

Essay

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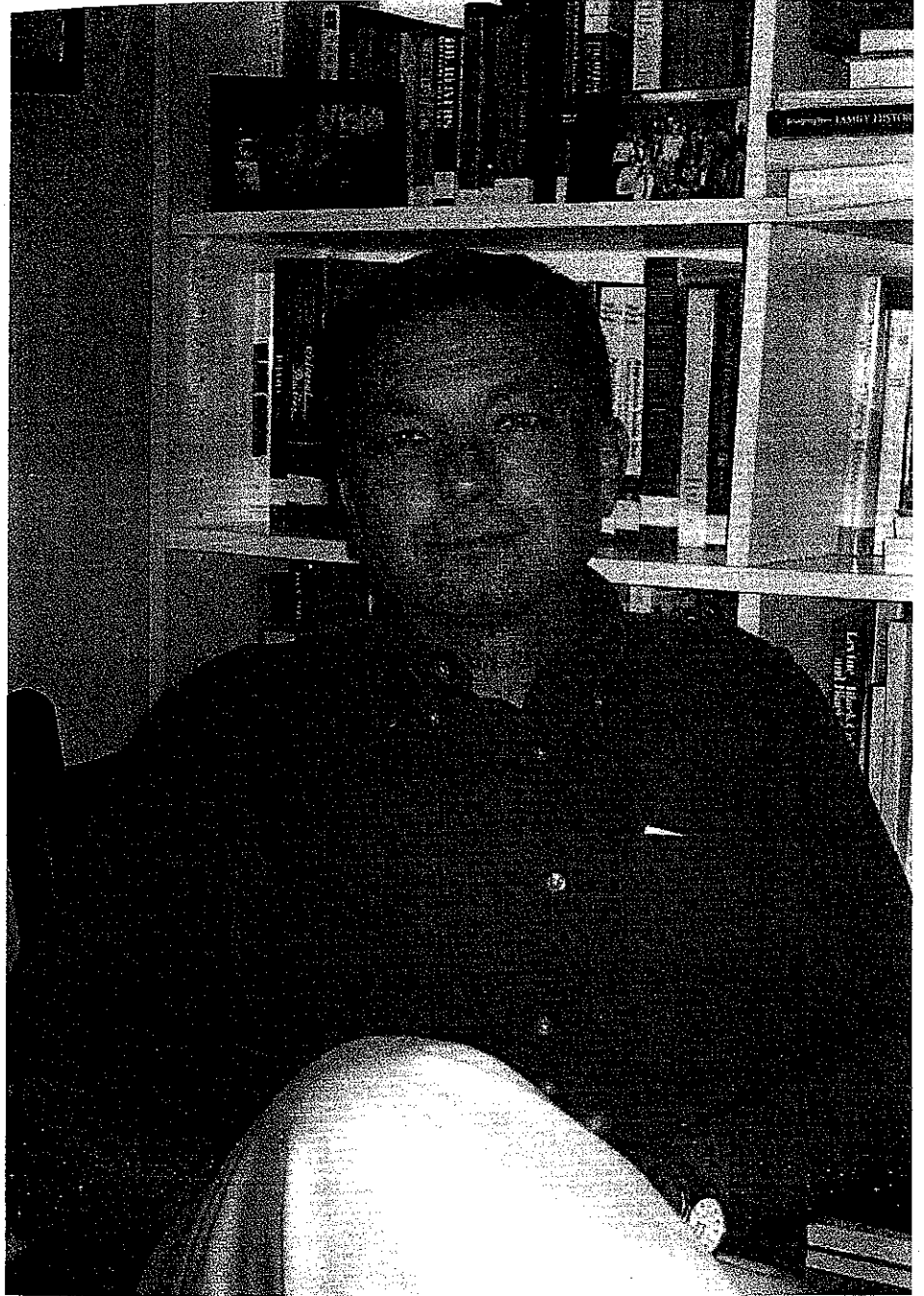
Renaming the World in the Valley of the Holston

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Late autumn morning sun glinted off the tin roof of the house across the road. In the old house that had become the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry College, Steve Fisher's office faced to the east and south, filling with the day's first light. He got to the office before anyone else, usually around 7 a.m. During winter's shortest days, he was there before daylight, often staying after dark. I arrived after the morning round of duties, putting my children on the school bus, and walking the short distance between Meadowview and campus. By the time I got to the office, Steve already had his cup of hot tea. Sitting in the sun, he was reading in preparation for the day's classes or slogging through the unending backlog of e-mails.

