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Narrating Socialization: Linda Scott DeRosier's Memoirs

Erica Abrams Locklear

Linda Scott DeRosier's autobiographical accounts of literacy attainment in *Creeker: A Woman's Journey* and *Songs of Life and Grace* reveal that entrance into a secondary discourse community via literacy can bring both pleasure and pain. Analyzing the identity negotiations DeRosier encounters reveals that although she experiences a sense of loss as a result of continued formal education, such schooling also makes possible the creation of her memoirs, which help overturn stereotypes connecting Appalachia with illiteracy

According to literacy scholar Janet Carey Eldred, "All fiction historicizes problems of socialization, including literacy" (686). Certainly literacy—and knowledge accumulated through literate activity—often functions as the catalyst for socialization and a growing realization that one's home discourse community differs, sometimes drastically, from other such communities. Linda Scott DeRosier's 1999 memoir, *Creeker: A Woman's Journey*, as well as her 2003 follow-up work of creative non-fiction about her family, *Songs of Life and Grace*, both operate as poignant narratives of socialization in which literate skills repeatedly cause internal conflict. In describing how she moves physically and emotionally away from her home community of Two-Mile Creek, Kentucky, DeRosier illustrates the need for self-monitoring in both her home and academic discourse communities, and although DeRosier frequently narrates activities centered on literacy throughout each work, she focuses most of her depictions on the losses and gains incurred as a result of those literate practices. For DeRosier the process of becoming literate, in a technical as well as in a discursive sense, introduces significant benefits and dilemmas to her life and her conception of the world. As she continues her education through study revolving around literate activity, she increasingly learns that her Appalachian way of being contrasts with accepted ways of being in the academic community. Despite the identity struggle this realization causes, through writing both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier identifies misconceptions of Appalachia and its people and works to overturn inaccurate assumptions that inevitably portray mountain people as ignorant, socially inept, and lesser.

The hint of such an assumption even makes its way into the preface to *Creeker*, when history professor Margaret Ripley Wolfe writes that the memoir "tells the story of an educated and cultured American woman who came of age in Appalachia" (xi). Although Wolfe writes a complimentary introduction, calling *Creeker* "a remarkable

alternative to much of what has been published about the Appalachian region and its women," Wolfe also suggests that DeRosier's story operates as an unusual one. By placing education, culture, and America along the same trajectory, Wolfe suggests that some greater entity of nation, not region, produced DeRosier, who just happened to come of age in an Appalachian place, an area not historically known for its education or high culture. Both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* provide a narrative response to this suggestion, and DeRosier consistently adds to what she considers an incomplete representation of Appalachia and its people. Although DeRosier acknowledges the existence of "the everlasting cycle of poverty and hardship in the hills and hollows," she also adamantly asserts that although the story of mountain poverty "is most certainly a part of Appalachia [. . .] it is not the whole story, not by a long shot" (*Songs* 205).

In publishing *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier makes a significant contribution to the written representation of Appalachia, especially through her focus on mountain literacies. When asked in an interview if people sometimes assume that DeRosier or someone in her family is illiterate because she grew up in Appalachia, she responds: "*Did I*? *Do I*? Everybody assumes that" (emphasis added). In *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier consistently returns to stories in which literacy plays a centralized and oftentimes gendered role. Although she writes of her grandmother teaching her to read and she repeatedly mentions her mother's love for reading and writing letters, DeRosier usually does not describe scenes in which she learns literacy skills. Instead, literate activity operates as the backdrop for the stage on which DeRosier lives her life. Always present, these multiple literacies usher drastic changes into DeRosier's life from early childhood to present-day learning activities.

The emphasis DeRosier's mother (Grace) and maternal grandmother (Emma) place on the centrality of literate activity in a productive life influences DeRosier during her adolescent years, fostering a lifelong affinity for books, which later culminates in DeRosier earning a doctorate in Psychology. Yet despite the ways in which DeRosier's mother and grandmother emphasize the practice of reading and writing, neither Emma nor Grace could prepare DeRosier for the vastly different discursive world she encounters after leaving Two-Mile Creek to attend Pikeville College and later graduate school at the University of Kentucky. Even so, for Emma and Grace, pleasurable reading fosters avenues for private contemplation not granted by their laborious duties as wives and mothers, and while DeRosier uses her literacy in a similar way, the education she gains through literate activity also helps her navigate the two different discourse communities of her Appalachian home and the academic environment in which she works.

Throughout her life DeRosier forges new paths not previously taken by other women in her family, since such freedom was not granted to her mother or grandmother. Despite their sometimes outspoken attention to literate practices, both Grace and Emma functioned within sexist societal limitations that prevented them from pursuing many of their individual dreams, as when DeRosier states, "My poor old momma was a freight train that never could get to the station. She had a formidable intelligence and absolutely nowhere to focus it that would have been considered appropriate in that time and place" (*Creeker* 17). Even so, Grace and Emma resist these gendered constraints in various ways, and much of their resistance revolves around literate activity, as when Emma finds a way to provide a high school education for all of her daughters,

which DeRosier explains is an unusual practice in the Kentucky mountains during the 1930s and 1940s. Not surprisingly, Grace and Emma pass this strain of resistance connected to literacy on to Linda Sue[1], who later enters a completely different discursive world of university life at Pikeville College and remakes herself over, morphing from "Linda Sue Preston, social misfit [to] Lee Preston, everybody's sweetheart" (*Creeker* 127). Lee's college years during the 1960s, a time when more opportunities were slowly becoming available to women, allowed her to explore options not easily available for her mother or grandmother, and such investigations result in a constant obsession over passing for "normal [. . .] not hillbilly" (*Creeker* 179). Reflecting on these memories, DeRosier writes:

> *Technically*, I left Appalachia when I was thirty-nine years old. But I submit to you that I really left Appalachia and the comfort and pain of shared values that early September Sunday when my daddy loaded up our black-and-yellow '57 Chevrolet and hauled all bad-haired ninety-four pounds—not counting my three new sweater sets—of Linda Sue to Pikeville College. That was the end of Linda Sue Preston right there, and I think my daddy knew it. (*Creeker* 123)

For many years DeRosier clings to her non-Appalachian identity of Lee, but when she begins work as a professor at Kentucky State University, a historically black college, she writes that because of her "hillbilly" background, she understands the marginalized position of many of her students. This realization results in a return to her Appalachian roots, and when she accepts a job as director of the new Appalachian Studies program at East Tennessee State University, she reflects, "After two decades of having leaned on my creation [Lee Preston] for strength, I finally felt ready to let her go; I went to my new job as *Linda* Preston Scott" (*Creeker* 189).

By placing education, culture, and America along the same trajectory, Wolfe suggests that some greater entity of nation, not region, produced DeRosier, who just happened to come of age in an Appalachian place, an area not historically known for its education or high culture.

In a cyclical turn of events, we see that DeRosier's familial (and often feminine) exposure to literacy practices prepares her academically (but not socially) for the journey to college, where she re-shapes her identity and denies some connections to Appalachia. Yet her educational endeavors culminate in a job as an academic, where she returns in spirit to her mountain heritage, and it is this return via highly skilled literate practices that allows her to create *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*. Both works provide moving accounts of Appalachia that resist the stereotypical mountain portrayals so long perpetuated by non-native scholars and documentary directors. Literacy theorists like James Paul Gee and Paulo Freire identify the impetus for remaking oneself as a desire

to fit into dominant ideological practices, no matter the cost to one's own discourse community affiliation. In some aspects, DeRosier's journey aligns with theirs, but with one important addition—her identity re-formation ends close to where it began, and she writes both accounts from the perspective of an adult comfortable identifying with her Appalachian roots.

From the beginning of *Creeker,* DeRosier establishes her literary prowess by referencing William Faulkner's famous allusion to Yoknapatawpha County as his fictional postage stamp of native soil when she writes, "This is my postcard from Appalachia written from the beginning of the 'Big War' through the 'Age of Aquarius' and running headlong, as quickly as all my baggage will allow, into the twenty-first century" (1). In evoking Faulkner, DeRosier immediately connects one of the most respected writers of the American South with her account of Appalachia. Doing so signals an awareness of past southern literary traditions, and it also foregrounds the connection she has to the Appalachian region and its people. Not only do *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* tell the story of southern mountain people, but they also relate DeRosier's personal story, and it consistently returns to a theme of storytelling through both oral and literate forms as major forces that shape the course of her life.

Although literate activity functions as an important ability for many of her immediate family members (namely her mother and maternal grandmother), the same cannot necessarily be said for the rest of her community. To illustrate, DeRosier writes about an instance that occurred with her neighbor and uncle, Keenis Holbrook. After Keenis returned from a trip to Baltimore, DeRosier recalls him "regaling" us with descriptions of his adventures in the big city" (*Creeker* 25). During the story, Keenis cites Baltimore as the capital of Maryland, and ten-year-old DeRosier corrects him by stating Annapolis as the capital. Keenis nonchalantly tells her she is wrong, but not to be swayed, DeRosier retrieves her geography book from her house and displays its contents for everyone to see. Remarkably, DeRosier remembers: "Uncle Keenis glanced at my book, said, 'No, it's Baltimore,' and continued with his tale. Everybody accepted his declaration as the final word, and that was the end of the story. Book-learning was not very credible on Two-Mile Creek" (*Creeker* 25). This incident foregrounds the discursive divide between home and academia DeRosier later encounters when her career as a professor largely revolves around book learning.

Continuing a theme she establishes in *Creeker*, in *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier emphasizes the lack of balanced representation of mountain people. When explaining that her parents' "story is not bound by blood but by community," she goes on to assert, "We are of a kind, we rural, hill-country Appalachians. We are common folk, misunderstood by scholars, thus not often seen in books. We are family" (117). Here DeRosier carefully distinguishes between scholarly portrayals of Appalachian people (which she oftentimes deems inaccurate) and more truthful representations in which she describes the presence of both literacy and illiteracy. Ironically, it is DeRosier's scholarly training that enables her to write accounts of her people, and her career as an academic sheds light on the divide between scholarly analysis and the kind of truth DeRosier feels she can reveal about her home-based discourse community. Later in *Songs of Life and Grace*, she describes that family friends (Bob and Jane Allen) agreed to help with DeRosier's primary research, and recalling the Allen's she writes: "Bob and Jane Allen are my people. They are consummate Appalachians, the kind of folks never

seen in the documentaries of gaunt, sad-eyed hill folk standing before ramshackle cabins. Nor are they represented by portrayals of Appalachia inhabited by the weary disadvantaged and the fat cats who've taken advantage of them" (205). In writing both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier works to fill that gap, and she reflects:

> I don't come from the kind of people who pass-along by setting words to paper, so my heritage has been largely ignored by folks who come from the East reaching down to help us. Those folks dropped in on us, then returned to their offices in universities or federal agencies and wrote of the everlasting cycle of poverty and hardship in the hills and hollows. It's hard to find a smile in the entire recorded history of rural Appalachian people. [. . .] If there is one point I want to make here, it is to separate my rural Appalachian people—we of the creeks and hollows—from those rural Appalachians we have so long seen reflected in pictures of sad-eyed hill-country folk on ramshackle porches. This rural Appalachian story—the one I inhabited growing up and the one that is with me every single day, whatever my zip code of the moment may be—is one of hard work and hope. (205)

In the above passage DeRosier comments on the damaging effects of unbalanced written accounts of Appalachia. Although DeRosier pays special attention to her mother and grandmother's inclinations for reading and private letter writing throughout her memoirs, as readers we do not get a sense that public writing played a central role in either woman's life. Conversely, university scholars and federal agents recorded their perceptions of Appalachia, and DeRosier insists that they fail to capture a well-rounded vision of mountain life. DeRosier makes clear that she takes great pride in depicting what she feels is a more comprehensive view of Eastern Kentucky, yet in contributing to the absence of these portrayals, she also reveals vast identity changes wrought by literacy acquisition, and her perspective in looking back on the heritage that shaped her takes years to cultivate.

In part, DeRosier discusses the rich vernacular traditions of her childhood to establish the differences between her Appalachian community and other groups she later encounters. In depicting Appalachian orality as unique, DeRosier prepares readers to understand the disparities she later encounters when she leaves home. Early in *Creeker* she highlights the divide between Appalachian and "formal" names for various geographic locales, and she explains that government officials came through the area giving names they deemed appropriate, "since the residents of those communities were mostly illiterate" (*Creeker* 5). Similar to her re-telling of the Keenis Holbrook incident, DeRosier does not deny the presence of illiteracy in Appalachia; rather she criticizes the rest of America's response to it, particularly those of government officials since they placed so little value on local naming conventions. While discussing the unique nature

of mountain expressions in an interview, DeRosier says, "let me tell you, the vocabulary is not limited in my community." Horace Kephart documented this wide range of expressions as early as 1913 in *Our Southern Highlanders*, and even though he appears to compliment the mountain people by claiming that the mountaineers he observed were not "simple characters that can be gauged at a glance," he writes from a smug, observational perspective, and in other areas he calls many of his mountain companions illiterate without declaring any evidence for his judgment (203, 83). Just as the officials DeRosier cites disregard the rich oral ability of Appalachian residents and fail to ascribe much significance to it, so too does Kephart, while DeRosier emphasizes it.

In noting that officials believed only the technical ability to read and write should grant authority to name a place, DeRosier comments, "This [insistence on government-sanctioned names] appears to me to be indicative of the power and credibility given my Appalachian forebears by all those well-meaning, philanthropic folk who came from Washington and the northeast to reach down and protect us from our own ignorance" (*Creeker* 5). Rich with sarcastic overtones, DeRosier's statements point to one of the foundational problems of the discourse transition she encounters when leaving home—much of the nation conceives of Appalachia as illiterate, and because systems of power are tied to literacy in complex ways, assumptions of mountain illiteracy result in almost automatic marginalization for mountain people.

Considering such marginalization, literacy scholars James Blot and Richard Collins continue the vein of critical inquiry begun by New Literacy Scholars by thinking about literacy as a strong-text skill set *and* as something that occurs in a social arena, but the most pertinent theme of their work for DeRosier's comments center on their consideration of the systemic control over conceptions of literacy by those in power. In the foreword to *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power and Identity*, Brian Street comments: "If agencies and educational institutions could convince others that the only model of literacy was theirs—for instance, that literacy was an autonomous, neutral, and universal set of skills—then the particular cultural values that underpinned this surface neutrality could be sustained whilst not appearing to be so" (xiii). In DeRosier's example of acceptable and unacceptable naming of geographic places, she reveals that government officials judge the Appalachian people's naming system as inferior, and as Street notes in his introduction, when agencies in power succeed in convincing others that their form of literacy operates as the only acceptable form, they have succeeded in two ways: government officials have claimed the "official" definition of literacy, and they have also brought their cultural belief system to the forefront while appearing to remain unbiased. This kind of transmission of cultural values tied to literacy greatly affects those considered illiterate, as DeRosier later reveals when discussing the dilemmas she encounters at Pikeville College and again during graduate school at the University of Kentucky.

Similar to the difference in naming DeRosier describes, she also carefully chronicles distinctive features of Appalachian speech, noting in *Creeker* "there is a difference in the ways words are used" (58). Throughout both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* she defines these terms where they might cause confusion for a non-Appalachian reader, explaining that "'whipporwill' is a term used in the hills for one who is so 'pore' or thin as to look unhealthy," and "drinking and sworping" means going on an alcohol binge (*Creeker* 19, 44, 63-66). In setting apart Appalachian speech, DeRosier

implies that the cultural differences between mountain people and "outsiders" are just as great as those introduced by language divides, yet she notes that she does not feel disadvantaged by this fact. Even so, mountain speech does set her and her community apart from mainstream discourses, and as readers we understand that the transition from a mountain home-based discourse community to a university-sponsored one as a choice that requires a shift in affiliation.

DeRosier repeatedly returns to the theme of literacy as the ability which allowed such a transition, and in doing so, she reveals the central role her mother and maternal grandmother played in her literacy attainment. Even though Grace and Emma operate under sexist ideological systems, both women resist those structures, oftentimes in ways tied to literacy. When distinguishing between her mother and other women of the community, DeRosier writes, "Still another difference between my mother and the other mothers on the creek was that my momma never sat down in front of the fire or on the porch and just rested. There was always a magazine, book, or crossword puzzle in Momma's lap (*Creeker* 15). The frequency with which Grace engages in literate acts (both reading and letter writing) influences Linda, and during an interview DeRosier comments, "the best thing for me in terms of identity was that from the beginning, I knew that there's nothing I couldn't do if the first step was pencil and paper." Grace's steady reading habits encourage Linda in her own literate endeavors, and even though she enters college "absolutely unprepared socially [and] completely unprepared emotionally," she fulfills all academic requirements with little trouble (interview).

