

## CHAPTER 3

### TELLING THE STORY

*Other people would tell this story differently, and none of them would be wrong.*

*Barbara Kingsolver, in Pigs in Heaven*

Imagine what it might have been like the day Konnarock Training School opened its doors. Nestled at the foot of Whitetop Mountain, surrounded by a landscape of stumps left by clear-cut logging of the once towering native hardwood trees, sits the impressive three-story building. The school is constructed from the lumber of Southern Appalachian trees and is covered with American chestnut bark shingles. The wood was supplied by the Hassinger Lumber Company, which donated the 225-acre tract on which the school was constructed. White, neatly painted window trim stands out against the bark exterior. On this day the building became home to twenty-eight female boarding students and several faculty members.

It is a sunny afternoon in December 1925, and the girls and their teachers are moving into the modern building. There is laughter and excitement as they climb the steps to the large front porch, enter the front door, and are greeted with an imposing hardwood staircase, beautifully shining hardwood floors, and, if they look to the back, a view of the chapel with its “Christ and the little children” stained glass window. The girls, between the ages of six and eighteen, eagerly explore the building, searching for their new rooms on the second and third floors, peering into the newly-furnished classrooms, opening the double doors to the incredible dining room where they will share their meals together, marveling at the bathrooms with hot and cold water, and trying out the electric lights. Possibly, after a few minutes to allow the girls the joy of discovery, Principal Mary Phlegar Smith may have called everyone into the chapel. The beauty of the room quieted the girls, and Miss Smith offered a prayer of thanks for all that had been given them. From this day, until June 1959, the building was the center of a teaching, preaching, and healing mission in the mountains.

What was it like to have been one of the girls or teachers who lived and learned under the roof of KTS? The story of Konnarock Training School presented here rests above all with narrators who were there and shared their experiences through oral history interviews. This portion of my inquiry consisted of twenty-three interviews with eight gracious women who welcomed me into their lives and imparted to me the gift of their stories. These stories have indeed been a gift! There is no other way to describe what has been shared with me. Throughout the experience, I have been repeatedly touched and humbled not only by the stories themselves, but also by the generosity of these lovely women as they opened themselves to my questioning and placed their words in my trust. Although I kept my research questions in mind during the process and had prepared interview guides (Appendix H), the interviews were open-ended and each took a very different course. During the interviews, I tried to follow the narrators' lead as they told their stories rather than steer them to a story that fit any preconceived ideas I might have (Riessman, 2000).

The participants share the connection to Konnarock Training School, and each feels she was shaped in part by her experiences there. The narrators' experiences at the school are varied, and their time there covers most of the school's existence. Briefly, their connections with the school are described here, and fuller portraits of each will follow. Dora Bentley Testerman, now eighty-six years old, was one of the first students in 1924. Cora Jeffcoat<sup>1</sup> brought Dora from North Carolina when her father was no longer able to take care of the small child and her four brothers. Dora spent the next eleven years with her Konnarock family, the only one she really knew. Narrator Virginia Whittaker's experience was as a teacher for three years during the 1940s. She is originally from the mountains of Giles County, about 120 miles away. Rose Kirby first came to Konnarock Training School as a student from nearby Grayson County; she brought her young cousin LaVerne Kiser with her. Rose later returned to teach three years. Graduating from KTS in 1948, LaVerne Kiser and Geneva Shepherd spent five and four years respectively at the school as students. The longest connection with the school is that of Emily Umbarger. In

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<sup>1</sup> Cora Jeffcoat was Lutheran Parish Worker in the area of North Carolina where Dora lived. Her connection to KTS was explained in more detail in chapter 2.

1926, her mother, Catherine Cox, became the second principal of the school and served there for four years. Emily's aunt and Catherine's sister, Cordelia Cox was a researcher in a scholarly study of the school published in 1930. Edward Umbarger, Emily's father served for a while as manager of the farm operated by the boys' school. Later, Emily was a KTS day student during her four years of high school. Then after graduating from college, Emily taught at the school during the 1957-58 session. The other two participants, Betty Reedy and Peggie Baldwin, were also from Grayson County. Betty graduated in 1952 after four years, and Peggie in 1954 after one year at the school.

All the women have lived lives of commitment to their faith, families, and communities, yet each has a unique story to tell. For the portraits that follow, I have concentrated on the distinctive aspects of the narrator's stories rather than the commonalities that are dealt with in the analysis. The portraits share events from the narrators' entire lives rather than only their KTS experiences. Narrators chose to respond to my questions in different ways, and my goal was to listen to their responses and follow their lead without losing sight of where I needed to go. I have endeavored to let the narrators speak for themselves, to remove myself from the picture, yet I realize that is not entirely possible since I have asked the questions and edited the answers. It is my hope, however, that each portrait allows readers to see the person who shared her story without the imposition of my analysis, to meet the narrators as they presented themselves and to hear their unique voices (Riessman, 2000).

### **Dora Bentley Testerman**

*"Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the Earth are never alone or weary of life."*

*Rachel Carson*

In 1924, Cora Pearl Jeffcoat traveled the treacherous mountain roads from Boone, North Carolina with tiny Dora Bentley in her Ford, knowing possibility and opportunity lay waiting for the five-year-old child at the exciting new mission at Konnarock Training School. But neither Miss Jeffcoat nor the girl could have known that Dora would also find in Konnarock the home where she would spend the next eight decades.

When I met Dora at a KTS reunion, she insisted that she didn't have anything to say that I would find interesting. She was very wrong about that. After some coaxing, she agreed to be interviewed at her home that sits at the foot of Whitetop Mountain, within a mile of the KTS building. Dora was one of the first children to come to the original house used for KTS and one of the first to move into the building constructed for the school. After eleven years as a student, she left the school to marry. Dora maintained close contact with the school throughout its existence, even attending church at the KTS chapel with her older children. Much of Dora's conversation is filled with raspy laughter and joking, but she is quite serious about what KTS meant to her life. This feisty and fascinating four-foot-six dynamo welcomed me into her home three times to share her life story, part of which follows:

*I come out of Lenoir, North Carolina, up on Blowing Rock road, and we were really poor. Born in 1916. I was the only girl in the family; I had four brothers. My mom*



**FIGURE 10: DORA BENTLEY TESTERMAN WEARING HER EVER-PRESENT HAT, AT HER HOME A MILE FROM KONNAROCK TRAINING SCHOOL, JULY 2002.**

*died when I was little; she died in childbirth. The baby and her both died; she was about thirty-nine. I was in an orphans' home [in North Carolina]. And there were men, boys, and girls, and old women there. I stayed there for a long time, a year or two. And Cora Jeffcoat, she's the very one that brought me to the Training School.*

*I was five years old when I came to the first training school. There weren't but seven girls, and a teacher, and a nurse. I was pretty well scared for a while, of course. Had left my daddy and my brothers in North Carolina. And of course I was scared for a while. And then the teachers all petted me, all the time bringing me little*

*gifts like ankle socks and things. I loved little anklets. They petted me, and I just got so I felt like this [KTS] is my home; I'm going to be here. And they raised me. I was five years old when I come. And the school raised me and took care of me. And I went home part of the time with some of the girls if I wanted to, [during vacations] and if I didn't, [KTS] was always my home. I'd stay of the summer.*

*I came to the big Konnarock Training School in 1925. To tell you the truth, it looked like a mansion to me. And it was. Really it was one of the nicest buildings I've ever seen. The Hassingers done the outside with bark. And I thought it was beautiful. But I don't know, it always seemed like home to me--comfortable. I roomed with a grown girl that was going to high school and another girl about my age. See they brought them there all ages. But there were three of us in a room. Most of [the girls] were poor. Some of them didn't like it [there]. I don't know why. They were fed good; we had good eats; they were fixed good. They got homesick, and they'd [the staff] tell me to go and try to make them happy. I'd go and try to make them happy, because they knew I didn't care. I was happy. Yep. They furnished everything. I don't know why anybody could have been unhappy. A lot of them were orphans like me. They were raised by their grandma and their grandpa or their aunt and uncle. And some of them would tell tales [stories], that [their guardians] weren't too good to them, which was sad.*

*Oh, I thought it was a good life [at Konnarock]. There was about eight or ten of us we called the "little gang," and we were rowdy. Just young and fast—we didn't do nothing mean, but we'd be noisy. We'd run down the steps or run through the halls and slide and that kind of stuff. Shew! Here we'd go, all of us, traveling through the hall or anything together. And we had a sewing teacher, and I learned how to sew a little bit. And we had one of them weaving things that you made rugs. And I would do that. I loved to do that, put that shuttle every other streak of cloth, you know, and see how pretty they'd come out. I'd do it a while, and Becky'd do it a while, and we'd make rugs just for the fun.*

*They had a wood cook stove, and me and the smaller girls would carry the wood in and put it in the wood box. I didn't pay tuition. I guess the Lutherans did. It was seventy-five dollars a year. [One year I kept the monkey stove.] Do you know what the monkey stove was? It was one of them round cast iron stoves that's got the potbelly, and it's little at the top, and you put coal in it. Just one eye on top, and I would keep it stocked to make the hot water, 'til they got the other kind put in. They had a huge wood stove. And the electricity was run by Delcos, motors outside the Training School, two of them. If one run out of juice, they'd turn it over to the other one to make the lights and our heat. I haven't ever seen any since. They called them Delcos, but they were big motors that run the lights. Didn't have wires that run to the Training School or anything on poles. Other people used lamps, kerosene. And we had an old coal furnace. Down in the basement, that you put coal in, this big iron thing. 'Course we had a hired man done most of that. And that's what kept us warm, came up into radiators. Those copper-colored radiators. And the steam would come out and the rooms would be so warm.*

*[I loved] the hall because I could take a run-and-go and slide a way over. You know how you skate on a real slick floor? 'Course I wasn't allowed to do it if they caught me. But I would every time I'd get a chance. I loved to take a run-and-go and slide. It*



**FIGURE 11: DORA BENTLEY TESTERMAN IS THE CHILD LYING IN FRONT OF THE MAY DAY COURT FACING THE CAMERA. THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN THE 1929. (Archives Virginia Synod)**

wouldn't make marks because it was hardwood floors and the shoes we wore—they were particular about what you wore, that you wouldn't scar the floor up. We had a swing, two swings on the front porch, that we could set out and swing in after we got our work done up. Or get out in the yard and play ball. I loved to play baseball. I was a tomboy, I guess. Oh, the chapel was beautiful! Had pictures, different things in the windows, what God was a-doing.

*[Religion was important at KTS.] Kenneth Killinger was our pastor. And, oh, I loved that man! He was a really good pastor. What I liked about him—I'd heard Baptists and, you know, that shoutin'—that always, I don't know why, it scared me. You know, these that go across the pulpit and holler and scream. Ooh, that would scare me so bad. I liked Kenneth 'cause he'd tell everything mild and good. And everybody loved him. And we'd do the catechism, and he'd help us, you know, learn about that. And he would say, "Dora, I'll give you a dime if you'll shut up your talking." I was a magpie! I was baptized when I got old enough. I'm still a Lutheran. [At KTS] we had chapel, and we had prayer meeting every night; we had prayer. One of the teachers would read a scripture in the Bible, and they we had prayer. Anybody that wanted to pray could pray. You just set on the steps and down in the big chairs—of course, forty-four girls, we couldn't all set downstairs. We'd set up on the steps that went upstairs to the rooms. And sing religious songs. I was in the choir too. And so there I'd be in my white robe, big black bow tie. Oh, law. Them were good days.*

*Law, we had a library. Nothing but a library with shelves, pure books. I read the Zane Greys, the westerns. Lot of them read the Zane Grey. When they'd bring in a new bunch, we'd try and see which one could get them first. And they had to be issued out to us like libraries down in Abingdon and around. I couldn't wait for the Roanoke Times to come in. Bonnie and Clyde was in it! Everyday something would come out about them. I don't know; I was just possessed with it, I reckon. [I had ] never heard of anything like that before—going and robbing banks. The paper would come in every day, and I'd break my neck to be the first to see what it said about Bonnie and Clyde. Miss Dyer'd go down and meet the train at Konnarock. There was a depot, the train came right along there in*

*front of that and stopped. Then it had to back up and go down here and up to Whitetop. And she'd go meet that and get the mail for the girls, letters or anything. And the newspaper came every day. And they got all kinds of household and flower magazines. They'd be a big pile of them on the table. You had to leave them there; when you read them you had to put them back there for the others to read.*

*[I went to KTS under] four principals. Mary Phelgar Smith, Catherine Cox Umbarger, Helen Dyer, and Miss Katrina. But they were all good to me. I reckon they were sorry for me 'cause I was an orphan. The principal and teachers was with me at my wedding. I was seventeen and got married. Married a boy around here; he was nineteen and [had gone] to the school at the Training School, a day student. I always wanted to get married. I even picked my husband out when I was eleven years old. We were like two peas. He was a in a higher grade than I was, but we played at recess. I was a baseball player buddy. One time he won the spelling bee and he got to go to Bristol, which back then was a big deal. And he wouldn't go without me.*

*[After I got married], I didn't become nothing but a housewife, [but I was prepared] because of that teaching, all that health I got. And you know I loved it. It's a wonder I had. I thought, what in the heaven! I may not even have kids. But I wound up with ten. Honey, [my life after KTS] wasn't nothing but working on this farm. We owned sixty-two acres. And my husband, he went off and worked up at Arlington, Arlington County. And [when] he came home, we'd put out a garden, potato patch. He'd put out corn patches. See, my two oldest boys, they were old enough to hoe corn and stuff. We'd have these fields full of corn. And raised a garden, [my boys and me]. Law, I used to can! Canned a way in the night. Put on two cannings in a hot water bath, beans and tomatoes and stuff. Mustard. We always had a good garden. [My husband would] come home from Arlington and put the garden out. 'Cause he had a green thumb, I always said. He would plant the crops and then go back up there. You see, there wasn't no work here. Nothing that brought in much money. He would come home once a month. But by that time, Luke and Jim and Marie and Naomi were big enough to help a lot. And Marie, she done a lot of the cooking, climb up in a chair and cook while I was in the field with Luke and Jim a -*

*hoeing corn or something. Yeah, stand up in a chair. She could make biscuits or anything, ten years old.*

*I never did [see my father again]. He died when he was about forty-three years old. My mother was already dead. They both were young when they died. But, don't you know, I lost my brothers for twenty years and found them. Or my husband found them for me. And they got to come and see me, or I'd go see them, me and him would. They came to that other house [we lived in] that burned down in '77. But they are all dead now. I went back to the graveyard where [my mother and the baby] are buried. This last son I got took me.*

*Law, I don't know [what the most important events in my life have been]. There are several of them. One thing was finding my brothers, knowing I had folks. Another thing was getting married. I was married for sixty-five years to the same man. Arde furnished the food and clothes and everything else. I can't say a thing against him. He kept [the kids] up. We'd have an argument, but we'd never quarrel deeply; I never was hit. He was good to me. Arde was good to me. When he couldn't make a go of it here, he went to Arlington and worked eleven year. I'm proud of the way I raised my children. They went to church. I went to church. And the Training School taught me good stuff. One teacher came back, Helen Dyer, and she said, "Dora, I thought you and Arde would never make it. You were so rowdy." So we showed her our cattle; we showed her my canned stuff. The cellar out there was full of all kinds of different canned stuff. Now I learned that at the Training School, too. I'm proud of my training that I had. I ain't forgot it yet. It was good help. My life was happy. It was a good life. Taught me a lot. God's been good to me. I've always had plenty to eat, plenty to wear, a roof over my head. So I've got a lot to be thankful for.*

Dora Bentley Testerman lives alone with her two dogs in the home she and her husband built after their first home burned about twenty-five years ago. Two of her daughters live nearby, as do some of her grandchildren. Dora still maintains her flower garden and is active in her church and community.

## Virginia Whittaker

*My satisfaction comes from my commitment to advancing a better world. Faye Wattleton*

Traveling to the small community of Eggleston in Giles County, Virginia for the first time, I felt very much as if I were traveling in the mountains near Whitetop. Although the village is not far from Blacksburg, after I turned onto Route 730, I was driving on a two-lane road full of curves and steep ascents and descents. The speed limit is 20 miles per hour, indicative of the conditions I met. When I arrived at Miss Whittaker's house, it was long after dark. She lives in a large house built shortly after the Civil War, one that belonged to her grandparents. Wearing a nice fleece outfit, Miss Whittaker, who is in her eighties, walked out to the car to greet me, and asked if she could help me get anything into the house.

During my first visit, in November 2001, there was a cozy fire in the wood stove in the kitchen and wood piled on the porch outside the kitchen door to ward off the winter cold. There were bird feeders on the porch and inside I noticed a number of books about birds. The back door led to kitchen where the first two interviews with Miss Whittaker were conducted. Surrounded by lovely family heirlooms, we sat at the table with the recorders between us. When I arrived for the third interview, Miss Whittaker took me to lunch at Mountain Lake Inn, and I interviewed her in the large lobby of the lodge there. Miss Virginia Whittaker is the only one of the narrators who did not attend KTS as a student; she was a teacher there for three years during the 1940s. She taught two of the other women I interviewed, LaVerne Spenser and Geneva Shepherd.