After fixing a pot of jet-fuel strength coffee, I tap on the doorjamb of Steve's office. Each morning, I would stand just inside the door with a coffee cup in one hand and my arm resting on a file cabinet and chat about yesterday, ongoing issues, the latest community news, and events of the day. Ever fearful that I would neglect some appointment or duty that he had put on my "to-do list," Steve would remind me, and I would respond, sometimes testily, that I would get it done. Some mornings, we bemoaned the state of the world or laughed at each other's foibles. When Steve expounded upon a pain presented by his robust hypochondria, I mocked the symptoms. When I got lost in an endless discourse on who was kin to whom in an off-the-map southwest Virginia place, Steve, with nodding head and glassy eyes, raised his hand in surrender. Sometimes we talked about the poetry, novels, and short stories we were reading. On mid-winter mornings, Steve talked about last night's Wake Forest basketball game. During the growing season, we talked about our gardens. Often we discussed the status of a student or a student project in the community.

These were not long conversations. My coffee had rarely cooled as I walked the few feet to my office. Throughout the day, we would stop at each other's door to talk about what had just happened in a class or a meeting or what we had heard at lunch. We routinely shared articles that we thought the other would find interesting or helpful. Sometimes in fits of glee over something funny, or in frustration, we would yell from office to office.



Tal Stanley, photo courtesy of Gloria Suber, Appalachian Center for Community Service, Emory & Henry College

From the outset in the fall of 1996, Steve and I had a standing weekly meeting. For these meetings, I prepared a list of the most pressing issues at the Center and updated the Center's "to-do list." These free-ranging discussions usually took an hour or more and focused on the ramifications of "the list" and interconnections with dozens of other things unfolding at the College and in local communities where we were working. Steve rarely determined the agenda, allowing me the freedom to define my work and responsibilities. These frank conversations set the direction for our work and the basis for our accountability to each other, the school, the place, and the work that we had come mutually to honor and respect.

Emory & Henry is not far from the headwaters of the three branches of the Holston River. The upper North Fork rises from the ridges and limestone ledges of Bland County, not far from Sharon Springs and Ceres, under the southern lee of Burke's Garden. The South Fork develops from the springs and mountain creeks emerging from the rhododendron, hardwoods, and hemlock on high ridges between Washington and Grayson counties, deep in the shadows of Whitetop and Mount Rogers. The College is located in the valley of the Middle Fork, which starts as a bold spring near the long-abandoned community of Mount Airy, just west of Rural Retreat in Wythe County. Except to the farms and homesteads along them, these three streams do not attract much attention, but as they converge, they form a river that names a region and contributes to larger rivers and larger stories. The work that Steve and I came to share is like that, little noticed in its smaller parts, like our conversations on any given morning. Yet, in bringing together different lives and different stories, the work forms something larger, sustaining, and more significant than its individual parts.

Writing about this now, over a year after his retirement, nothing seems more natural than our working together, but early on, there were some doubts. Steve and I have different backgrounds, were shaped in different crucibles of experience, built different lives, brought different talents to the work, reacted differently to the same situations. A working relationship between us could have been short lived, tumultuous, and frustrating. But our work at the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry College expressed who we were, who we are becoming, and what we hoped to accomplish with our lives.

Steve Fisher is a laborer for social justice. For more than a generation, Steve's impassioned work has been on behalf of marginalized and silenced people in mainstream American culture. Beginning from Marxism and the radical Left, and moving to a more subtle and complicated understanding of identity, social change, and our mutual complicities in systems of injustice, Steve came to intellectual maturity through his work with Appalachians struggling for democracy and justice. By the early 1990s, Steve was describing himself as a radical academic, a hillbilly, an activist, a scholar, a West Virginian, and a citizen of the mountains. *The Plow*, the Appalachian land study, the Pittston strike, protests against American involvement in Nicaragua, Just Connections, efforts to stop mountaintop removal, various political campaigns, the Appalachian Studies Association, the Southern Mountain Research Cooperative, the Appalachian Community Fund, the Appalachian Alliance—these are means by which he has

lived out his self-understandings and commitments. Those of us who have been his students remember well his often-stated ambition: "before I die, I hope to be a part of a great movement for social change."

