mucky broth. Which is why I like it. Try as they will the Progressives keep breaking their pick on this area. And our neighborhood rolls along quietly, peacefully, relatively crime free—unlike the Democratically run big cities.

(The trick is to avoid the pre-felons. The actual ex-cons and parolees are in my experience quite low key, discrete and law abiding—and often make pleasant and interesting conversation as I believe they are genetically imbued with a bit of a maverick sensibility.)

The ambitious poets hereabouts write with pagan worship of the natural world, naming all of the plants and species in settlers' terms much like Adam. They record their land's cyclical victimization versus eco renewal, of being driven from the garden and the hoped return, again and again, hoping to fit within the political narrative of the big-time poetry journal editors, who actively encourage authentic, regional work. It reads like a social worker's dance card in an insular world. The small presses and journals abound which thrive on this stuff.

The crime here is lo-profile. A home two blocks away was busted for selling methamphetamines. We didn't know. A fellow a block away was arrested for selling heroin. Seemed this seemed like a quiet frame home where the boys' bikes were always parked neatly on the porch. The rental up the block had a prostitute where our onetime contractor was spending all of his (actually my) money, but my neighbor had to tell me this. I haven't encountered any intimidating gangs in our town. I can walk my dog and chat with the residents. Nobody has iron grillwork on the doors or windows. People often sit on their porches. I don't hear gunshots or yelling. Parents aren't

yelling at their children, or husbands at wives, at least within my earshot. In fact, I don't believe I've heard anyone in my neighborhood yelling at anyone – except myself. (My son and I were doing some home repairs, and often don't work well together.) People don't yell much back here, come to think of it. (Perhaps it leads to violence.) I heard second hand about a volatile neighbor who has since moved, but I missed the police appearance. I know that there are a lot of people who don't get along on the block. I get the scuttlebutt. But I'm never around for the yelling, I'd suppose, or like a good lie, they keep it quick and brief. There is a certain level of civility which is maintained, even among the paranoid and suspicious, who will even nod when pressed. People wave courteously as they pass in their cars. The children don't try to intimidate me.

Gossip is a bit of a past time, and having a good gossip or two in your network just makes good sense. It keeps you tapped in and it's the way into some of the best stories around. The bars are fairly few, of minimal quality—like plywood walls with stuff stored in the next room—and far between. But this does not prevent alcoholism nor drug abuse which recently has reached extreme proportions. In Charleston, sometime back, traffic was stalled on the freeway as two separate drivers had overdosed while motoring. There was a note above the baby changing platform in the leading Charleston bookstore asking people to please not prepare their drugs on the changing table, “It's bad for the babies” –and a flyer taped in the front window advertising the emergency availability of Naloxone.

But the Harmar Tavern, in Marietta, is a great neighborhood landmark since 1900 and fine place to rest the hams for a while. My father in law, prior to the Korean War, used to warm himself at the Busy Bee Café nearby, on his several mile trek back across the tracks from courting my mother-in-law. Now and then you'll see kids occupying themselves at a Harmar back

table while their guardians enjoy a beer.

### *Harmar Tavern*

Years ago, the old fellow from the worm shop nearby would shuffle in for his afternoon beer to escape the heat. He'd rest his cane and in the cool, inner twilight, I could hear the coins chatter on the bar top. He used to work for my mother in law's, mother's, third husband's engineering firm called, "Dig it, Ditch it & Dam it."

The mugs were brought out freezer cold and the beers served with a thick skein of ice on their sides. Jars of homemade horseradish sat for sale on a front corner table. And the fried bologna sandwich was still "Almost Famous" and came with a side.

Fellows would sit in the quiet bar in the mid-afternoon, which stood halfway down a brick, tree-lined neighborhood of narrow working-class homes, with the Union Headquarters just up the street, and a guy selling farm produce from the back of a truck parked a block or so away where the crossroads met before the bridge across the Muskingum into Marietta.

I enjoyed my first fried bologna sandwich here and haven't ordered anything else, since. You sit back and watch the TV and barmaids; meet with friends. Currently, one barmaid has a circular maze tattoo on her right outer thigh. To struggle with it over five seconds would be considered leering, so I'm toying with the idea of taking a photo. and solving the problem at home.

Embezzlement seems to run rampant as the coal seams around here. Churches, charity organizations, businesses, many fall prey to the larceny of longtime fellow residents. And for businesses offering entry level work, slipping a few bucks from the till is sometimes justified as tipping, from what I've surmised.

And this is what I get when I simply talk to the people around here, and turn a blind eye to the news, events, and community outreach madness, which is all like foam on the surface of your latte, where underneath it's still ordinary coffee with cream. We have lots of people treating other people decently, and others poorly, with most everybody for their part minding their own business—excepting for the gossips. These are people making do with whatever life tosses in their path—with splintered families expanding like fractals, and then recombining as another sort of family. One of the first things my school aged son learned back here is to be careful who you're belittling, because “everybody is related to everybody else” here. And you never know what kind of poo might be related to another sort of poo you might be flinging. But the cake inside all of the frosting back here is that people believe they know how to live their lives better than the outsiders telling them how to do so. And, in fact, given the opportunity, could probably give those outsiders a bit of good advice—which they might offer if provoked. As Thomas Sowell noted, “Someone once said that a fool can put on his coat better than a wise man can put it on for him.” The implications of that undermine most of the agenda of the political left.

### *Bug Lights*

It took me a while to get them up this year,  
as I hate to do anything.

But I also like to sit outside.

Anyway, they're up now



and shining their perpetual blue light.  
I can see the body count  
fuzzing the wire mesh.

I'm still getting bit,  
but not so much.  
And I can see that  
I'm getting some of my own back.