Even though Emma (or as DeRosier refers to her, Emmy) took care of her disabled husband and eight children, she still carved out time for solitary reading, despite the fact that "pure drudgery was the standard for country women in those days—a life filled with birthing, nursing, and bringing up as many babies as the Lord sent, while continually laboring in both house and field (*Songs* 42). Yet similar to Linda's memories of her mother, DeRosier highlights the central role of literate activity in her grandmother's life, commenting that she too "always had something to read" (*Creeker* 35). Just as Emmy encouraged her daughter Grace to read, she does the same with Linda. In several scenes we understand that Emmy teaches Grace, Grace teaches Linda, and Emmy also teaches Linda, creating a maternal legacy of literacy instruction that spans three generations[2]. Additionally, letter correspondence between Emmy and Grace comprises an important part of their relationship, especially when distance separates them during Grace's time living at a coal camp in West Virginia.

DeRosier also highlights the way in which Emmy's affinity for books functions as a type of resistance to the oppressively patriarchal system in which she lives her life. In order to help support her mother and siblings after her father's departure, Emmy dropped out of school after the sixth grade, yet she was still able to secure an education for all of her children. In one case, despite a lack of cash funds, Emmy arranges to pay the administrator at the Mayo Vocational School in Paintsville, Kentucky with fresh vegetables, canned goods, and hog meat so that her daughter, Amanda, can attend classes (*Songs* 125). DeRosier notes that while many neighbors encouraged Emmy to force her daughters to drop out of school and help around the farm, she proudly refused since "while she insisted her boys get a high school diploma before they went to the mines, WPA, or some other job of work, her intent was that *all* her children be able to figure well enough to keep folks from cheating them and that they learn to read

for the pure fun of it" (*Songs*, emphasis added 127). Here DeRosier pays careful attention to the distinction that for Emmy, education played an important practical and leisurely role for both her sons and daughters. Reflecting on her grandmother's beliefs, DeRosier writes, "in my view, degrees and diplomas may well prepare me to make a living, but the information and habits attendant to an education add immeasurably to the making of a life" (*Songs* 127). Literacy functions as the foundational core of those educational habits, and Emmy valued literate ability for its assumed connections to a better economic life[3], as well as a more intellectually fulfilled existence.

DeRosier repeatedly emphasizes that as an adolescent she too subscribed to acceptable gender roles: "It never occurred to me that I would ever do anything other than [cooking, straightening, 'nussing' as wife and mother] or live anywhere other than on Two-Mile Creek. I was female; that was my future" (*Creeker* 21). In *Creeker* DeRosier explains that marriage was a crucial step in beginning a "real" life, and she writes, "When I say I wanted to get married, I mean that I truly thought of nothing else," and in an interview she says, "I wasn't just marrying Brett Dorse. I was marrying what I wanted to be" (117). In *Songs of Life and Grace* she details the identity submersion that women underwent upon marriage in her Appalachian community:

> Traditionally, boys 'married on' and girls 'married off,' so the process was a little different for a female. Taking a man's name was just the beginning of a woman's commitment to her husband; indeed, she became part of his family, his community, and his work. Though, on occasion, folks in her new environs might remind each other that some wife or another had been perhaps 'a Barnett from over on Hammond,' the woman's identity was expected to be completely submerged. Even in speaking of the woman, folks would use past tense: 'Elmer Jackson's wife *was* [not *is*] a Barnett from over on Hammond.' (56)

These changes parallel the same identity shift that occurs as a result of literacy-initiated changes, and when asked whether the change in female identity necessitated by marriage mirrors that of an Appalachian person encountering a wholly different discourse community within the university setting, DeRosier responded, "of course" (interview).

Although DeRosier attends college after high school graduation instead of marrying, she spends several pages explaining this unexpected turn of events. At sixteen DeRosier falls in love with Johnny McCoy, but his eventual rejection of their relationship leaves her devastated. A subsequent relationship with Billy Daniel fails to fulfill her in the same way that her time spent with Johnny McCoy did, yet she still hopes for a marriage proposal. When one does not come, she decides to attend college and reflects: "While that looks like a good decision from where I'm sitting now, I want to make it clear that going to college was not even on the B, C, D, or E list of routes I wanted to take with my life. College was a detour, at best, and I detoured by way of Pikeville College" (*Creeker* 117). She goes on to explain that although she had multiple scholarship offers from other, larger schools farther away from home, she chose Pikeville College to

be near Billy, who was studying at nearby Mayo State Vocational School. Although the relationship with Billy ends, DeRosier's journey to Pikeville College results in identity changes that she could have hardly imagined upon first climbing the college's "ninety-nine steps to success," and as she makes the transformation from Linda Sue Preston to Lee Preston, she remembers, "I didn't want anybody to know that I was sort of looking forward to college for fear they'd think I was getting above my raisin'" (*Creeker* 127). The fear she describes here aligns with trends noted in literacy scholar Katherine Sohn's work: Sohn chronicles the educational histories of three Appalachian women who attend college as non-traditional students, and she finds that these women worry about how their home communities will respond to their continued education. One of Sohn's interviewees (Mary) admits concern over losing her common sense as a result of college, and Sohn explains that some of her Appalachian students resist the homogenization of their native dialect, fearing "getting above their raisings" (24, 35). DeRosier's fears echo those of the women in Sohn's study, yet while DeRosier repeatedly describes the constant need for self-monitoring, Sohn concludes that the women's "acquisition of academic literacy did not destroy family or community" (44). The disparity in these conclusions may result from a difference in perspective: Sohn writes about her informants from a research perspective, while DeRosier reflects on the effects of academic literacy from a personal viewpoint.

