

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

Pastor's Blog: November 9, 2011



By the Rev. Louisa Watkins Umphres

Last week, a group of seven BMPCers ventured south for a mission trip to Eastern Kentucky. Guided by our partners at the Appalachian Ministry Educational Resource Center, we experienced the beauty of the mountains, we struggled with questions around the environment, poverty, drugs, and joblessness, and we had conversation after conversation with the inspiring people of Kentucky. As our trip progressed, a theme slowly emerged: the power of stories.

One such story came from Derek Mullins. Derek is a young man who grew up the son of a coal miner, dreaming of the day he would escape. He told us about sitting around with his high-school buddies, discussing how they would go to college and lose their accents; they would live in the city, away from their 'hillbilly' grandparents; they would start their own bands and never have to hear another joke making fun of banjos.



After all this scheming and dreaming, Derek wound up working for a summer in high school at a place called Appalshop. Appalshop is a non-profit arts and educational center that produces an array of its own film, theater, visual and audio art. In working with Appalshop, Derek began to see his own region and people through new eyes: through his own eyes. He began to ask "who has been telling my story and the story of my family?" Thinking of the Beverly Hillbillies or vaudeville 'Appalachian Music' acts, he began to wonder, "have I been letting other people lie to me about who Appalachia is? Who we are? Who I am?" Years later, Derek now works at Appalshop full time. He escaped after all, but not the way he expected. He now shares his story and the story of his area behind and in front of the lens, playing traditional Appalachian music over Appalshop radio, and meeting with people like us.

Hearing so many stories, we began to ask some of the same questions Derek asked. Who gets to tell the story of east Kentucky and their future? And just as important, who gets to tell our stories? Who tells the story of the church and of God working in our lives? This week, I wonder: Who tells your story? Who tells you stories about God? Have you ever felt you were told false stories about yourself, your community, your church, or God?

Join us Sunday, November 13th at 11:15am in Congregational Hall as our mission team explores the many stories we heard on our trip to Kentucky.