

Fonde . . .



***"the good ol' days
when times were bad."***

By: Stephanie Marie Wyatt

This Paper is Dedicated To:

My mother and grandmother,

Janette Anderson Wyatt

and

Valda Davis Anderson

For all their help on this project

And

The people of Fonde, Kentucky

Without whom this paper could not have been written

Introduction: The Way In

The title for my introduction comes from an idea I gained from Rena Gazaway's book about Appalachia, *The Longest Mile*. In the first chapter she describes not only how she physically traveled to the small Kentucky towns she would visit in pursuit of understanding the Appalachian way of life, but also describes her objectives and how she managed to work her way into the hearts of the people. To fully understand the kind of study I have put together, my readers need an overview of my intentions and the evolution of this project. Readers also need to gain a sense of my goals in this project so that they might see why I have chosen to emphasize certain facets of this one Appalachian town.

My emphasis in College Scholars is International Justice and French. In designing a curriculum for myself, I have done much research and course work focusing on issues of war and peace, human rights, and justice issues in French society. Each of these topics has been integral to the formation of my conception of justice. However, when I began searching for a topic to synthesize my studies these past four years at the University of Tennessee, I wanted a topic that would demand more of me than doing pure library work, and that would be of some value to someone other than myself.

Appalachia has interested me for many years, but it was not until this

opportunity arose that I had a chance to put together research which focused on so many of my concerns. In this project I have combined my interests in history, faith, justice, Appalachia, and personal narrative into one cohesive work. It is my desire that this project be a representation of what I have gained from my experiences, (both inside the classroom and out in the “real” world) and that it will be of some meaning to the people of Fonde, without whom it would not have been written.

My grandmother, Valda Anderson, offered to introduce me to a small Kentucky town that used to be a mining camp. Her Sunday school class had been traveling annually to Fonde, Kentucky at Christmas time to deliver food baskets to the people there. She had become well-acquainted with two women in the community, Elta Garland and Reba Lawson. She offered to set up a lunch meeting so that these two ladies, along with herself, my mother, and I, could visit for a while. On November 15, 1997, I made my first pilgrimage to Fonde. I was not sure what I would find there. From reading and watching films I had gathered that Appalachia was a place plagued by abject poverty and hopelessness. That knowledge, along with conversations with Grandmama about Fonde, puzzled me. I knew that the people in Fonde were not starving to death, but I also knew they lived in a very depressing situation. Their community was crumbling around them.

The coal mine that had provided the only source of employment in Fonde (which, in fact, was the sole reason for the existence of the town), had closed in the early 1960s. In the initial stages, I hoped to discover the scars the coal mining industry had caused in Fonde. I resolved that this project would be about understanding the stories of the people there. I wanted to understand how a community continues after its only industry leaves. Once I understood the enormity of this task, I wondered how these women would accept an upstart university student. To my surprise, talking with Reba and Elta was not so different from talking to my other female relatives. Elta and Reba treated all of us as though we were part of their family.

What I found in listening to these women's stories both confirmed and refuted my previous conceptions of the Appalachian way of life. I had imagined women who were much like the elderly Ivy Rowe Fox from Lee Smith's novel, *Fair and Tender Ladies*. I envisioned women toughened by the bearing of heavy loads over the years, while at the same time sweetened by the lessons that hard life had brought them. My thoughts concerning the men were not as defined. I expected them to be hard-working and proud. I assumed that they would have a disdain for the coal mines and the grueling existence it had forced upon them. I predicted that the people would feel an affinity for the union and a hostility towards "the company." I anticipated

seeing the effects of economic deprivation which had resulted from the town's only industry pulling out. I supposed that religion would play a major part in the community since there would be few other avenues for social interaction between neighbors. As I continued to visit Fonde, my thoughts metamorphosed from assumptions to knowledge and from understanding to wonder.

What I found in Fonde was indeed a proud, beautiful people, strengthened by long lives of hard work. I expected economic deprivation to have left a horrid scar across the face of the land and its people. It is true that the departure of the coal mining industry caused a chain reaction in the hearts and minds of many of these people. Some could no longer work and others choose not to, not necessarily because they were lazy or incapable, but because the only way of life they had known had been taken from them. Very few people are left to discuss what has become of Fonde. Those who remain do not think in terms of what might have been or what could be, but more in terms of what was. The people of Fonde talk much about the "old days" when there were so many living in that little camp town. They are fully aware that those were not glorious days, yet they miss the personal interaction the hard times provided. As Reba put it, those were "the good ol' days when times were bad."

Appalachia is an important region for those of us concerned with justice, because it has been home to many injustices inflicted by people of the same nationality. When looking at injustices in Africa, one can point to sources outside that continent which came in to uproot the people, take their resources, and rape their land. When examining Appalachia, one does not have to look very far to find those responsible for its problems. It would be easy in this study to point fingers, to look at one sided studies, and to pick quotes from the oral interviews I have conducted in such a way as to condemn all the effects that the coal mines had on Fonde. But I refuse to do that. The issues at stake are not simple. Broad generalizations about Appalachian people's attitudes towards the coal mines can prove to be false when one examines individual communities, like Fonde.

What I hope to do is use the testimonies of Fonde's people to examine where the community has been and where it is going. I hope to paint a small portrait of the area using historical, sociological, and literary sources as a backdrop. Within that context I then will talk about the kinds of efforts that have been successful in revitalizing similar, local communities. Only within this sort of framework do I feel I can make generalizations about the kind of approaches that might be taken to ensure a just future for of the Appalachian people.

Part II. A Brief Introduction . . . to Appalachian Values, the Advent of Coal Mining Era, and the Unionization of Fonde

Before we begin to look at the Appalachian region, and Fonde in particular, it is a good idea to focus on some commonly held Appalachian values, meaning commonly shared ideas and beliefs. These values will give us a kind of lens through which to view the overarching history of the region and town, the local culture, and efforts to promote sustainable development. In short, Appalachian values are key to the discussion that follows.