Although college provides the first series of incidents that illuminate the differences between DeRosier's home-based discourse community and the academic community, she chronicles several experiences on Two-Mile Creek that foreground the discursive divide she experiences upon beginning college, and all of these incidents happen in a place focused on literacy instruction—the classroom. DeRosier recounts that during her fifth-grade year at Meade Memorial, no less than seven teachers taught her class, since the children "wore 'em out one after the other" (*Creeker* 52). Her least favorite teacher, Janis Carroll, "was [at the school] long enough to get across the message that civilized behavior ended once you left the city limits of Paintsville" (*Creeker* 52). Like many other teachers depicted in Appalachian literature,[4] Miss Carroll devalues the language practices of her students and takes pains to introduce them to a more "cultured" lifestyle, oftentimes through music. DeRosier remembers that Miss Carroll generally had trouble controlling the classroom, and during these times she would "burst into song, which might have been effective at calming us if she had sung something that was recognizable. In a class full of kids who could have sung every lyric to 'I Saw the Light,' 'Sugar in the Gourd,' or 'Fair and Tender Ladies,' Miss Carroll was given to bringing us light opera selections" (*Creeker* 52-53). Instead of singing songs familiar to Appalachian children, Miss Carroll chooses foreign opera selections, which consequently sends a message of cultural judgment: their songs are not worth singing. In this way DeRosier's process of socialization (as Janet Carey Eldred defines it) begins, and literacy instruction provides the impetus for classroom gatherings and subsequent singing.

Not surprisingly, Miss Carroll also makes value judgments about the children's dialect and verbal expressions. DeRosier remembers, "Whenever one of us said we were *done* with a task, she would counter with 'Nothing is *done* but a chicken.' She encouraged us to respond to anyone using the term that way by asking, 'Are you a chicken?'" (*Creeker* 53). Here Miss Carroll not only judges the mountain expressions of her students, but she also indoctrinates her pupils with her own value system by actively en-

couraging them to mock other students who do not speak "properly." Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of speech genres proves useful in analyzing the consequences of Miss Carroll's teaching methods, particularly his idea that verbal utterances are not simply uttered by the speaker and then interpreted by a passive listener, as some linguists once believed. Instead, Bakhtin argues, "the fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he [or she] simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it" (68). The active response Miss Carroll encourages is one that supports her cultural value system, and regardless of whether her pupils respond in the intended way, her pedagogical direction leaves a lasting impact, especially for DeRosier: "Miss Janis Carroll and her city ways were soon gone, but not before she taught us the difference between who she was and who we were" (*Creeker* 53). Mortensen and Eldred contend that "attempts to change a person's language are, in effect, attempts to fabricate a new person," and Miss Carroll attempts such a fabrication in DeRosier's classroom (523). As DeRosier continues with her educational endeavors, she encounters more of these attempts which foster a shift in identity, resulting in amplified self-monitoring, especially when returning to her Appalachian community.

As DeRosier continues to identify with this new persona, it begins to take on elements of her new university discourse community, resulting in a split with the former Appalachian identity embodied by the name Linda.

As DeRosier narrates the transition from Two-Mile Creek to Pikeville College, she highlights the underlying reasons for such identity shifts: "While it may well have been close to home in distance, Pikeville College was light years away in all the things that nobody talks about but are critical to know—such as how to pass for normal, how to fit in, and most of all, how to keep folks from knowing that I had no idea what I was doing while I figured out how to do it" (*Creeker* 123). Literacy lies at the foundation of this process of socialization, and just as Janet Carey Eldred describes "Barn Burning" as a story that "chronicles [the main character's] developing awareness of social power structures, of class distinctions, and of conflicting family and communal values," DeRosier's memoirs also tell "a story of conflicting discursive worlds" (689).

Even so, it would be misleading to assert that all of the changes DeRosier underwent resulted from these discursive conflicts. In part, DeRosier purposely reshaped and revised her image in hopes of a more productive social life at Pikeville. She knew that being a bookish, thin mountain girl would probably not increase her popularity in college any more than it had in high school. Consequently, she changes her name and reflects, "Probably the first step toward changing my life began when I changed my name [. . .] As I pictured it, the birth of a whole new character would begin with the creation of 'Lee' Preston [. . .] Lee sounded to my ears like someone who was popular, beautiful, sexy, and fun—everything Linda Sue wanted to be but was not" (*Creeker* 126). She finds success with her new identity, and after gaining a few highly sought after pounds, Linda becomes a more popular version of herself, but this time as Lee. As DeRosier continues to identify with this new persona, it begins to take on elements

of her new university discourse community, resulting in a split with the former Appalachian identity embodied by the name Linda.

