

The *Journal of Kentucky Studies* At Twenty-five

This year the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* reaches a proud milestone, our silver Jubilee as it were. It is hard to imagine that we have been publishing for a quarter of a century and yet the facts are spread before us—our inaugural issue: Volume 1, Issue 1 made its public debut in July, 1984. At such a watershed time, it is probably worth stopping, if just for a moment, to catch our breath, wipe our brow and reflect on our achievement. Thus, in this special issue we want to not only take stock of where we have been, but to turn on our heel and take a sighting of where we might be headed.

With this in mind, we have included several special features in our anniversary issue that we hope will help us to not only remember our past, but also to celebrate it.

Our first thought when it was brought to our attention that the current issue was indeed to be our 25th anniversary issue was to look back to our beginning. To that end, we asked many of those authors who so illustriously graced the pages of our fledgling issue if they would like to contribute to our anniversary issue. We are happy to announce that they all agreed. Thus, we are excited to include the work of George Ella Lyon, Richard Taylor, James Goode, Gurney Norman, Ed McClanahan and Wendell Berry. In this delicious variety of venerable voices, we can see the rich tradition of our region roiling out before us: from Gurney Norman's mystic story "The Ceremony," to Richard Taylor's poetic meditations on Lincoln, to James Goode's memoir on his remarkable association with James Still in "Writing Up a Storm," to Ed McClanahan's advice to young writers, to George Ella Lyon's intimate lyrics of modern life, to Wendell Berry's pastoral prayer in "Sabbaths," and finally to Wendell's cautionary warning to us all in his "Commencement Address, Northern Kentucky University, 2009." In addition, to these superlative Kentucky voices, we are most gratified to be able to include the work of such nationally known poets as X. J. Kennedy and Diane Wakoski, whose



Danny Miller and Wendell Berry,
Northern Kentucky University,
2008 (Photo courtesy of Michael Murray)

poems have graced our pages in the past and who have agreed to help us celebrate our anniversary by sending us new offerings.

Of course, we are very happy that many fine poets and writers from not just Kentucky, but from around the country are able to help us celebrate our anniversary by having us include their work, including: John Cantey Knight, from Louisiana; Tessa Nelson-Humphries, from the U.K. by way of Las Cruces, N.M.; Maren O. Mitchell and Glenda Barrett, from Georgia; Dennis Saleh, from California; Phillip Mathis, from Tennessee; Travis Du Priest, D. E. Laczi and Mike Michaels, from Wisconsin; and Richard Hague and Sue Neufarth Howard, from Ohio. From Kentucky we welcome such fine writers as: Frederick Smock; Paula Kopacz, James Hacker, Ray Abbott; Tom Frazier; Robert Wallace; Donelle Dreese; Harry Brown; Walter Lane; Nettie Farris; Ron Watson; Tanya O’Nan; Janie Goode; John James; Jane Stuart; and Llewellyn McKernan.

Our celebration is tinged with sadness, however, with the passing of Danny Miller this past year. There is no way we can express our feelings of loss caused by the absence of Danny, who was a steadfast friend, an empathetic mentor, a noted scholar of Appalachian literature and genealogy, Chair of the Department of Literature and Language (now the Department of English), and an editor of the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* from 1988 until the time of his death in 2008. To say that Danny was the editor of this journal is an understatement—for twenty years he was the very heart and soul of the publication. His knowledge of Appalachian literature was unmatched, his empathy for both established and up-and-coming writers was unflinching and his energy as an editor was indefatigable. Danny loved writers almost as much as he loved students and he loved writing almost as much as he loved the writers themselves. Danny loved publishing established writers who could express themselves in sophisticated and innovative ways, but he delighted in offering a venue for new writers who were just finding their voices. He believed that a journal, like the classroom, could not just look backward and venerate the past, but it must prepare the field in the present for the new growth to be harvested in the future. Danny believed in the process of writing as well as its product. Since that is the case, we are pleased to offer in this issue several pieces that reflect Danny’s belief in the integration of the past, present and future in writing. First, we offer an essay written by Danny himself called “Kin and Kindness in Gurney Norman’s *Kinfolks: The Wilgus Stories*.” This essay illuminates the several aspects of Danny’s professional personality. First, it shows his interest in promoting Appalachian literature and culture by arguing that literary criticism (“English-professor-criticism”) can help promote and elucidate an author’s work. As importantly, however, this essay shows Danny’s interest in mentoring students and his ability to selflessly promote their ideas and careers by incorporating one of his own student’s arguments into his essay on Norman’s collection of short stories. He was as interested in what his students thought of a piece of writing as he was in what the professionals thought of it.