*I was born at Eggleston, Virginia on July 15, 1921. This is my grandparents' home I live in. It's more than a hundred years old. My grandfather was a merchant. He was in the War Between the States. Soon after he was married, he came to live here. He died rather young though, and so my parents lived with my grandmother here, and I've just taken over. My mother was widowed when she was thirty -seven, and she raised four children. I went to high school at Eggleston. Eggleston was a combination elementary and high school, grades one through eleven. They didn't have twelfth grade when I was*



**FIGURE 12: MISS VIRGINIA WHITTAKER IN EGGLESTON, VIRGINIA, JANUARY 2002**

*there. The children were all from a rural area, and most of them were bussed in. I lived close enough to the school that I had to walk all the time. You had to be a mile away from the school before you could ride the bus, so I walked all the time. We were very small. There were eleven in my graduating class. I think the most in a graduating class was about twenty-nine. The elementary was downstairs and the high school was upstairs. We had combination classes and the juniors and seniors took class together.*

*Then I went to Marion Junior College. I had been a Lutheran all my life. I had relatives that went to Marion College, and I just thought that was the place to go. And I finished, you know, at a small high school, and I didn't feel quite ready to go to a larger college, so it was very nice. And from there I went to [James] Madison and graduated in '43. I didn't know very much about Konnarock Training School, although I'd been a Lutheran all my life and it's a Lutheran school. It seemed to me like we heard more about Rocky Boy Mountain Mission out somewhere in the West. And I went to the Massenetta summer session the year I was a senior. I went from Harrisonburg. Maybe we hitchhiked or walked out to Massenetta; it's so close to Harrisonburg, and I saw my former pastor that I had when I was growing up. He told me they needed a teacher at Konnarock, but I wasn't very interested. It was during the war and I kind of wanted to go into something concerning the war, maybe a branch of the service. I hadn't made up my mind about a career. I didn't have a job; I hadn't even made any applications for jobs. Reverend Hewitt was the superintendent of Konnarock at that time, and the pastor recommended me to Mr. Hewitt for the position of home economics teacher, and other things. And it was close to the time—I finished school on Friday afternoon, and I was supposed to be up to Konnarock on Monday morning if I was going to take that job. I had some relatives*

*that visited me from Rural Retreat, and they knew Mr. Hewitt real well, and they just encouraged me to go there and see what it was all about. We had a young pastor here, just out of seminary, and he took me up for my job. I decided to go, and he took me up. I've lived in the country all my life, and when I went to Konnarock, it wasn't so different from my home community. I stayed up there three years, and really enjoyed it.*

*I was supposed to be the main home economics teacher there, but I know I taught social studies; I had that on my certificate. And I think I taught a science class. I had boys and girls in social studies. You know we taught the students at both schools at KTS. While I was there—it was during the war—we taught the community students, the public school students. They were having a hard time getting teachers, and we taught them, too. I was employed by the Board of American Missions, but I remember we went to teachers' meetings in Abingdon in Washington County.*

*The boys had a farm that they worked, and the girls helped with the food preparation and house cleaning and laundry. Besides the regular home economics classes, we did a lot of things. In the fall, we made apple butter. The boys would bring the apples up from the farm, and the girls and I would peel apples at night. We were down in that sort of basement room, and we peeled, and peeled, and peeled apples. But we had fun, you know. It was an old-fashioned apple peeling. And some of the ladies in the community actually did the stirring of the apple butter in the copper kettle, and we sold apple butter. We called it "Copper Kettle Apple Butter" and sold it in the stores. We had our little label on, and that was quite an experience. And then later in the fall, the boys would slaughter the hogs, and we would can the meat. I know we canned sausage and tenderloin. And I think the community women maybe made the lard. They had sort of a barter system with the community people. We would get these mission boxes of clothing and things, more than the students could use. So we would let the community people have clothing to do chores for us, like make apple butter or lard. I know another thing [the girls] did. They picked huckleberries. Huckleberries! And we canned huckleberries. And we made a dessert that we called "tumpy" out of huckleberries. We had our own farm milk and cream, real cream. And we whipped cream and put graham crackers and*

*huckleberries in it. Now I don't know whether anybody else knows about that or not, but it was my first experience with tummy, and I still make it out of blueberries.*

*We had lots of guests, lots of guests when I was there, people coming from all over the United States, especially in the summer time. Now, we worked—I told you the children came back and worked so many weeks in the summer time—[but teachers worked, too]. I stayed there in the summer. I was there year round. And one of the community things I did was help with the community cannery. We canned our own stuff, food from the farm. The boys would pick the produce and bring it, and the girls and I would prepare it and can it. We had a man that usually took care of the steam pressure and all that, but it was a hard, hard, laborious job. We would spend all day down there canning. I saw a record somewhere not long ago of what we canned. It would be hundreds and hundreds of cans of canned beans, and canned corn, and squash, and tomatoes, and soup mix. Things were rationed while I was there, but you know, we had the farm. And we had steak when nobody else was eating steak. And we had fried chickens, and we had pork chops. They raised all this stuff. Somebody would go out to Marion once or twice a week and bring things from the store. We had nice meals; we had good food. And from the farm, we had plenty of milk and butter. We had to churn to make the butter. And since I was a farm girl, I knew how to churn, and I knew how to dress chickens.*

*We had a lady, a dietician, that planned the meals. But the girls helped prepare the meals for the dining hall. And they set the tables, and it was family style dining. I was the substitute cook—it seemed to me like the cook got sick an awful lot and I had to substitute. But the girls were real good to help. I had a lot of duties that I didn't expect. Sometimes just the long day [was difficult], the physical part. You were on duty all day and all night. I thought the summer work was very strenuous and tiring. Seemed like there was no end to it. That cannery business was hard. It was hard for all of us. I'd get so tired sometimes I couldn't sleep. I never was in charge of study hall, though. I was always doing something else. But I loved the kids. And I liked the staff. You felt like you were doing something worthwhile. I just think they had a wonderful quality of life there;*

*we emphasized Christianity, and I never heard anybody complain about chapel and devotions. Everybody was just very cooperative. I think the name Konnarock Training School meant we would train [the students] to be homemakers, farmers, and good citizens, and Bible and the religious life; that was very much emphasized, living the good life.*

*I was impressed with the intellect of the students. They were very intelligent pupils, but the disadvantage most of them had was the transportation and highways and so forth. The roads were so bad that until recent years when they had topped them, the children were isolated and just didn't have any way to get to school. Most of them came from the mountains, from an isolated area. They weren't wealthy people. I know some of them didn't have very nice clothing and didn't have very much. We furnished a lot out of those mission barrels. They didn't have a lot of material wealth, but they had intellectual wealth. Some of the students went on and did great. They were bright people. They learned a lot, just by doing. They learned that we all have to have responsibilities; we can't slack off.*

*We had a wonderful doctor there in the community that was hired by the Board of American Missions, Dr. Meyer. He was a German refugee, and he and his wife and two children had come to the United States. He was a fine doctor. He came to Konnarock and doctored the people in the area, in the mountains, and he doctored us at school. I know I had a bad case of the flu, and I think he saved my life. He came, maybe once or twice a day, and really took care [of me]. So if anybody was sick, he took care of them, but I don't remember any of the children being really sick.*

*While I was there, we did have one very tragic thing to happen. One of the little boys got in a freak accident on the farm and lost his life. And that was very hard for all the students. He was very popular, a very, very loving boy. It was hard on me too. I was young and I had—we all had—to counsel and console, and---I know just before he lost his life, he had to stay in after school and say the Twenty-third Psalm. And he did. He did it wonderfully, didn't miss a bit. So that had kind of stuck with me. We had to go to his*

*service, and that was real sad. He had a little girl friend, and it was very sad. But most of the time everything was happy.*

*The fall I went to Konnarock, I didn't know too much about the school and a lot of things that went on in the Lutheran Church. I grew up in a very small church and our pastor had to do a lot of traveling, and I didn't hear about a lot of things. But the teachers at Konnarock were all excited. They were going down to Hotel Roanoke to the Triennial Convention. I didn't know what that was. I hardly knew what triennial was. Anyway, it's where women from all over the United States and maybe some foreign countries meet every three years. And that year they were going to meet at Hotel Roanoke, and the Konnarock staff was invited down to be their guests. So everybody was so excited. I didn't get too excited because I hardly knew what it was about, but we went, and it was so lovely, and we were treated like queens. That was one of the first things that impressed me when I went to Konnarock.*

*I remember when one year we had the Junior-Senior Banquet. I guess it was the first year I was up there. I was in charge of decorating the tables. I don't remember what the class color or what the class flower was, but I'd seen these little blue iris out on the road, little teeny, miniature iris, so I decorated the tables with those. I went out over on the roadside and climbed around and got all these little blue iris and made beautiful little arrangements all up and down the tables with those irises. And I was supposed to respond to the welcome. Anyway, I was supposed to make a speech at the banquet. We dressed up in long dresses, and I guess the kids got theirs out of the mission barrels. But I had an old dress from college that I was wearing, and I was sitting next to the president of the senior class, and he had his foot on the tail of my dress. And when I got up to make my response, maybe it was to his welcome address, I can't remember exactly; I stood up and I heard my dress rip because his big foot was on it. And I was speechless. I could not say a thing. I stood there like an idiot for I don't know how many—seemed to me like minutes, but I guess it was seconds. Finally, my speech came to me and I got it out. Recently I went to a church program, and the same thing happened to this little twelve - year- old boy. He got up to make his speech, and he couldn't say a word. But I was really*

*sympathetic with him, and I told him about my experience. It happened to me one time when I couldn't say anything.*

*We didn't have too many field trips with the girls. The pastors in that area had a camp not so far from the Konnarock school. And we could take [the girls] up there on weekends camping. I told you one of my cousins came up and taught a year while I was there. She drove the car; I wasn't driving at the time. She and I used to take the girls that wanted to and were there on weekends—some of them went home on the weekends—but the ones that didn't, we'd take camping up there. It was real fun. We slept in like sleeping bags or pouches on the floor. We didn't have any great planned activities for that, but we went hiking a lot with the kids. We used to take them up to Whitetop. We went up there a time or two for picnics. I don't think we really did field trips. Probably they did in later years, but one reason [we didn't] was gas was rationed and it was hard to get enough gas to be able to do those kinds of things.*

*I was paid sixty-five dollars a month, but I got my room and board, and that counted a lot. Back in those days, teachers weren't paid very much. I got paid twelve months a year. We had our doctor furnished, and what little transportation we had was furnished. And one thing that was nice for us, and I don't know who, maybe a wealthy church, but they provided a weekend a month for the staff members to go out on the town. We could go to Hotel Lincoln at Marion if we wanted to, and three of us went to Hotel Roanoke one weekend because we thought that would be nice. And it was. But if I got a chance, I wanted to come home for the weekend, so I didn't [go to hotels much]. But the teachers that lived in Philadelphia and St Paul, Minnesota couldn't go home, so it was nice for them to be able to go out and get away for the weekend.*

*I told them when I went [to Konnarock] that I wouldn't be there very long. My mother was a widow, and my one brother was in service, and the other was with the railroad, and my younger sister was ready to go to college. Mom was a person that didn't feel like she could live by herself, and I'd always planned to come home when she needed me. She wanted me to come home. I kind of hated to leave; I really did. I don't think I*

*would change anything about the time I spent at Konnarock. I enjoyed it. I was there three years, but I came home, and then I taught in my home community. I taught in the small high school here. When you teach in a small high school, you have to teach many, many subjects. I didn't teach home economics; that job was taken. But I taught science and English and social studies. Then they needed a guidance counselor, so I went to school and got some credits in that and got certified in guidance, along with the other subjects. Then they needed a librarian, so I went to school and took some courses in library science, and I did that work. So I had a pretty full schedule when I taught high school. Then it became popular to consolidate the smaller high schools, so the high schools in four communities were consolidated. At that time my mother wasn't so well. I could have gone to the new high school, but there was a vacancy in sixth grade here. I had sixth grade on my certificate, so I took that job and taught sixth grade, then went down to fifth, took some more classes, and went to fourth. When our elementary was consolidated, I retired after teaching thirty-nine years.*

Miss Whittaker lives alone in the large farmhouse her grandfather built. A nephew and his family live nearby on part of the family land. Church continues to be an important part of Miss Whittaker's life.



**FIGURE 13: VIRGINIA WHITTAKER IS SECOND FROM THE LEFT IN THIS PICTURE TAKEN WHILE SHE WAS A TEACHER AT KTS.**

(Private files of LaVerne Kiser)

## Rose Cox Kirby

*“Men live by forgetting; women live on memories.” T.S. Eliot*

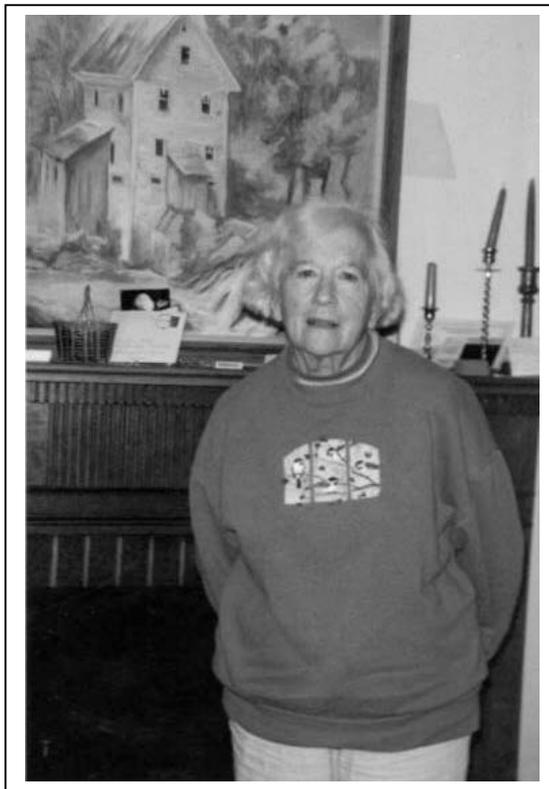
Rose Cox Kirby’s Konnarock experience includes one year as a student and three as a teacher. When Rose came to KTS to complete her final year of high school, she brought along her cousin, LaVerne Spenser Kiser, who was then eleven years old. A few years later when Rose returned, she taught Betty Reedy Weaver, another of the narrators in this study.

I first saw Rose Kirby at the 2001 KTS reunion. Noting that she seemed to be the individual in charge, I approached her and asked if I could tell her a little about what I wanted to do and if I might have a few minutes to speak to the group. The soft-spoken Rose was most interested and most gracious, and from that moment, I knew I wanted to interview her. Rose spent time with me in her home in Lansing, North Carolina. When I arrived in her drive, Rose came out to greet me. We entered her home through a sun porch, into the dining room, and then on into her living room. We sat on the flowered sofa together with the tape recorders between us. Throughout the interviews, Rose remained eager to participate, believing the story of KTS needed to be preserved. When relating her story, Rose would frequently gaze into the distance, as though she were seeing Konnarock in her mind, her memories vividly alive. She was transported back to her time there, saying things like, “Right here was the principal’s office,” and “Over to this side was the dining room.”

On each of my four visits, I left not only with the treasure of Rose’s story, but with gifts from her kitchen and from her garden—tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, columbine—all evidence of her generous nature. In her own words, a portion of Rose’s story of her life and of her time as both student and teacher at KTS follows.

