

Interview with Jim Webb
November 1, 1990
Whitesburg, KY. Courthouse Cafe
Interviewer: Chris Green

Green: I figure the first thing to do would be to ask questions about the cooperative and from that we'll move historically up until the present time, and then move on to more specific questions about the magazine. I want to try and focus on that.

Webb: O.K..

Green: The first thing that would be good to know is your background. What were you doing when SAWC was formed and how did you start writing for that matter?

Webb: I started writing a long, long time ago. Basically, when I was in high school, but I never took it seriously or never thought about it and never studied it. When I graduated from Berea College I had a major in biology and a minor in chemistry.

But I had been writing. They had a writing club on campus called Twenty Writers and when I was a senior I'd started paying a little more attention to my writing and tried to get into that club and it was--

Green: Not full?

Webb: Twenty people only and I didn't get in. And then I went to work for three and a half years and during that period of time I decided I wanted to be a writer and so I went back to school to study English.

Green: Where were you then?

Webb: I was working in Williamson, West Virginia for the Appalachian Regional Hospital. I was buyer in the purchasing department and originally thought I would end up as a hospital administrator. Not originally, that's what I thought I would do as a result of my working. but I went to school at Eastern to graduate school in English and that was a painstaking process for me. But I thought that would be the only way that I could find some kind of a job until I became famous.

At that particular point I wanted to be the next John Updyke and that's kind of where I was headed. I, of course, didn't get a job when I got out in 1972 and so I hacked around for a year, traveled around, and ultimately ended up learning to print at a print shop owned by one of my best friends and one of my mentors.

It was a small print shop in Williamson, West Virginia and just job printing and stuff on small scale but I learned how to print. I had already done one book called Reck while I was in graduate school. I was able to do that because the hospitals had a print shop and they let me print the book at cost.

Green: Were you working in the hospital at the same time you

were going to graduate school?

Webb: Well, I worked in summer for them and I worked one semester at the Lexington office while I was in graduate school. So I kept a relationship with them, but they were just being kind and the people working in the print shop did me a favor by doing it and a girl friend of mine typed it. So it was done for next to nothing, which was the only thing I could afford.

So that actually made some money. One of my professors at Eastern worked with me on it and we did the editing and I did all the production and publishing, but I had a lot of help. The second Reck was done when I was at the print shop and we did it there. I did a lot of the actual work on it as far as the printing went.

Green: What was your motivation for doing this? Was it because you could and you wanted to do something with your hands?

Webb: No, I was always fascinated by printing, it's fun, but too I had nothing else to do, no job prospects and I didn't want a real job. And my friend basically just paid my expenses while I worked in his shop. He wasn't making any money out of it. It was just day to day. Hand to mouth kind of thing. But also too to publish things. There were precious few place in the region to get published. And at that particular time I had never considered Reck as an Appalachian literary magazine although there were many Appalachian writers in it. But that wasn't my goal. We had, as a matter of fact, in the second issue a poem by X. J. Kennedy.

We had some fine work by writers from all over the country, connections made by my professor and then my colleague on the magazine. So, then we did a third issue of it. By then I had gotten a teaching job and so I was a little better able to handle things.

So the third Reck we did I got real adventurous and we had very high quality paper, we expanded the size of it. I had it type set at the newspaper, we had a photographic essay in it, and the cover stock was really nice-- expensive compared to what we had done before. I ended up working about 200 hours on it. Doing everything except running the press because the printer, the guy who taught me, was an excellent printer so I had him do it.

Green: Had you built up a group of writers at this time?

Webb: No.

Green: Kind of like each issue was a new issue?

Webb: It was. It was a new issue. I had, of course, make some friends from my time at Eastern and from the first two Recks so word was getting out a little bit. But that issue I ended up loosing \$200. And back then \$200 was a pretty significant amount of money considering that I had worked about two hundred hours on it. I figured I paid a dollar an hour to work on it.

Green: How many issue did you print?

Webb: I can't even remember that far back. I hadn't even thought to it and there's no one to ask.

Green: Did you keep expanding the first one, let's say a hundred, and then a little more and a little more?

Webb: No, we expanded in the quality of the book. And the same thing with Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel. Each issue, the quality of the actual appearance of the book disregarding the contents has improved. Remarkably. Which is something I might warn people who do small magazines to not get carried away with because you will end up losing money.

Its an economic venture only so far that I wanted to survive but it can't survive if you lose money on it. That's one of the reasons Sand and Gravel is printed so irregularly. We've done three issues in four or five years. And people say when is the next one coming out and actually what it amounts to right now it what I've got a \$1,700 debt from the third one.

Green: You're still working on paying that off before you do another one?

Webb: No, I've paid it off. We don't owe anybody anything except that its all the money has come out of my brothers' and my pockets. And it takes a while to heal up. Its worth it and we've definitely will be doing another one soon. But distribution and sales are difficult things because they're so few book stores, relatively speaking. And they'll sell so few copies. Joseph Beths has probably sole 20 or 30 copies.

Green: Do you depend mainly on the authors published to sell books?

Webb: That's a part of it. They can take as many as they want, and sell them, even allow a little for them to make some money on it. But it's salesmanship. I carry some with me everywhere I go. If I do a reading, I can always sell three, I always carry some in my car if I'm going to a town and I go to a book store and they'll take some. The real problem is you may not be back in that town for two or three years and you'll forget what book store you took them to. And so a lot of times when you take books to a store like that you've just given them away. Which is okay except for the loss of money. It's better that they be out and available. But, we haven't had a coherent, cohesive sales plan. It's difficult to develop. For example, there's not a book store in this town.

