

A Country Girl's Experience In The Smokies

By CANDICE GRIMM SARTEN

By March of 1943, America had entered World War II following the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and able-bodied men across America had volunteered to go to war.

Civilian Conservation Camps (CCC) within Great Smoky Mountains National Park and elsewhere were closed so the young men could enter the military. Without the CCC boys, work building roads, bridges, buildings and other structures in the park was halted. Only a handful of men were left to continue land acquisition, recording species of life, and protecting the park's plants and animals from poachers and fires.

With the men gone, the federal government tapped into the resource of American women to keep the country running until the war ended and the men could reclaim their jobs. One such woman was Wilma Miller, 18, of Loudon County, Tenn.

On Monday, March 6, 1943, Miss Miller stepped off a bus in front of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park headquarters feeling apprehensive, but ready to fulfill a three-year war service appointment. Unknowingly destined to marry Rell Maples of Gatlinburg, she went to work that day as clerk/stenographer for the park's ranger division.

For Wilma Miller Maples, now 85, and a resident of Gatlinburg, memories of that day and her years of work for the park are as precious as those of her childhood.

"I was so naive," said Maples. "I was raised on a farm; a country girl. (Working for the park) was a big change for me. ... I still think about it. I enjoyed it. Park Service people are tops to me."

Only the third woman hired in the park, Maples said she accepted the challenge of that new experience because she felt it her duty to contribute to the war effort. Hired by Ted Davenport, assistant to Park Superintendent J. Ross Eakin, Maples became secretary to Chief Ranger John Needham, and typist for the park's historian, naturalist, and maintenance department head.

"The rangers were called wardens then," she recalled. "They had fire towers all over the park and their job was mostly to take care of fires. But, I remember the wardens arresting people for moonshining or poaching – that was the main two things they arrested people for. The U.S. Marshall would come and preside over those trials and I took notes. ... You know, back then a lot of people couldn't survive if they didn't make moonshine."

Recalling the first time Supt. Eakin dictated a letter to her, she said, "I was scared to death. But, I guess I did alright. ... He had me take letters maybe three times. ... The biggest thing going on in the park then was that Mr. Eakin was being dragged through an investigation in Washington. He suffered a stroke on the way back and never recovered. It was so sad. Mr. Eakin had to solve issues with land acquisition. It was hard, and he had to hire all the workforce. There were people from all different parts of the country working there."

Due to that diversity of the workforce, Maples said cultural differences were a problem for park managers. But, she understood the locals because she was born in the Norris Dam area of Union County, Tn., and as one of 11 children, grew up on a 700-acre Loudon County farm.



Wilma Miller Maples has generously supported Friends of the Smokies since 1993.

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"I heard some park service people say that the mountain people weren't very friendly with them. Well, they didn't understand the local people. I'm the same way; I wait and if there's somebody in an important position, I don't move toward them. I wait until I'm introduced to them. I think people were shy. Even though they were grown men and women, they were that shy. I think it was a natural reaction because (park staff) worked for the big government and that was so far away from here."

An amusing moment in her park career involved park naturalist Arthur Stupka. Said Maples, "I did payroll and Art Stupka brought his two little girls in to introduce them to me. I had one of them on my lap and was letting her hunt and peck on the typewriter. Just then Mr. Eakin walked in with Park Service Director Mr. (Arno) Cammerer and I thought, 'Oh dear, I'll be fired.' But, Mr. Cammerer just looked over and said, 'I see you start them young here.' That was a big relief for me."

With the CCC disbanded, the camps in the park were destined to be demolished, but Maples said Sugarlands CCC camp instead became an internment camp for conscientious objectors.

"One of them was connected with maintenance work and often came into the office. The objectors did mostly outdoor and building maintenance, road clearing, and I guess they were probably the first ones to start building trails," said Maples.

She also recalled that the park was not forested as it is today, and noted there were signs it had been cultivated in recent years. "The main thing was that between Gatlinburg and headquarters, there was no forest, just a young grove of trees," she said.

Ending her appointment, Maples wanted to stay in Gatlinburg and applied for work at the Gatlinburg Inn. Hired by her future husband, she worked there five years before taking a job as a secretary at Oak Ridge.

"I was there three years when I got a letter from Mr. Maples asking me to marry him. I didn't really know him, except as a boss. I guess I cried. I never prayed over anything as much in my life. I was 30 years old; an old maid. He was married, divorced, had grown sons and was 18 years older than me. But, we had a wonderful marriage," she said, adding that her marriage in 1954 brought her back to her mountains.