Steve came to Emory & Henry College in the fall of 1971, believing that it was only a temporary stop. Then through a series of student-organized programs on Appalachia at the College, and interactions with scholars both on-campus and in the region, Appalachia and southwest Virginia began to lay their claim on him. Slowly, painfully, unevenly, Steve came to understand that social justice cannot be experienced apart from relationships, that struggles for democracy and justice grow from the need for sustainable and mutual relationships. Over time, Steve's work to build hope and justice was indistinguishable from his work to build relationships. He had offers of more prestigious jobs at larger colleges and universities, but he turned them down, even though staying at Emory & Henry did not make conventional sense in the class and status hierarchies of the academy. As he struggled with the last offer, Emory & Henry offered him the opportunity to develop an academic program that would allow him to enact in the classroom all that he had learned about the intersection of education, stories, citizenship, justice, social change, and relationships.

I came to this work because it offered me an opportunity to return to southwest Virginia, the home of most of my people for ten generations. I know the language of this place: how to talk with people, particularly rural people, of kin, gardens, work, and history. I know the questions to ask to create a space for people to tell their stories. Despite my love for New York City and my interest in other places, I have never wanted to leave here. I have wanted to be a part of its stories since my childhood. I thought that going to graduate school would give me the opportunity to study, think, talk, and write of matters of importance to me and stay in the region. But in the winter and spring of 1996, as I finished my dissertation, my prospects for a job, much less a job in Appalachia, diminished by the day.

Steve and I first knew each other during my student days at Emory & Henry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Later he served as a reader for my dissertation and a collaborator with me on a major Emory University graduate school project. From him I learned that I could not write of Appalachia without also thinking about how to ensure justice for others. We shared a commitment to building relationships and to putting relationships first—with family, neighbors, colleagues, and the larger community. Relationships are inseparable from my experiences of place. My understanding, hammered out in the enforced and competitive isolation of graduate school, is that all places were formed in analogous relational processes, depending on the prolonged interaction of the natural environment, the built environment, and human culture and history. I also had ideas about place-based scholarship.

In 1996, responding to Steve's proposal for a new academic program and with a grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Foundation, Emory & Henry College established the Appalachian Center for Community Service and the degree program in Public Policy and Community Service. It emerged from a joint effort

of the College's faculty, staff, students, and representatives of the community who worked with Steve for more than two years on its creation. The Center would differ from other centers for the study of Appalachian culture and history in that its primary mission would be to centralize all of the College's community service programming and then expand this programming to build a culture of service on the campus. At the same time, the Center would undertake the long-term responsibility of establishing working partnerships with surrounding communities, making available College resources to serve the region. The new degree program would become an elemental component of this initiative. The Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry College would act as a place of convergence of smaller tributaries, forming a larger, more significant work, making explicit what had been a commitment for the College since its founding in 1836: to educate citizens to serve the Holston region as well as the places beyond this valley.

The duPont grant also made possible the hiring of an entry-level staff person to work to build a culture of service on the Emory & Henry campus, direct the Bonner Scholars program, and coordinate the service learning aspects of the Public Policy and Community Service program. The job did not require a Ph.D., nor did it entail any teaching. After interviewing in June 1996, when Steve called on July 1 to offer me the job, I did not have to think about it. I began work on August 15, 1996.

Our friendship and partnership grew from differences in style and a shared approach to work. Steve is far more detail-oriented than I am; he is an inveterate worrier who can obsess about the finer points of a plan. I often prefer the big picture, tend to procrastinate, and find the small details tedious. While I need a plan and a list from which to work, I also enjoy the excitement of making the path and drawing the map as we go. When Steve typically raised concerns about potential complications of a plan, I often responded with "we'll cross that burning bridge when we get to it." Some days, our insecurities and fragile egos rubbed against each other. However, we both brought crucial energy and delight to the work.

Steve saw the Center and the new major as a chance to develop an academic program that more nearly reflected his personal, professional, and intellectual journeys, and which could help to transform the institution he had served and come to love. Tired of the condescension and hazing of graduate school, I was excited to be home and engaged in thoroughly enjoyable work that grew from my strengths. From the first day, I understood that I had found my life's work. Early on, we agreed on two principles for our partnership. We would always be honest with each other about our frustrations, feelings, and hopes. We agreed never to foreclose our friendship. When we were angry or disagreed, we would not allow it to keep us from working together. Despite questions and approaches to opportunities that remain unresolved, the partnership holds strong. No major decision at the Center was made in isolation from each other or from those directly involved in the decision.