*I was born in 1927, June 25, 1927. We lived in a little community of what we called Haw Orchard. It is now the Grayson Highlands State Park. I had a most enjoyable childhood. My grandmother and grandfather lived with us. And I had a brother, two*

*years older than I, and then, much later, I had a little sister, nine years later, in fact. But they were so supportive, and not just my parents, but we had an extended family. I had uncles and aunts; my mother had eight brothers and sisters, and about six of them lived within walking distance. My father taught school, and then he became postmaster. Dad had served in World War I, and he told us delightful stories. Then in World War II, [when] my brother Roald was in Europe we knew where he was [because] he would refer to [one of Dad's stories and get his whereabouts past the censors]. We had a map, so we knew where he was. [Roald] was killed in January before the Germans surrendered in June.*



**FIGURE 14: ROSE COX KIRBY AT HER HOME IN LANSING, NORTH CAROLINA, JANUARY 2002**

*My grandfather taught me to read, and it was using the newspaper. And it was our secret. We were the only ones in the community that got a newspaper. The older men would come [to our house]. They knew what day the paper came, and they would want to read the paper, so they would read it out loud. And of course, I wanted to be where the action was, so I was sitting in Grandpa's lap, and [he would find the three-letter words for me]. I could [soon] recognize the words. And he said, "Now that's our secret." So when I started to school, I didn't know, since he's said it was our secret, I didn't know whether I should tell them that I could read. But the teachers soon found out that I was a little more advanced than some of the others, and I don't know if I ever told them or not [that Grandpa had taught me to read].*

*I went to a one-room school through the seventh-grade. Can you imagine? We went to school in the church. And so during the week the desks were used on one side and the pews were moved to the other side. And then on Sunday, it was church. And we had good teachers. One teacher, Mr. Slabey stayed with [my family]. When we weren't in school, like on the weekends, he would take us on hikes, and we identified the wildflowers and we found Indian relics. Mr. Slabey—because he had traveled in Europe—he told us things about other nations that we didn't know. And we sang "Adestes Fidelis" in Latin. It was just a wonderful childhood.*

*It was rough living in this area until we got roads, good roads. We shared, and that's the only way that some could survive. My grandma would take food—there was one family [in our community] that had twelve children. In a two room house! The house was probably not much bigger than this living room. And Mom was always sending food over there. And if a child was sick, Grandma would go try to nurse it back to health. Kids had to sleep on the floor. But you think of that many children in two rooms! But they have done well, and, oh, it makes me so happy when I see them at Decoration. We have Decoration in August, and many of them come. And one of them teaches at Brandies.*

*Christmas was a fun time. My grandmother said the twelve days of Christmas go from December 25 to January 6. So we didn't put up our tree until Christmas Eve, and then we left it up. And I still do; I still leave my tree up until January 6. We would just go out and find a tree. Sometimes we'd go up where Grayson Highlands Park is now and cut a tree and carry it down the mountain. And we decorated with thorn berries, because we didn't have cranberries or anything else that would add color. And my Uncle Blake, LaVerne's dad, smoked; he smoked Prince Albert tobacco in his pipe, and he would save the foil in those tobacco cans, and we would make stars, anything to decorate it. We had a Frazier fir. We didn't know it was a Frazier, but that's really the premium Christmas tree.*

*My brother and I would get the money from any of the lambs that the mother [ewe] wouldn't own. We fed them on a bottle. And we got--that was our spending money*

*for Christmas. Because we had one ewe that every year had triples, we would count on at least one, and sometimes--I think we had five or six one year, so we really felt like we were rich to buy presents. We would [also] pick berries and sell them. We could trap rabbits in the wintertime and sell them because the winters were colder and they were kept frozen until the truck came around to get them. And we sold iron. I hadn't thought about [selling scrap iron] in a long time. Let's see, how old would have I been? I was probably five years old. We didn't realize what we were doing, [helping the Japanese get ready to attack us].*

*[When I began seventh grade], we walked to Mount Rogers, a four -room school, the stone building part, and that's about three miles away. So we walked to school because the roads were impassable; they were more trails than anything else. The principal of Mount Rogers left [my junior year], and he taught us Latin. I had Latin with him and I wanted to continue that. And Dad said I needed some more algebra because they only taught Algebra I at Mount Rogers, so that was the reason that I [went to Konnarock Training School].*

*Going on a picnic on the lawn at Konnarock was when I first knew of [the school]. Pastor Zerkle was the minister of the three churches; Ivy Grove was there on the Haw Orchard, and Faith above Mount Rogers, and Whitetop. So he took us to Konnarock for picnics and youth group, the Luther League, I believe was the name of it. He had a*



**FIGURE 15: ROSE KIRBY AS A KTS TEACHER** (Archives Virginia Synod)

*car with a rumble seat, and oh, we all wanted to ride in the rumble seat. And then, I don't know the name of the car, but over the headlights, two people could sit there. The boys especially wanted to sit there. I must have been nine or ten [at the time], but I didn't dream that I would be going to school there. They let us go through the dormitory, and in some rooms there were three beds. And I just thought it was the neatest place, and I guess that was my first experience with a flushing toilet because we didn't get electricity [at home] until I was almost through college, and we had to carry water.*

*Sister Sophie took LaVerne and me over there [to the school]. LaVerne, my cousin, went with me when she was only in the seventh grade. It was right at bedtime; I know it was getting dark, and I was afraid that I would get homesick. Miss 'Trina said that everyone had a job, and because I would be going down to the public school to get my algebra, the only job that I could really do would be breakfast help. And little did I realize that I was the cook. Miss Katrina said that I should be down in the kitchen at six o'clock. Miss Neff, the dietician, had the menus posted. So [next morning], I went down to the kitchen, and Pate, who was the janitor and groundskeeper, had the fire going. I said, "When is Miss Neff coming?" And he said, "Oh, she'll be here before you're ready to serve breakfast."*

*I looked at the menu. Biscuits. Biscuits, and gravy, and scrambled eggs, and an orange roll. I'd never made rolls in my life! I could make biscuits, but I'd only made enough for maybe twenty-four biscuits, not sixty. So I doubled that, or I think I made three batches, and I had flour up to my elbows, and Uncle Pate saw the predicament I was in, and he said, "I'll help you." And so he did. He fried the bacon, and I made the biscuits and rolls. But I thought, "Now will I last?" But that was my job all year, because I went down in the afternoon to the public high school. The others changed [jobs throughout the year]. Breakfast help, and then lunch and supper, [and] the waitresses, and then the dishwashing crew, and the pots and pans crew, and the front hall. Now the chapel was dusted everyday. Then on the weekends everything was waxed, paste waxed. And I would usually help because after I got through breakfast, I was finished. We'd put the wax on and when it dried, we had wool blankets. We didn't have a polisher, just elbow grease. A couple would pile on the [blanket] and you'd pull them and polish the floors with them.*

*I didn't get homesick [at Konnarock], but I did when I went to Marion College. I wrote my dad; I said, "Dad, I want to come home. If you don't come after me I'll die." And they came, but they waited a week, and I was over it. He said he was afraid not to come. [I only attended Konnarock] one year, and then I taught there three years after I graduated from Lenoir-Rhyne. And I taught everything! I taught French; I taught*

*geometry; I taught English; I taught biology, whatever was needed—history. I had a double major; I majored in French and social studies, but you just filled in. I had a good time. [I was paid] ninety-dollars a month. We lived on the second floor. There were two rooms on [one end of] the second floor, two rooms sharing a bath plus another little room with a connecting door between the little room, and that was my room. It was tiny little room, but it was just so cozy. It had just barely room for two beds, single beds in there, and later they took one of the beds out, and it gave me a little more room. And the home ec. teacher, Miss Huston, had the room that connected, and then the only connection to the other room was the bathroom. I taught at Konnarock for three years, and I taught at Northwest about twenty-five years. Then I taught at Lansing two [years]. I taught thirty years.*

*I met my husband-to-be at a square dance at the American Legion over at Rugby. I knew his parents because they drove cattle to the mountain for pasture, and we would open gates for anybody coming [through]. The states had not adopted the highways. I knew they had a son, but I had never met him. And so it was the first year I taught at Konnarock. Miss Huston had a car, and Helen came to my house and we went to the square dance. And I met him, but I wasn't too impressed, but he was good looking. [Helen and I were] resting between dances and a relative [of Bud's] introduced us. Bud said, "When you start dancing again, may I have the first dance?" And I said, "Okay." But I wasn't too impressed. And then it was later when we had our first date. That was during my second year at Konnarock, my second teaching year. The girls liked to go on walks if the days were long, and a chaperone had to go with them. It was at fishing season, and my husband-to-be's first cousin was one of the girls. This carload of fishermen, students at Emory and Henry, came by and Betty Jane recognized her cousin, Bud, and asked if she could go talk to them. And Bud said, "Is that Rose Cox?" And Betty Jane said, "Yes, do you know her?" And he said, "No, but I'd like to." Anyway, the second time we saw him when we were walkin g, he wanted to know if I was busy Saturday night. So we had our first date. And I knew then he was the one I'd like to marry, or some one like him.*

*We dated that spring, and he came to the school, and I introduced him to all the teachers. We continued dating during the summer. So we decided we were going to get married, and we planned to get married at Thanksgiving. But my dad had gone blind. We wanted to be married in the chapel [at Konnarock] and [we both] had some time off at Thanksgiving. Dad said that he would give me away, if I would sort of lead him down the aisle. Mom was so excited, [but] Dad was dreading it. Mom had made all the plans; had gotten [Dad] a new suit. But Dad was dreading it so much. He felt required to [walk me down the aisle] since I had asked him. But we decided we'd just elope. We got married the twenty-sixth of October. Helen [Huston] made the plans. I packed my suitcase and she took it down and put it in her car. I made out my lesson plans. This was on a Thursday, and Friday I had to arrange [for a substitute]. Sarah was going to teach my English class; we had it all arranged when we informed her about it. So I called Pastor Ludwig and I said, "Pastor Ludwig, could you meet me at Laurel Valley [Church] at 4:00?" He said he'd be glad to; I guess he thought I needed some counseling or something. And Margaret [Meyer] had graduated from Bryn Meyer and was teaching. I asked if she'd meet me at the church, and I didn't say why, and of course, Helen, the co-conspirator. So we all met at 4:00. Bud had my corsage and he put the corsage on me. Margaret came in her blue jeans; she thought we were going hiking. So Pastor Ludwig realized what was going on, and said he would marry us, but he said, "But I want to talk to you a little bit first." So Helen played the organ, and Margaret was the other witness. So we married and off we went. I wrote Mom and Dad a letter explaining what we had done, and we would be back by to see them on Sunday. I put the letter in the mailbox on Rt. 58 [as we went] to Linville Falls. So I continued teaching and he went on to Emory and Henry that year. Bud had graduated and I was visibly pregnant the last of May. We lived with his parents a year; then we built a little house down by the church.*

*I have a son named after my brother Roald. My children are Roald, and Helen, and Russell. Roald works in the park. He went to Virginia Tech and majored in wildlife and forestry. Helen went to Duke and married someone she met there. They have two boys, Brian and Patrick. They are divorced, and Helen has remarried. And Russell, the third child, joined the Army his sophomore year of college. He's a respiratory therapist*

*up at the Ashe hospital. [Bud and I] were married thirty -eight years, so that's pretty good. He died in 1988. He was a teacher; he taught math, and then he worked at Sprague Electric, and of course, we had the farm and had cattle. We had good years.*

Rose Cox Kirby now lives alone in the home she and her husband built near Lansing, North Carolina, and remains active in the life of her church and community.

### **LaVerne Spenser Kiser**

*What we call the secret of happiness is no more a secret than our willingness to choose life.*

*-- Leo Buscaglia*

LaVerne Kiser is Rose Kirby's cousin and went to KTS as a seventh -grader when Rose went as a senior. My mother and LaVerne were in the same graduating class and have kept in touch over the years. I had met LaVerne before starting this project, but did not know her very well. When I began the study, almost everyone I talked to said, "You need to interview LaVerne. She can tell you a lot about the school." This was excellent advice. LaVerne was not only able to tell me a great deal about the school and the people connected with it, but she also made available to me her scrapbook and two albums filled with photographs, clippings, and other memorabilia she had preserved. Many of the pictures used in this work came from her personal files.

The mountains of Virginia have been LaVerne's home for her entire life. She told me she had tried other places, but was always homesick for "my mountains." Her love for her heritage can be seen not only in her collection of KTS memorabilia, but also in her home. A beautiful painting of Christ with little children hangs over her sofa, and on the opposite wall, sits an antique pump organ. Both these artifacts are from Ivy Grove Lutheran Church where LaVerne's family attended church when she was growing up. She was the organist there for a number of years, and when the church closed, she bought the organ and was presented with the picture by the Board of Trustees in recognition of

her service to the congregation. There are three little girls in the picture that LaVerne says she “named” after herself and her sisters when she was a child.

LaVerne’s home sits facing State Route 16 near Mouth of Wilson. The Wilson River is across the road from her front yard. During our interviews, we sat on the living room sofa with the recorders between us. A small woman whose once reddish hair is now gray, LaVerne welcomed me warmly into her home. Her delightful sense of humor and rich store of memories made for very pleasant interviews.

*I had a very, very happy childhood. I was born in a little two-room house on Haw Orchard Mountain, right down below the Park. And my momma had had twins before I was born and they died. So I was born, and I was so tiny the doctor didn’t even weigh me. He said I wouldn’t live; there was something wrong with my heart. But at any rate, my Daddy said that he had seen little lambs get better. He had an old goat, and he milked her and fed me with an eyedropper until I could suck. Then I had a sister Carol who also went to Konnarock School; she was there two years. My sister Junella graduated from Mount Rogers. And my brother Sherill was the baby boy.*



**FIGURE 16:**  
**LAVERNE SPENSER KISER, 2003**

*My momma’s family owned a lot of that mountain where Grayson Highlands State Park is, and her grandfather lived up there, and they lived up there; in fact, she was born up there in the park. But we were just down the hill from there, a community called Haw Orchard. The road now is Spenser Branch, and my grandpa Spenser moved from upper Sturgills, North Carolina, on the Spenser Branch and built a house there. So most of his boys and he owned all of the mountain there, and so my grandpa grew up there. And my great-grandpa Osborne had an old log house which burned before I*

*was born, but anyway, I was born right across the road from where my great-grandpa Osborne lived so I was surrounded by Osbornes, Spensers, Richardsons, all my kin folks; a happy life. Over home everybody was, well, it was family all around there. We probably had over 200 people there on that mountain. It's a deserted place now; the Park and the Forestry have it. They've been bought out, and then everybody's moved up north to get rich. But it was all family.*

*So I grew up there [on the mountain]. The church, Ivy Grove Lutheran Church, was a few feet from our door. So I would be carried to church, and Pastor Killinger was the pastor. I always got Pastor Killinger and Jesus mixed up. So I grew up on Haw Orchard Mountain. We finally moved to a three-room house, and then later Dad built a bigger house. And my momma, bless her heart, she couldn't go to high school. Her mother had had polio and she had a whole houseful of kids, and my mom was the oldest daughter. There was one boy before her, and then she was the oldest daughter, and as a result, a lot of the home chores fell to Mom, because Grandma would go down and stay with her momma for days at a time, and Mom had to tend to all the kids and do the cooking and stuff like that. But my momma loved school, and so when she finished seventh grade--she went to seventh grade for four years, because she couldn't go to high school, and she was a very bright lady, too, and well read. Her brothers went to —one went to Oak Hill, and one went to Grassy Creek, and boarded with people, and went to Berea College, but my mom didn't get to do that. But she read. We were all readers. Dad was a reader. And we all read, I remember even in the little house. After we moved to the big three-room house, and had one lamp. I'd just sit over in the corner and read. Mom would say, "LaVerne, you're going to ruin your eyes." But I could see perfectly.*

*They had the school in a little church that was right up above us. And when I was five, there was this teacher, Daniel Slabey; he came the year before, when I was four; he came to Oak Hill and taught a year, and understood that he was to come back the next year. So he drove down, with very little money in his pocket. He was from Richmond. And they didn't have a job for him. So Kyle T. Cox, the superintendent over Grayson County, said they needed a teacher up at Haw Orchard. And so Slabey was my [teacher], I had*

him for four years, first, second, third, and fourth grade. And he lived at Grandpa's, and he had a telescope. So after I got big enough, we'd go up to Grandpa's, and Slabey would get us in his old Model A or something, and tell Old Mill stories on Thursday night to all the kids, and we'd look at the stars. I used to know the stars and things because Slabey taught all that. He was a wonderful teacher. He had translations of The Iliad and Odyssey, and so I had read them before I went to Konnarock. I had read everything I could get my hands on. I was a voracious reader. But after four years of Slabey, then in the fifth grade Mason Bascam was the teacher and in the sixth grade, Ada Kirk, in a little one-room school, lots and lots of kids.

We played air base all the time, as much as we could. We loved that. It's a game they brought from old England. See up here they still had those old things that they'd brought from other countries. And this—I don't know, I think they call it prisoner's base. But where two teams would chose off, and then you had a picket, a base, to put when you caught somebody. You'd dare each other, and then run catch somebody and put them in jail, on the picket, and then try to get them out. It was just fun. We'd run up in the woods and everything. Build playhouses in the woods. And of course, going to the spring to get a bucket of water at recess. That was always fun. And running home at dinner, to eat dinner [lunch]. It was a good experience.