Loyal Jones, in an article entitled “Appalachian Values,” names a series of characteristics he sees as fundamental to Appalachian people. It is important to know that Jones himself is a native of this area, has studied it carefully, and has a great deal of authority. Jones states that mountain people came to this region of refuge in the early eighteenth century. They were looking for “space and solitude,” a place free of “religious and economic restraints” (169). Harry Caudill in his masterpiece, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, explains that those who ran to the “interior” were the refuse of Merry ol’ England. Upon completion of their term of service, those sent to the New World as indentured servants, “street orphans, debtors, and criminals,” fled to the Appalachian Mountains (5). According to both writers, this kind of ancestry bred some distinctive characteristics into the Appalachian blood. Both the physical atmosphere of their new surroundings

and their lineage led to the development of a value system that seemed to come from “an earlier America” (169). Jones defines these values as:

Religion

Individualism, self Reliance, and pride

Neighborliness and hospitality

Family solidarity

Personalism (described as a tendency to try to get along with others)

Love of place

Modesty and being one’s self

Sense of beauty

Sense of humor

Patriotism

According to Harry Caudill, interest in the Appalachian region as a source of coal began in the late 1800s, during the post Civil-War period.

Those with money were investing it in the many companies the industrial revolution was birthing. In *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, it is stated that during this period “accumulation of capital coincided with a new southern ethos that equated progress with industrialization” (Hall et al., 24). The South was being rebuilt from the ground up and everyone with the means wanted a piece of the action. What was good for big business was equated with what would bring progress to all levels of society.

It is ironic that those who owned the land others would find so valuable did not know the wealth of their holdings. Although some small-scale mining had been done by the people themselves before this period,

there was not a concentrated effort to mine coal as a way to make a living.

When mining was done, it was done as an afterthought, as a secondary source of funds after farming. The main catalyst for the pursuit of coal mining as an industry in Appalachia was the development of a networked railway system. Before the Civil War, there had not been suitable means of transportation for prospective companies to engage in mining.

A second catalyst was the already developed timber industry. Speculators soon found that wood was not the only resource this area had to offer. Those who took interest in coal mining were those who already had their foot in other business affairs, companies in the North and East as well as England and other foreign nations (Caudill, 71). Some of the interested parties received land grants from states, while some purchased the land they wished to develop. Others sent agents to the Appalachian people requesting the mineral rights to their property (72). Many of these agents spent time getting to know the area's families. Values of hospitality and personalism drove the Appalachian people to bring these agents into their homes. The people had no concept of what they were giving up. They would retain their land, they were told. They were assured that the mining would not begin for a long period of time and that there would be no damage to their children's holdings. The mountaineers were given small compensation for the vast

potential wealth they were signing over. Harry Caudill estimates that for an acre of land yielding from fifteen to twenty thousand tons of coal, the Appalachian people received on average fifty cents! (75) And so the region was destined from this point to be controlled by outsiders. A detailed description of the founding of Fonde as a coal mining town will be discussed in the next section.

As I will detail in the “community section,” Fonde was a carefully run mining camp. Thought and care went into the development of the plan for Fonde. The mines at Fonde were locally owned, and the citizens seem uniform in their belief that the mines were fair in their treatment of the workers and their families. This sentiment was not uncommon among the Appalachian people. For many of them, life in the mining camps after a harsh life of picking out their own existence in the rocky Appalachian mountains was a move up. Thus, unionization was not always an easy process. Mountain people felt grateful for the improvements the company had provided. According to Crandall Shifflett in his article concerning the development of “The Company Town,” this appreciation for the company may be the reason “Southern miners were the last to join the labor movement” (197). In *Power and Powerlessness*, John Gaventa argues that the United Mine Workers began drives to acquire new members in the

Clearfork Valley (where Fonde is located) during the late 20s and early 30s. In search of the kind of presence the union had exerted in Fonde, I talked to the local people. One Fondian, Lalia H., explained that her father had taught her that the companies in that area were fair to the workers after the unions were recognized but not before that time. Another Fonde citizen, Reba Lawson (whom we will meet more in depth later) stated that the union in Fonde was “powerful.” Fonde Union members seemed to be dedicated to the national organization. George H. stated that whenever the head of the United Mine Workers called for a strike, the Fonde people would obey. Even when the people had no reserves to get them through a difficult period, the strike would go on. During these difficult times the whole community would chip in. George said that the women of the church always made sure that everyone had what they needed. It was important to the entire town that no one had to ask for necessities. In Bonnie Page’s book, *Clearfork and More*, Lizzie Davis says in her testimony that when a strike took place, her father, who was in charge of the union food committee, and other men would go to farming communities close by to acquire food supplies. They would bring the collected food back to the school for distribution (the school building is also where the union had its meetings). Davis says that the most needy were served first. This spirit was not unusual in Fonde, as we will

soon see, nor was it limited to the times when strikes were in effect. The union was important to the miners, but affection for it did not seem to overpower the affection for the mining company itself; thus it appears that the union, while prominent, was not a mainstay in Fonde life.

In summary, it is important to note that Fonde was created to be a company town. It was constructed by a local company who lived a short distance away from the town they were building. As will be seen in the next section, care was taken to insure that the quality of life for the miners and their families would be impeccable. Those who came to work at Fonde came from other locations. For these Appalachian people, life in a company town was often a step up from the life they had lived before. The fact that living conditions were exemplary did not keep Fonde miners from participating in the union, but it did ensure their loyalty to the company in the long run. Their value system is an integral part of how the Appalachian people approached their lives then and now. Of Loyal Jones' designated traits those which I find most evident in the people of Fonde are: a strong commitment to religion, self-reliance, pride, personalism, love of place, modesty, and a sense of both beauty and humor.