Green: Wow. Do you have certain places that you go to in all the towns around that do have them?

Webb: Not really. Because by the time you would drive to Lexington to put them in a book store it would take a tank of gas

and you've eaten the profit on ten books. I mean I might do it if I'm going to Lexington sometime but you can't drive some place to do it.

So there's no point in that. Its just accidental. Pretty much, who ever gets them. And then word gets out and you get a few orders by mail. And people will see George Brosi¹, now George will sell some books for you. And other places like that. And you'll realize some money from that because I'll see George at least once a year and every year he'll need some more of them. Last year, at the Appalachian Studies Conference I sold him another ten or so, and George will pay you up front so that's okay.

Green: What was the cost of the third Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel?

Webb: About \$3,400.00.

Green: How many issues did you print?

Webb: Well, there was a real mix up, but we did 1,250. No, that's not right. They cost about \$4.00 each to do.

Green: So just under a thousand then?

Webb: Yeah, I think a thousand, a thousand. But that's an awful lot; we were too ambitious. We jumped it up a lot.

Green: Can you bring me through the first couple of issues?

Webb: Well, the first one was printed right across the street here. It was a good little print shop. We typed it up and Jenny Galloway Collins, a poet and writer, helped me on it. And Carl Banks, a former teacher around here, helped me with it. So we did it, very cheaply, relatively speaking, and sold it cheap.

It's real funny, you know, if somebody's not famous or something like that you ask them, "Hey, you want to buy this book, people?" You know, they have no concept of the fact that the book you ask them to pay \$4.95 for costs \$4.00 to publish. They think, "Oh, I don't, that's an awful lot of money." But when you go in the supermarket and pay \$4.95 for a book that's going to sell a million copies, people won't think a thing about it.

Green: It seems a lack of trust of locality. We don't trust the people around us to be experts in whatever we need them to be an expert in, let's say a writer or somebody else, we need them to have a certificate.

Webb: I don't know what it is. It's like somebody has a tape or

1. George Brosi is the proprietor of Appalachian Mountain Books, whose address I have to find

a record and you've never heard of them: it's kind of hard to think about buying the record. But you go out and you hear them in a cafe or something and you say, "Oh, man, that guy is good". You'd buy the record, but you'd never hear of them. I mean, everybody does that because we're bombarded with so many things. You know, I see an Appalachian publication and as long as I'm working and stuff I'll buy it sight unseen and then read it whether it's good or not because I know how important it is to support little things like this. I know how vital it is that the word gets out and that money gets back to the people putting that word out.

Green: Have you ever been invited into any schools or any places where people are learning about literature to talk about it?

Webb: Sure. All the time. Well, relatively speaking all the time. I just did a couple of classes for one of the teachers up at the high school. I'd go in and talk about poetry and writing and things like that for three or four classes. And I've worked. I've been a writer-in-residence in schools and I've read at universities and colleges throughout the region. And I've read all over the eastern half of the country, for that matter.

Green: Well, I want to get you reading something on tape and so what I'm going to do is pull something out of the first Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel.

Webb: You have a copy of the first one?

Green: I went to Gurney's house and I've copied everything.

Webb: That's good. You know, that's, if you could ever see one of those somewhere, buy it because it's worth something.

Green: Yeah. They're not to be found anywhere. I looked all over the place.

Webb: Same way with the second one.

Green: Let's see. Do you remember this one?

Webb: "Buzz Saws in the Rain"?

Green: Yeah. Do a reading of it.

Webb: Well, you know that's -- (interruption)

Green: I'd appreciate it.

Webb: Well, that's kind of a vicious one.

CM: Yeah.

Webb: You all close your ears. This one has some rough language

in it.

PERSON (UNKNOWN): Go ahead, Jim, I've heard worse.

Webb: Okay. You sure? Wouldn't want to offend anybody right here in my hometown.

PERSON: Just be quiet if anyone walks in the door.

Webb: Okay. This actually, unless I change my mind, will be the title of my book, which may or may not ever get done. But that's another story about publishing that I know about and have been a derelict about. I'm not very well organized; I'm not much of a business person. Well, this is

"Buzz Saws in the Rain".

I know all the reasons
for ending this knee-jerk
assault on a steamroller,
these mosquito drill drone,
ping pong ball full of dead fish,
stinking, rotting rancid slop bucket
full of pork barrel projects &
senate chamber glories (or
Bobby Byrd's thousand fiddles
playing when that great gash
slashed the Phelps Kentucky Pleasure Dome
in two)
blues

But none of them reasons
make any sense so

I just
got to keep
on thinking about
Rocky Pharoah & Arch Enema,
Noah Flood & Nasty Bunion
Ka-thunk, Ka-thunk
past them
to them

Broke lung, bent back, can't pay for the truck
cause it's rolling over my leg, standing
up to be counted and they hit me in the head,
throw me in the garbage can & roll me over
the hill into the river on Sunday my one day
off till I start on the hoot owl
tonight too
blues

Yeah, I know all the reasons
but someday Rocky Pharoah,
when they ain't nothing
left to tear up

and the lines are straight and true,

Stand in that white house, look at it all, all
that you've done. Then may you
ram your fist
through the pane, slice up
your arm, shit your blood, &
fuck a buzzsaw in the rain.

Green: Some anger in there, some anger.

Webb: Lots. A whole bunch. You know who Arch Enema is?

Green: Arch Coal mine?

Webb: Arch Moore. He's a former governor of West Virginia who's now in jail. They finally caught him. The one absolved the Piston Coal Company of all blame and let the state and the government pay for most of the damages after the Buffalo Creek flood. The man who was caught with a \$100,000 or something like that in his desk drawer and said nobody was giving him pay offs. Real scum bag.