But when I was eleven, they did away with the seventh grade [at the nearest school]. I would have been in the seventh grade. And Dad said I was too little to walk to Mount Rogers School. So some of my cousins, and a lot of the girls on Haw Orchard Mountain, Jeanette Farmer, Lee-Etta, Geneva Farmer, Lorraine Richardson, several of them had been taken to Konnarock. And they were happy over there, had been over there for many years. So I thought—everybody pronounced Konnarock as Korner-rock—but I thought if they can live on the corner of a rock, I can, too. So Rose was going that year to take her senior year, and when I was eleven in the seventh grade, I went to Konnarock. I went over on a Wednesday night. I remember Mom packing my suitcase, one little suitcase. And Sister Sophie drove my mom and me and Rose and her mom over. It was after supper. We went upstairs, and I thought, "Well, I don't have to live at the corner of

*a rock.” There’s this great old big, beautiful, shingled building. It was the biggest house, of course, that I’d ever seen. And we went in, and Rose, of course, was going to be a senior, and so I stayed right with her, and we went upstairs. Katrina Umbarger was the principal. And it was September, on a Wednesday night, the middle of September, I don’t remember the date—but anyway, she met us. And we went upstairs to room number 7. And so Hazel, Hazel—what was her name? Hazel Jones, from Marion, was in the room, too. And so we spent our first night in there. And I do remember the next morning—I slept good—but the next morning, then, of course, they had to move the seniors up to third floor to room number ten or eleven, I think. And so, Miss Katrina saw me looking kind of downhearted, I guess, and she said, “LaVerne, would you rather stay down here with some of the other girls, or would you rather room with Rose?” I said, “I’d rather room with Rose.” So she said that would be just fine; so I got to room with Jane Goodwin, who was a junior, and Ester Greer, who was a senior, and Rose, who was a senior, and me. Up on third floor, four of us girls in that room. So that night in room number 7 was my first memory of Konnarock.*

*Oh, [I thought the building was] beautiful; it had beautiful shiny floors. See over home, we had just old linoleum floors and old wooden floors. But these were shiny and bright. And oh, the bathroom—see we didn’t have bathrooms. I had an aunt though over at Marion, Mom’s sister; we’d go over there periodically, and I kind of knew about a bathroom. But I mean, there was one with hot and cold running water and all that. I do remember that first night. I wasn’t certain, this was a different commode, and I wasn’t certain when I went to brush my teeth, how to flush it. So I sat and waited ‘til everybody else went out of the bathroom. And I’d been hearing those noises; I knew it was flushing, but I didn’t know exactly which thing to punch. So, I waited until everybody got out. I didn’t ask. I never asked anything. I just got it by osmosis, I guess. But I didn’t ask. So I was the last one in there, so I went and sat and waited until everybody got out, and then I experimented; I found out how to flush.*

*I didn’t get homesick at all, ‘cause there was Jeanette Farmer, and Lorraine, and Rose, you know, the big girls. I had always known them. And besides, it was so different*

*from home, and yet in a way it was like home, 'cause the same type of people, mountain people. The girls were friendly. And I remember the first letter I wrote home, I said, "And don't worry about me because everybody is just like over the re." So I remember that. [I spent] five years [at Konnarock]. Happy years. Seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade, because then when you were in the eleventh grade you were a senior.*

*I read. They had this library; well, there were two rooms. One room had bookshelves all around. Books, books, books. So every spare minute I could I would go in there and get a book to read. And of course, our jobs; we had our jobs. But Miss Katrina, she didn't give me any hard jobs that [first] year. I didn't get in on the dishwashing. She tried me out on waitressing. I always liked that, but I was little, she said, and those dishes were heavy.*

*Then the first summer—we always had to stay during the summer, and since I was close, I guess, I don't know, they would keep me there for a month because they couldn't get a lot of people; grandparents would die and things like that. But I always remember Mrs. Neff; I think that was when I was in the eighth grade, and I was over at Konnarock by myself for a couple of weeks, and the boys, after they got the milking done and everything, they'd bring those big, five gallons cans of milk up and eat supper up there. So Mrs. Neff, who was a wonderful cook, always built a fire in the stove and got that done. Well, one day she was busy in the basement; I don't know what she was doing, so she asked me to—no! we were cleaning out the glory hole, and she asked me to run down and build a fire. Dad always built the fires at home. I didn't know how to build a fire; I was eleven when I went over there. I didn't tell her. Now this is me, at that time, I never asked how to do anything. I'd never say I don't know how. I'd just try it. I went down in [the kitchen], and [they had] this great old big stove, nearly as big as this room, I put the wood and paper and stuff in; I just stuck it in. I kept trying, and I almost struck all the matches, and then finally she came down. I didn't go up for help; that's the way I was. She came down, and it was almost time for [the boys] to get there. And she built the fire; she had to clean out all that mess that I had made, and then she put the paper, and then the kindling, and then put the wood on top of it. So that's how I learned to build a fire, by*

*watching Mrs. Neff. She didn't say a thing to me, though. So I had good people around me. I know one time I was telling that to a friend of mine and she said, "Good Lord, I would have been beat to death if I had done that, made a mess like that." And I had made a mess. But [the way I wasn't criticized] was good.*

*Then we had this wonderful music teacher from Kannapolis, North Carolina, Winifred Bodie. And I think she went to Columbia; she didn't go to Julliard, I believe Columbia, but anyway, she went in New York, that's where she got her good training. But at that time, of course, there was a radio station up on Whitetop, and so Miss Bodie was such a wonderful music teacher that—now I had been playing, by ear, all my life, all my life. And Miss Katrina, Pastor Killinger had told her to give me some music lessons, and she did. I never could do too good with it, but Clara Norris, a girl who was ahead of me by one year from Boone, North Carolina, Clara had had music lessons for years and years and years. So when I had to do my practicing for my next week's lesson, then Clara would go in with me and she would play the tune by music—and then I would pick it up by ear. So I had wonderful music lessons. But Miss Bodie gave intense musical training—and thank goodness Clara was there, so I was a wonderful musical student for her. Miss Bodie was wonderful. Then the next year, Clara graduated. So next year, my musical training, except for playing by ear things I'd already heard, came to not too good. She would pull her hair, "LaVerne, what has happened to you? Why aren't you like you were last year?" I didn't have Clara to memorize my songs by. I muddled along, and I made it through.*

*We got together this choir, which I know you have heard of—the Iron Mountain boys and KTS girls—and Ken Hewitt and Pastor Hewitt, they had the evening vespers service at 6 o'clock on Sunday afternoon. So sometimes they would take us to Bristol, to WOPI FM studios, and they made big records, and they'd play them over the air at 6 o'clock on Sunday. But, weather permitting, good weather, we'd ride up to the top of the mountain and broadcast at 6 o'clock. That was the first FM station in this country. Nobody could get it in; Rose's mom got an FM radio, and they said you could hear it; but you couldn't really hear anything at all. But that was wonderful, going up there and*

*broadcasting. We had beautiful music. I got some of those [records], after the Training School closed. Preacher Lady gave me some of those records. But I don't have anything to play them on now. But that was good. I really enjoyed the choir. And that was when I was in the tenth grade.*

*As I said, I started playing the organ when I was just little. So Pastor Killinger would come over and if he was going to preach, there was Grassy Creek Church, and Haw Orchard Church, and Helton Church and Whitetop Church. So he would come and get me and bring me over. I always hated to come to have to play the organ up at my own home church, because then I couldn't go home. I had to go on over to Helton for the next service. And then we'd go up to Walter Powers's house and eat dinner, or we'd go to Whitetop and we'd have to go to Giles Graham's house and eat dinner. So, I thought everybody in the world went to three or four church services every Sunday. But after Pastor Ludwig got over there, he would take me—he was only there the last summer I was there. Lord, those summer jobs! We had to go and stay two weeks every summer and help can and entertain the guests that were coming from afar. But Pastor Ludwig would take me from the training school [to play at church], and he would sing, and he sang in his operatic, beautiful voice--tenor. But he would drive his car in tune to the music. And these were dirt roads at that time. And he would sway that car, a little red Ford, and he would sway that car just back and forth, and sing to the top of his voice. So, I attended church many, many, many times on Sunday. And I lived through it.*

*I loved English from a very early age, 'cause I loved to diagram sentences and stuff like that. We always had a half a year of grammar, and then the next was literature. I never did specifically like literature, because I liked to read what I liked to read. But we had to do that. Elizabeth Whittaker was one of my English teachers; I think she was ninth grade. Helena Waters was a really good English teacher. I never did like home ec. I hated home ec. At home, Mom, bless her heart, could look in a catalogue at a dress, and she could make that dress, and her sewing machine was her pride and joy. So Mom did all the sewing, and I never did want to. My sister Carol would draw up beautiful dresses, with ruffles and everything like that for Mom to make; she would design them. But I had*

*to take home ec. over there, and I had to sew. So I would sew; I made Mom enough dish towels and aprons to do her for ten years. And I didn't like cooking, but your momma, bless her heart, she loved to cook. So I'd take me a Zane Grey western down to home ec. class and sit there, and a lot of times Virginia Whittaker would leave the room, or Miss Hewitt would leave the room, or Helena Waters would leave the room. And so, we were all kind of assigned recipes, so Geneva would do my cooking work, and I would sit and read my Zane Grey book.*

*We were very polite to the teachers. We always said, "Yes, Ma'am" and all that sort of stuff, but we had our ways. On Saturday, we had to clean the place up and we had extra things to do, wax the dining room floor and wax all those floors and clean windows and things. Then after you got your Saturday job done, you were free for the afternoon. And that's when you took your walks down to Stansberry's store and drank your five-cent Pepsi with peanuts in it. But Mrs. Deal, bless her heart, she always wanted somebody to do something for her, so she asked me to do her laundry. And she had great, big, baggy bloomers, and she had slips, you know, all her underwear and things like that. And her blouses, she wanted starched and all that sort of stuff. I starched everything, good and stiff, hung them out on the line. She never again asked me to do her laundry. So my mission was accomplished. And another time, right after that, her husband was going to come up to visit her, spend the weekend with her. Mrs. Deal had a living room and a bathroom and a bedroom down on the end of the hall. So after my Saturday job was done, when nobody was supposed to infringe upon my rights as a free woman, she asked me to clean her apartment. I did; I cleaned her apartment. Her husband was coming and she wanted everything spotless. I cleaned it spotless, changed her sheets, and short-sheeted her. She never said one thing to me, but I never again had to clean her apartment.*

*[At graduation] I was supposed to sing a solo, and so I got up, basically I wanted to cry, but I didn't, because us hillbillies don't cry. But just as I was singing, my boyfriend, with whom I had--we had separated; he walked in just at that time, and my*

*heart leaped into my throat, and I thought I was going to faint while I was singing. But it was a sad day. It was a sad day. I did cry. I hated to leave.*

*I went to Marion College. Actually there was nothing to do around here except teach. So at the age of, the ripe old age of seventeen, with one year of college under my belt, I became a teacher. I started [at] Mill Creek School, in fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. And then the teacher who had the first three grades decided to become a Welfare worker, and so she quit and the superintendent's son was brought in for the big grades, and I started with the little ones. I've had them all, including LD. I went back [to college], but I never did finish my degree. I have more hours than a master's degree required, but I would not take any more sociology. I was not taking sociology; I never took my second year of language, and I never took my other math. But I took plenty of English and psychology and music. Oh, I got a twenty-year pin, but when I got the kids through school, I did quit. Drew my retirement out. Had a wonderful time. See, I wasn't supposed to live to be as old as I am.*

*I also went [to Emory and Henry], and my husband, too. [He's a] draftsman. And he farms; that's always been his happy time, and then he worked for Sprague Electric for many, many years as a draftsman over there. And he retired and then worked as a draftsman up at Gates Rubber up at Jefferson. He always worked in North Carolina. And then he retired again. And of course, that almost caused his death because he would, you know, tell me how to do things in the kitchen which I'd been doing for forty years and all that. He's a good person; he's put up with me all these years. Really, he's a good person.*

*I have my older daughter, Rachel Anita. She was my first one. She's always been very musical, too. She could go places in music if she would, and her little daughter could, too, but they're like Mommy. We don't apply ourselves often. But she graduated at Emory and Henry with a math degree. She taught at Rural Retreat for a few years, and then she got burned out. So she works at the Job Corps education department. She has one daughter who is, when she was just a tiny thing—her daddy left when she was just two years old, and so she had a hard time getting used to life, but I would call her—the*

*kids always call me Bom-Bom. So I called Alex “Bom-Bom’s precious little T-Y-R-A-N-T.” So at the age of two she could spell T-Y-R-A-N-T, and she always thought of that as a great compliment. So two weeks ago, she’s ten now, at eleven o’clock, I got a phone call. And it was Alex, and she said, “Bom-Bom, I’m going to kill you.” And I said, “Why?” See Saddam Hussein, she’d been hearing that horrible word tyrant on television, and that’s what it was about. And she’d been so proud of being my precious little T-Y-R-A-N-T. Oh, well. I’ve been safe. She’s not killed me yet. And then Charles, my son, my only son, graduated Emory and Henry. He has a CPA firm in Salem. And he has a little five-year-old boy, Will. Then my baby Elizabeth graduated Radford with her teaching degree, and she’s been teaching for several years, always right down at Bridle Creek. And she has my little five-year-old Blakie. He’s my buddy, too. We go hunting with my B-B gun and all that sort of stuff. She teaches fifth grade. She’s never taught anything but fifth grade, and I told her that makes her a very dull person. I had all these grades! And that just makes you dull, so I order her every year to start in kindergarten.*

*Oh, my dear! [I don’t know when I went] from childhood to adulthood. Law, I don’t know. I just don’t know. I was always grown. Whether anybody realized it or not. [I learned] about the facts of life—I was an innocent five-year-old, and Dr. Osborne brought babies in his black bag ‘cause we’d see him passing, and then somebody would have a baby. We knew they were carried in that black bag. Well, when I was five years old, Lorraine’s sister Jackie was my first best friend. She was two years older than I was, but she was in the same grade. So one day, she came to school, and she started very graphically telling me certain things that I knew were not true, but I vomited anyway. She’s the one who told me there was no Santy; she told me the facts of life. So at the age of five, I learned those things. So I vomited.*

*[At this point in my life, I’d describe myself [as] lazy, but happy; lazy, absolutely no use for anything. Oh, [I’m] a wonderful grandmother, and a wonderful mother. I was until my younguns got grown. And I like people, but I never had any ambition. I still don’t. A drifter. Live from day to day, but I wasn’t supposed to live to be old because the doctors all said that there was something wrong with my heart and tried to get me to go*

*to Charlottesville, you know. Mom and Dad just said I'd be all right, and I was all right. Basically, I've been a pretty happy, lucky gal. I used to think of myself as God's pet because, good gracious, I should have been killed about two hundred times. I used to consider myself God's pet.*

### **Geneva Blevins Shepherd**

*A tree reaches below the surface to gather strength for stargazing.-- Dolly Parton*

Although streaked with gray, Mommy's hair is still dark, her appearance much younger than her seventy-five years, giving little indication of the harshness of her life. We sat on the living room sofa, with the tape recorders between us, in the house that has been home for almost forty years. Everything in the room was familiar, comfortable for me, but my mother was obviously nervous about the recorders, uneasy about the process. Interviewing and writing about my mother has been both the most difficult and most rewarding part of this research. Her life, her story, her influence have made me who I am, and it is not always easy to look into one's self. Among the many gifts I have received from my mother are my faith, my love of the mountains, my love for reading, and my respect for my heritage. It is also through her that I became aware of Konnarock Training School, long before I thought of anything such as doctoral research. My mother's life has not been easy, yet she has never wavered in her faith and in her generous, loving, and forgiving spirit. She has again given me a gift for which I am extremely grateful, sharing afternoons of conversation with me about her life and about KTS. Always reserved, reticent, and lacking confidence in herself, my mother struggled with her emotions leaving a number of pauses on these tapes. It was difficult for her to talk openly with me, especially to share parts of her story that are painful, and the portrait that follows reveals much about her that I learned for the first time in our three interviews. In many ways it is her story that most illustrates the value of the KTS mission, and while not about "great" achievements or "grand" adventures, is nonetheless heroic.