Part III. The Community Itself/Values/Religion

Grace Hensley Zoochi, a Fondian, says that both Fonde and neighboring Pruden were founded in 1905 (Page, 304). What made Fonde unique as a camp town is that the owners of the unincorporated Clearfork Coal Company, which ran the Fonde mine, were Christian people, intent on making Fonde a safe, clean, and happy place to live. The company was owned by the Reams family of Middlesboro, Kentucky. During Fonde's heyday, the president was Mr. Steve Reams. The vice president and general manager was Mr. Roscoe J. Lankford. According to Lillian Thomas, a former resident, Mr. Lankford "lived in Fonde and took an active interest in the community." Other residents confirmed Mrs. Thomas' statement, speaking favorably of both gentlemen. Mr. Lankford and his wife taught Sunday School classes at Fonde Baptist Church. Mrs. Lankford was a Training Union (an evening Bible study time) Leader and served as the church pianist. Mrs. Thomas states that these two individuals "wanted their community to be a pleasant place for people to live; and I, for one, can say it was a good place for a child to grow up." When Mrs. Thomas graduated from high school, Mr. Lankford aided in making arrangements for her to attend business school and offered her a position when she completed her

training. She adds, "I'm sure he helped lots of other young people, too"
(Page, 306)

Everyone I have spoken with personally and all those who have given testimonies in Bonnie M. Page's book, *Clearfork and More*, repeatedly talk about the cleanliness of the town. Lizzie Jackson Maiden's statement, "The Fonde mining camp was a good place to live" is echoed constantly by those who have lived in Fonde (307). Another former resident of Fonde, Lillian Thomas, stated:

The layout of the camp at Fonde . . . was done by someone who had a personal interest in the town and those who were to live there. Most of the houses were built on fairly level land and had large yards and lots of them had a good-sized garden. That garden meant so much to my parents especially during the depression. Lots of coal mining camps I have seen had very small yards around the houses and no place for a garden or a place for the children to play (306).

Nita Webb is the wife of Shields Webb, who pastored Fonde Baptist Church during the late 1940s and early 1950s. She emphasized the cleanliness of the town as well; "Fonde was an unusual mining camp, as the people called it, because it was such a clean little town, both as far as physically, and the fact that there were no beer joints and that type of thing in the town itself." Elta Garland, a current resident, was adamant about the fact that the superintendent would not allow the miners to drink. In fact, she was critical of the union's influence in the matter of a miner's personal life. Before the

union established itself in Fonde, the company could fire a miner for drinking. Elta felt this was a positive way for the company to ensure the welfare of its workers and their families.

One of the main forces unifying any Southern community is the church. The Fonde people I have spent time with are all tied to the Fonde Baptist Church, although not all Fondians go to this one church. This was true during Fonde's heyday as well. There are a variety of churches in the area. The Fonde Baptist Church was established as a Missionary Baptist church in 1910. Grace Zoochi, whose father was one of the first settlers of Fonde, stated that this church helped later to found the Baptist church in Pruden (Page, 304). Mrs. Zoochi explains the importance of the church's role in forming community spirit:

There was a closeness in the camps that is hard for outsiders to understand. There was no road to Middlesboro until about 1928, and most of our traveling was by train by way of Jellico. None of us went much, and we joined together with community affairs and church activities (Page 304).

The original church building was reconstructed of brick in 1936. This building burned in 1951 and was again reconstructed. Elta Garland explained that the men of the church worked to rebuild the church at night after they had worked at the mines all day. She said that the company's carpentry crew participated in the construction as well. There was a feeling

of real cooperation between the company and the people. The company took care to maintain those institutions that were dear to the people.

The company took a serious attitude towards establishing good schools for the children of its employees. Lillian Thomas states that the company paid the teachers for a month more than they actually worked. She says that, "Our teachers were specially picked and ones who didn't walk the straight and narrow didn't last long." Mrs. Thomas adds, "I believe we got more basic education in those eight months than most kids get today in nine or ten months" (Page 306). Grace Zoochi cites "the pride we had in our church, school, and our community" as one of her fondest memories of Fonde (304). Lizzie Davis talks about the cleanliness of the Fonde school (305). Many of the other members of the community identify their teachers as special people in their lives. The community felt a responsibility for its young people. Lillian Thomas says she "will never forget many of the people who were interested in the young people of Fonde" (307). Being raised in such a loving environment would lead many of these individuals to want to raise their children in this community, but as we shall later see, with the decline of the coal mining industry, this would become impossible.

In John Gaventa's treatise concerning the Clear Fork Valley, *Power and Powerlessness*, he talks about the development of community within the coal camp. He states:

Other than the workplace, the only organizations or institutions which brought the community together were the schools and churches. Both were encouraged and controlled by the same interests which controlled the workplace. As for the schools, the teachers were usually hired and the building usually financed by the companies For adults, the churches were the only places where community solidarity could be expressed . . . (91).

For Gaventa, the fact that the coal companies were enmeshed in every aspect of their employee's community life was a negative thing. For many towns this kind of absolute power was negative, because the mines were owned by corporations outside of the region or country. Because the companies did not have to face the day to day reality of seeing their employee's living and working conditions, they were able to free themselves from the responsibility of caring for their worker's needs. A second negative aspect for other towns (and perhaps to some extent for Fonde) was that the mineral riches were removed from the region and used to make other regions of the country more prosperous. Usually the coal miners and their families did not see their standard of living improve as a result of the profits of the coal mining industry (Lewis, 223).

In contrast to the picture Gaventa painted, for Fonde the involvement of the coal company in every aspect of its citizen's lives was the reason that the community functioned so well. Because the owners and the managers of the company felt it was their duty to maintain a positive environment for the people, both they and the people prospered in Fonde. In sum, the quality of life in a company town depended upon the goodwill of the company. I think that the lesson we can gain from this aspect of Fonde is that when companies do invest in the lives of their workers and their families, the results are beneficial to both parties. In today's corporate America so often big business seem to think that by ignoring the well-being of their employees they can somehow increase profits. Corners are cut in order that the company can receive greater returns. Fonde shows us that by investing in the short-term lives of its workers, the Clearfork Coal Company was able to increase profits and secure its workers' loyalty. Every human wants to feel that the work they do has some greater usefulness than increasing profits for an institution. When workers feel that their employer cares about their lives, and that they are participating in a goal larger than money, they will work harder. Investing in workers' lives is a necessary step for businesses if we are to have a sustainable future.

Part IV. The Women of Fonde

Women are an integral part of any community, but they are particularly important in modern Fonde. The majority of today's inhabitants of Fonde are women. Were it not for women who have maintained their ties Fonde and its church, Fonde might have shriveled up and died long ago. I hope to give my readers a deeper view into their lives in this section.