Unlike Linda, Lee remains silent much of the time, especially when asked about her classroom performance: "I received four A's and a B at midterm, but I told everybody that I had 'done okay' because it was the highest set of grades I had heard about in the dorm. I had learned in high school that admitting I made good grades created a barrier to the kind of popularity I was aiming for" (*Creeker* 128). DeRosier learns to disguise her academic prowess in order to achieve popularity, and this masking technique is no doubt a gendered one. A quietly demure girl, Lee Preston "knew when to keep her mouth shut," while "Linda Sue Preston had been just full of ideas and opinions, and that had gotten her exactly nowhere socially" (*Creeker* 128). Although it seems that DeRosier's new creation of Lee aligns with the identity submersion DeRosier describes in typical mountain marriages throughout her childhood, when asked in our interview whether Lee was more in line with gender norms than Linda Sue, DeRosier responded, "No, actually, I think it'd be just the opposite." She goes on to explain that while "Linda Sue wanted more than anything in the world to be married [. . .] Lee [was] a lot freer spirit," but in some cases DeRosier's descriptions of a subdued Lee suggest otherwise (interview). Most notably, Lee downplays her literate ability and success in the classroom, while Linda Sue openly read books, but she also remembers, "However much I loved to read, I would have given up reading in a flash if I had found a girlfriend to talk with or a boyfriend to pay attention to me" (*Creeker* 109).

During her first weeks at Pikeville College, DeRosier meets Brett Scott, and the couple marries before she graduates. Instead of ending her education, her marriage has the opposite effect: although DeRosier remembers that she "saw no point in continuing" school after her marriage, Brett strongly encourages her to finish college, and she does (*Creeker* 137). Soon after she takes the Federal Service Entrance Examination and acquires a job with Social Security, which requires her to attend training in Asheville, North Carolina. Once she finishes her training DeRosier moves to Corbin, Kentucky with her husband and son, and she continues to work for Social Security until the long, required driving distances and a subsequent car accident cause her to seek work elsewhere.

She acquires a job teaching at Sue Bennett, a Methodist junior college, and the requirement that she earn her Masters degree marks the beginning of a major transition in DeRosier's life. Her entry as a student at Pikeville College resulted in the creation of Lee Preston (from Linda Sue Preston) and a distancing from her Appalachian self, and the start of life as a graduate student—along with all of its required literacies—furthers this discourse community distancing from Two-Mile Creek. DeRosier's gender also plays a major role in her decision to teach: "Although I still believed that money was the reason for my not quitting work and being forced back to school, I think a good part of my decision had to do with my assessment of the difference between my life and the lives of other women my age" (*Creeker* 165). She goes on to explain that like many other wives she knew, she followed her husband's golfing schedule by faithfully attending tournaments, adjusting her activities to fit his, and she remembers that she "spent just about every weekend for eight summers of [her] life engaged in this waiting game [waiting for her husband to finish playing]" (*Creeker* 167). She goes on to remember that while she dreaded the thought of attending summer school, "one positive aspect

was that I had assignments to complete, books to read, and papers to write" (*Creeker* 167). As in the past, DeRosier succeeds in her academic endeavors, but when she begins work on her doctorate in Psychology at the University of Kentucky, while also teaching as an instructor, she enters the new discursive arena of "advanced" academia. Different from her experiences as an undergraduate at Pikeville College, where her literacy skills met her academic (if not social) needs adequately, she encounters a new situation a Ph.D. student.

DeRosier's transformation to Lee at Pikeville College, and her continued revising of herself after her marriage to Brett Dorse and training in Asheville reaches its pinnacle as she begins her studies at the University of Kentucky. In this new environment, DeRosier realizes that her colleagues are wholly immersed in intellectual thought processes: "The thing that impressed me, however, was not that they took classes, read books, and wrote papers, but that they never shut up about what they were doing" (*Creeker* 172). Unlike DeRosier's home community of Two-Mile Creek, where her childhood text-book-supported declaration about a state's capitol goes ignored, in the university setting DeRosier finds that she did not have one "inkling of what [her office mates] were talking about," and consequently could not enter into their philosophical and theoretical conversations (*Creeker* 173). She goes on to remember, "For the first time in my twenty-seven years, I was in constant contact with folks talking over my head, and I was not amused. Here I was having a veritable salon in my office, and I could not even participate. I mean, to hell with that business!" (*Creeker* 173). To remedy the situation, DeRosier checks out forty books from the university library and reads them over her winter break in 1968. In this instance an important shift occurs: whereas DeRosier's constant reading at home on Two-Mile sometimes (though not always, especially with her mother and grandmother) isolated her from her community, in the university setting this penchant for reading operates as a necessary component for admission into the university discourse. Although DeRosier writes that reading those forty books did not qualify her to participate in the discussions held by her colleagues, reading them allowed her to know "enough to phrase a question," and she reflects, "And with that, my former life, my marriage, and everything I had ever thought I knew and believed changed forever. One more time: *Education, if it takes, changes the inside of our heads so that we do not see the same world we previously saw*" (*Creeker* 173). Here DeRosier italicizes her statement about education, as she repeats it for the third time in *Creeker*. Several years earlier DeRosier thought that her happiness hinged on marriage, but now she reflects: "Thus it was that my own education was able to give me exactly what I had been looking for all along: love, and through that love, salvation. I read those books and truly fell in love for the first time in my life. I fell in love with ideas and with a world where such thoughts appeared to be in infinite supply—the university" (*Creeker* 173).