Green: Can you talk about the relationship between your own art and writing and politics. It seems to be something that you're really concerned about and something I'm concerned about.

Webb: Well, looking back upon my career, I don't feel that I developed my voice until I got politically active and I didn't get politically active until one day when I realized what strip mining was doing to this part of the country and to the world for that matter. When I started writing strip mine poetry and environmental poetry and political poetry that's when I developed my voice. And that's when I think my poetry became something worth reading. I had spent years writing love poetry, had written my share of Rod McCuen type poems and Richard Brautigan kinds of stuff. But it wasn't until I started writing poems like that that I feel like I was writing anything worthwhile and not all of my stuff is so bitter and so political. I mean, I've written a lot of things I'm pleased with that are just story poems and things. I like to listen, I like to watch, I like to spend time in taverns and I do my best writing in taverns. It's one of the reasons I'm having a hard time right now is because I'm living in a dry county and it's a pain in the ass to no be able to go to a tavern and listen to the jukebox and watch people and listen to people. Some of my best poems are story poems that are not necessarily political.

Green: Are they then just being conscious of the world about you, including political consciousness as well as what people do every day?

Webb: Well, I really think you're writing has some prospect to, at least, if not help change things. at least serves as a record. I decided after the '77 flood, when all this part of the country

was just devastated, Williamson, West Virginia was where I was living, and towns around there like half of Matewan West Virginia were literally, completely washed away. One of my best friends had lived in three houses in Matewan, two of the three houses he had lived in completely gone. You went there a couple of days after the flood and there was a bare spot on the ground where somebody lived all of their life.

Green: Let's go back, let's talk about the beginnings of SAWC because, because I was reading in one of the pamphlets about SAWC and it had a quote from Bretch in it and it had a quote, "The Five Things That a Writer Must Do" and one was tell the truth, know who to tell the truth to, know how to go about spreading these truths. So this seems like part of your political consciousness was a consciousness that was shared by a lot of these people who you joined in SAWC. Could you talk about why? That seems to be one of the central points of SAWC. It was agreed on the by people who there that should be one of their goals. Could you talk about how that was reached?

Webb: It still is. I was in on pretty early, but I wasn't at the first meeting when SAWC was officially born. That was at the Highlander Center which has quite a reputation in itself for fostering innovation and descent and education. The first meeting, I got a flyer just out of the clear blue sky when I hadn't been teaching long, I don't know how they got my name or whether they just got the names of all English faculty. So I went to the meeting where I met all these people for the first time and I didn't know anybody else knew I was writing. Turns out that was the case with many of the people, of course, Gurney was an exception because he had been published, you know, Divine Right's Trip and he was back in Kentucky or, no, I guess he was still going back and forth to California, but he was famous but none of the rest of us were to speak of. But to find out that all of these different kinds of people doing different things and just to know that other people were writing about not necessarily the same things, but a lot of cases the same things, about injustice, what's going on. You know, you scratch you head and say, "Jeez, what is going on around here."

You know, in Mingo County where I was, 1.1% of that county was owned by people who lived there, 80% was owned by outside corporations. You cannot have any kind of control in your lives and it's the same way here, it's the same way throughout Appalachia, you know, if you can't control the land. And so there were a lot of people writing about these things in a lot of different ways, all different kinds of writing: fiction, essayists, teachers, derelicts. But I think everybody recognized that there were very few places to get published: Appalachian Journal, Appalachian Heritage, Mountain Life and Work, Twigs, Wind in Pikeville were about the only places to get published that I knew of in the region.

And so we all decided that one of the priorities of the group should be to figure out a way that, not only can we communicate with each other and share our experiences but we would strive to find ways to increase the possibilities of being pub-

lished because, you know, there were a lot of people sitting there writing for years like I was, and at that particular point I hadn't been published much. I had had some things published that at Eastern and maybe one or two other things, but not a whole lot. And I wasn't trying because I wasn't interested in sending things to New York or California or whatever, places I wouldn't see them and nobody would see them, where it wouldn't make real sense, you know. That can be argued, of course.

But we set out and one of the things we started to do first was an anthology, so a bunch of people worked real hard and we came out with a wonderful book called New Ground. It took a long time, there were a lot of mistakes made, even some hurt feelings in the process because of some accidental things. But anytime you have people volunteering to do stuff, people trying to do things in addition to whatever else it is that they have to do in life to get by, you're going to have slip ups. I consider myself an excellent proofreader, for example, and I keep thinking that every book that I do is not going to have a typo and yet it matters not. As soon as I get the book back, I'll start looking and see one right off the bat, and sometimes it'll hurt people's feelings. I just decided that if I ever see one in my poems that I just understand that in the luck of the draw nine out of ten things aren't going to have something wrong with them and you hope that yours is one, but if mine's the one of the ten, I just accept it.

Green: It seems like that's one of the proofs of our human craft and work; that it's okay to be imperfect because that's what we are.

Webb: That's one way to rationalize it. I personally would like for no one's poem to have a mistake. It's like one of the things as an editor I have a real commitment to publishing, if I like it, what is sent to me. And even though I have some friends, who I won't name on this tape, but I have one friend who's a colleague, who's a wonderful poet but a terrible speller and so I always have problems, but I'm always able to work with him and get the spelling right. I'm a good speller and when I send poems out, I don't send poems that much, but if I ever do that's how I want it spelled because I play a lot with words and double entendres and things like Arch Enema and stuff like that. But every writer's different. You kind of have to get a feel for that so I don't change things unless I consult with the writer.