I have already identified some characteristics believed to be fundamental to the Appalachian people, but when discussing women as a group, there are other traits that need to be explored. As a part of our Southern Literature and Culture class last fall, a classmate, Travis Wright, and I developed a set of characteristics we believe are peculiar to the Southern woman. These traits are based solely on themes that Travis and I observed while looking at various films. These films included *Steel Magnolias*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *All-American Hero*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Let's Give Them Something to Talk About*. These characteristics will provide important background information for our viewing of the lives of Appalachian women. As a group Southern women are strong. They are "steel magnolias," creatures of a beautiful spirit strengthened through ordeals they have endured. Travis observed that in many cases the Southern woman "is the driving force of the household, the spiritual center, . . . and the voice of

reason.” She is sassy, cracks jokes, and makes sure that the menfolk know their place. She is oftentimes a gossip, staying abreast of community happenings. The final characteristic is that she is fiercely protective of female relatives and close friends.

Elta Garland

Elta Garland is a matriarch in Fonde. She is the caretaker of the church and the official bell ringer on Sunday morning. Now 80 years old, this is no easy task. Elta, only a little wisp of a woman, keeps on going. She was born in Virginia in 1917. Her father came across the mountains to Fonde to find work in the coal mines when she was five years old. When he had found employment and established a home, the family traveled to Middlesboro, Kentucky by wagon. The road from Middlesboro to Fonde was not constructed until the late 1920’s or early 1930’s (Page 304 & 306). So Elta’s family crossed Fonde Mountain on foot. Elta’s father became what the miners call a “company man,” a supervisor or manager; thus Elta enjoyed the benefits of living in a nicer home and having more money than many of her neighbors. Elta was married at sixteen to a miner from Fonde. They had five children. Only one remains in the area. Elta’s husband, Babe, died of “black lung” and old age. Elta is very thankful for the supplemental

income she receives from the coal company in recognition of her husband's affliction.

When Elta talks about the town itself, she emphasizes how clean it was and how the superintendent did not allow the men to drink. She said if drinking did occur, then the men had to hide it from their managers. The cleanliness of the town was very important to Elta, perhaps because her husband was an alcoholic. His addiction sometimes kept Elta from being able to lead the kind of life she wanted to. On Sundays, Babe would inform her that she better take the children with her because he did not want to watch them.

Babe's addiction to alcohol was not always something that could be kept a family secret. The following story was related by Nita Webb, whose husband was the pastor of Fonde Baptist Church at this time. The Webb family was preparing to return to Knoxville, Tennessee. During this period, Reverend Webb was walking down the street in Fonde when he came upon Mr. Garland. Babe inquired why Reverend Webb wanted to return to Knoxville. Mr. Garland began shouting that Reverend Webb was the "Best damn preacher they'd ever had in Fonde!" He continued by saying that if he wasn't being paid enough, the miners would "pass the paper" (take donations out of the miners pay) at the mine until there was sufficient

incentive for Reverend Webb to stay in Fonde. Mr. Garland had never attended church.

Their father's drunkenness made deep impressions on Elta's children. One of her daughters was married twice. The only request she made of either of her husbands was that they would never drink. The first kept his word for a time and then commenced drinking. This same pattern repeated itself with her second husband. After the second husband started drinking Elta's daughter lost her mind and died soon afterwards. Elta says she died of a broken heart.

Elta's trailer home is a kind of shrine. One can barely sit down for all the tokens of love which have been given to her by children and grandchildren. Her handmade quilts and crafts add to the décor. Elta is very cheerful and open. She, Reba (her best friend), my mother, and grandmother all laughed about the men in their lives asking, "What those men would do with out us?" Elta is very honest about her life, her loved ones, and her community. Elta often uses phrases like "praise the Lord" or "thank the good Lord" when talking about her life. She is very thankful for the position of the church in her life and the opportunity to be a part of the fellowship at Fonde Baptist. The church's prayer list (which consists of the names of the majority of the town's members) is displayed on her refrigerator door.

Reba Lawson

Reba Lawson is in her sixties. She lives next door to Elta in an old company house. She was born in Pruden, Tennessee, Fonde's neighboring community. Reba's father worked in the mines. She tells the story that one day he worked all day in the mine not knowing that he was suffering from appendicitis. He almost died before they realized what was wrong with him. Like the father in James Still's novel, *River of Earth*, Reba speaks of how her father would often set off with a "grass sack" (a burlap sack) to find food when there wasn't any in the house. Reba was married at fifteen to a coal miner. After he hurt his back in the mines he began to take disability payments from the coal company. Reba and her husband had four children. Tara McGaughey, the wife of the current pastor of Fonde Baptist Church, told me that Reba is frustrated because her husband does not want to attend church with her. He came recently to an evening service and cried the entire time. Since that night he has not been back. Reba looks to her community and church for support. When Reba speaks of the heyday years of Fonde she speaks of them positively, but realistically as well. She comments, "They were the best years of our lives, but times were hard." Visits from grandchildren and church activities now occupy her time.

Ellen Marcum

Ellen Marcum is presently the church clerk for Fonde Baptist. She grew up in Pruden, but married a Fonde man in 1946. They moved into their company home in Fonde the next year. Her husband worked at Tipple #3. They had two children. She now lives in Middlesboro, as does her son. He is a coal truck driver. Her daughter and her husband live in Powell Valley. They financed and constructed their own home.

Ellen taught Sunbeams (a mission organization for young girls) at church and always enjoyed church activities. During this interview the other community members talked about how Ellen was known for her ability to give good “home permanents” to the women of the community. She also often wallpapered friends’ homes with newspaper. George H. stated, “She was there when people needed her and people could count on her. They still count on her.”