Primarily, DeRosier relies on a skill set grounded in literate ability to gain entrance into this community, and although entrance brings great pleasure to DeRosier's life, it also distances her from another community she loves dearly—her home on Two-Mile Creek: "Graduate school also seemingly rooted out the last vestiges of my Appalachian essence, though I did not know it at the time. Passing for normal—not hillbilly—was a journey I had embarked upon when I entered Pikeville College, and each year thereafter I had moved a bit closer to my goal" (*Creeker* 179). In this instance DeRosier discusses "passing for normal" in academic circles, but she also later realizes that this

transformation causes her to appear rather abnormal to her home community, and in this way her relationship with those on Two-Mile Creek changes by requiring more self-monitoring and consequently, a loss of spontaneous expression. Even so, during our interview DeRosier points out that in her opinion, she has also made substantial gains as a result of this self-monitoring: "I have a range of friends from a lot of different kinds of life, and it's the sort of thing that it's hard sometimes to mix people, but you know, I still live both of those lives."

In a chapter aptly named "Finding My Voice," DeRosier narrates one particular scene that illustrates how her shift in identity—from Linda Sue, to Lee, to Lee with a Ph.D.—changes her interactions with homefolk:

> Some years back, I was at a dinner-on-the-ground with about forty members of my extended family—folks who love me. We were sitting in the grass, eating Hazel Lee Johnson's cabbage rolls, when I used the word "atrocity." I don't even remember the context, but I do recall that it practically stopped the meal, mid-bite. Nobody said anything: there was just this pregnant pause where everybody stopped what they were doing to take note of what had been said. That one slip was as offensive as would have been bringing up the fact that I had returned from Japan the Friday before, which I would *never* had mentioned in that setting. That sort of glaring lapse has not happened often and never quite so blatantly. Usually, I am more careful, but it does require some degree of self-monitoring. (*Creeker* 61)

In academic communities the word "atrocity" functions as another expected part of someone's vocabulary that he or she might use in any given situation. Conversely, in the Two-Mile Creek community, the word stands out as something out of the ordinary, and DeRosier deems her usage of the word an offensive slip. While the word itself does not denote an offensive meaning, everyone observes that DeRosier has spoken a word outside of "normal," everyday Appalachian speech. DeRosier interprets the word's utterance as an intrusion on the mountain assembly, and she understands that using a word like "atrocity" represents entrance into a larger, much different discourse community, a community to which no one else at the gathering has access. Although DeRosier writes that inclusion into the university setting provides her salvation, it also molds and shapes her into a much different person than the Linda Sue Preston who left Two-Mile Creek to attend college (*Creeker* 173). Even though DeRosier writes, "Home is largely an idea, a place where we go and know that whatever changes we have made in our lives, we will still always belong right there," her recollection about the dinner-on-the-ground illustrates that some changes made to a life should not be emphasized (*Creeker* 34). Despite the fact that DeRosier also kept (and still keeps) close ties with home, she says that after graduate school "when I was home, I always acted as if I had not changed, but they knew I'd changed [. . .] I didn't recognize [it] until I wrote

it down, [but] I don't think I much liked myself during those days" (interview). Although successful at school, DeRosier recognizes that her relationship with her home community has changed, and even now, she says that she "probably [does] more [. . .] self-monitoring at home" (interview).

In addition to masking certain elements of her literacy-initiated academic identity, DeRosier also finds that she must render certain aspects of the university discourse community into something more acceptable to her Appalachian home discourse community. In *Creeker* DeRosier comments on the gendered split in acceptable behavior on Two-Mile Creek: men can occasionally drink alcohol, "but no decent woman takes even one alcoholic drink" (60). Such divisions generally do not exist in academic communities, and DeRosier writes, "Champagne brunches, cocktail parties, and wine-and-cheese functions come immediately to mind as events that must be translated into something acceptable to homefolks" (60). Like with her usage of the word "atrocity," DeRosier must again consider which parts of her university life to share with people in her home community, and which parts to exclude.

As a result of the literacy-initiated identity changes DeRosier experienced, she must choose between two very different rhetorical approaches when discussing the relative safety of air travel. While visiting with her friend Bonnie Sue Ratliff on Two-Mile Creek, Bonnie's ten-year-old grandson (Jacob) eagerly asks DeRosier about the various places she has traveled. Thanks to his incessant questions, DeRosier admits visiting a long list of foreign countries, when another neighbor (Vidie) asks if DeRosier travels to these places on an airplane. When she says yes, Vidie asks if DeRosier worries about plane crashes, and DeRosier describes how she responded to Vidie's concerns: "Fearing all was lost anyway, I launched into lecture number 347, the old song complete with statistics about how much safer it is to ride on an airplane than it is to ride in a car, when suddenly I knew exactly what to do. Abruptly, I said, 'You know, Vidie, I figure if the Lord's gonna take me, he's gonna take me wherever I am, whatever I may be doing. So, I just don't worry about it" (*Creeker* 62). This response satisfies Vidie, but only because DeRosier successfully shifts her rhetoric mid-explanation, something DeRosier says she does "routinely" and "everywhere" (interview). In first answering Vidie's questions using statistics to back up her argument, DeRosier initiates a type of syllogistic reasoning popular in academic communities, but before she finishes this explanation, she tries a different approach. In evoking the Christian fundamentalist reasoning of the churches so popular in her home community, DeRosier leaves the worrying up to God, and this strategy aligns with the belief system of her audience members. The fact that DeRosier first cites statistics in her argument and only later takes a different, more audience appropriate approach reveals that years of schooling have caused DeRosier to first rely on academic forms of reasoning and only later on those she first learned as a child in her home community. Jacob finally names a country that DeRosier has not visited (India), and she feels relieved that the conversation moves in another direction, as when she writes: "I know the rules. It's those sudden shifts I have to watch out for" (*Creeker* 63).