Green: Let's talk about the editorial process, at least for the first one, let's move ourselves back into the of the first Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel. And what I'm interested in is how you went about getting the manuscripts and how you went to choosing what would go in, what sort of criteria did you have and, in determining what and how this work was going to interact underneath this cover together?

Webb: Well, there are a couple of ways. I solicited quite a bit of it, asking people who's writing I like to give me things. That's how a lot of stuff gets published and, you know, it's who

you know, just like in any other business. But also, too, I sent a letter out saying that we were starting a new venture and if anybody wanted to send Appalachian things. See, by then I had gotten out of the idea with Wreck, but also had done a book called Mucked, which is one of the only small publications in Appalachia that I know that's gone into a second printing, only private one. We actually had a second printing on it, of course, we sold it for a dollar, but I got the college where I was teaching, they had a print shop, and so again it was a case where I got this book published at costs and we were able to sell it for a dollar. It's very political.

Green: That was in response to the flood at Tug Valley, right?

Webb: Right.

Green: And that seems to me to be a direct means of action.

Webb: Yes, it was. We wanted people to think, we wanted to make a record, we wanted it to not be forgotten and just covered up and come out in a special edition in the newspaper every now and then, and we wanted it to be vitriolic, we wanted it to piss people off, we wanted people to scratch their heads and think, 'Yeah, wait a minute. What in the hell is going on around here.' And so it was very strong, very strident and I'm proud of it. It was a good, it is a good book.

Green: Something else I'm interested in is the kind of feedback you get from readers, because as part of a community that's who you're trying to reach. Did you, do you have any sense of what kind of effect, any effect that it had on people when they read it? Did they come to you and say, "Oh, my God, do you, I've read this and I just, it struck me"?

Webb: Well, a lot of times you don't get much immediate feedback, but you do when you do readings and things like that. Almost always somebody will come up and say something about one of the poems. A case in point is that we had a real problem here in Letcher County with the first Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel because some of the poetry was so strong, some of the language too, including "Buzz Saws In the Rain". A lot of people opened it and saw some of those words and, of course, thought that it was not fit, not fit to be seen, so it hurt our sales here. We would have done a lot better locally if we hadn't had "Buzz Saws In the Rain" and maybe one or two others, I can't remember, but we really hurt local sales in that respect. But those are people who aren't buying books of poetry, they're buying things because it's done here in Whitesburg or because they know some of the people involved. But that's okay, that doesn't hurt the sales in other places and all.

Green: So did that effect your editorial decision making on the next Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel? To look for things that would force people to think, but not repulse them? People who are on the edge of making these realizations and conscious deci-

sions?

Webb: Well, I think I've mellowed a bit in that respect, yes. That's not to say that's what I would do. I mean I will publish anything that I believe in and if the author is willing to stand behind it and speak up for it too. My feeling is that it's good and, you know, I don't think I would pull something just because of the language. It's subject matter can be offensive to people. It's just that there is a problem people see shit or fuck or something like that and then all of a sudden, ooh, you know, "I can't read this trash", although you hear it on tv on any of the pay channels.

Right now there's something going on on tv that's worse than that. I don't know what it is about people seeing it on the page, and it can be a wonderful poem. I personally do like "Buzz Saws In the Rain" because it was my way of saying things about J. Rockefeller, Arch Moore, and the Godfather of Mingo County Politics whose name was Noah Floyd. I don't expect people to get that but Noah flood is enough because the subject of the flood that devastated the area and Nasty Bunyon was a county commissioner who was a real doofus and his name was Rasty Runyon and so Nasty Bunyon's a play on that, plus a bunyon is a real pain if you've ever had one.

Green: Did you ever get any feedback from any of these people who you attacked with "Buzz Saws in the Rain"?

Webb: Not from any of those people, no. But I wrote a play that really focused on them--it was kind of that poem in a play--but it was a comedy, a tragic satirical comedy that did have some problems with some of the county officials.

But at that particular time, for example, a friend of mine, Ken Mills, a caricaturist, I'd always try to get him to do something for Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel but he never would. He did a character of local scoundrels, had it printed up and sold it and they loved it, even though it blistered them. But they loved it. One of them came around one day and was getting people to sign the calendar. I was in it too all the people in the calendar weren't scalawags, but he had me in it because I was writing a political column for a radical newspaper that we'd started after the flood called the Sandy New Era and I wrote it under the pen name Wile E. Coyote and changed the names just like I did that poem and wrote about the jerks that were doing all that crap. And so my friend did this calendar and one of them came down the street. We had a restaurant in the middle of town where we all hung out, it had an old bench from the courthouse in front of it and one of my favorite things in the world to do was just sit there and watch town go by, it was right on main street just down from the courthouse. And sitting there one day, this guy came down with three calendars, he was a judge and he was one of the ones in the calendar, and it blistered them all, and he was getting everybody to sign it. He thought it was the greatest thing in the world, got me to autograph it because I was in it too, got me to autograph my picture in the calendar.

Two or three of them in that calendar are in jail right

now for what they were doing then. It took ten years for the FBI and the state police and all to get them, but they got them finally.

This one guy sold the sheriff's office, and the cartoon that Ken had drawn, this caricature was in there with big six guns and a big sheriff's badge and stuff and the guy was selling the sheriff's position over his shoulder, you know, saying, "Sheriff for sale". But it had to go before the federal grand jury when they were investigating all of this, and this special prosecutor, used that calendar in court because it had been done like ten, ten years before or something like that. And the prosecutor asked Ken, "How were you able to do this and not get in trouble?" And Ken told them, "Well, everybody knew it. They knew it and everybody knew it, they just laughed about it when I did the calendar".