Our work divided along a very natural line. Steve was the Center's director and the director of the program in Public Policy and Community Service. He had

worked extensively with the advisory committee that planned the courses and approved the overall curriculum of the major; he had participated in every effort to bring the major from an idea to a degree program at the College. He was the primary teacher in all of the core courses, with a few courses taught by an adjunct faculty member and faculty from other departments. Because of his deep knowledge of the faculty and his status as a senior faculty member, Steve assumed primary responsibility for the relationships with faculty and administration. He understood the importance of faculty collegiality.

Because of my family commitments and my previous experiences in southwest Virginia, I worked with our local partners surrounding the College. I began the work of organizing service opportunities for students, bringing students together, and setting up the Center's administrative structure. I also served as the director of the Bonner Scholars program. Funded through the Bonner Foundation of Princeton, New Jersey, Bonner offers a full, four-year scholarship to students with financial need who agree to perform ten hours of community service each week of the academic year, and a certain amount of service in the summer. Students also participate in reflection and personal development opportunities. Emory & Henry has 80 Bonner Scholars. There are 27 colleges and universities with Bonner Scholars programs in the United States. Between December 1996 and January 1997, in response to expectations of the Bonner Foundation, I set forth a comprehensive plan to structure the College's engagement with regional places. Drawing heavily on what I learned in graduate school and what I believed about education and about southwest Virginia, the plan laid out the principles of place-based educational and service programming. More than just a five-year plan, the document set forth the concepts that continue to have defining force for the Center. This document became a watershed moment, drawing to it all manner of resources, opportunities, questions, and challenges.

Looking back, neither of us knew much about what we were doing, but we knew the place, and we shared an intuitive sense that we were moving in a good direction. Steve brought insights about what made for an effective learning process: the importance of stories, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of politics and policy, the necessity of working closely with individual students, the structures and processes that could enable a democratic classroom. I brought an understanding of southwest Virginia and the ability to talk meaningfully with neighbors. I have an intuitive sense of what people are saying between the lines of their stories. Steve brought to full expression in his classroom the collaborative student-teacher relationships that Paulo Freire calls for in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We shared an abiding conviction that if students and professors could be co-teachers and co-learners, then citizens from local places could also serve as our teachers, pointing us toward effective citizenship and showing us how to be a better partner in that place and how to offer the College's resources to help build a strong future together.

As other grants and administrative changes made possible the addition of staff members to the Center, we wanted to create a working environment that somehow modeled our work in classrooms and off-campus. Staff members were

increasingly involved in all decision-making processes. Staff meetings were organized democratically, with rotating responsibilities among all. Several times throughout the year, the staff shared meals together. Often staff members attended performances and presentations in which others' children were involved. We recognized every staff member's birthday. The Center began to build strong relationships with the custodial staff. The Center's staff acknowledged when persons across campus experienced a death in their families, illness, or some honor or award. Other offices on campus came to see the Center as distinctive and a good place to work.

To fulfill earlier commitments made while researching for my dissertation, by the end of my second week of work, I made the 60-mile, two-hour trip to McDowell County, West Virginia. During that afternoon visit, I reconnected with Franki Rutherford, who then worked at Tug River Community Health Clinic. I later made several more trips to visit with Franki, chat with the folks at Big Creek People In Action (BCPIA), or contact others I had met while writing my dissertation. I spent afternoons learning the roads and communities of McDowell County, to retrace my family's lives there in the early- to mid-20th-century, to get the landscape in my mind. Soon I was inviting individual students, faculty, or staff to make the trip with me. These day trips would focus on the history of the Pocahontas coalfields, my family's stories from that place, the failures of American capitalism, and the questions of justice McDowell presented. When I raised with Steve the possibility of developing a working partnership in McDowell, he was reluctant, saying, quite rightly, that we needed to work at home first, and that McDowell would be too far for a daily placement for students. A host of difficulties rendered such collaboration impractical. For some time, I did not again raise the question, but I kept going back.