Nita Webb

Nita Webb lived in the Fonde Community in the late 40s and early 50s with her husband Shields, who pastored Fonde Baptist Church at that time. Nita describes the Fondians as “among some of the most generous people I have ever known in my life.” Fonde was Shields’ first pastorate so he and Nita sat up housekeeping for the first time. The local people pitched

in, helping Nita to gather necessary items. The women were particularly helpful in donating hand-embroidered linens for the Webbs to use. The coal company itself aided the Webbs in acquiring affordable furniture. As she and Shields became accustomed to their role in the community, they found that one service they could offer the people was a ride to medical facilities. There was a company doctor in Fonde, but often people needed additional medical attention. The couple would often carry people to a miner's hospital in Harlan, Kentucky where the local doctor would refer his patients. They got along well with the people there. Shields would go some mornings to lead a service at the mouth of the mines for the miners before they would venture to work. Nita said she was often awakened in the mornings by mischievous miners who would throw gravels on the roof. As a social activity, the miners played softball. Nita and Shields both liked to play, but Nita admitted that the men didn't take too well to her participation in what they felt should be a man's sport, so she was not often able to play.

Nita said there were a few local customs that she had to become accustomed to. The people of the Fonde church had not much experience with a preacher who had had seminary training. Shields had been taught to plan out the service before he led it. Many of the people did not understand how a service could be Spirit-led if it was planned. After a while they

became used to the idea. Fonde did at that time and still will ordain anyone who feels called to preach, regardless of their education. Many of the local men would preach at local churches even though they had never served as full-time pastors. During the services it was common for the people to pray out loud while someone led in a church prayer. This was a different experience for Nita. The prayer would continue until everyone had finished. Nita's son, Sandy, who had been raised in Fonde, had to unlearn this custom when his parents began a ministry at a church in which only one person prayed at a time. When the time for the Lord's Supper (Communion) came, Nita learned that as the pastor's wife, she had a special duty in the preparation process. It was her job to make the unleavened bread. A neighbor, Mrs. Mary Bates, helped her by letting Nita bake the bread in her electric oven. After the bread was partaken of in the service, Nita had to bury the remaining portion. She was not accustomed to the practice, but said that when she thought of how "our Catholic brothers and sisters feel about the sacrament" this ceremony made sense.

The women of the community often did their chores out on the porches of their homes, which gave the women the opportunity to visit with one another. The life of a coal miner's wife was not an easy one. There

were many chores to do. Describing her mother's chores, Grace Zoochi states:

I remember Mama cooked a big breakfast. We often had ham or chicken (which we raised), fried potatoes, corn, honey, biscuits and gravy. We only took a small lunch to school, then about 4:00 or 4:30 when Daddy came in from the mines, we had another big meal. With nine children, Mother always managed to get breakfast, milk the cows, cook Sunday dinner, and be ready for church on Sunday morning. Of course, we had the chores of beds, dishes, and sweeping to do. On prayer meeting night, if the cows weren't there to milk, she would go to prayer meeting and then milk when she got home. She was president of the Women's Missionary Union for years (Page, 304).

These women are a blend of Southernness and Appalachianess. They were and are the center of their households; the glue that keeps the family in one piece. They have an amazing ability to complete household duties while dealing with the stress marriage and child rearing can cause. They love the place they grew up, and no one knows it better. They are frank and sassy. They are strong, beautiful, and proud. They love one another and their community, but maintain their individuality. They are neighborly, taking the first step when someone is in need. They are strongly bound to the church and to God. They work to instill a sense of roots, tradition, and spirituality in their children. They are the backbone of their families and of their town. I believe these traits (a unification of the characteristics of the Southern woman and of the Appalachian citizen), exhibited in the kinds of ways I

have mentioned above, are the reason Fonde has been able to hold together as long as it has. Even when the menfolk wanted to give up or give in-to alcohol or to disabling circumstances-the women kept on going. Their inbred survival instinct kept them active in the community even now that it is crumbling. If Fonde is to continue-their spirit must live on.

Part V. The Children of a Dying Industry: An Interview with George H.

The migration out of the Appalachian area began as early as 1945.

Coal mining is fast decreasing as a viable industry in Appalachia. In 1932 there were 705,000 miners; in 1940, 439,000 miners; and in 1968 the number had dropped to 132,000 miners (Lewis, 225). This industry, which had been the life-blood of so many small communities in Appalachia, was dying, and is now nearly dead. Why? Helen Lewis suggests the reason for this decline in her article, "Fatalism or the Coal Industry?"

Resources generated by coal mining for the local area are low. In other industries surplus is used for capital investments and this creates new corporations, associations, and other businesses and develops a middle stratum of technicians and specialists. This does not happen with coal mining (225).

Where do the children of workers of a dying industry go? Fonde's George H. is one of these children. His father, Tom, began working at the age of 16 in the local power plant pumping water and rolling ashes from the boilers. The plant produced all the power for the mines and the company houses. After a time, Tom was promoted to the position of firing the boilers at the plant. He continued to move up the ladder until he was put in charge of the night shift (10p.m.-6a.m.). In this position, he was responsible for caring for all the boilers and steam generators. After the power plant shut down, Tom went to work for the mines running the #3 tippie, the largest tippie (the large

funnel-like piece of machinery that drops coal into train cars for transportation) at the Fonde mines. George said his father enjoyed all his jobs and was known for his dependability. Tom often worked through vacations so that he could earn overtime pay. Lalia, George's wife, interjected that working overtime was necessary to feed George and his eight other brothers and sisters. George spoke knowledgeably about his father's work. It is evident that George was very proud of his hard-working father. Tom retired from the mines around 1960.

George graduated from Pruden High School on the evening of Friday May 26, 1951 and left the next day to journey to Detroit to find a job. He found work in a steel mill and planned to stay there only through the summer. He was going to return that fall to enter school at the University of Kentucky. However, the money he was making kept him in Detroit longer than he had originally expected. George stated, "I thought I was making all the money in the world." He stayed there for two years until he was drafted for the Korean War. He spent two years in the army in preparation for the war. As George expressed it, "fortunately" the conflict ended before he completed his basic training.