So those kinds of things have been happening, but getting back to the writers, what we've been doing is trying to raise consciousness and also to make a record. See, it's like that calendar now is a document that somebody was calling attention to what was going on and somebody was saying, "Look at this. What is going on?" I think that that's like Mucked and those things. There are some poems in Mucked that are in there, but they were all verbatim you know, found poems sort of. For example, Senator Bird came to town the day after the water went down and we followed. The state police picked him up at the airport, it was a small airport, and we followed them down and we were raising all kinds of sand. We had had several community meetings by then. We were trying to figure out what we were going to do. I mean, there was no food in town, everything was devastated and he came down. The Senator drove downtown, went up one main street, down the other, stopped and went into the radio station and so when he came out we started trying to talk to him. He wouldn't talk to us and somebody said something to him and said, "Aren't you going to hang around?" And he said, "Well, I've seen floods before." He got back in the state trooper car, went back up to the airport and flew out. That was the extent of his visit.

And so there was a poem for that in Mucked". There are, I don't know, five or six of them. But any rate, that's a verbatim quote from Herb because we didn't have a conversation with him. He wouldn't talk to us: it was obvious we were going to ask real questions or something.

Green: It seems like over the three issues there's kind of a mellowing of tone as they go through and maybe a deepening of consideration, I don't know. I was reading the first one and I was, I was struck by poem after poem and story after story and when I was going into the second or the third one, maybe it was because I had been reading them straight through, but I wasn't quite as overwhelmed with the material but a lot of things I had to go back to. What am I trying to get at?

Webb: Well, you still saying that they mellowed from one to three. Well, that's probably true, but also I think that the works themselves in the Sand and Gravel are longer, basically. You know, just the words themselves. And require a little more

thought and so aren't going to hit you as rapidly as with number one. A lot of the poetry there is a little short and quick and those are the ones that jump out and get you. You know, something that you can look at on one page, but look at like Lance and Gurney's thing in the third one, you have to commit yourself to reading that. I think there's more of that in the second and third ones.

Green: Why were you moving towards that?

Webb: It wasn't necessarily a conscious movement. It's also always dictated by what you have to choose from. And also, what you want to do to expand. You don't want to do the same thing every issue. You want to expand it. Every one that I've done has hopefully grown, covering more territory, expanding. There are so many things to write about in this region. I mean, you can do just about anything. I just really don't like fences.

And so I won't ever put any up around something that I publish. Any kind of fence. So I'm not going to say that, well, we're going to have twelve poems, two short stories, one essay, three drawings.

Green: But you're going to let it build its own self, just the self that comes to you.

Webb: Sure, right.

Green: Are things sent to you now?

Webb: Yeah, yeah. I'm not doing real well at responding to them. That's a real problem because my life has not been conducive to publishing a magazine. With having to take care of more pressing issues and stuff, no pun intended.

But there are some submissions and they're usually pretty good. The one thing that we decided on when Gurney got involved with Sand and Gravel was that the one fence that we would put up would be that we should always dedicate a part of each issue to unpublished writers. New writers, regardless of their age or had just been published in school things or whatever. And I guess that goes back to the days of the co-op; that's always been our thinking in terms of that it serve as a means of encouraging not just the writers that we know but the writers who are coming along, who will be the writers, who aren't aware that they're writers right now, but who will be.

We can certainly fill the book with more established, with completely established writers and it might make a little more sense to the casual browser in a book store, but we hope that we have enough names in the book to still attract the browsers and still provide an opportunity for people who's names won't register.

Green: Who are some of the people who you are assisting in the third book here?

Webb: Well, it's not so much assist.

Green: Or to recognize them?

Webb: No, just to provide an opportunity. You know, provide a form for them to be found in. I think Chris Holbrook, I don't know Chris Holbrook, and Tracy Fraser, they were both students at UK, I believe. I know Tracy ended up working here at the radio station with me. Gerald Abner, now Rita Quillan is pretty well known. Ron Collier, Joe Barret's pretty well known, Richard Hague.

Green: Richard Hague's been in all three issues, hasn't he?

Webb: He helped edit one of the issues.

Green: Do you have guest editors for the issues?

Webb: We've had guest editors.

Green: What kind of effect do they have on it? Is it just taking your view and giving it to somebody else?

Webb: Spread it out. Yeah, sure. Plus it's help, but also because Dick Hague helped do this we got a bunch of Cincinnati area writers that we probably wouldn't have gotten. Joseph Enz-weller, for example, and Richard Stansberger. I mean, there are a lot people in here that I don't know. But now, there's Harry Brown, George Ella Lyon, and Ann Shelby, they're well known, and Bob Snyder. So we have enough names to get some recognition so that people look into and say, "Oh, Jim Wayne Miller. I've heard of him."

Green: And that's almost exactly the effect it had on me.

Webb: Well, see now, the Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel is right up on the mountain which is the second highest mountain in Kentucky. It's right up here. It's the first place I ever worked in my life. When I was about nine years old, my uncle owned it, it was a very small sand quarry, it's beautiful and so that's where I got the name. It's always been about my favorite place on earth and the idea of the title is that the writing is, some of it is, new and some of it's kind of rough.

Green: I hadn't thought of that.

Webb: Sand and gravel, you see, and everybody's got a Pine Mountain. You know, this whole Pine Mountain Ridge goes all the way from Middlesboro to the Breaks. And any place where you can cross this ridge, there's a place here where it goes right by my house and there's over at the pound and in Harlan County, all those places are called Pine Mountain. There are a lot of Pine Mountains like there are a lot of Caney Creeks.