During this time, although DeRosier stays physically connected to her Appalachian home through frequent visits, she focuses her academic energies on teaching and continuing work on her dissertation in the field of Psychology, neither of which focus on Appalachia. After receiving her doctorate in 1972, she secured a tenure-track

teaching job at Kentucky State University, but she notes, "There was, however, one difference between Kentucky State University and the other universities where I had taught before: KSU was a traditionally African American university, and I was the only white female Ph.D. on campus" (*Creeker* 181). In this role DeRosier faces numerous challenges in overcoming her own assumptions about African Americans while also working to overturn her students' misconceptions of white women. Despite the many differences between DeRosier and her students, she reflects, "Teaching at Kentucky State taught me about making connections with students whose culture was different from my own while letting me see just how similar my background was to theirs" (*Creeker* 182). Although the content of the stereotypes differ, much of "mainstream" American society has preconceived notions of both African Americans and Appalachians, and these ideas are oftentimes negative[5]. DeRosier goes on to remember:

> If you did not see the difference in our skin color, we were remarkably similar. Many of them were, as I had been, first-generation college students; they too had never planned to go to college; they believed income was the only marker of success; they didn't much trust anybody outside their own families; and, where higher education was concerned, they also wanted to "get in, get over, and get out." (*Creeker* 182)

At this point in her life, DeRosier can identify elements reminiscent of a young Linda Sue Preston in her students, and she understands the difficulties these students encounter as they struggle to master the university discourse. In an unexpected turn of events, DeRosier knowingly sheds her identity as Lee, reverting back to Linda:

> All of this took me by surprise. By 1972, prior to going to KSU, I had become so thoroughly assimilated into the culture of academe that with the exception of my still-distinctive speech patterns, I was well-nigh close to passing for normal—as in non-hillbilly. As a result of my six years at Kentucky State University, I rediscovered the hillbilly girl sequestered since my early days in Pikeville and found that I could use cultural insight, long repressed, as a bridge to understanding more about ways my students came to know. (*Creeker* 183)

Almost ironically, the discursive divide that prompts avid self-monitoring at home also allows DeRosier to recognize that many of her students cope with a similar divide.

Also during her time at KSU, DeRosier begins conducting research on the effects of culture on cognition, including her home county in Eastern Kentucky (*Creeker* 184). Thanks to a series of speaking engagements about this research, Mars Hill College in Western North Carolina invites her to speak about Appalachian culture, and she reflects, "Consequently, by the time I spoke at Mars Hill College, I was in full hillbilly

mode. I had rediscovered my roots completely, and by that time I was taking another look at the twists and turns my life had taken in light of this new knowledge" (*Creeker* 186-87). Her speech leads to a job offer (and acceptance) to be director of the Institute for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University. Thus her realization about the similarities between her students and herself acts as a catalyst for a return to her Appalachian identity, and while she still engages in a great deal of self-monitoring while home, she can more easily incorporate aspects of her home discourse into her academic research.

During our interview DeRosier reflected, "it is very hard to maintain your value system [. . .] in a world where that value system is not the one most wanted," a fact she no doubt became increasingly aware of throughout her years of schooling. Near the end of *Creeker* DeRosier writes, "One thing I know: The hills of eastern Kentucky and the values and customs of that place and those people remain a central part of me today. It is left to me, then, to recognize that fact and draw strength from it or attempt to deny the connection, thereby cutting myself off from it. In either case, it exists" (219). The literacy skills passed to DeRosier from her mother and grandmother, as well as those skills learned in a classroom, cause DeRosier to "deny the connection" for a time, but she later decides to "draw strength" from her Appalachian identity, and those same skills enable her to narrate her journey of socialization. In *Creeker* she reflects, "I also believe I have been able to achieve full membership in both Appalachian and academic speech communities, although it has taken some time and a sense of watchfulness" (66). Near the conclusion of *Creeker* DeRosier writes, "Appalachia haunts both of us [her and her sister], albeit in somewhat different ways, and we speak to each other of regaining possession of what we have lost upon leaving," but in our interview she conceded that "it could not be regained by going back" (227). Consequently, DeRosier channels her response into her memoir writing, and through depicting scenes that explain the difficult identity choices she made as a result of literacy acquisition, she illuminates both the gains and losses that can result from entrance into a new discursive arena via literate practices, because as she notes, "culture is so interwoven with literacy that you really can't even look at one without the other" (interview).

Notes

[1] In her home community of Two-Mile Creek, DeRosier grew up as Linda Sue Preston. Throughout her adolescent years she kept the name Linda Sue, but when she entered Pikeville College she created a new identity in hopes of becoming more popular, and she began calling herself Lee Preston. While studying at Pikeville College, she met Brett Dorse Scott, and after the couple married she became Lee Preston Scott. After securing her first tenure-track job at Kentucky State University, DeRosier began reflecting back on her Appalachian roots, and she decided to abandon the name Lee in favor of Linda and began calling herself Linda Preston Scott. Meanwhile, DeRosier and Brett Dorse Scott divorced, and after DeRosier met and married Arthur DeRosier, she became Linda Scott DeRosier.

[2] For more information about domestic literacy narratives and connections between mothers, children, and literacy, see Robbins, Sarah. *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh P, 2004.

[3] For more about perceived connections between literacy and improved socio-economic standing, see Graff, Harvey. *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the 19th Century City*. New York: Academic P, 1979.

[4] Such scenes abound, and just a few can be found in Arnow (1954; 2003), Giardina (1987, 1992), Smith (1983, 1988), and Williams.

[5] To read more about the connections between these stereotypes, see Klotter, James C. "The Black South and White Appalachia." *Blacks in Appalachia*. Eds. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell. Lexington: The University of Kentucky P, 1985: 51-67.

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