Lalia and George came back to the Fonde area when George left the service. He wanted to find a job somewhere in the vicinity of Fonde, but

there was no work in Middlesboro, Knoxville, or “anywhere.” Lalia’s uncle was a plumber in Dayton, Ohio. He offered George a job and so Lalia, George, and their baby girl moved to Dayton. George was not trained in plumbing. Lalia’s uncle paired George with a licensed plumber who was working with his firm so that George could learn the plumbing trade from the bottom up. He worked with this firm for two and a half years. When the job requests started slowing down, George left Lalia’s uncle and opened his own business in 1958. He worked with another man charging a small amount for their work for two more years. In 1963 George told Lalia, “If I’m going to try to make a living doing plumbing, I’m going to go down and get my master plumber’s license.” After he achieved this goal, he was able to move out to other towns and cities with his work. He loved his job. He exclaimed, “It was one of those jobs that I’d beat the alarm clock every mornin’ to get to the job.” He and two other men approached each day not as a set amount of hours they had to trudge through, but as a competition to see who could accomplish the most. They would race through the buildings where they had work to see who could finish first. He spoke fondly of those he worked with. His recount of their experiences made it obvious that the lives of these fellow workers had become entwined with his own life. George developed a kind of familial relationship with his co-workers. It

pleased him to be able to share stories about his life's work. He and Lalia returned to the Appalachian area when George retired in 1997. They now reside in Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, about 30 minutes or so from Fonde.

According to George, the mines began to "go down" in the late 1940's. He cited 1946 and 1947 specifically. Official figures show that the coal mining industry was at its height during World War II when it employed 476,859 workers. By the 1960s three million 'economic refugees' had left the South to seek employment in the North (Branscome, 257). When asked where his friends went to find work when they graduated (which was around the time the mines began to lower their production levels), George replied,

That's one thing about the state of Kentucky, they didn't seem to care anything about their youth . . . they didn't bring any business or anything in. So there wasn't any work here for them. My generation all left. Not all of them now, but just about all of them left and went North or somewheres to get a job. I think the majority that left here left with the intention of eventually comin' back.

When George was looking in the Fonde area for a job (after he came back from the service), one of the places he inquired was in Oak Ridge. The employer stated that if he was able to acquire some plumbing knowledge then they would be able to use him. When George originally went to work for Lalia's uncle, he did so with the hope that this job would provide the

needed training for the position in Oak Ridge. However, once George felt he had enough experience, he and Lalia had already established themselves in Ohio and felt it would be unwise to uproot the family.

And so it goes for the children of a dying industry. Feelings of abandonment by “the system” are not uncommon in Appalachia. Another son of Kentucky, Harry Caudill, an author, lawyer, and spokesman for the rights of the Appalachian people, expresses similar sentiments. Unlike many of the Fondians, Caudill’s experiences with the coal companies have not been positive, as have those of the Fonde people. Yet he shares with George H. and others a feeling that the state of their birth had abandoned them. In a 1981 letter to the editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Caudill posed this question:

Why should Kentucky be the nation’s leading coal-producing state if all we get out of it is crippled and dead miners, silted streams and lakes, torn up roads, uprooted forests, and holes in the ground?
(Berry, 8)

In one of Caudill’s works, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, he makes a plea for the just treatment of the miners and their families who have given away their land and their labor to coal companies so that those companies could, in turn, give the profits to the government officials of Kentucky in the form of campaign contributions. Caudill is infuriated with a cycle which allows big businesses to continue to take advantage of the Appalachian

people, while those elected to protect the citizens do nothing to stop the oppression. Even in Fonde where the coal company worked to ensure good living standards for its people, this success does not pardon the state from its responsibility to its citizens. By allowing an industry that could not thrive beyond a few decades to run its economic policy, Kentucky turned its back on the young people who would need a future beyond coal mining. The coal industry, as a whole, has not concentrated on the welfare of its workers after it was no longer prosperous for them to operate (which is true even of Fonde). Helen Lewis states that there are “coal company executives . . . heard to say that they have no responsibility to the area or to the people.” And almost as if in direct response to Caudill’s question, one coal company executive stated in the film, *Rich Lands Poor People*, “If there is something wrong with what we are doing in Eastern Kentucky, then there is something wrong with the country” (Lewis, 226).

In summary, yes, the Clearfork Coal Company made efforts to provide a happy, healthy environment for its workers in the short run, but what about for the children of its workers? Even though it established a model community, should it have done more for the next generation of Fondians? Harry Caudill raises some interesting questions concerning the issue of responsibility. Thus, the question still remains: whose responsibility is it to

care for the people of Appalachia? If the answer is the coal company, then efforts need to be made in this industry and others for an outside body to watch over its operations. Unions have been able to do this to some extent, but improvements could still be made to ensure the democratic nature of such bodies. If it is the responsibility of the state to oversee the workings of its industries and if it is the responsibility of the state to provide for the basic welfare of its people, then all citizens need to hold public officials accountable to the people and not big business. Some institution or some government body needs to feel responsible for the people of Appalachia, because those who are now displaced are the ones who gave the labor that made coal mining such a prosperous industry for the first half of this century. The people's labor brought profit both to the state and to the industry. In light of these observations, another question arises: what strategies can be undertaken to provide for and protect the youth of the next generation? Now that mistakes have been brought to light, what efforts should and can be made to keep them from happening again? Before we can answer these important questions we must look at where Fonder is now. Then from that knowledge we can look at hands-on efforts being made in similar communities to answer these same questions.

Part VI. Fonde Today . . .

Fonde today is a skeleton of what it once was. In fact, one might not even realize it was there, were it not for the large signs advertising the Fonde Christian School and Church which stand alongside Highway 90 running between Jellico and Middlesboro. Fonde is now just a smattering of a few houses on either side of Fonde Road. The steep hillsides carve out the wide valley that the main road winds through. The railroad tracks, which were once a mighty coal highway, now sit unused. The hillsides, once home to lively dwellings, have now returned to nature. When coal production began to wane over the years, the houses were removed as they were vacated by inhabitants. There are a few ruins left midst the bramble and underbrush. Halfway up Fonde Mountain some of the concrete pillars of the #3 tippie, the largest of the five tipples, still stand. The others lie crippled on the bare ground. The old school house was torn down for its materials when it ceased to be of use. However, the frame of the school was built with creek rock from the Clear Fork Creek and it remains as if to testify to the heart of a community which will not be torn down. The bright white Fonde Baptist Church stands beside the school ruins demonstrating that the heart of the town, though slowed, still beats.