*I was born on November 27, 1927 on Middle Fork [in Whitetop, Virginia.] Well, [my family] lived way back in the woods; and there were eight of us kids, four boys and*

*four girls. And I was the second. I had a brother older than me and then three brothers younger and three sisters. [Dad] mostly farmed and then worked on the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. They built roads and he worked on that for a long time. And then, you know, they'd get out extract and paper wood and sell stuff, and things like that, and just farm. But we were really poor.*

*We didn't have any real close neighbors. Aunt Banie was our closest neighbor; I don't know how far she lived--about half a mile up there. Now, I'd go up to her house, or across the hill to Uncle Boomer's. But Aunt Banie, I don't know why, when she went to the store, seemed like I was always the one that went with her. We'd go to the store a lot. We'd either walk down to Roscoe Weaver's or out to Glen Reedy's and across the bluff out through there. But she'd come down there and get me; I don't know why. Well, sometimes, of course, Mom would send and get stuff. But I don't know why I was usually the one that went with her [instead of her own kids].*



**FIGURE 17: GENEVA BLEVINS SHEPHERD, SENIOR PHOTO, 1948**

*I reckon Dad and them all [his siblings] lived on Middle Fork. And then Boomer, well, he was the first one that moved to Helton. Then Dad bought his [Boomer's] house and we moved in with them. They lived in two rooms, and we lived in two rooms, 'til he got his house around the hill there finished. Then he moved out there, and then Uncle Charlie and Aunt Dessie got married and they moved in with us. They moved in the two rooms we did live in, and we moved in*

*the rooms Boomer lived in. But Dad built another house then and let Aunt Banie move over there. Her husband was dead, so she moved up there, but it was Dad's house. But that house Banie lived in, she lived in for a long time, and then she moved on around the hill. I don't know if Dad tore down that old house, or what happened to it. It was just two rooms, but she lived there a long time.*

*I miss the closeness of people [from my childhood], visiting each other and everything. Now, people did visit then, especially on Sundays. You'd usually have company, your kinfolks. And you don't see that anymore. People just don't have time to visit or anything.*

*[I helped out a lot at home]. I didn't do as much cooking as I looked after kids and worked out in the field. Mom would usually cook, and we would work out. I just did things because it was expected of me. You didn't think, "I like or dislike this." You just did it, whether it was milking, chopping wood, or going to the top of the mountain getting the cows, or hoeing a row of corn through the field, or getting up hay, you just did it.*

*I didn't start to school until I was ten years old. I don't know why; but I didn't. They didn't send me. And I was real interested in school. We went to that little school up on Helton 'til the seventh grade. It was a one-room school and you had classes from first through sixth grade. First when I went down on Helton,—well, I don't think I'd even been in that school building then; I thought that was the biggest building and so high up! That little old building on Helton! You went up in the big old room, you know. We only had one teacher, and she'd teach you whatever she was teaching, and you'd sit there and study while she was having another class. But it was good, or I thought it was. Just learning. Having books to read. I really learned to read, and I read all the books they had, and she promoted me to third grade the first year. But I really liked school, and I would cry when I would have to miss a day. And somebody at school [had the measles] and when I had a chance for measles, Dad made me [stay home]. They wouldn't stop that person from coming to school and Dad made me stay home, afraid I would get the measles and give them to him 'cause he hadn't had them. So he wouldn't let me go to school, and then Benny got them from somewhere; I don't think he got them at school, [but he gave] them to all of us. Dad did have a rough time with measles. But we were every one in the bed at the same time but Mom and Benny, and we were pretty sick, too.*

*We never went anywhere much. I never got to go anywhere—I remember one time when I was in grade school, I went every day one year. And Miss Hazel wanted me to go*

*to West Jefferson with her to a circus. And they wouldn't let me do that. That was my prize for [perfect attendance]—so she gave me a silver dollar. And you know, it would have meant the world to me just to have done that. I'd never even been [anywhere]; I'd never even been to Marion when I went to Konnarock. I'd been to West Jefferson and to Independence, and all I'd ever known was Upper Helton. I remember the one time I went to Independence was to testify in court. Wetsel Richardson broke the windows out of the schoolhouse, and I saw him, and they summonsed me. I was about fifteen then, I guess.*

*Oh, Lord, honey, I can't ever remember anything else but fussing at home. I thought that was what life was. And you know, we was always scared to death when Dad came home, especially if any of us had done something; just scared to death to see him coming.*

*But we were okay. We had fun, even though we had to work and everything. We always had time to play, you know. We'd make us an old rag ball and a stick and play ball, and do things just together. But we never got to go anywhere, you know, or do things like other kids did. It was just us. Girls back then would usually build them a little playhouse out somewhere and take the broken dishes and set tables and had mud pies and daisies for eggs and acorns for tea cups and saucers, and just played like that. Of course, I never had any girls to play with and the boys were all the time tea ring mine up. They would, you know, Benny and Norman were always picking on me. But I stood up to them, but they were always picking on me. They'd just aggravate me, honey. Just 'cause I was a girl I reckon. Even after I got a great big girl. They caught me one time and tried to cut my fingernails off, and I scratched Benny's back terrible. And one time Benny was aggravating me, and I threw a gravel gun and hit him right in the back, and floored him. We were all the time [fighting]—I mean we were just playing, but they aggravated me. See I missed out on the girls because I left home. Reva wasn't very big when I left home. Just boys, and they just liked to aggravate me, I reckon.*

*Christmas was always a good time. Dad always saw we had extra things to eat, oranges and apples and candy and things like that. Christmas was a good time. I always*

*thought I got a doll every year for Christmas, but I don't know. I don't think I did. But I know the first year we moved to Helton that I did. We'd always hang up our stockings at Christmas and they'd be filled with candy and nuts and an orange—that was the only time we ever got oranges. But that year Dad played Santa Claus, went out--and he'd just get a Santa Claus face and turn his breeches inside out--I don't know why--and he'd come 'round the house and come in, and [that year] he put me a doll in my stocking. Then the boys always got cap shooters, you know. I remember I got a doll that year. I don't know how old I was, but one year, I didn't get anything for Christmas. That was the saddest Christmas I ever had. I hunted around everywhere you know, and I didn't get anything. And they never explained to me or anything. The boys got fire crackers. But I didn't get anything. And the next year, I wasn't expecting anything. And didn't hunt for anything. I started to put my shoes on and there was a little brown bag in my shoe. And it had two little flowered handkerchiefs in it. I'd give anything if I had them now. I don't know what happened to them. But that was the happiest Christmas, 'cause I wasn't expecting anything. And they were in a little brown bag in my shoe.*

*I don't think we had a book in the house; we didn't even have a Bible until Grandpa came [to live with us] and brought his. I guess after Benny and Norman went to school we probably had; they probably brought their readers home. But I can't ever remember having a book. But you know Aunt Banie would go down to Roscoe Weaver's and get papers and paper her walls with them. And I'd go up there and read all around the wall. Read them—it was the Grit and had these Western stories; I think there was one about—it might have been the Lone Ranger. Was he back then? And I'd go around the wall reading these stories out of those books, magazines, or Grit I reckon it was. [I sometimes missed part], but a lot of times practically the whole story would be there. And I'd just go around her wall and read the stories. I don't know why she never gave me a book, a magazine. But I just loved to go up there and go around her wall and read.*

*And after [Helton school], I went to Mount Rogers when I was in the seventh grade. I was the only one from Helton who went to school there. The bus didn't even come up there. I had to walk all the way from the old house down to Royce Greer's to*

*catch the bus [about two miles]. But that was a bad year. At the beginning of the year, we all had chicken pox, no; it wasn't chicken pox; it was the measles. Except Mom had had them, and the rest of us were all in the bed at one time, except Mom and Benny, who hadn't gotten the measles. Then my grandfather came to live with us. And Mom was pregnant with Lola, and I had to stay out of school a lot to help with things. But I missed a lot that year. I don't know how on earth I passed. [At the end of the year] Aunt Banie came up and stayed with Mom—she'd just had Lola—so I could take my exams. I don't remember how I did, but I must have passed them.*

*And I guess that would have been my last year in school if Sister Sophie hadn't talked Mom and Dad into letting me go to Konnarock. And I'd never even heard of Konnarock, or KTS, 'til then, 'til she talked Mom and Dad into letting me go. And it's a mystery how come them to let me go. But they let me. I don't know how come him to let me, because Mom really needed me then, you know. Lola was just born in June, and then I went over there in September. I guess they missed me at home. They needed me to work and help out. It was a sacrifice for them to let me go over there; I know that. I've always said that was the one good thing Mom and Dad did for me, let me go over there. But then I missed out on the life at home, too. I never was around Jettie and Lola [my sisters] when they were growing up because as soon as I graduated, I got married.*

*The school sent us a list of what we had to have: a housecoat, and a sweater, and something else, I don't remember, several things. And Dad bought me that big old red sweater with wooden buttons. But he got me a pretty nice housecoat. I never had a lot of new things. Mom made me a pink checked dress [to take], and I had a dress or two. Mercy me, I didn't have much to take over there. I had this dress on I was going to wear over there, and went down to Billy Greer's house to meet Sister Sophie, and I sat down on a bench, and they had painted it, and I got paint all over this dress, and I had to change it and put on the one that Mom made me. But I didn't have many clothes, that's for sure.*

*Lord, I didn't know what to expect [when I went the school]. I was just all excited and scared, afraid I'd mess up and shy and afraid of everything. Scared to death of people. Sister Sophie took me and Ruth and Faye Sheets, three of us. And then when we got over there, Miss Katrina took us down to Creek Junction to meet some more girls. The train came down there, and she took us down there to meet some more girls. It was right before suppertime, and when we had supper in that big old dining room, we were just all amazed. I was scared to death. Afraid I'd spill something or do something wrong. And I remember, we had a glass of water, and Faye Sheets drank hers and turned her glass upside down. And I did the same. Oh, I didn't know what to do, and I guess she didn't either. I guess I wasn't the only one that was [unsure of herself]. The second year I was there, [a new girl] came to Konnarock. One of the teachers told me to show her to her room and I took her up. We went up to the room and she opened up her suitcase, and it didn't have anything in it but boys' clothes. She was so embarrassed; her cousin had come at the same time to the boys' school, and they'd just switched suitcases. But she was so embarrassed and closed that suitcase up and said, "I don't think I'll unpack now." You know, it wouldn't have been anything to have told me that she'd got the wrong suitcase, but she was just real embarrassed about it, so I guess other kids felt about like I did.*

*We always had flowers on the table, too. Especially in the summer time. Sometimes they'd just put a bowl of water and go out and get flowers and just let them float in that water, but we always had flowers on the table. I just thought it was so pretty. The white linens and napkins and flowers. The dishes were white with a green rim around them, the best I remember. And the waitresses always set the table up, you know, when the dish washers would wash the dishes, the waitresses set them back, stacked the plates up at the end of the table and put the glasses and silverware around. And the teacher always served the food and passed it around. Well, she'd serve one thing, I think, maybe the meat, probably, and pass it around, and then they'd pass the other dishes around.*

*Everything, I guess, was just so new to me, and the other kids just probably took it for granted. Everything there was so nice, and clean, and big. It wasn't anything special*

*to them. But just everything was to me. But just to, you know, to have a nice room. We had to room with other girls. And then the bathrooms. You know we didn't even have a bathroom at home. I don't think I'd ever been in any place where they had commodes and things. It was just a big old bathroom with a lot of sinks, and I think it had a couple of showers and a whole row of commodes. Everything and everybody seemed happy. And at home it was always just fussing, fussing, fussing. I'm sure some of the girls had problems and went to the teachers. I was one that never went to the teacher and talked to her. I reckon, I was ashamed of my home life, and I never talked to anybody about it. Or any of the problems I had, to the teacher or the girls either. Nobody really knew what my home life was like. Mrs. Deal all the time tried to get me to talk to her, especially after I got involved with your daddy, but I never did talk to her. Which would have probably have helped me a lot if I had, not just talking to her, well, it might have helped talking to her, but to anybody, but I just never felt like I could talk to anybody about it. And I was scared to death when Colleen first went home with me because, you know, I didn't know what kind of home life she had, and she just invited herself—insisted on coming. And before we got home, I tried to tell her how life was like, I mean how our house was, and we didn't have inside plumbing or anything. She didn't seem to care. You know, I think it bothered me more than it would have other people, because there were probably lots of them in the same shape as I was, but I don't know if they were or not.*

*We always had jobs at school, and some of the jobs were to help with the meals, you know, help the cook. But on Saturday, we cleaned the whole building. Everybody had different jobs. And we would clean in the hall and the dining room --we had to clean that every Saturday, that whole big dining room. We'd get down on our hands and knees and wax it. And we'd get an old towel or something and pull each other on it to shine it. That was a hard job, but we enjoyed it. We had to scrub the kitchen floor. It was two girls. I don't know if we had that job for a week or just one day, one night, two girls. One got down on your knees and scrubbed it with a brush and the other one would come behind you with a pail of water and cloth and mopped it and rinsed it. Now that was a hard job. That old floor was hard to clean. I guess we just did that once, one night, you know, at a time, but everybody had to do it sometime or other. And if we came home, we'd have to*

*get somebody else to do our job for us, and we'd switch. We'd do theirs and they'd do ours.*

*Mrs. Deal was kind of strict sometimes and wanted things her way. If you took anything out on your plate, you had to eat it. Did I tell you about the time I got a cheese sandwich? Back then, I couldn't eat cheese. And she made me sit at the table 'til Luther League time. I just sat right there with her, but I never did eat it. Usually, that's all we had for Sunday night supper, and it was always a pimento cheese sandwich. Peanut butter cracker and a sliver of cake. And I'd usually swap my cheese for somebody's peanut butter. And one night I thought it was different, something different, and got a cheese sandwich and took a bite of it, but I couldn't eat it. And of course, I couldn't trade it then. And she made me sit at the table to try to make me eat that cheese, but I couldn't eat it. That's the only thing I couldn't eat. But of course, when I was home, I wouldn't eat a lot of stuff. And over there, they started out, you had to take three bites of everything. If you'd just take three bites, they'd let you go, but pretty soon you were eating stuff, but I didn't have a whole lot of different things than we had at home.*

*I couldn't believe [what church was like at Konnarock] because shouting and scaring people was all I'd ever heard--preachers that came around at people's homes or down there in the schoolhouse. They'd just come and preach. Sometimes it was in people's homes and sometimes it was at the schoolhouse. But I guess, they might have had revivals, or just maybe one night they'd have preachin', but Dad wouldn't hardly let me go like to even that. I didn't know anything about the Lutheran church. But I know that's what I could understand; I knew what they were talking about. Pastor Poff was so good; I just could really get something out of his sermons. He always had three points he made with his sermons and that really—well, I just understood what he was talking about. I never did know before. I never knew much about God or religion or anything. You know, Mom and Dad never did teach us anything about God. They always just said if you're good you go to heaven and if you're bad, you go to torment, they said. And that's all I knew. They'd never read the Bible or anything. So that was all new and amazing to me. And we'd always have devotions at night. That was really meaningful. And when I*

*went in that beautiful chapel! I just loved that chapel. That was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. And I'd just go, sometimes when I'd get lonely or anything, I'd go in the chapel and just sit and look at how beautiful it was with that picture up there in the window. And the sun would come through that window with Jesus with the little children up there, and it was just so beautiful.*

*I remember we'd get the newspaper [at Konnarock]; it was lying on the dining room table. Usually there was a big table there; we didn't use it unless we had a lot of company. And I'd sit down there and start reading the funnies, and Miss Bodie would catch me every time. She would say, "Oh, well, it happens in the best of families." She just thought it was awful that people would read the funnies before they would [anything else]—now, I look at the obituaries first thing. If I'm not in them, I'll read the rest of the paper.*

*I don't know of any teacher when I was there that wasn't liked. We had really good teachers; I can't think of anything against any of them. Or I liked them all. [In home ec.], we made a lot of clothes and stuff for our rooms; our curtains and bedspreads, and skirts for our dressing tables, which were two orange crates. Mostly what we used was chop sacks. I don't know if they came from the boys' school or how we got them. But most all of it was; later in our senior year, we might have other material, but I don't know where it came from. Mom had a sewing machine, but I couldn't use it. I tried to one time, but I couldn't pedal it. It was a pedal machine, and I couldn't use it. I thought it would be so simple. I was going to make some pillowcases and set down at that thing, and I could not sew them. So I learned to sew at Konnarock. Of course, I could cook when I went over there, but you learned a lot different things about cooking, and how to set a pretty table. But we always had a napkin ring and linen napkins, you know. That's why we sat at the same place. You used your napkin all week. At the end of the week on Saturday you changed the table linens.*

*If I could, I would have acted a little smarter at Konnarock. I was so dumb. [There are] things I would have liked to have done different; I didn't do well in certain*

*situations. [In English class] when we had to write anything, I'd always pretend I didn't have [my paper], if we had to get up and read it. I didn't have mine ready. I didn't like getting up and reading. Scared me to death. And I would hand it in next day. For my graduation speech, Miss Miller give me a book that had all these speeches in it, and I kind of went from—but you know, I think back now and I think, well, I could have given a real good speech. You look back and think, my goodness. You just don't know.*

*[Getting a high school education] meant a whole lot to me. I mean, I just always liked school and liked going and everything. And I was probably the first one off of Helton to get a high school education. So it meant a great deal to me to accomplish that, which I probably wouldn't have done if I hadn't gone to Konnarock. I think it was a good, well-rounded education because you got the basics that you needed back then. Of course, nowadays, things would be different, but way back in the 40s, I think it was a lot better education than we would have got in the public schools.*

*Our graduation was just like most graduations, I reckon. Like they are now. Our teacher, Miss Lilliana Bartolomei was our speaker. And she had quit over there to go be a missionary, and she had come back and was our speaker. And I remember her talking about them eating bugs and things. I don't remember a word of my speech. I don't guess anybody else did either. I was valedictorian, but I always thought LaVerne should have been; Mrs. Deal did, too. She made me add up my grades, made me do it. Because she couldn't believe that I was valedictorian. You know, I made the best grades, but I wasn't the smartest. And I couldn't even write a speech. LaVerne was a good writer; she was salutatorian, but you know, she could write well, and she was smart. I was dumb! I could get things in a book. I could learn, but I wasn't smart otherwise. Well, you know, being raised up on Helton and never getting out anywhere to know anything else, just what little I could get from reading books. I'd never experienced anything. But I didn't even get a new dress, and I was so upset, and—well, I sent by Miss Miller to get me one, gave her the money, she came to Marion. But it looked like an old woman's dress and I didn't keep it; I had her to take it back and then I never had time to get one. But Miss Deal said, "Now, that's all right, honey." She said, "One of those little dresses there's just fine."*