There are a lot of Turkey Creeks and Goose Creeks and stuff. When the people first come through they see a lot of cane there and they say up by that caney creek. So in every county

and places there'll be a bunch of them.

Green: So people with my mountain all of a sudden because of that personal identification.

Webb: Well, you know, trying to make it more universal. But it is my mountain. So that's an ambitious undertaking and it's a lot of hard work and you can't do it if you think you're going to make any money.

Green: That doesn't seem to be the purpose of it.

Webb: It's not. The purpose of it is to get words out.

Green: One of the most interesting things about this third magazine was the transposition of George Ella Lyon's wonderful talk about the community and the writer with Lance Olsen's views of disintegrating foundations with in a postmodern discussion. And Gurney kept referring to it throughout the interview, with a "oh, my God", or a "I can't believe", you know. We keep looking for foundation and so that was interesting, that really brought up the question. One things led me to this magazine was question of community.

Webb: Well, see, that's not any kind of a conscious thing because we put people in alphabetically.

Green: Oh, okay.

Webb: No, I'm joking.

Green: Oh.

Webb: See, that's one of the interesting things that you can do with work: you can take things and really expand their impact by what you put them between next to.

Green: Tell me about the radio station you manage, WMMT at Appalshop.

Webb: We have a guy on now, a retired fella who does Bluegrass and Bluegrass Gospel. Had Jazz just before this, we just had Gatewood Galbraith's campaign manager and another candidate, the head of the Green party, on this morning at 10:30. At 10:00 we had a series produced at WFPL in Louisville called "Down to Earth", a thirty minute environmental interview talk show. And then we have some real creative funny people doing programming.

Green: That's great.

Webb: Yeah, I got involved with it like I get involved with most things-- just because I believe in it and want to help make things a little better if I'm going to live here. It behooves you to take a part in what you you're doing where you are and try to make it better. I've always felt that.

Green: Inside the cover it talks about, let's see, where does it talk about Appleshop? It says Appleshop production, what's this, what's the -- (interruption)

Webb: There's no connection? Read that.

Green: With Appal Apple Productions.

Webb: That's my brother's and my company. That's why it's New York and Whitesburg. He lives in New York City and I live here. It's Appal for Appalachia and Apple for Big Apple.

I don't have a card with me right now, but at any rate my brother provides a lot of the financing for this, most of it.

Green: What does he do in New York?

Webb: Well, he went to New York as an actor. He does voice overs now. He's the voice on many tv commercials you've heard. That's my brother. That's the apple of Appal Apple.

Green: When you guys get together to do a project do you just put it underneath the company name?

Webb: Yeah, we talk about doing a lot of things. This is the most concrete thing that we are doing right now. I'm supposed to be writing a new play. He wants to direct a movie and things like that. He's actually written a script lately apparently and so there's no telling what we will ultimately do, but we've done three Sand and Gravel's.

Green: What's Sand and Gravel's connection to SAWC besides the people?

Webb: Just the people, you know. That's all SAWC is. There is no office, there is no officer, there's no money. We do have an annual meeting which we almost always have and we just had it. Shame you couldn't make it.

Green: I know, I thought it was in November. Gurney told me it was in November. And then I found out, I wrote a letter down to Pat Arnow in East Tennessee who was organizing it, and she said it was too late and I pounded my head against the wall. Can you give me an overview of it. I've heard kind of what went on.

Webb: Basically what went on, in addition to what we usually do, was a very serious and somewhat strenuous gathering. We talked business and read, mostly read, about all day Saturday and didn't get to the sworp 'til about too late, everybody was read out and stuff, but we did have a mild mannered sworp which was always a part of it.

Green: Now, what's a sword?

Webb: That's a having a good time. You know, drinking one if you want to, that kind of thing. Dancing a little bit. Hooting and hollering. That's always been a part of our feelings about it. I remember one time, to digress a little bit, after we were getting together after the flood in '77, we were trying to have a party, this was some months afterwards when nothing was back to normal, but at least you could get together, and all we did was stand around a talk about strip mining and the scum bag politicians.

Green: So, it's the feelings that come and what needs to be known. People just feel and then there's a need to be a party?

Webb: Well, sure there's a need to be a party. But see what happened when I was talking to one of my best friends I said, "Wait a minute, James, listen to us. Even when we're trying to relax we can't even let it go. This is crazy. We gotta quit eating and breathing and sleeping this. We gotta try have some kind of a normal life too, you know."

Green: So how did you resolve that? That's an issue I'm dealing with.

Webb: Well, we quit talking about strip mining and we started talking about drinking, hooting and hollering and getting drunk and raising cane and having fun. That's how we resolved. We said, man, this is crazy, you can't talk about this. You don't have to be serious every minute of the day. You can let loose every now and then and we do at the co-op meetings, pretty much. Now not workshops or anything like that but you learn a lot from them anyway. And every year new people come, so we make new friends and stuff.

One of the main things out of this year's is that we decided to publish the next Sand and Gravel as an issue that deals with censorship and that we will include works that have been censored. Some things that could only be published in something like Sand and Gravel. For example, there are some people in the group who will publish some things but haven't had total freedom like we have with Sand and Gravel and haven't been able to publish some things that they believed in. And so we'll publish some of those things. Things that might not see the light of day otherwise. But it's has to be all stuff that's going to have some kind of social import. And its not going to be stuffed just to titillate, but stuffed to educate. So that should be the next Sand and Gravel.

Green: When is its perspective date: the next two or three years, next year?