Moreover, since Danny had dedicated himself to teaching and mentoring young writers, we thought it would be a fitting tribute to him to participate in a writing contest on the theme of Appalachian literature, arts and/or culture entitled the “Danny Miller Memorial Writing Contest” sponsored by Northern Kentucky University and NKU’s Department of English, with the winners to be published in this issue of the journal. The contest was open to both undergraduate and graduate students with a \$100.00 prize awarded in the each category of creative writing and the analytical essay in both undergraduate and graduate levels. The contest was judged by Dr. Sherry Stanforth, Thomas More College; Dr. Rhonda Pettit, Raymond Walters College/University of Cincinnati; Stephen Leigh, Northern Kentucky University; and Andy Miller, Northern Kentucky University. All of the judges are noted authors and educators in the field of creative and analytical writing. The winner of the graduate creative writing award was Matthew Vetter (Morehead State University); the graduate award for analytical writing went to Mindy Beth Miller (Spalding University); the undergraduate winner

for creative writing was Phillip Craig Ratliff (Pikeville College); and the undergraduate award for analytical writing went to Keith Wilson (Northern Kentucky University). (An interesting note here is that, although totally unknown to the judges of the contest or to the editors, Keith Wilson was a former student of Danny's—a fact which only demonstrates Danny's success in mentoring young writers. Danny would have been very proud of Keith's accomplishment.) The cash prizes for the contest will be awarded to the winners at the gathering (we like to call "Dannyfest") organized to honor Danny Miller: "Voices From the Hills: A Celebration of Appalachian Writers" on September 26, 2009 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The celebration will feature many of the writers included in our pages, including Wendell Berry, Gurney Norman, Crystal Wilkinson, Richard Hague and others. All proceeds from "Dannyfest" will benefit the Danny Miller Memorial Fund. Donations to the fund can be made to: the **Danny L. Miller Memorial Fund, Department of English, Landrum 500, Nunn Drive, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 41099.**



Danny Miller at
James Still's home on
Dead Mare Branch, 1979

(Photo courtesy of Tom Frazier)

chronicles Bob's trip to the annual meeting of the Appalachian Studies Association at Shawnee State University to participate in a special session honoring Danny to feel the love and admiration of Danny's friends and colleagues. Richard Hague's poem "Coal-Biters" is another *memento mori* in which it is impossible not to feel Danny's absence—but also his inimitable presence. Mike Michaels's poem "Danny Miller" and Walter Lane's elegy both honor Danny specifically, but if one reads with enough sympathy, one can feel Danny's presence at the very core of this journal's mission. Thus, we dedicate this issue to Danny L. Miller—colleague, mentor and friend.

Finally, at this special time in the journal's history, we would like to thank our contributors, our readers, our subscribers, and Northern Kentucky University for helping to make the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* a success over the last twenty-five years and we pledge to do our part to make it an even greater success the next twenty-five.

Danny's effect on people was the stuff of legend. Even if he had just met you, he made you feel as if you were an intimate friend. His hugs were as famous as his laughter. We at the journal have received scores of heart-felt reminiscences from both contributors and readers. Perhaps the one from George Ella Lyon sums up Danny's relationship with virtually everyone he met:

The last time I saw Danny was at Cincinnati's Books by the Banks Festival the Saturday before his stroke. With typical energy and enthusiasm, he rushed over to my table, gave me a hug, and said he was looking forward to some upcoming work I was doing in northern Kentucky. He *didn't* tell me that he was, in fact, working on that project and doing a presentation related to it. That's how he was, always generous, always maximizing your work and minimizing his. I didn't know him well, but he always welcomed me as a friend and colleague. I'll always remember the laughter in his voice, his generosity of spirit.

Danny was modest and his personal warmth was infectious. You knew he was your friend, even if you had just met him. One need only read Bob Wallace's affectionate memoir "An Hour for Danny" which