*'Course, you had your gown on, you know, but still, it would have been nice to have had a dress. But graduation was sad, for me. And when they sang "Til We Meet Again," I was just blubbering.*

*[After graduation] I just went home and started preparing to get married. Prayed I was doing the right thing. See we got married in August then. So, that's what I did that summer, besides work my two weeks at Konnarock. I'd have liked to have gotten a job and worked before I got married, but I knew I couldn't. I don't know where I would have worked. One year, there was somebody that wanted a babysitter, and they considered me. But of course, I didn't get to go. It was in Roanoke. And the first year I was over there, you know, Colleen, that friend that kind of took me under her wing, she came home with me after graduation and tried to get Dad and Mom to let me go home with her and work through the summer. But they wouldn't let me go. You know, I'd really have liked to have done something like that. Never did get to go nowhere or do nothing. That's why it was so great for me to go to Konnarock. At least I got out that far.*

*Your daddy did a little bit of everything. When I first married him, he was working in the coalmines and we moved to West Virginia. Life wasn't too bad then, just a lot of moving. We couldn't stay in one place long enough to put down any roots. He'd work a while, and then he'd quit and we'd come back home to Whitetop. And he'd go into trucking. Then he'd go back to the mines, and we lived out there and he worked in the mines until after the twins were born. He quit right after they were born and never went back to the mines. I think he trucked for a while, and then we moved to Hopewell. He first worked filling up cigarette machines, I think. And then he started being a mechanic at Whitten Brothers, and I got a job at Miller and Rhodes, and worked a little while.*



**FIGURE 18: GENEVA SHEPHERD IN HER HOME, NOVEMBER 2002**

*Your Grandma Ollie kept you kids. We lived with her and Martin. We all lived together. And then, of course, Billie quit there, and we moved to Richmond then. Then we came home and stayed a while; I guess he trucked. I guess we must have gone to Baltimore then, and he was working up there in a garage. Ma and Phyllis and Grayson went with us. Phyllis and I got a job at the White Towers, a little old restaurant-like thing, and Ollie kept you kids, and I was pregnant with Jimmy then. Then we left up there. We went to Alexandria. Well, we stayed there for a while. Where did we go? Yeah, we came back down here, and your daddy went into business for himself with Lacy Weaver and was in that business for a while.*

*I don't think we moved any more, and then the house burned down, you know, and we moved up there in that little house. Your daddy started building this one, but then we ran out of money, and he had to go off and work again. So he went to DC, and we stayed on up there [in the little house], you kids and me, until June of the next year. And then we moved to DC. And Jettie went with us. So we stayed there in DC for a year; then we moved over to Oxen Hill. And your Daddy was a mechanic. When we moved to DC, I got a job at Acacia. Ollie kept you kids for a while; then she decided to leave again. But I still worked a while longer. Then your Daddy quit his job and went back into business and brought us down here. He stayed up there a little while, but then he came on down here and started a business down here. After you kids got bigger, I worked in sewing factories.*

*After I retired from the sewing factory, most of what I've done is take care of the sick. I think now, I don't know if I'd know what to do if something happened to Mom. When she's gone [up to my sister's], I just kind of feel lost. That's the way I felt after your daddy died; I felt lost. But I first took care of Dad for about two years, off and on. He did have other people sometimes. Then I took care of your daddy for three years before he died. And then I've had Mom since '96, six years anyway.*

*I have four wonderful kids; one daughter, who is the oldest. She put herself through college and became an English teacher, which she'd always wanted to be. And is*

*still teaching. She's married and has two girls of her own. Then I have twin boys, Bobby and Billy, and they took after their daddy; they're mechanical. One lives in Ohio and works at Kroger and works on their trucks. He's married and has two boys. And then Billy lives here [in this area] and stays with me a lot. He works at General Dynamics, and he's not married and doesn't have any kids. Then I have another boy, Jimmy. He put himself through college, and now he's a landscape architect and lives in Richmond with his wife and little girl. And they've all done pretty good. I guess you kids would be my biggest success. I do think you kids turned out pretty good to have parents like you did. And grandchildren. Grandchildren are a lot of joy.*

My brothers and I disagree with my mother; we all say that anything we are is because of the person she is. Maintaining a deep faith in God, she continues to bear the major responsibility of caring for her 100-year-old mother. Mommy lives in the house she and my father built on the site where an earlier home burned.

### **Betty Weaver Reedy**

*Nevermore, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings  
of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm,  
he is rich forever.—John Muir*

At the 2001 KTS reunion, Betty Reedy was there when I explained that I would like to interview alumnae in a study I was conducting, and she filled out a card expressing her interest in participating. She was the only one of the participants with whom I could not remember talking at the reunion. We were strangers when I called her home to arrange an interview, but other KTS “girls” had recommended that I talk to her. Her friendly voice and enthusiasm indicated the advice I had received was sound. Betty’s articulation of her memories was a valuable addition to the study, and her love for KTS apparent throughout our discussion.

When Betty gave me directions to her home, I was surprised. My relatives had spoken of “The Bluff” before, but I was unaware that anyone still lived in that section of

the Whitetop area, and I had never been there before, or at least not since I was a very small child. In Whitetop, I always think of places in terms of my relatives' homes or places I have visited. The Bluff is between Upper Helton, where both my mother's parents and my father's mother lived, and my Aunt Lura's house. It seemed strange to me to turn back up the mountain onto an unfamiliar road. I was told to go to the last house on a road where I didn't know there were houses. Traveling along a deeply shaded lane, I reached the end of Bluff Road and was amazed. I turned into a gated drive and soon a magnificent vista of the mountains opened before me. At the end of the drive, sat Betty's lovely home looking out over ridges and hollows of the Virginia mountains.

Betty's husband's work had taken the couple to several parts of the world, and they had lived for several years in Northern Virginia. When it came time for them to retire, they built their home in the mountains they love, although they generally spend the winter months elsewhere. The many windows of their home provide panoramic views of the area, and the house is filled with a lovely eclectic collection of furnishings and a welcoming atmosphere. Betty and I sat in her living room as she shared her life and her experiences at Konnarock Training School with me.

*I was born in 1935 at my grandmother's down in Sturgills, North Carolina, just across the state line. I was born at home. Dr. Dean Jones was the doctor. [I grew up] right here in Whitetop. My grandfather had a country store. We lived nearby, just across the creek. Later my uncle ran the same store. In my early years, Dad was a coal miner and worked mostly in West Virginia and came home on weekends. Mom taught school in Grayson County in several of the little one- and two-room schools here. She taught in Mud Creek School; she taught in Cave School, which was out between here and Whitetop. She taught in Whitetop School, which was a two-room school, and then I think her last year was probably at Mount Rogers. After she taught for all those years, she worked for the Grayson County Department of Social Services. At that time, people knew it as Grayson County Welfare Department. I had one brother who was deceased at the time I was in college.*

*I had so many relatives that taught school, I actually went with my mother to Cave School the year I was about five, and I wasn't old enough to go to school, but I went and just had to sit and be quiet. And then when I went to Mount Rogers the next year, I enrolled in first grade. And Miss Ida Crouse was the teacher, and I just loved her. But they only let me stay about two weeks, and they moved me into second grade. My aunt Vivian Weaver taught second and third grade, and I wanted to call her Miss Vivian because all children want to be like the other children, but she made me call her Aunt Vivian. So I was sorry to leave Miss Ida. We had six grades then in the elementary, and then I went to Konnarock the next year.*

*One of the main reasons my mother was interested in having me go [to Konnarock was] the local high school at that time was not accredited, which meant the students who graduated had to go down to Independence and take a state test. And Konnarock, the Lutheran girls' Training School, was accredited. Mom was determined at that point, even when I was a freshman, to have me go on to college. She felt from what she could observe and find out about the school that it would be a good background to go to college from.*

*Of course, when you first go [away to school], you're timid about all the new people, and of course, the situation of four girls rooming together. But Mrs. Deal was my principal the whole four years, and I think she made the transition from home to Konnarock easier for us. I don't remember anybody being really, really homesick or upset. Now some girls went part of the year and dropped out for whatever reason. I think [the girls] seemed to adjust pretty easily. I don't recall many [problems]. Probably my memories that stick out in my mind were going back every summer to work two weeks. We did a lot of canning and things for the school. And that's one of my fondest memories, going back in the summertime because we tried to, if we possibly could, get best friends to go at the same time for our two weeks of work.*

*But the two weeks was expected of everybody, regardless of how much they paid for tuition. It was a part of the agreement that you would come and give two weeks' time*

*to whatever the season was and whatever was being done at that time. We picked berries and made jellies; we canned foods from the garden, and most of the summer there were groups of ministers and other people that came and had retreats, using the building while the girls were away in the summer. When we went back in the summer, part of our job was to help prepare meals for the people who were there for retreats.*

*[During the school day], the bell rang for the change of classes. We had a bell that was not a buzzer-type bell. It was a ship's bell type that hung at the top of the stairs on the third floor. I guess the cook, Mrs. Williams, rang that bell to get us up. We had a certain amount of time after that before the breakfast bell, and we went down to eat and did not have to be dressed for school at that point because we had to do our little jobs if they were morning jobs like cleaning the stairs and that kind of thing. Then we went to our rooms to get dressed for school. Most of our biggest classes were in the morning. We had home ec. and that type of thing in the afternoon. [We had] at least four, maybe five, [classes] because our classes started about eight. Probably four in the morning, and one in the afternoon other than home ec.*

*Home ec. was usually a two-hour [class]. We rotated, half the year in sewing and half the year with cooking, so we got both. Helen Huston, [the home ec. teacher] was good, but we thought she was really strict. She ripped the seams out if they didn't look right. And you weren't allowed to put pins in your mouth because, of course, the danger of swallowing, but she said she didn't want us to rust the pins. She was very, very particular, but I'm glad, because we learned to do it properly. I had her three years. The last year I was there I had another teacher, but I had Helen Huston three years. I liked cooking probably better than sewing. Helen was a really good cook, and part of the time she selected what we would cook, and part of the time we did. And then every so often we would do a full meal and then invite someone in to eat, some of the teachers and that kind of thing. But I'm glad I had her for home ec. because she was strict, but it was a good thing.*

*I liked home ec, but to me the home ec. classes were—I can't say like play, but more like real like real life than just classes. They were great. I liked history a lot. I liked the English classes. Probably my favorite was English and history. And I enjoyed the French. I'm not wild about math; I never was. And I'm not wild about science, but we did have science classes. I liked the religion classes, the Bible history classes. We also had, so many times a week, health classes. We had those separately, with a group of girls, and had all of our instruction about girls growing up in those. We had phys ed. almost every day. Sometimes for our phys ed. we walked, long walks. And we played softball.*

*I remember [we took] some day trips. And we went to the movies once in a while. One time the whole school went to Bristol because there was an exhibit that came through the country by train. It was called the Freedom Train and had on it—it must have been the originals; I can't imagine they let those go though—but we saw the Declaration of Independence and a lot of those things. They were in the glass cases that are weather proof and have the air temperature [controlled]. We thought it was the originals. But that was a real good day we had. And we used to have a lot of fun when we went to gather some of the running pine and holly and that sort of thing for decorations for Christmas. We'd go do that. Helen Huston was real good at that. She'd get permission from people so we could go get holly for decorations. [At Christmas] we went caroling. We'd get together as a group and go around the community caroling. We would have hot chocolate and things when we came back. We would do that more than on e night. And in chapel, we always had the whole biblical Christmas story. [We didn't receive gifts from the church women.] They used to do that, prior to us going, but we didn't.*

*We had a music teacher, a Mrs. Steinsnider, who was German, and was very strict. She used to whack us on the fingers with a big wooden knitting needle if we played wrong. But she was good; she was stern, and she had a strict German personality. She had escaped from Nazi Germany by way of Holland and then came to the states with her daughter. Her husband died in Holland. And looking back, now that I've been away from this area a little bit, it was good for us to know her, but she seemed so different, but it*

*was her nationality and the way she grew up. She loved the sun. She used to sit out and just sunbathe, and open her shirt to get the sun. And she would put a leaf over her nose so she wouldn't sunburn. But she had a big influence on me because she was so strict, but she meant so well; she was, in her way, also very kind. She would not let us practice voice lessons if we had a cold or didn't feel well because she said, "It will ruin your voice." When you look back on it, we should have been much more patient with her because she had been through so much.*

*Of course, Mrs. Deal, the principal all four years, was a big influence on all of us. And one of my teachers that I had for French ended up marrying my first cousin, and I introduced them while I was at Konnarock—Rose Cox Kirby. I introduced Rose and Bud and they ended up getting married. Then we had the lady who was secretary for the Lutheran church, Sarah Miller, who lived on third floor in our dorm, but she didn't actually teach. She used to be real good; she'd play the piano for us to sing a lot after dinner because she was real good at that. It seems like one time she may have taught a few music lessons when we were between music teachers, but typically she was not one of the teachers.*

*[The teachers] were good role models. They never did anything that I can think of that you wouldn't want to mimic. But I remember thinking they were so old. I remember Helen Huston, after she left KTS, she stayed back in Indiana because it seems to me like someone in her family was ill and she was needed. But I remember when we heard that she was dating and got married, I thought, "Oh, she's so old." She wasn't, but we thought [the teachers] were.*

*We all had jobs, and they rotated those jobs, it seems like every month. If you had laundry, that four weekends you did the washing. I remember we had that huge washing machine in the basement where we washed all the linen, and it used to be so much fun to fill it with soap—too much soap. It operated by going back and forth, and when it got the soap sloshed up really good, we could open the lid, and it would come out in the floor, and then we could skate around in it. That was one of the fun things about doing laundry.*

*And then we had the big electric roller thing to iron the sheets on. We didn't have dryers; we had to hang them outside. But I remember how good the sheets smelled when we took them off the line and folded them. We had to go outside and fold the sheets. If you had vegetables [as your job], you cleaned and got the vegetables ready [for meals]. We did our own picking chickens and that sort of thing, so that was another job, and then dusting and cleaning certain areas. [The jobs] were divided up. But you learned about housekeeping by doing.*

*[The school] was beautiful. The hardwood floors! We kept those shining like you wouldn't believe. Everything was always immaculate. One job I didn't like was the stairways because you had to dust between each one of the rails coming down, and they were all hardwood, and of course, a speck of dust shows. But [the school] was immaculate, and it was beautiful. The classrooms were even attractive. They weren't just oiled floors like the schools back then where they oiled the floors to keep the dust down. Over there we had the hardwood floors, and they were not easy to keep clean, but we kept them really spotless.*

*We had to keep our rooms clean. They inspected every single day to be sure they were clean, the beds were made, and the dusting done. [They] used to check over the tops of the doorways and things to be sure. But we learned to do things right by having the supervision and the checking.*

*[A teacher sat at] each table [when we ate]. We weren't instructed at the table in manners, but we were taught how to [be mannerly.] We were not corrected at the table, but if there was something that needed to be corrected, it would be done with the girl privately. We took turns serving at the table, doing the dishes, cleaning up, so that that was done properly. We always had interesting conversations at the table, everybody at the table [participated in] sort of a group discussion about whatever. I don't remember teachers steering the conversations. But it was like a big family table, served family style, just like a big family table.*

*[The meals] were real good. We always had vegetables; plenty of vegetables, and a lot of those were grown at the farm. Down at the boys' school they had a farm, and they had a dairy farm with some cows, and they had gardens. We always had plenty of vegetables; we always had fruits and meats. But everything was presented attractively. We always had special meals on Sunday, and we usually had homemade, not ice cream, but more like sherbet that we made there. Sunday evening, we had a light supper like sandwiches and things, not a big, elaborate meal. I liked that. And on some of the Saturdays, but mostly on Sundays, it would be served buffet style from the server from the kitchen, and we could just sort of pick and choose our sandwiches and that kind of thing. Oh, and one time, poor Mrs. Steinsnider made buttermilk soup. I don't like milk anyway, and I don't like buttermilk, and buttermilk soup is really bad. But you had to eat four bites. You had to eat four bites, and I'll never forget the buttermilk soup! Oh, it was just awful! You can't imagine.*

*There were four girls and one boy [in my graduating class]. My freshman class was a lot bigger than my graduating class. I don't know what the typical [size of a] graduating class was. At this point, I know of two of us that are left. I'm not sure if the third one's left or not. The boy got killed within two years in a car wreck, and one of the girls died two years ago. Another one is like me, had been gone and came back and is living in this area now.*

*[Graduation] was really nice; it was a pretty day. I was scared to death because I had to make the [valedictory] speech. We had a pretty good crowd, and of course, had it in the chapel. The chapel was full; I remember that. And we had our caps and gowns and what not. Then we had lunch for the parents and the graduating class there at the school and stayed around in the afternoon. I stayed that first two weeks to do my two weeks' obligation because I was going to try to go to Emory.*

*I think [the education I received] was excellent. I was valedictorian when I graduated. When I went to Emory and Henry, I did not have to take bonehead English, and I didn't have to take some of the remedial classes that really didn't count for credit*

*because when I took all the tests the first three days, I was able to go ahead and take the college level classes. I think we got an excellent education.*

*There weren't many graduating classes after mine. Mine was '52, and then I went to Emory and Henry the next two full years; I went summer and winter. I got married in '54, into my junior year, but I went back and finished. I majored in English, minored in history, and minored in education and in French. I taught my first year in Grayson County, and then I taught in Pulaski County while Jimmy went to VPI and finished. When he went into service, he had only finished two years, so he finished at VPI, and I taught in Pulaski County. Then we went to the Washington, DC area. With his job, we went overseas twice, and we moved around a lot. We were married a long time before we had our first [child]. [We have] two, a boy and a girl.*

*Deciding to come back to this area after we'd been gone so long was a big turning point [in my life.] We've been back nine, soon be ten, years.*

*[Konnarock] was a unique experience, and I wouldn't take anything if the world for it. I wouldn't take anything for it.*

Betty and Jimmy Reedy spend their winters in warmer climates, but both are active in church and politics. For seven years, Betty was a member of the Grayson County Board of Supervisors and has also worked to bring about the restoration of the KTS building.