Webb: Well, I'd hoped to do it by Christmas, but that's an impossibility, I realize now. But several people are going to help edit it and so I'm sure it will be done by spring. Winter may not necessarily be the best time to come out with it, so maybe aiming for early spring. But you've got to understand that when you have no staff and you have nobody paid to do anything,

and when you deal with a derelict like me that deadline's are hard to set and/or reach.

But that's one of the reasons why I like having other people involved with it because that helps speed the process or at least helps move the process. I don't think speed is an appropriate word.

Green: Take over?

Webb: Well, to prod. But even five miles an hour is a speed. What else? What's next?

Green: A thousand questions. Okay, got through what happened at the meeting: you were talking about the freedom to do publish and that's implicit in that you're doing it yourself, where as most, such as Appalachian Journal and Appalachian Heritage, are linked up to universities and I've heard of several occasions that Berea College has been vicious against politically active people. So is that one one of the things that makes Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel different?

Webb: Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons why we do it. And we've always been aware of the fact that Berea College has got to write its alumni regularly. I got a letter from them just the other day asking for money. You know, if they get involved in a controversy, if they start doing things besides the-granny-on-the-swing-on-the-front-porch stuff they're going to piss people off and gonna cause problems. And there's a need for publishing those kinds of things. I like all of those publications don't fit what they are trying to do and I know that and it doesn't bother me and it doesn't cause me to not like them or appreciate them at all. It's just that can you imagine "Buzz Saws In the Rain" in Appalachian Heritage? But there has to be a place for political writing.

Green: I've been going back and I've looked at things like the Unrealist and The Appalachian Intelligencer. And there seems to have been a whole hoard of these magazines in the early '80s and late '70s but they seem to have died off.

Webb: I don't know that a whole hoard would be appropriate.

Green: Comparison.

Webb: Compared to the end of the '60s or early '70s, yeah, yeah. I remember those. Mountain Call was another one that you might run across in your travels that had the, actually one of my, one of my poems that, it's very political, but I could read it in church. It's a poem called "The Day the X Man Came" and it was first published in the Mountain Call. They did a special, cause I wrote it right after the flood. Then I published it in Mucked and then it was published in Southern Exposure. I think that that's a poem that's been like in five different places.

Green: Which is just a wonderful thing to have because something

that needs to be published should be published again.

Webb: In the next Sand and Gravel, for example, we will probably be republishing some things. We actually haven't even had our first editorial meeting. The idea just came out of the meeting in Highlander and that was just three weeks ago. We're still working on what we're going to do with it, but my thinking right now is that it might be like a third previously published stuff which is worth being republished. A third of stuff that couldn't get published that some people wanted to have published, but because of where it was or whatever, where it was submitted, they couldn't publish it. And then maybe a third just completely new stuff. I mean it's nothing concrete about that, but that seems to me that might be a way to go, but some other people may think that it could go a different way. But whatever, it's going to be a hell of an issue.

Green: Sounds like it. Especially on the tail end of all the artistic debates that are going on with crosses and photographs.

Webb: Well, that's, of course, prompted it all. We were trying to figure out what should our response be to assholes like Jesse Helms and so we thought what better thing to do than to do what we can with no government financing whatsoever. And publish the things that couldn't be published cause all of those other things are supported by the government. Even The Appalachian Journal, publishes great stuff, it's published some stuff of mine that I was real pleased that they were brave enough to. I think Jerry William has done wonderful things for Appalachian literature, maybe as much as anybody. And Gurney has, of course, been in the forefront of everything and with unbounding energy and encouragement.

Green: Well, let's revert back to a specific sight inside of a magazine. One of the things I'm interested in talking about is how when something is written it doesn't exist alone.

Normally, when we go into a classroom, and my experience with literature poetry has been, a poem has been taken out, set before you and you are to commune with it and the gods and forces that were behind it; but in reality when a poem or story comes out in Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel it's talking to and it's discussing with the other poems around it.

You used "dialogue" earlier, or maybe I dreamed you used it, and you said there was an internal dialogue between the poems and things that you put in here and I'm really interested in how the people who edit it consciously use that process to bring things together that will enhance one another.

For instance, if you put two poems together and they don't have anything to do with each other then it becomes obviously that they are different. But if you put together a group of poems that are political they amplify each other's effects. When we were talking earlier you made the awful joke that I believed about putting the work in alphabetical order, then you said no you don't do that, obviously. So what sort of criteria do you use for placing work in a certain order?

Webb: I just think it's thematic. If you've got three poems about what an ordeal it is to be sixteen you put them together. Or if you want to have things that contrast, that approach something from two different views.

On some of my radio shows I'll do that; like yesterday evening I did three hours of Halloween music, but not just funny Halloween music, I played the Bluegrass song "Devil in Disguise", but everything I played had a double meaning because you see a lot of devils at Halloween and disguises but that was just pretty standard Bluegrass tune. It's a Grand Parsons tune.

I mean I'll actually do a radio show each week and all the music is around the theme. Sometimes it will be frivolous, other times it will be really serious. But at the end of any show you can look at it and you look through all of the songs and you'll see that they are all tied together.

And so I'll try to do that. Sometimes you have three poems that don't fit into anything else that you are doing to put those three in a row. And if you're looking for any kind of connection between them you won't find it because there isn't any. But you just like them because they are good poems and good things need to be in it. And I have a tendency, if you're going to do more than one poem by somebody, to have their poems together.

I mean those are kind of nuts and bolts ways to approach it, but that way a reader, if they read something and they're not jumping around, can read all three poems by somebody if they like the first one.

Green: You begin to see what that person is up to.

Webb: Yeah, and you try to get a feel for that person's voice. I mean a million ways to do it.