Many of those who lived in Fonde during its coal mining years have now departed because of lack of opportunity or for opportunity elsewhere. Many of those who had connections to this town and once had to leave, such as George H., have now returned to the area after retirement. Few have returned to the town itself; instead, they often settle in local areas which are more developed, such as Middlesboro or Cumberland Gap. Since many of these small mining camps have been deserted, there is a greater sense of community among the neighboring communities. The Pruden and Fonde Baptist Churches meet together one Sunday evening a month for a joint service. The churches are too small to hire a full-time pastor, so they are led by pastoral interns from Clear Creek Baptist Academy in Pineville. Currently the Pastor is Steve McGaughey. He and his wife, Tara, have been active in the community since Steve took the pastorate there.

I spoke with Tara concerning the current situation in Fonde. The majority of the people left in Fonde do not work. They are either retired persons or young single mothers receiving government assistance. One young mother has recently received her GED and is now participating in job training through a government assisted program. Tara said that the experience has been a positive one for this young woman and that her self-esteem has improved. Her son is extremely intelligent and hopes to attend

the University of Kentucky, perhaps with the help of the Air Force. Life does go on in Fonde for her young people, but the chances of finding work in the area are slim. Tara explained that today's young have three options, "They either work in the mines (what few there are), drive a long distance to get there [to a job], or go on welfare." She continued by saying, "There is no way out of Fonde except over the mountain, which is dangerous, as you know."

The lives of the children of those who worked in the coal mines is not easy. Many of those who mined in Fonde were proud of the work they did, proud of the contribution they had made. Hubert Huddleston of Fonde told a Knoxville-News Sentinel reporter that he was "proud to have been a coal miner" (Page, 302). Children who are left in a home town that their parents idealize can feel frustrated and purposeless. Tara McGaughey told me that two local boys (cousins) were playing a game of "chicken" in their go-carts. Neither boy swerved, they hit one another head on, and one of the boys was killed. When he heard the news, the father of the son who was killed took up his shotgun and killed the father of the other boy. Some might blame this murder on Appalachian values. Perhaps these had something to do with it, but I feel that much of this type of thing is caused by economic despair. What can be done? How can a community be reinvigorated, regain purpose

and focus? Is it possible, or should towns like Fonde give way to larger communities and give up? This question I cannot answer. However, the next section will deal with some very positive steps being taken to help empower people in similar towns to recreate their own communities.

Part VII. Efforts to Promote Sustainable Development in the Clearfork Valley

If Appalachia is going to thrive as a region, efforts must be made to bring industry and business to the people. If these efforts are to last they must come from within the communities themselves. In the past, many of those trying to spawn sustainable living efforts have failed. Why? Because many “reformers” ride into Appalachia on their white horses of salvation with strategies such as: “maximum feasible participation, development of indigenous leadership, preparation for modernization . . . preservation of the ‘best’ in their culture, self-help programs” (Lewis, 222). Ron Eller suggests that, “Appalachia will not be rescued from the outside, whether by the federal government or the private sector. Renewal must begin from within, with the revitalization of communities” He continues, “Such an initiative requires that we relearn old skills and acquire new perspectives . . . how to connect personal troubles with social issues” (150).

A recent article in the Knoxville-News Sentinel described the efforts of a Methodist missionary couple, Steve and Diantha Hodges, in Sneedville, Tennessee to foster community development in a struggling area. Working in association with the local Methodist congregation, the Jubilee Project has renovated some abandoned buildings in the town and set up shop. They are currently involved in fostering economic cooperatives, small

business, and youth out-reach. Since their beginning they have developed recreational activities for local youth, which included a trip to Baltimore to meet and “hang out” with youth of that city. The objective of this outing was to give the youth a sense that they are not alone in their problems. Part of Jubilee Project’s new facility is used as a youth center so that the young people will have a safe place to socialize.

Another part of this mission is the development of the Appalachian Craft Cooperative. An additional part of the facility is used as a store for selling locally crafted goods. A studio area has been constructed for a local potter. Computer training classes will begin soon thanks to a loan from TVA, and small business training classes are currently taught. As part of the small business initiative, the leader hope to add kitchen facilities so that food businesses can be “built on the local agricultural economy” (Simmons).

Why this merging of religion and economic development? Because the Hodges ‘believe that Christian faith needs to be expressed in the community in concrete programs’ and that this faith ‘ought to try to empower people’ (Simmons). This merging of the local church and development efforts is necessary if efforts are going to reach people whose community connectedness is tied to the church. Loyal Jones states that “social reformers also view the . . . churches as a hindrance to social

progress. What they fail to see is that it was the church which sustained us and made life worth living in grim situations” (170). Allowing established institutions which are accepted by the people to be the initiators of social reform is necessary if that reform is going to be successful.

Susan Ambler, a professor at Maryville College and a social activist, is currently working with three organizations working to revitalize communities in the Clearfork Valley. Two of these are particularly interesting for this study. The Woodland Community Land Trust in Roses Creek (near Eagan, Tennessee) works to return local land to the local people. The reason this is necessary is that when coal companies left many of these small towns, they either retained ownership of the land or sold it to another corporate body. Many of the miners did not have enough money to purchase their homes and land from the company, and so it was necessary for them to continue to rent from the land’s owners. The community land trust program acquires the land and then leases it to the present tenants for periods of 99 years. When the lease time ends, the tenants may renew the lease or relinquish it. If they choose to relinquish their lease, the land returns to the land trust program so that it will continue to be accessible to the people of the community. This program may prevent a large company from gaining control of the people’s land. The Model Valley Community Development in

Clairfield, Tennessee (another neighbor of Fonde) is a similar project.

However, in this project the land is simply acquired and then sold to the current tenants.