"I tell you that my love for the mountains is so great – you know they're magnetic. When I go anywhere I tell people I'm like a horse trying to get back to the stable. I can't wait to get back to the mountains. I've enjoyed my years here," said Maples.

Prior to her marriage, Maples had hiked once to LeConte Lodge, going there a second time by horseback on a camping trip with her husband. She has also hiked to Alum Cave several times.

Although never an avid Smokies hiker, Maples is more than generous in her financial and verbal support of the park.

"I think (the park) is wonderful. The subject of cutting trees in the park has been brought up several times, but I think it's wonderful that it has been preserved. I do not want to be a part of tearing this earth up. It belongs to God, it's not ours, and we're just here a little while to nourish it and take care of it," said Maples.

Original Perspectives

BY EMERITUS CHAIR JUSTICE GARY WADE

On September 3, 1993, Randy Pope, Superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and his “scribe,” Bob Miller, called together a collection of Smokies lovers from North Carolina and Tennessee for a meeting. I was fortunate enough to be among a cast of wonderful, giving people that included the likes of Tennessee’s Lindsay Young, Natalie Haslam, Judy Morton, and Mary Johnson and North Carolina’s Barney Coulter, Steve Woody, and John Dickson. The Superintendent suggested the formation of a non-profit support group designed to help raise a “little money” so the park could address its backlog of capital needs. This, of course, was the official origin of the Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Four months later, Randy retired and was soon thereafter succeeded by Superintendent Karen Wade (no relation).

Upon her arrival in Gatlinburg, I asked for her best estimate of what the Park really needed. She answered “about \$3 million,” which I thought might be doable in time, but she quickly added, “annually!” That got my attention. By our next meeting, “heavyweights” John Waters and Wilma Dykeman Stokely agreed to join the board and we were on our way!

But there is an unofficial version of how this organization came about, and I am often asked to tell it – regardless of its accuracy (a convenient memory is one of the few pleasures of growing old). Let me digress for a few lines. My grandfather, West Reagan, was born in the Sugarlands in the late 1800s and lived there until he found job opportunities in Knox County around 1915. He was 6th generation in the mountains on the Reagan side, the first being Timothy, a Revolutionary War veteran (wounded in the Battle of Brandywine); his Irish ancestry (O’Riagan, I’m told) served him well as he farmed for subsistence in difficult circumstances. My dear mother, Kate Reagan Wade, loved the mountains and, after her marriage to Dad (Dwight, Sr.), prevailed upon him to trade a new 1950 Ford for two acres on the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon, just outside of the (Big) Greenbrier Park entrance. Dad finished a two bedroom summer cabin there where they, my three brothers and I spent several weeks a year – swimming and fishing in the stream and hiking and camping along the trails – until each of us went away to college. After graduating from UT’s School of Law in 1973, I returned to our county seat in Sevierville to practice. While I also served as mayor between 1977 and 1987, and enjoyed the Smokies in my spare time, I knew almost nothing about Park Administration until my longtime friend from grade school, Tom Trotter, by then a successful Gatlinburg architect, suggested that we hike “all the trails” as a part of our “bucket list” (Little did we imagine the magnitude of our ambitions; twenty years later we are well short of our goal).

So, in 1990, Tom planned a trip to Mt. Cammerer out of the Cosby Campground along the Low Gap Trail. When we arrived at the western style fire tower with a panoramic view, Tom immediately recognized the architectural significance and the uniqueness of its design, but was disappointed at its deplorable condition. Graffiti adorned the interior walls. In the week following, Tom complained to Superintendent Pope.

(continued on page 4)



Members of Friends of the Smokies’ board & staff in 1999. Pictured here are (left to right) - Superintendent Karen Wade (back), Stephen W. Woody (front), Public Information Officer Bob Miller (back), Dr. Barney Coulter (front), Natalie Haslam, Justice Gary Wade (back), Mary Johnson (front), John Dickson, Judy Morton, Executive Director Charles Maynard (back), Wilma Dykeman Stokely, and Lindsay Young.