Within two years, doubtful that it could continue without a full-time executive director, Big Creek People In Action faced a leadership crisis. After introducing Franki to the president of the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation and suggesting that with time and resources, BCPIA could become an ongoing partner with all of the Bonner-affiliated schools, a partnership was established. BCPIA could host students for service during summers, alternative breaks, and other occasions, with the promise of Bonner Foundation support. With her own courage and the commitment of her family, Franki became the full-time executive director of Big Creek People In Action. I began introducing Franki to the directors of other Bonner programs and other service learning coordinators throughout the region. Through Emory & Henry College's Bonner Community Fund, we began to direct financial resources to BCPIA. Steve and I began inviting Franki to speak in classes and to gatherings of Bonner Scholars on our campus. We invited her to talk to other Emory & Henry faculty members, encouraging them to incorporate a McDowell service component into their classes.

Beginning in 1999, Franki and I were invited to conferences to speak about our shared work in McDowell and at Emory & Henry and the values upon which we were building it. Groups from the Pacific Northwest, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Savannah, Spartanburg, and other far-flung places began making the

trek to McDowell for BCPIA-led service weeks and reflection experiences. In many cases, these groups stopped at Emory & Henry for an evening of orientation to the region and to McDowell before traveling over the mountain. We began placing Bonner Scholars at BCPIA for summer service experience. As the third class of Public Policy and Community Service majors prepared for their senior capstone experiences, three of the students wanted to do their practicum work in the summer before their senior year. This request provided the opportunity to place these students at Big Creek People In Action and at Stop Abusive Family Environments (SAFE). Franki Rutherford, Marsha Timpson, Dyanne Spriggs, Kem Short, and the other staff at BCPIA showed us how to build a long-distance, place-based partnership that took seriously the needs identified by citizens of that community.

The partnership with the Meadowview community in Washington County, Virginia, evolved differently. While I was making routine trips over the mountain to McDowell, my family and I were becoming neighbors in Meadowview. We bought supplies from Big M Hardware, feed for the chickens at the Meadowview Mill, and took the children to see Santa Claus at the Meadowview Volunteer Fire Department's Christmas party. We learned who our neighbors' kinfolks were. We shared extra produce from our garden and asked for advice about the little things that help people to know a place.

Our children, however, offered us the best opportunity to take up membership in Meadowview. When we came to Emory & Henry in 1996, few families at the College had young children. Soon after arriving, we enrolled David, our older child, in the preschool at the Meadowview United Methodist Church, which gave us immediate acquaintance with a number of parents, all of whom were connected to the Meadowview community. The next year David began kindergarten in Meadowview Elementary School. In 1998, Sarah, who is two years younger than David, began spending time in home-based childcare, offering yet other relationships. As the children have grown, many of these same relationships have continued into high school. Marching band and 4-H have offered other opportunities. None of this differs from the experiences of anyone else with children in a rural place, but in that community, family life and work flowed together for us.

My wife Susan and I became involved in the Meadowview Elementary PTA. Susan was asked to be PTA President, a position she held for two years, so our awareness grew of the politics, policies, funding issues, and administrators in the Washington County Public School system. The PTA had set as its goal the purchase of computers for all classrooms, a desperate need that the county was not prepared to meet, and under Susan's leadership, the Meadowview school's Fall Festival became the opportunity to make these resources available. As with every other school, the PTA needed a great deal of help to realize its goals.

Within weeks of our arrival, neighbors began to encourage us to attend the Meadowview Civic Club, a long-standing organization, mostly of senior adults, that meets monthly for a program, socializing over a potluck meal, and undertaking community projects. The Civic Club had a number of dreams,

mainly for restoring the town to its former vitality and building a community center. As often happens to new folks who express a willingness to be involved, we were soon put on committees and given jobs. With the help of Jimmy Wallace, a long-time resident active in local civic affairs, who also works for the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, we began to see possibilities for acquiring the resources to build a community center. Before any funding could be made available, the Department required that Meadowview undertake considerable research and extensive "needs assessments." The Civic Club did not have the resources to do the work, but here was an opportunity for college students to help.

While I was learning about Meadowview and McDowell, allowing them to shape the contours of my thought and life, courses in the PPCS curriculum were developing, the Bonner Scholars program was increasingly focused on civic engagement and working for social justice, student groups on campus were asking for service opportunities, and new staff were joining the Center. Initially, placements for the introductory course in Public Policy and Community Service, the Bonner Scholars program, and other volunteer work were designed only to help with short-term needs and projects. The Meadowview Elementary School Fall Festival, Meadowview Apple Butter Festival, Meadowview Square Clean-up Day, and mentoring and tutoring opportunities all became standard offerings for service.