Apparently this phenomenon of miners not owning the houses and land they have lived on for years is quite common. In Fonde, the company homes are now owned by the Huber Corporation, a timber company. Two Fonde gentlemen, Clyde Mace and Hubert Huddleston, expressed to The Knoxville News Sentinel in 1986 that their experience with this timber company has been a positive one, but they both hope they will eventually own their homes (Page, 302). Nita Webb shed some light on why the miners might not have saved enough to purchase their homes, “Many of the miners and their families didn’t think a whole lot about saving for the future and that kind of thing. They enjoyed eating, and they enjoyed spending, especially at Christmas time.” John Gaventa suggests that with their housing and land being provided by the company and with goods readily available through the commissaries (the company-owned store) on credit, the miners and their families took advantage of purchasing modern goods to which they had never before had access (90). Crandall Shifflett confirms this theory in his article about company towns. According to Shifflett, miners and their families, many of whom came from farming or

sharecropping backgrounds, were overpowered by “high wages, labor saving conveniences, and a richer social life.” For many of them life in the mining camp was like paradise (196). Shifflett goes on to explain that the attachment to the coal companies developed as a result of such improvements in the miner’s lives. Understanding this mindset is imperative if those interested in aiding in community development are going to do so effectively. Susan Ambler says the most difficult challenge in protecting the land trusts is that in many cases the local people view grass-root groups as working against the coal companies. Many Appalachian citizens view the coal companies as their benefactors, as providers of jobs. Other citizens see the companies as their enemy, the perpetrators of an environmental disaster. Ambler says that, in many situations, involving citizens in efforts to better their communities is difficult because traditionally held values such as conservatism and an affinity for individual rights are antithetical to the community oriented atmosphere. Overcoming such obstacles in such a way that the people themselves feel empowered to change their situation for the better is the biggest challenge for friends of Appalachia.

Part VIII. Fonde . . . A Conclusion

If I have learned anything during this study it is that it is impossible to try to reconcile the many contradictions Fonde provides. A town, like a people, is a work in progress. Neither will ever be complete. Thus my answer to the problems of Appalachia can only be a work in progress as well. In trying to make some sense out of the issues I have presented in this work, I must refer back to my list of Appalachian values. The same values that characterized the people of Appalachia during the birth of King Coal are still coloring their actions now that the King is on his deathbed. Unions had a difficult time gaining members in Appalachia because the miners felt a kind of **loyalty** to the company that had provided them with employment. Today those who would like to establish institutions promoting sustainable development have a difficult time because some Appalachians remain loyal to the company that now owns their land, perhaps feeling no need for it to be otherwise. Those of us who want to provide a more sustainable future for the Appalachian region have a challenging task ahead of us. It is necessary to make room for the people themselves to develop solutions for their own problems; outsiders can only provide the tools for such action. However, activists and other interested parties must go into the region realizing that the people may not always want to help themselves. Loyal Jones would argue

that the history of hard life in Appalachia mixed with its **religious beliefs** has created a feeling of acceptance (rather than resentment) among Appalachian people. **Pride** and **self-reliance** may keep Appalachians from wanting to accept help from activists and helpers, even when they will take it from a somewhat invisible government (in the form of welfare checks). Understanding the reasoning behind their behavior is absolutely necessary if activists are to sympathize with the lives of Appalachians. In many cases they have felt abandoned for so long they may not even know where to begin. However, I feel that the success of some of the efforts I have mentioned here have shown that it is possible. Helpers must enter the region with the mindset that they are there to be listeners, encouragers, and tool providers, rather than saviors on white horses.

I feel that in much of my reading these issues can be simplified, even by those activists who pride themselves on looking at issues in a multi-dimensional fashion. In many areas of Appalachia it is true that miners were treated unfairly by the coal companies, particularly in situations where the mines were owned by agents outside of the region or country. I am positive there are other nuances that need to be identified before we announce that we have a grasp on the problems of Appalachia. We must proceed with the caution that befits our station. One or two case studies

does not sum up every experience of every miner in Appalachia. Appalachia consists of many different subcultures. For each one of these subculture there are probably thousands of little towns-each with its own unique experience. However, this realization does not excuse outsiders of a sense of responsibility. My statements are simply a caution saying that before “experts” act as if we know it all, we need to understand that each situation is different. Depending on the area that we wish to aid, we need to make sure that we thoroughly research that particular area’s experience so that we might provide the proper tools for their needs.

In the case of Fonde, it is not very easy for them to look ahead and see a positive future when they idealize “the good ol’ days when times were bad.” Even the difficulty of a situation in which they once found themselves does not seem so bad when compared to the frustrating situation many of them find themselves in now. Most of their beloved friends and institutions are gone. However, they still, as they once did, love to laugh, to sing, to tell stories, and enjoy the company of others when they get a chance to see them. The Fonde Reunion, which is held once a year on the second Sunday in July, helps reassure its past and present citizens that the memory of their beloved community will live on.

Personally this study has meant a great deal to me. My first epiphany during this project took place during my first trip to Fonde. As I sat at Elta's kitchen table eating the lunch which was jointly prepared by my grandmother and her, I listened to the stories being told. As the women present: Elta, Reba, my grandmother, and my mother laughed and carried on, I became acutely aware of the tradition of Southern womanhood that I too am a part of. I may not be an Appalachian woman in the sense that Elta and Reba are Appalachian women, but much of their history belongs to me as well. Because we come from a similar tradition I feel a responsibility to the people of Fonde. I can understand many of their frustrations, hopes, and desires, not only because of my feeling of kinship towards them, but also because I am human. I think diving into the stories of this town has given me a better understanding of my own place in this world. I have gained deeper knowledge of what it means to be human: having a sense of individuality coupled with the sense of belonging to a community. Eudora Welty has written, "One place comprehended can make us understand other places better." My study of Fonde continues to teach me to see places inside and outside of me in a new light.

The second personal contribution that this study has made to my life is that it has given me a more inclusive view of how I want to do ministry.

Before I began this project I thought I was going into ministry to teach others about life. Now I understand that life itself is the great teacher, and lessons that others, along with myself, gain from it are to be shared, rather than taught. The white horse of salvation I so desperately wanted to ride on at one point has been replaced by some very humbling walking moccasins. God has said to me that to teach I must be willing to be taught, which includes sharing in difficult times and listening; two aspects of ministry I didn't understand as clearly before my Fonde experience. It was my goal to gain a window into a different world through my work at Fonde, little did I know that world had as much to do with me as it did with a physical destination! I feel I have succeeded.

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