Photo credit - Jack Williams

BY EMERITUS DIRECTOR DR. BARNEY COULTER

As this grand country works its way through the present period of diminished resources, it is even more important that we seek ways to bolster our morale as well as find affordable times and places to treat ourselves to moments or days of togetherness as a family. Have you recently considered how those precious times can be found in our unparalleled national parks? Our federal park system offers adventure and relaxation in a natural environment that is the envy of much of our planet. Certainly one of those national jewels is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, whose 56,000 acres rise and flow over the peaks of Tennessee and North Carolina. The Smokies encompass our nation’s most varied species of flora and fauna, and specimens unknown to science are being discovered each year. What a treasure!

And this treasure is open to you, at no cost. Yes, this expansive and beautiful national park is restricted from charging an admission fee. Of course federal funds are appropriated for the support of the Smokies in similar proportions to the other national parks. But, think of the revenue the others derive from rising costs of admission that are not available to the Smokies. So, how can this park keep pace with the other parks across the country?

In the early 1990s the administrators of the Smokies were asking that very question. A few visionaries, led by Superintendent Randall Pope, organized “Friends of the Smokies” to help this natural icon preserve and enhance its facilities, its trails and waterways, its historic pioneer cabins, its volunteers, and its wildlife. Since its birth in 1993 the Friends, some 4,000 in number in over 40 states, have raised over \$26 million in private funds by devising a creative and personally exciting series of annual events. The two states sell special license plates to benefit the Park, and the Friends place drop boxes for coins and bills, produce annual auctions and balls, offer great resort opportunities, bring in celebrities for public appearances, and provide numerous family-oriented activities in nearby communities.

One of the highly popular efforts of the Friends was the re-establishment of a herd of 52 Wapiti, the great American elk that had not roamed the Park in 170 years. Now, after seven years, this rapidly growing herd of almost 100 animals lives in the Park’s unfenced wildlands and many graze in full view of the public each day in Cataloochee Valley, North Carolina. All one must do is drive into this alpine valley to watch the bulls, cows, and calves going about their natural routine, unrestrained by fence or wall.

Being a member of the Friends gives one a sense that, “This park is part mine; I have helped to make sure it stays this way for us and our kids.”

The Friends of the Smokies needs you, and you need to be a Friend of the Park. It is easy and it is affordable, for everyone. Become a Friend today.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Needs and Opportunities for 2009

Throughout 2009, we will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. And with your help, we will once again provide more than \$1 million to the Park to support its needs. You can be a part of the 75th anniversary celebration by becoming a member of Friend of the Smokies, renewing your membership support, volunteering your time, or making a special 75th anniversary contribution to ensure that the Smokies are preserved and protected for the next 75 years and beyond!

Resource Education

Remount Sugarlands Visitor Center Exhibit Specimens	\$ 14,000
Parks as Classrooms Education Program	\$106,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education rangers work with teachers to provide in-Park curriculum-based lessons for K-8 students from communities bordering the Park (in TN and NC). Rangers use the Park as an outdoor classroom. Since its beginning, Parks as Classrooms has reached 100,000+ students (12,600 in 2006 alone). 	
Expand Parks as Classrooms Program Curriculum	\$205,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A \$1 million multi-year grant from Toyota is helping to fund the expanded curriculum. 	
Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program	\$ 7,200
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides wonderful educational opportunities by allowing local teachers to have the chance to work as seasonal park rangers during their summer months, and then return to the classroom to impart their newfound knowledge of the Park's treasures to area students. 	
North Carolina Teacher Workshops	\$ 24,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation's grant for science teacher enrichment workshops provides opportunities for educators to learn research and data collection methods that they can take back to their classrooms, and impart their knowledge of the wonder of the Smokies to their students. 	
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont Support	\$ 16,875
Co-Sponsor 75th Anniversary Coordinator	\$ 32,000
Oconaluftee Visitor Center Exhibits	\$190,000
(Possible federal Centennial Challenge match) -	\$190,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconaluftee is the major North Carolina park visitor stopping place. The exhibits focus on the Park's cultural history from pre-Cherokee through logging and the establishment of the area as a national park. Plans are underway for the construction of a new visitor center, complete with new exhibits, and areas to house portions of the Park's vast collection of cultural history artifacts. 	