As the College proved its trustworthiness in these matters, citizens began to identify more far-ranging and complicated work for students. Students in a community organizing class and Bonner Scholars as well as Greek organizations and general volunteers helped with a door-to-door canvas in which every household in Meadowview completed a needs assessment inventory in order for the community to qualify for federal block grant funds. Students in methodology classes analyzed the data collected and presented the results to the community. Community organizing students helped with community-wide meetings and hearings. Bonner Scholars provided childcare during these gatherings so that parents of young children could attend. Seniors in Public Policy and Community Service helped to write proposals and applications for federal grants. Students attended meetings of the Virginia Tobacco Commission and the Washington County Board of Supervisors. When citizens identified the need for a sliding scale medical clinic in Meadowview, students were engaged in every aspect of the work to secure financial resources for this clinic.

In McDowell County, students conducted listening projects that focused on educational reform, researched domestic violence cases, monitored court cases involving victims of domestic violence, led youth development programs, tutored high school students for College Board tests, and coordinated arts and cultural programming for BCPIA. The Emory & Henry Bonner Scholars program began offering scholarship assistance to qualifying students from Big Creek High School, creating opportunities to attend Emory & Henry College.

Students led work teams, sponsored children's carnivals, organized fundraisers, renovated rooms in the BCPIA community center, and continued their active support of tutoring and mentoring in grades pre-K through 12.

Youth empowerment conferences enabled students to explore issues and questions of diversity, and, unintentionally, to experience the local terrain of cultural conflict. After-school programs and academic enrichment summer camps helped address what many citizens had come to see as the unevenness and class biases in public education. Projects focused on sustainable agriculture in far southwest Virginia. Food banks and food pantries offered opportunities for students to address hunger in the places where they served. Outdoor classrooms and gardens at public schools became the projects for classes in community organizing and environmental studies. Work in faith-based organizations offered students opportunities to see not only the limits of public policy dependent on faith-based initiatives to meet the needs of citizens, but also to understand the great range and vitality of mediating structures in this place.

Whether the work is curricular-based service or extra-curricular, all of the service initiated through the Center adheres to several standing rules. The Center's partnerships always seek long-term, sustainable solutions to problems and have a goal of helping to build a democratic future for all the people of the place. Every project and initiative is planned in coordination with citizens of the place. All service engagements have a pre-service and a post-service reflection component that provides a context for the work and focuses on questions of personal development and identity, public policy, and social justice. Finally, all service work, whether short-term or long-term, gives back to the community some tangible product. The place is to be left better than it was before the service. The brooks and streams that form the tributaries of our work in McDowell and Meadowview are not without eddies and pools, brambles and thickets, but as they converge, the stories of the places through which they pass add to their vitality.

The students' service work cohered exactly with their work in Steve Fisher's classroom. For him, teaching is an art and a craft; it is not merely a profession, but a calling and a vocation. Steve understands teaching as creating common ground in the classroom so that life experiences can be allowed to inform and instruct, an approach that differs from others' concepts of teaching in colleges and universities. Instead of being the expert or authority with answers and categorized knowledge to impart, Steve sees himself as a co-teacher and co-learner with everyone else in the classroom. Students' life stories and experiences, including their community service, are just as much part of the curriculum as the texts in the course syllabus. The Public Policy and Community Service program reflects this view of learning, based on the idea that education can be more than a mere depositing in people's lives of received and assumed truths.

The program in Public Policy and Community Service takes students from one-on-one service delivery to significant leadership in agencies and organizations serving local places. Students move from basic questions of justice in a particular place to considering the global forces and issues at work in every place. The degree program prepares students to be active citizens, involved in community life, equipped with an understanding of power, a vision for social justice, and appreciation of and engagement with the multi-layered, complex

diversity of people. More pointedly, the program gives students the moral, intellectual, and civic tools and values to make decisions to return to communities in southwest Virginia and throughout Appalachia. The program makes clear that public policy is not the purview solely of quantitative methods and approaches, but also qualitative approaches, stories, cultural understandings, and the ability to evaluate policies in their lived contexts. The curriculum offers deep links between policy and community service. Service to one's community is an integral part of citizenship, allowing learning and perspectives otherwise not available and giving expression to commitments that public policies must incorporate.