### **Emily Cordelia Umbarger**

*Music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God.--Martin Luther*

The connections between Emily Umbarger and Konnarock Training School are varied and of long duration. Catherine Cox, Emily's mother, was the school's second principal who later married the farm director, Edgar Umbarger. After several years away

from the community, the Umbargers returned to Konnarock, and Emily attended the Training School as a day student during her high school years. When Emily graduated from college, she returned to teach one year at her alma mater.

The old St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Konnarock was a frame building that was replaced with a beautiful stone structure in the early 1940s. Stones for the exterior were sent to Konnarock from all over the United States. In addition to the church itself, a distinctive stone parsonage was constructed next door. For several years, the congregation of St. Matthew was without a pastor, and at other times like today, their pastors have provided their own housing. Consequently, the church rents the stone parsonage. It is in this house that Emily Umbarger now resides. Emily also serves the church as musical director.

Emily is a soft-spoken, intelligent woman with a delightful sense of humor. She is deeply interested in the preservation of the KTS story because it represents so much of her heritage and her life. I spent three extraordinary and productive afternoons in Emily's home as she generously shared her memories with me.

*My mother was the second principal [of KTS]. Mary Phlegar Smith was the first one, and she was only here a year or two. My mother came in the summer of 1926, I think, and was principal 'til, I believe, sometime in 1930. This was in the very early days of the school, and she was a trained social worker rather than an educator, although the fields have many overlapping areas. So she was very interested in knowing the backgrounds of the girls, and at that time it was girls as far as boarding students went. She did not teach very much. She basically did the planning; she liked to visit in the homes. Especially she has spoken of going over around Boone and up into some of those hollows and so forth and making home visits, thinking that gave her a better chance to understand the students and their needs. Perhaps make a pitch for [the school to] younger members of the family.*

*I think she [Mother] said one time that she taught a class, not exactly home ec., but in home management kind of things. And one or two of the students at that time whom*

*I have known in later years would often say [to Mother], “Well, I think when you told us how to do so and so in that class.” But otherwise she was not in the regular schedule. She might have had to substitute if somebody waked up sick one morning or something and there wasn’t anybody to fill in, but that was I think the only time that she did a regular class. And they did quite a bit of investigation and home visiting and so fo rth before the students were admitted.*

*[Mother] and my father were married in the [KTS] chapel in 1928. And 1930 had come along, and there were still the two of them, and they wanted a family and thought removing some stress would give her a better chanc e to fulfill that goal. I don’t think there was any disagreement or any lack of cooperation or anything of that kind. I think it was purely a personal decision [to leave the school].*

*My grandfather was President of Marion College, and naturally my mother and her sister attended college there. I remember a few things about him, but I was only six when he died, and my main contact with him was when I was three and four. In fact, the most vivid memory I have about him was that I was given a little set of rake and hoe and shovel or something that kids have with colored handles and little metal attachments. And I remember, he was at our house one time when we lived in Eastern Virginia, and he was telling me about [the tools], and the lesson that he ingrained firmly in my mind was what could happen if you stepped on a rake and it came back and hit you in the face. So I seldom pick up a rake for any purpose, leaves or whatever, in this day and age without thinking of that. And that is about my most vivid memory; although, I know that when we lived only twenty-some miles between us that we went up there on Sundays and so forth. But that’s the lesson he taught me anyway. It took. Heavens knows what happened to the implements. I haven’t seen them for fifty-some years.*



**FIGURE 19: EMILY UMBARGER, AUGUST 2002**

*I think I remember going [to visit KTS], probably when I was four or five, which was probably the time I fell in love with the little china napkin rings. I know there were other times that we dropped in. I was two years old when we left Konnarock and went to Eastern Virginia for several years. And we didn't get back very often during that time. And then we were down past Asheville for about a year, which wasn't good for Daddy. And then we came to Abingdon, and we visited back and forth quite a bit. We attended the, I guess, twentieth anniversary program in 1946. In fact, I think Mom and Daddy were both asked to be after dinner speakers. I remember going for that. I would have been about ten. But since several of the teachers stayed such a long time, Miss Katrina and Miss Ponwith and Miss Twedten, and several others, they were just people Mother and Daddy wanted to see when they could. I know I was in and out [of the school]. Mother and Daddy were married in the chapel; I was baptized in the chapel.*

*But when I myself began to have my own close relation [with the school] rather than just as an occasional visitor, it was for high school. I started in 1949 and went through all four years of high school and feel sure I got many things in that way that I could not have gotten in the local public schools. I must say when we left Abingdon when I was in seventh grade—here we were coming to the sticks! And I was going have to go to this old country school up here with two grades in one classroom, and so forth—and I hadn't really thought at seventh grade about what high school might bring to me, but that decision was basically made for me. And frankly, I think Mother and Daddy discussed it without my knowing about such things and decided that I would get a better education and a better preparation for college, which they had intended all along for me to have, than what the public school was providing at that time. And I think it was, I'm sure it was a conscious choice, not just to carry on tradition, but because they thought it was the better thing to do in the long run.*

*And I know it was better than what the high school was by that time; I think there were far more interesting people involved and certainly a more caring, nurturing type of environment that I have always been grateful for. Some classes were being offered in the*

*town schools, but not here. I had home ec. four years, where we usually managed to spend most of the time sewing because we liked having the new things to wear. We did have some cooking and were taught home management type of things. Then in most of the falls, if there was an apple crop, we spent our home ec. time peeling apples which were made into apple butter the next day and sold for some added support for the school, in stores in Abingdon, perhaps Marion, too, where they retailed pints and quarts of apple butter. Whereas that wasn't exactly home ec., it was certainly a way of contributing to the support of the school.*

*We freshmen had our classes together, and the sophomores were together, and then as I say, the other classes combined for most things. For instance, they would teach government one year and American history the next, and swap that back and forth so that everybody was exposed to both of them. And basically the same with literature. You might very well have senior literature books in the junior year and such as that. But it worked, relatively well, as far as I know. Of course, [in] things like home ec. and boys' shop, grade level didn't matter that much in those more hands-on doings.*

*And I've been very grateful for Latin. Latin has been very interesting and helpful to me in—I like words, and I like knowing where they came from and how to use them and so forth. And I think Latin is certainly the best background for knowing --whether it's a matter of choosing the right word to use in a certain situation, all the way up or down to crossword puzzles or whatever.*

*In many ways Mrs. Deal [had a great influence on me]. She was a much friendlier, individual oriented type of person than the, at least caricature, of a school principal. She cared about each one of us. She tried to keep up with each of us, and there were many admirable things about her. I also was very fond of Sarah Miller who filled a number of roles at the school for five, six, seven years anyway. I guess her first responsibility was to be the secretary to the superintendent in the office down here in town. And that I expect in itself was practically a full time job. But several years when*

*they couldn't find a music teacher who would come, she taught the music and led the choir and so forth. And I think we all enjoyed working with her in those capacities.*

*My mother's father had been President of Marion College, but my great-grandfather Umbarger had been an Emory graduate; my father was; his brother was. Most of the sisters went to Martha Washington, which was the girls' side of Emory at that time; although it took a number of years before there was any real sharing between the two schools. But it was a family tradition that one way I could carry on. I'm sorry I don't have another generation to send over there. But somehow I was a little more interested in carrying on that tradition than the Marion one. One never knows just why they make certain decisions. I didn't know anybody there at that time. It was purely my father's connection, and he didn't try to sway me. He wouldn't—he basically left it up to me. But I really didn't consider anywhere else.*

*I had the four years at Emory, which were also rich in many, many ways. And I guess our class was around a hundred, and the girls weren't quite half of it, but I still have contacts with some ten to fifteen people. We're the forty-five year class this fall for the reunion, so I'm hoping to see some people I haven't seen [for a long while]. But those were four very rich and very important years for me. The first year after college I came back up here [to KTS] and tried to teach. It's a lot easier to sit in education class and listen to Professor McDonald or Dr. Hill go on about whatever the subject was than it was to put it into practice. I learned a lot; there was much I enjoyed, particularly being with the girls who were boarding students, which were not, I doubt if we had twenty. I could pretty near go around the circle and make a count at that time. And we did have more day students at that time. I think maybe a student body of close to thirty, something like that. But I did not handle the classroom well. The ones that were a little more mischievous and so forth really just almost took advantage of me and my inexperience. I had not been to practice teach in college. But I still say it wasn't all my fault when you consider my freshman class which I had for English and civics. There may have been twelve to fifteen people in it, and you know the traditional bell curve--that you're going to have a few outstanding students and a few failures, but the majority are going to hump in*

*the middle, the C range. Well, that one class in particular, was a reverse bell curve. I had some ten to thirteen students, and about half of them could literally not read, or not on a high school level, maybe first or second grade level. But they could not read the textbooks or express themselves in words. The other half were A and B students straight down the line, and maybe one or two in the C range, but that was very difficult. So it was enough of an experience that I have not wanted to teach since then.*

*So after that I was at home for several years during which time Daddy began to have more and more troubles with heart-related problems. I would not be surprised but what he had some congenital heart problems that didn't show up 'til his fifties or sixties. Because he'd been a hard worker all his life, as a young man, climbing apple trees to prune branches in the springtime and harvesting and carrying bushels into the coal shed and so forth. And he did have a very serious heart condition. So then after his death, I was glad to be with Mother. In fact, we could get through it better side by side together than we could in two different places. I didn't work for some years, and then [Mother] began to fail, and it was up to me to take care of her. I think Alzheimer's is too vague a term. It certainly had many of those symptoms of increasing detachment from reality and so forth, but certainly I knew very little about nursing once she became bedfast. But I did have contact with the county health department, and they sent a woman twice a week to help her with the bath, with both of us helping together in the bathtub for a while and then finally it got to be bed baths. They were aides and not nurses, but then nurses would come, maybe once a week, especially toward the end, with blood pressure and things ---- that was a very difficult period.*

*I felt it was my responsibility to take care of her as long as I could. I did not ever say I will do it until the end or else. I knew there were many things that could happen that would put it beyond my ability to deal with, but as it happened she was in the hospital for several weeks, the fall of '81, I think, and I don't know what they decided the real problem was. Instead of saying Alzheimer's, I guess the technical term is chronic progressive heart disease, or something of that nature. And I got her up and dressed her as long as I could and let her sit around, and she would eat sitting up, sometimes with*

*help, sometimes all I had to do was cut meat, butter bread, and so forth. It was a privilege to do it, but I certainly wasn't prepared to do it really well, but I was grateful for these several women from the health department who were professionals. Several different people came to help with her bathing and so forth, and it could be any one of them. I never knew just which one to expect. And there were times I could call them and ask, she seems to have a little fever, or whatever the situation was. But at least I had somebody that I could talk to because most of that time we didn't have a doctor here. Basically, it was up to me to use what common sense I could and hope I knew enough to call when something was serious enough to need help. But of course, the end did come.*

*I guess the two things that made the biggest change at one time were when each parent died. Daddy in '68, I think, and Mother in '83. And each one of those made a, you had to give up a lot, some things you had been doing and at least go around a corner of a path through life and think that, hope that you would keep your same—morals isn't quite the word I want to use, but standards, I think is better, and that kind of thing. But you couldn't do some of the things. You couldn't go out on Sunday afternoons and take short walks and so forth like you did when there was a man in the crowd and things of that nature. But there have been things to do. I try to participate in many of the things that become available for me.*

*After [Mother's death] I had to start thinking about a lot of other things, including trying to find a job. And thanks to several people's prompting, I took several classes with the community college and then got into a couple of library classes at Appalachian State, and still nobody was very interested in hiring me. So it took me some years to get a job, but then I think it was probably '88, I finally got a part-time position at the county library in Abingdon and worked there 'til '99, when I began having problems, and there was no way I could meet a eight-hour-a-day schedule. I was part-time for the first five or six years, and then I think it was in '94 that they made it a full-time position with some added duties. So, I thankfully had enough that I would get a small payment from the Virginia Retirement System. Then after I got sick and had gone through chemo and so forth, I just didn't have the energy to go back. And I had a forty-five minute drive*

*home, if I didn't stop for anything. So since then I have tried to catch up on some things I've wanted to do and didn't have time to do before. There's no real evidence of it yet, but I'm trying hard to get rid of some things I don't need and hope I can take care of a lot of things myself so that there won't be such a big job when eventually somebody has to come in and get rid of whatever I may have left.*

*Mother and I went to the last graduation [at Konnarock]. We didn't really want to, but we felt that we should, and Miss Deal was desperately trying to get the files cleaned out and the Synod had said that they would take care of certain records and so forth. So anybody that was available that could be gotten into it went through the files and picked out records of the main information. So we would just go through files as they came to us, probably take out a stack [about a foot high] and then come back for more. But anything about their grades or transcript type of material and more or less official documents was kept—did they graduate or not, that kind of thing, was supposedly sent to Synod, but then many times, for instance, the girls would send teachers they knew like their wedding announcement or the first baby or two, or a boy that was in service maybe had a little article in the paper about him, or I don't know, some of that I'm making up, but that type of more or less personal thing, just went. And I think Mother was very hurt about that, but it was a matter of time, but she did know that even those things have their places in a file.*

*[It's] hard to say [what is most satisfying in my life]. We all go through different stages, but it does seem to me that I have continued largely with most of the same interests. I have always loved to read. There's never been a time but what I could entertain myself with a book. I like music and have to see if I can't manage to get with the fellow that said that he'd work on my record player. I could just load that up and play it all day long and listen to the kind of music I like, which is basically classical. My cousin fusses at me. "Emily, don't you like anything but classical music?" And I said, "Yes, but there's an awful lot going on the radio nowadays that I don't like." I include a big interest in Rogers and Hammerstein and some of the other good musicals that we all*

*know songs from. And of course church music in its many manifestations. But that is a continuing interest.*

*I care about history, Virginia in general, and the Appalachian area in particular. And I like to read about and go places that I haven't been or haven't been for a long time. There's a lot of things that I like to do. I like to sew. I like to mess with various needlecrafts. I'd rather do something with a needle, some kind of a needle. I've made snowflakes for Christmas with my crocheting. And I've done some knitting; I don't know that I've tried a sweater. I tried one that looked so lumpy that I didn't finish it. But that's a nice way to spend time. I used to have a stamp collection; I still have a collection, but I haven't added to it in a long time.*

*I also had a good enough foundation in music to have been a help to the church, not quite ever since [I graduated]. As long as the school was here, there were several of the teachers that they usually took care of the music. But as the whole group has diminished, that has been my thing to do for, I don't know, starting when. But anyway, I expect there was some carry over from the times that I was the one that happened to play for the chapel. We could choose something, a hymn of your own choice, for a prelude and a postlude. And there wasn't time for more than one hymn. At that time, it didn't amount to a great deal; of course, it was a big thing when we got to the point where we were allowed to play the organ. Then it was fun. But I've helped St. Matthews since, I don't know when. Of course, I was out for a long periods when Mother, when both Daddy and Mother were sick and we weren't able to come. But it didn't take me but a week or two after Mother's death to start coming up from Damascus on a regular basis.*

*I didn't ever talk about it with him, but we had an older pastor at that time who had been a military chaplain for a long time. I think he had always heard of Konnarock and had some interest. I don't know how exactly the connection were made, but he and his wife were here for just a couple of years, I think. And he happened to be here when Mother died, so he was helpful to me at that time and was a part of her funeral, and as I started coming back occasionally—I don't know who was here that played sometimes, I*

*don't remember now—but anyway I just sort of picked up where I'd left off some years before. And it wasn't very long before he told me that council had voted; they thought I should have a little payment for it. And I said, "Pastor, just forget about that. If I can play, that's my way of helping, helping with church necessities. Now you're not going to see me volunteering to teach Bible School or Sunday School or something like that. But I can play, and I'll be glad to." He said, "In my churches organists are paid." I said, "Yes, Sir." And there have been times when it made a difference; I've been very grateful for it, but more than that, I just enjoy knowing that I can keep my finger into that field. I enjoy it, and I enjoy doing it with Will, because he likes more than some pastors to have make his hymns fit at least the gospel. And it's really fun when we get together and usually do two or three months, pick out hymns at the same time.*

*I'm sure I've gone [to the Konnarock reunions] every year since Mother died which is now close to twenty years. But I think even the year when she was bedfast I got someone to stay with her just for a few hours so I could come up and tell people howdy. I have missed very few, but I won't say that I've made every one. [It's] just the desire to see and keep up with friends. And know what's going on in their lives. I do have the advantage of knowing my group and [Mother's] group, and not too many from the in-between periods. It's a nice group to be a part of, and it's nice to see that it's not just one or two people who are interested in what goes on. It's really just somehow the place where I belong on the first Saturday in July. It was never all right to miss unless it was something that I couldn't manage. It is important to me. It would have been important to me if I had not been a student. I've known about Konnarock as long as I've had memories of anything. And I remember visiting several times when I was just a kid. Then on ce I sort of became my own part of the family, rather than the inherited part, it has meant a great deal to me.*

### **Peggie Wingler Baldwin**

*The grand essentials of happiness are something to do, something to love,  
and something to hope for. - Chalmers*

A self-confident, attractive woman stood at the podium in the Konnarock Community Center. Her blond hair was neatly styled, and she wore a bright green blazer and white pants. She spoke to the gathered alumnae about the project to which she was devoting her efforts and time, the restoration of the Konnarock Lutheran Training School building. Peggie impressed me immediately as someone who knows what she wants and who will go after it, and this initial appraisal has not changed. After living in Northern Virginia for a number of years, Peggie and her husband returned to the Whitetop area and began immediately to involve themselves in community work—the volunteer fire department, local commissions, the rebuilding of the Whitetop Train Station, and helping their neighbors in many small and large ways. One day when I met with Peggie for an interview, she received a phone call from a local lady whose husband was dying and wanted to come home from the hospital. Peggie was helping her arrange for Hospice care. The caller was not a relative or even a neighbor or close friend, just someone who needed help. As she told me during our interviews, Peggie wants to make a difference each day of her life. I believe she does this.