Green: When the editorial staff is selecting things to go into Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel, is it based on individual work? Or let's say that you have a group of five poems and from two different people, one person has five poems and other person had five poems, and they each have a good poem, but the two poems have nothing to do with each other is there a primary criteria on the individual piece of work?

Webb: Sure. And then too, say somebody submits three or four poems and they come close and you look at it and say, I couldn't; but then sometimes you pick the one that's may not, if it had come in by itself, might not have knocked you out, but you can see in the three or four poems there's somebody that's coming close.

Sometimes you do things like that to encourage, I mean we'll publish one. May not be the best poem that person's ever written, certainly probably not going to be the best that person will write.

Green: But maybe they'll write the best poem because they got one published.

Webb: Yeah, later on down the road. It's just the individual. I mean, everyone's an individual case you just judge them that way. Sometimes you just you open the envelope and you see the poems and they don't fit the what we're doing at all and it might not even be bad poems, but I do have a tendency to want things that bring you to an edge or take you to an edge.

You know, where you have to think about it or you're going to fall. I haven't necessarily been totally thrilled with everything that's been in the Sand and Gravel and I think every person who's worked as, whose done some editing for it would say the same thing. I would hope they'd say the same thing.

And that's where, again, having different editors work on it is, to me, a real good thing because you do get different perspectives and you get a much broader view. I could edit it completely by myself with no input whatsoever and probably sell as many copies but I don't think it will be as appealing.

I just think things like this aren't ever going to sell very many copies, whatever, however, you do it and so I've kind of just resigned to doing it the best way that we feel it should be done and not worry too much about it. Take our licking and heal up and then come back and do another one another one a year or so down the road. I am determined that the Sand and Gravel is going to survive, but I'm not going to get rubbed in into any kind of a every September "Sand and Gravel" is going to come out. Well, I may, hell, if it makes some money sometime down the road when we could actually afford to get some help on it and stuff and it wouldn't be a major loss. But I'm not going to lose \$1,700.00 every six months or a year. I can't. It's that simple. I wish I could, you know.

And so, that's all, this issue is still going to sell. Everywhere I go I'll sell two or three and so that's gonna knock the debt down just a little bit each time. So it's probably actually down to about \$1,600.00 now if I think about it: I just haven't thought much about it. But there are plenty of copies still available of this one. The first two are indeed collector's items if you ever see one. George Brosi had one of the second one and he had the original price on it, which I think was \$6.00 and I should have bought it. I think that would be the cosmic irony to lose money on something and end up buying it. You know, because there are so few copies of it around. I said, "George, you know you can't, you can't get copies of that book."

Green: I asked Gurney if he had one, because I really needed to see one, and he very preciously took out his three copies and was amazed that there was only three copies left.

Webb: That's the tan one with the boys on the cover: And the dark tan, the cream one, yeah I love that cover. I like this cover too. Needless to say.

Green: Which is a real good thing.

Webb: I can't blame anybody but me for it.

Green: Who did the drawing?

Webb: A real fine artist from here in Letcher County named Jeff Chapman Craig. It's here, this is it.

Green: I noticed that throughout the other two Boyd Carr had his drawings. Is he going to make a reappearance in another one?

Webb: Oh, very possibly. Yeah, he's a wonderful artist and writer. He lives in Charleston, South Charleston, West Virginia.

Green: Okay. One more question: how and why did you choose the paper stock? Also my copy is missing pages 29 and 30.

Webb: Well, originally we had an extra blank sheet in the front but the printer left it out. We used milder mannered paper than this for it, it's still a thin card stock, a contrasting grain, you know just for looks. We had it printed in Pikeville, and they sent it to Lexington to be bound in the binder.

Green: Didn't send the instructions in?

Webb: Well, they didn't know what that extra shoot was for, didn't put it in there. So I'm not real happy, it would have made it look a lot better. Well, you're definitely missing a page.

Green: Well, I appreciate little imperfections, but when you're a person who's making it you're not apt to be happy.

Webb: I just looked to make sure the pages aren't upside down and stuff. See, we collated it ourselves to save money.

Green: This is something else. This is something that's real, real important. Two things actually. One thing is that I would like to get in contact with some of the people who you published in here and talk to them about, about just their writing and why they selected this, this place to give their things to, and talk about that in relation to the rest of their work. I'm looking at this as a community effort because there's an editor, then the writers, and then there's the audience all of which are, of course, inter combined. And so something I need to do is figure out, I can get a hold of people like Jim Wayne Miller and George Ella Lyon, but the rest of the people are pretty much enigmas right now.

Webb: Well, Bob Henry Baber is somebody you need to talk to. Jenny Galloway Collins would be interesting to talk to. She lives here in Letcher County. You might even call her while you are here. Joe Barrett's dead.

Green: Really.

Webb: He committed suicide a few months back. He lived in Lexington. Richard Hague would be a good one to call in Cincinnati. Michael Joseph Polly would be a good one. He's real active

in West Virginia. Mike Hanson lives in Cincinnati. He would be a good one to talk to. He's published a couple of novels and book short stories and stuff. He's a fine writer, a real activist.

Green: Who have been some of the past editors? Guest editors?

Webb: Gurney and Bob Baber and Dick Hague.

Green: So all of these people have been editors along with being contributors.

Webb: Jenny Collins has helped edit it a little bit. Yeah, those would be good ones to call. I don't know where my phone book is to give you numbers.

Green: Buried. Deep, deep down.

Webb: On my desk somewhere. I'm not very well organized.

Green: I've only been organized to do this.

Webb: Okay. I've got to get organized and get back to work so let's head on up.