Meaningful citizenship also involves the skills of critical thinking. In all the core courses, students read texts ranging from newspapers, academic journals, news magazines, and traditional academic monographs, to novels, short stories, poetry, song lyrics, and cartoons—class readings represent a rigorous academic standard and a vital interdisciplinary approach to the questions the class raises. The courses are based on challenging, collaborative questioning. In the community and in the classroom, working for solutions to seemingly intractable issues is also about raising good questions. To borrow from Rilke and from Freire, in Public Policy and Community Service classes, students are called to live the questions with which their life stories and their service provide them.

Although courses have different goals and objectives, student chemistry varies, and the readings and questions change, several common patterns have emerged in the Public Policy and Community Service program, giving voice to who Steve Fisher had become, what he had learned, and what he hoped to accomplish. All classes are discussion-based, though Steve occasionally lectured. Returning from those class sessions, he always regretted having talked too much, fearing that some student had been stifled or silenced in the drive to get material covered.

While meeting institutional expectations about grades, reports, and evaluations, the principal measure of an effective class is that students are empowered to envision the world they want to inhabit and understand that they have the power to build that world. The goal for every course is to be as democratically structured as possible, which involves helping students to envision and then claim new responsibilities. Instead of being consumers and passive bystanders to their education, students become active participants with decision-making responsibilities for the class. On the first day of every semester, students are asked to form a circle and sit every day beside different people, but the circle remains the semester-long seating formation. Each semester begins with opportunities for students to tell their stories and make connections with others with whom they may have thought they have little in common. Throughout the semester, every class session begins with an established ritual in which one student sets the tone and raises the primary questions for the day by bringing a quotation, song lyrics, or some other expression that helps the class focus on what that student believes to be the most important issue for the day. The ritual rotates through the class so that by the end of the semester, most students have launched class discussion at least once. Following the ritual,

Steve always asked for questions, observations, or experiences from the service work. These were not questions briefly posed and then passed by in a rush to follow a preordained agenda. Rather, the question rested there between them, with Steve waiting patiently to see who would be the first to take it up and who would carry it from there, offering observation and reflection. Sure, prompts and questions elicited comments, but on most days, Steve pushed himself to relinquish control of the classroom, going against every learned instinct of the traditionally trained teacher who lectures.

Moreover, all Public Policy and Community Service classes have an extensive writing component. Students are required to record their observations and reactions to what happens in class, what they observe in the places they are serving, and what they are learning about themselves. While the exact journal expectations differ from class to class, students must write. They often find keeping a journal is a good way to process issues and questions they are unwilling to raise in class, and they discover what they later discern to be the most significant questions of their lives in the context of the class' conversations, readings, and service. Routinely, students turn in their journals to be read and evaluated. Steve read all the journals, wrote extensive comments, and returned them, thereby opening another means of dialogue. He learned from the first that good writing does not happen in a vacuum, but is produced within a learning community of vitality, integrity, and mutuality.

Every student who graduates with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and Community Service takes eight core courses, with several other support and contextual classes. By the time students reach the capstone courses, they have had a number of classes with each other and formed a supportive learning and serving community. In class sessions, they talk across the circle to each other. They know each other's strengths and weaknesses; they hold each other to accountability. They know each other's stories and often risk a deeper vulnerability around the circle.

Students also share a common language that allows them to struggle more meaningfully with the issues and questions of the class. By the time they are seniors, students have applied understandings of place, community, culture, the sociological imagination, democracy, hegemony, ideology, conflict, social capital, mediating structures, internalized oppression, racism, privilege, service and charity, sustainability, capitalism, distributive justice, poverty. They use this communal language to confront each other, to deal with the readings in class, and to evaluate their service work, the life of this place, and their own self-understanding and development. Most importantly, they use these concepts to help to bridge the divide between faculty and student, understanding that they are responsible for their own learning and that they must take upon themselves the great calling to raise questions and propose solutions to our most difficult issues.

The Public Policy and Community Service program exerts a force across the College's curriculum. Other faculty members tell us that students routinely speak of their work in Meadowview and McDowell and the policy issues and questions of justice they encounter in each place. Fellow teachers tell us of our

students' ability to discuss key concepts of the major in meaningful ways, in multiple contexts, adding to discussions in other classes. Colleagues comment on the incisive writing our students produce in their classes and the insightfulness of their self-understandings and reflections.