When I first interviewed Peggie, she met me at the local firehouse, because I knew that building's location. We then drove to her home a couple of miles away on a less-traveled road where I might have become lost. Her home sits on a large piece of land with wonderful, expansive views of the mountains, near what was once the town of Whitetop. Although Whitetop is my official place of birth, the town was gone long before I was born. It was not until Peggie took me to the train station after the interview that I saw in photographs and maps the bustling village that my father had talked about from his childhood. Peggie is rightly proud of the rebuilt Whitetop Train Station, located on the Virginia Creeper Trail, preserving local history for hundreds of visitors each year.

Not satisfied with this achievement, Peggie continues her public service work. It is in large part due to Peggie's efforts that the US Forest Service has entered into talks

with the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary to transfer ownership of the Konnarock Training School building to the church. It is in large part due to her efforts that Southern Seminary is even considering the project. This work, as she says, is her first love.

Peggie graciously welcomed me into her home for one interview and into her beauty salon for a second. Each interview was approximately two hours long. Because preserving KTS is so important to her, much of Peggie's story is about this work. At the conclusion of our second interview, as we were talking about the significance of KTS and the need to preserve its history, Peggie said, "We can't die without letting them know we were there."

*I grew up just right out the road. I lived here all my growing up years. I started school at Mount Rogers School. And quite a few girls from Mount Rogers went over there to Konnarock Lutheran School. My folks said, "Oh, Peggie, would you like to go to Konnarock?" And I said, "I'm not sure." I had my friends, three friends, already over there. So I said, "I'll think about it." They said, "Oh, but it's such a nice school." At that time, Mrs. Deal always came around and interviewed you and your family [before you were admitted]. I'll never forget. She'd just walk in, catch you doing whatever. I was down on the floor, scrubbing the floor in my mom's kitchen. I was so embarrassed. I thought she's caught me scrubbing the floor. But she said, "Oh, isn't this wonderful?" She said that she just knew I was going to work out, and I'll never forget going there. I went over there to visit, and they took us through the school and showed my mom and me everything through the school, and told us what the duties would be, and what our activities were, and the following year, I enrolled because it was too good to pass up. My mother knew it, too.*

*I did get homesick. I cried the first time my mom came to see me, like a kid, because I'd missed her. She said, "Honey, you've got such a wonderful school." I said, "But I never get to see you." I didn't know then they had encouraged the parents not to visit that first month. But when she could come, then I was great. I thought, "Oh, it's not*

*such a bad place after all.” I can remember when school started, we would be overrun. You didn’t know where to put all these kids. We were doubling up the bunks and everything. And so they would eventually drop out and drop out and drop out. Some kids couldn’t handle the confinement, they thought; it was what it seemed to be to them. Of course, you get used to living away from home. It’s like college, I suppose, your first year in college.*

*After I got there and the girls [and I] got to be buddies, and everybody was such good friends and everything, it was just home. It was a home, your home away from home, but it was home, too. And Mrs. Deal, she ran the place like a sergeant. She conducted business; let me tell you! Which kept everybody in line; we just didn’t have any big problems. You answered to her and you knew it; and with enough respect that you told her the truth if anything was wrong. We had the conveniences of home, and we had nurses. Sister Sophie was one of the visiting nurses. We had Dr. Meyer’s wife, and our Dr. Meyer who was right there for us, and who took care of all the people in the school. We had the boys’ school, which was an exciting thing for us because girls and guys got to be together. We had classes together and everything, but we could separate the boys from the girls. And we went to chapel together, and we went to church together.*

*There were just so many good kids that came to that school. I don’t know what all their backgrounds were, but I know the ones who grew around here. There were quite a few kids that came for just classes that did not live on campus. We were all involved with ball games and things like that, sports activities. My best friend was my roommate, Evelyn. We still keep in touch. She married Dr. Dean C. Jones, and we’re still close. She tries to come up to the festivals, and we try to get together once in a while. She has children and grandchildren, and I have children.*



**FIGURE 20: PEGGIE BALDWIN  
JANUARY 2003**

*That building was beautiful! Absolutely beautiful! All the woodwork, and believe me, I didn't realize when I first saw it that we were going to have to polish all that woodwork either, which we did. But it was just beautiful. Clean. Very, very clean. As Mama Deal used to say, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." We weren't allowed, like kids today, to throw dirty clothes down, or wet shower towels down or anything like that; we just didn't do that. Our towels were hung up to dry; our clothes were picked up; everything was dusted. You know, we thought that was pretty bad. I thought, am I in the army? I thought this was military inspection. We had to keep our rooms spotless clean. But that didn't hurt us. We knew how to do that. I realize that we just learned not to be messy.*

*We had chores every day. We all had chores. We polished all that woodwork in there. And we scrubbed the floors. We did the work. We kept the building shining. And we got the white glove, too. Oh, the most difficult was cleaning old chickens! That was the worst thing. I could clean house. Of course, I never was a cook at home. I always told my mother, "I'll never need to know how to do this." And she said, "Peggie, you must come and you must learn how to do this." And I said, "Mother, I'm going to have a cook, and I'm going to have a maid, and I'm never going to have to know how to do that." And so many times she's come to see me and said, "Oh, the maid wasn't in was she? And who's cooking dinner tonight?" But what was actually the most difficult [at Konnarock] was preparing the chickens. The guys would bring the dead chickens in—I said I'd never eat chicken again, but I have. It was plucking those feathers, and we had to cut those chickens up, too, which was murder. But that was all part of our food supply, and it all worked out. But that was the worst thing. Sometimes you could trade jobs out. Now I traded off chicken a couple of time, but you couldn't keep doing it because whatever you were assigned to was the job you were supposed to do, and it rotated so you would know how every job was to be done. We had to know how to do each one. You could get out of it for a while, but eventually it came right back around so you would have to do that job.*

*And there was canning. There was a cannery down in Konnarock, down near Dr. Meyer's old office across the street there somewhere. I can remember that they'd take*

*some of the girls [from the school] and they'd do down and help at the cannery. It was canning tin cans of green beans and stuff like that. And I thought, well, I'm going to go down and help do that, and I thought that was pretty exciting. I got down there, and it wasn't too exciting--once it was work. But it didn't kill me by any means. It didn't hurt me either.*

*Now we had a black list. If you got on that black list three times, and that meant you had dust up over your doorway, or you had dust under the edge of your bed, or anything on your dressing table, or on the floor itself—if you got on the black list three times, your little privileges were taken away from you. We got to walk to the little country store just down the lane from the school, and we could go down there and buy junk food, candy bars and sodas and chips and whatever. If you were on the black list three times in one week, then your privilege of going to the little store was taken away from you. And that was hard, when you had to give that up! You know teenagers. If it went beyond that, I think you got called up and sent to the office, and you got talked to, to see what the problem was you weren't keeping up. Now a lot of it was real strict, and some of that you could bend a little bit. I think today you would have to because I don't think children would take that pressure. You were always—you wanted to be perfect. I just wanted everything to run smooth and be perfect, I guess. But they'd take you out and stack the wood! They'd make you take it out of the woodshed and put it outside and make you stack it right back in the wood shed. But they had to have some rules. We had some kids that came that were freewheeling kids. That will always be in any school or any college, and it's certainly different today than it was back then. We had a couple of girls who came in and they weren't going to follow the rules; they were going to bend the rules. They didn't last too long.*

*On Sundays in our free time, between church services, because we did go to church a lot, we would take walks. We would walk down to where Dr. Meyer's office was; I think it was about two and a half to three miles down there. We would walk in groups. The guys could go with us. That was the one time we got to be with the guys. And if they didn't walk, the girls walked. The guys weren't really big on it, but the girls liked*

*to get out there and see who was passing in the cars and wave and flirt. Sometimes we'd take a weekend and go up to the cabin, and we would camp out. The boys would meet us up there, too. We'd all go up there together. And of course the teachers went with us, and they all stayed with us. We weren't allowed to be alone; that's for sure. But most of us were good kids, and we weren't about to do anything bad. We had dances and the boys were always invited. And the community kids were invited to come to that, too.*

*Piano was taught. I played my guitar. I did take a little bit of piano, but you could never get a piano to practice on, but I took my guitar to school, and I played that. Music was taught [in the chapel] at times. We had a big pipe organ, the most beautiful organ that filled up that whole end of the chapel.*

*[Our meals] were most healthy. Vegetables were in abundance and were offered. You ate a lot of raw vegetables. I know I learned to eat celery there. I was a picky eater at the time, and I didn't like celery. I would wrap it in my napkin, carry it back to my room, and throw it out the window upstairs. I think celery was the worst thing I had to get used to, but before I left there, I was eating celery. I had learned to eat it with cheese. I had learned to eat it with peanut butter. I had learned to eat just raw celery, and to this day I love celery. Like I said, vegetables were in abundance. We had cooked, stewed, fried, raw, and everything. We always had a plate or bowl with raw vegetables, like the summer stuff, garden stuff, because we did have the farm. The boys raised a lot of this, and parents would bring vegetables in the school and give them, or they may have sold them, I'm not sure. They tried to feed us on a healthy scale. The food was very tasty, very good. We had lots of good baked foods. I'll never forget the cinnamon rolls, great cinnamon rolls, and the little cook that baked those. She was just something else. We loved those, and we did eat a lot of cinnamon rolls. But they kept good people and good diet menus for all the girls.*

*And we had plenty of apples. There were always apples there. They encouraged us to eat those; to eat an apple after your dinner, because apples were always good. One a day keeps the doctor away. We heard that one. We had an infirmary at school. If you*

*were sick or you really didn't feel well, you were taken to the infirmary and the nurse would come and look at you. I cannot remember if she stayed on duty or if she came up from Dr. Meyer's office. Anyway, we did go [to the infirmary] and you were given that aspirin or whatever it took to get you over that. If you didn't get over it by the next day, or if you were sick enough, they would get in touch with your parents, and your parents came and took you home or to see Dr. Meyer. He worked with the school, and he did everybody in this area. You were sent home if you were ill enough that you couldn't attend classes, and of course, with Dr. Meyer being your doctor, he kept in contact and let the school know if you were well enough to come back.*

*[We had] a Junior-Senior banquet. We got dressed up in our evening gowns, and it was great. We thought it was. We had a dance and a dinner, and it was really nice. [The dance was] downstairs in the basement. That's where all our parties were, down in the basement, and all of our plays. It was not on the hardwood floors; we had to go down on that tile floor in the basement. I guess it was tile; I can't remember, but it was nice. It wasn't just concrete. [The banquet] was really nice. I can remember that we were taking pictures. My parents came over and took pictures. We played music; we didn't have a band, probably a record player or something. And we had a nice dinner and everything. I know I had a beautiful gown. I was quite pleased with it, but everybody else had a beautiful gown, too.*

*I graduated when I was sixteen, and I left here; I went to the Washington, DC area. At that time there were not a lot [of options open to girls]. You knew you had to leave the area. You had to go away to the big cities to work. You did have a good background and everything, but you still needed that college degree. I went to Washington, DC, and I was a secretary for the American Chemical Society. I worked with doctors and lawyers, and all kinds of good people, but I was still low on the totem pole. I'm sure if we had presented ourselves and said, "Hey, I need help [to go to college]," they [KTS] would have been willing and able to make contacts to get us the education beyond [high school]. But if you didn't know about it, you didn't know to go after it. Some [of the girls] went on to Lenoir-Rhyne or Roanoke, and to Emory and*

*Henry. I had lost my father at that time, and I didn't feel that my mother could afford the education that I would need, and so I went to the big city and went to work. I really wish I had [gone to college], but at that time my dream was to be an airline stewardess.*

*I ended up being a hairdresser. But I did do other things. It wasn't like I stuck to one thing. Hairdressing [has given me the greatest satisfaction] because of the communication with the people. I have worked on models; I have worked on a lot of military. I lived between Belvoir and Quantico, so most of my clientele was military people, and I came in contact with a lot of generals' wives and people like that, and a lot of just real people that I have enjoyed. The life has been glamorous. I have worked on stage; I have been a model for the Wella Company, and that has given me a lot of pleasure.*

*I have two lovely daughters who have made a great living; they fly all over the world, and they have a great life. And I raised another daughter that we adopted, and I have a good husband for forty-five years, and I still have him. I know what hard work is, and I have achieved a lot of my goals in many ways. I built Whitetop Station, train station, back down here, so that was a great accomplishment. The community work that I do and what I have accomplished with Whitetop Train Station; that has been a great pleasure. It has been a labor of love. It's like my first love was the school, but you know, until I asked to have it back to us [there didn't seem to be much hope]. I do a lot of community work, as you just heard that phone call, but I do this every day. There are always calls and I help people, help them to understand—older, especially senior citizens. My husband and I are politically active in the county, and my husband is on the board, the zoning board, and so we try to be just good neighbors and good decent people. Hopefully our neighbors feel that we are. And life is good! I feel God has been good to me and I feel good about it. So I can't complain.*

Peggie is actively involved in her church, is on the committee working to build a branch library in Whitetop, and is working to reclaim and restore the KTS building.

### Writing Lives

Although personally rewarding, it was not an easy task to write these lives. The stories are offerings I make to the women who imparted them to me. Again, my journal expressed my doubts and hopes for the work.

*When I listen to the stories of my narrators, when I am entrusted with the gifts they give me, I feel grateful and I feel connected to them. They are at once ordinary and extraordinary; their stories cause me to examine my own, to feel both comfort and discomfort. I return their smiles and laughter; I see contentment and pleasure in their faces. I sense their hesitations, their wonderings as to whether I should be trusted, as to whether they can trust themselves to open their lives to me. I wonder if they feel at ease with me. Do they have confidence in my ability to tell their stories? Do they believe I will take their lives lightly, that I will judge how they have lived? And that my judgment of them will be put into print? Do they fear that I will put their feelings on display?*

*When I leave an interview, there are too many emotions to sort out. I have laughed; I have been surprised; I have been humbled and saddened. And I wonder what I am to do with all I have experienced.*

*I close my eyes and see KTS in its “glory days,” floors shining, windows gleaming, tables covered in white linens as children and adults bow their heads to give thanks—and I see my mother quietly sitting in the chapel as the afternoon sun streams through the stained glass window and plays on the floor—“Suffer the little children to come to me” ---when she was lonely, she said. Lonely, in a house filled with others, she would seek God. Does telling her story draw her closer to me? I have learned much I never knew about the woman who gave me birth. I see her with new understanding. If for no other reason, the interviews have been a blessing.*