Resource Management & Science

All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory Support	\$ 25,000
Appalachian Bear Rescue Support	\$ 10,000
Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Control	\$100,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This funding supports the salary and material costs of a crew of forestry technicians who help preserve selected hemlock stands through application of soap sprays and injection of systemic pesticides. This crew also releases two species of predator beetles that are reared at the Lindsay Young Beneficial Insects Laboratory at U.T. (funded in-part by Friends of the Smokies) as a biological control and monitors the treatment results. Targeted treatment areas will be expanded, in order to save more trees. 	
Balsam Woolly Adelgid Control	\$ 2,500

Facility Management & Backcountry

Purchase Knob Maintenance/Utilities	\$ 28,600
Cataloochee Amenities	\$ 21,800
Townsend Wye Amenities	\$ 4,000
Roaring Fork Amenities	\$ 29,200
Bat Prevention CC and Palmer Churches	\$ 20,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The historic houses of worship in Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley are some of the most well-loved places in the Smokies. An infestation of bats poses a threat to the structural integrity of the churches; the guano the bats leave behind poses potential health hazards for visitors. These areas will be cleaned, and materials will be installed to prevent "roosting". 	
Mt. Collins Shelter Rehab	\$ 10,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The backcountry shelters along the Appalachian Trail inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park have undergone extensive renovations at a rate of one per year thanks to volunteer help from the A.T. Maintainers and funding provided in-part by the Richard Haiman National Parks Foundation. 	
Trails Now 2008	\$130,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friends of the Smokies has received a generous \$2.3 million challenge grant from the Aslan Foundation of Knoxville to establish the <i>Trails Forever</i> endowment to fund a new, permanent trail maintenance work crew to maintain the more than 800+ miles of hiking trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. <i>Trails Now</i> is the pilot phase of the program, which allows the crew to get busy making improvements to trails like Jakes Creek, Baskins Creek, Forney Ridge, and Ramsey Cascade while we work to fund the endowment. 	
Trails Now 2009	\$150,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For more information visit www.SmokiesTrailsForever.org. 	
Totals	\$1,126,175



Cades Cove Missionary Baptist Church

Original Perspectives

(Continued from page 2)

Randy explained that there was no money, and Tom volunteered to donate his architectural services, while providing assurances that his “friend Gary” might help figure out a way to raise the funds. In the words of Mark Twain, “With ignorance and confidence success is sure!”

So that is how Tom helped inspire the creation of the Friends and how I “qualified” to become a board member for an outfit with no money, no roadmap for success, and high ambitions.

But let me give credit for the organization where credit is due. Randy and Bob, “the voice of the Smokies,” conceived of the plan and gathered together a board of very generous and talented individuals, unfamiliar with failure and committed to the cause of protecting our mountains. Later, help from above came in the form of Charles Maynard, a Methodist minister, writer, and photographer who loved national parks. And working together, the board enlisted 150 or so “charter members.” Charles spread the Friends’ message to anyone who would listen and by September of 1994, we had a staff and a core of volunteers (some of whom continue to donate part-time and full-time service to the cause). Meanwhile, the board discovered just how eager park lovers were to support such a worthy cause. Tennessee quarterback (now North Carolina Congressman) Heath Shuler became our poster boy. Local artist Terry Chandler painted the Mt. Cammerer fire tower and Rotarians throughout Tennessee (thanks to Bob Ely) promoted its sale. Tennessee State Senators Bill Clabough and Bud Gilbert joined with Representative Wayne Ritchie to sponsor a license plate bill (a “home run,” thanks to the superior graphic design by Chuck Morris). Park officials approved the placement of “donation stations” at strategic locations within the Park boundaries.

In the years since, the organization has evolved significantly. As an administrator, President Jim Hart (formerly of WBIR-TV fame) has few peers, and our Chair, Mark Williams, and his terrific board are absolutely dedicated toward stewardship within the Smokies. Our greatest asset of all, however, continues to be the remarkable people of this area who volunteer their time, talent and treasure to the preservation of our most precious natural resource.

Check us out on the web!

To stay informed of current events and happenings, you can always visit www.FriendsOfTheSmokies.org. News, events, and a publication archive are just a click away. **Right now on our home page, there is a link to purchase Dolly Parton’s new CD “Sha-Kon-O-Hey”; proceeds from the CD benefit Friends of the Smokies throughout 2009!**

We also developed a new site, especially for *Trails Forever*. We encourage you to check it out at www.SmokiesTrailsForever.org. There are project photos as well as volunteer information for upcoming projects.

Friends of the Smokies has a group in LinkedIn, as well as MySpace page. We’d love to connect with you!

We invite you to join our semi-monthly e-newsletter mailing list so that you can keep up with Friends of the Smokies activities throughout the year. To be included, send an e-mail to fotshb@bellsouth.net with the words “E-News” in the subject line!

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