In journals, essays, and class evaluations, students in the initial classes in the curriculum sometimes speak of their frustrations at what they regard as the unwise use of class time, their feeling that they are not learning anything, or their absence of notes for the class. However, by the time they have reached the mid-point to graduation, students report that they are learning more than they realized, and by the time they are graduating seniors, students say they are learning that our stories are of consequence. Students articulate the ways by which careful, active, empathetic listening is a part of citizenship and service. Students come to understand scholarship, activism, politics, service, and citizenship in the broadest context, allowing for the diversity of human expression. Students tell us that they are learning how to learn, how to teach, and how to apply both to the work of being a citizen. They tell us that they cannot envision an educational curriculum that interests them which does not draw deeply from the two deep springs of place and classroom, of activism and scholarship.

Steve and I draw from these same waters. We have learned that statements about commitments to justice are pointless without a willingness to be engaged in the daily, ordinary work of citizenship and being a good neighbor. We have learned that service without vigorous and structured reflection does not challenge the structures of power and injustice; that all people, regardless of status or education, have within them the talents, passion, and abilities to make a difference. If that is true of people, it is also true of places—that every place has the potential to be a safe, healthy, good place. The new world is formed in real places, in the long effort to build mutual relationships; it is the political result of trust, give and take, love, forgiveness, struggle, and the labor of hope. We have learned that separating activism and service does not acknowledge the great width, breadth, and complexity of citizenship. Sometimes the gift of a pound cake to a grieving neighbor is of more importance than holding a protest sign. A card in the mail can mean the world. In all places, care for the elderly, teaching the children, and the art of hospitality are sacred trusts. All people have gifts and vision that spring from different sources, but which with time and understanding can flow together to make a mighty river that nourishes and sustains.

All that the Appalachian Center has attempted and accomplished are the direct result of good people who have been a part of this work. In addition to the hundreds of Emory & Henry students, citizens, and partners in Meadowview, McDowell, and the larger region, the Center owes much of its vibrancy to its staff:

Barbara Biedleman
Amy Braswell
Meredith Brown-Harper

Amanda Dye
Jenny Rowe Fairchild
Robin Grossman

Christian Miller
 Travis Proffitt
 Charlotte Roberts
 Marsha Rollison
 Sandy Frederick
 Billy Schumann
 Meighan Sharp
 Scott Sikes

Gloria Surber
 Susan Stanley
 Scott Tate
 Julie Taylor
 Michelle Terry
 Carolyn Wilson
 Tammy Weens
 Jessica Woodruff

All these people, named and unnamed but remembered, bear witness to the streams and brooks that have flowed together for this good work.

I work at the convergence of streams, literally and metaphorically. I have learned (and relearned) that we travel in the footsteps of those who have gone before. Every day, I sit in classes and participate in conversations that were envisioned nearly 15 years ago, and which flow from repeated decisions to stay and serve this place. I am not sure what kind of teacher I would be had I not come to this good place where I am still learning. Part of what I teach is to create the space for people to think critically and creatively about themselves, their places, and their citizenship. I am increasingly convinced that to do this well, I need to step outside traditional academe, combine scholarship and activism, think boldly and act passionately, serve, put down roots, and be a good neighbor in this place.

Several years ago, Dan Leidig, a good neighbor and friend, wrote a poem in honor of Steve Fisher. The poem describes bluebirds singing in a "January thicket." In the poem, Dan compares the work of bluebirds to Steve's work, saying that those bluebirds and the song they sing in that thicket "rename the world." From the foot of that same ridge, across the long Holston Valley, the work of the Appalachian Center for Community Service has been part of an effort to rename the world. Like the bluebirds' song, like Steve's work, our work is never quite finished, always in process, the streams still converging and flowing on, and the song still not fully sung.

WALLY SMITH

From Bray Field, Cohutta Wilderness

There's not a place much lonelier
 than a second-hand wilderness.
 Where the echoes of a generation past
 speak through the rumblings of a river.
 Voices of old loggers at work, trees
 crashing to a dark forest floor,
 the clanking of rusted iron tools.
 Knowing they once all filled this place
 makes the silence even thicker.