

Complete

Interview with Pauletta Hansel and Renee Stamper
Conducted at home of Rita Green
November 18, 1990
Interviewer Chris Green .

Green: Well, let's go back to 1975, Pauletta you're fifteen, and Renee you're seventeen?

Stamper: Nineteen.

Green: O.K. so there is four years of difference. Pauletta, did you get entangled with the Soup Bean people before SAWC?

Hansel: Not exactly, it all kind of happened at the same time. I was writing as a teenager and sent some of my poems to Mountain Review, which was a magazine that Appalshop was putting out and at the time. The editor was a guy named Don Askins. And about the same time I had submitted poems there, the Southern Appalachian Writers' Co-op was forming. And so the poems were accepted, and I got a call from them a month or two later asking me to come down to a meeting of this group. And the people who were there were Don Askins, who is now a lawyer living in Virginia near where he grew up (I don't think he is writing at all these days or real connected with any of that); Peggy Hall who is still connected with SAWC; Jim Webb and Bob Baber didn't make it that particular meeting (I didn't meet Baber until I moved to West Virginia the next year, or later that year, and didn't meet Jim Webb until a couple of years after that); Ron Short who is still with Appalshop and Roadside theater. Dave Morris--I don't know what's happened to Dave these days, but Dave was actually who got me to Antioch, because at the time I went to meet him I had decided I was going to quit high school at 16, I probably would have been 15 then.

Antioch Appalachia was a branch of Antioch college, the Southern Appalachian Circuit, in Beckley, West Virginia. So I talked about that at the SWAC meeting at Highlander and they told me about Antioch, Beckley and I applied a month or so later and was accepted on the condition that I got my GED prior to graduating.

Green: Why did you decide to quit high school? Did you just have enough of it?

Hansel: Renee had set the example.

Stamper: I did the same thing.

Hansel: A few years before. I think that I felt older than everyone there and it was accepted within the family to give it up at a certain point as long as you went on and continued your education in some other way. I just did it. I felt real trapped.

Green: Renee, did you share the same experience in high school?

Stamper: Yeah, I felt pretty alienated. I did the same thing in terms of leaving high school early and going to college, but I wasn't as brave as Pauletta, I stayed home. I went for two years to the junior college and then came to UK.

Hansel: Well, I didn't have any choice if I was going to be in college because you were the last of the group that was allowed to leave.

Stamper: See, my perception of it was that Pauletta was very daring and brave and goes away from home at the age of 16. But it was really neat.

Hansel: Right after Renee had done it the college struck a deal with the local high school that they would not let any more students in unless they had finished high school or got their GED.

Green: High school is a scary thing. I know many people who were burned out too. So that was in '75 that this was going on. Did you then move to Beckley to college?

Hansel: Yes, this meeting would have been in the spring I think. Spring of '75.

Green: So this was one of the real early meetings then.

Hansel: This was like the second or third. It was right at the beginning. And so in October of that year I moved to West Virginia. And there was already a little literary magazine going on there-- What's a Nice Hillbilly like You?. Maybe two issues had been published at that point, a poetry issue and a short story issue.

Stamper: I've got all those chap books she's mentioning if you ever want to see them. I've got them all.

Green: Well, I'll definitely take advantage of your archives then.

Hansel: I didn't bring any of them like I meant to.

Stamper: But I have them all, almost everything that there was that you gave me.

Hansel: It just kind of happened that the college attracted a bunch of writers, and Bob Snyder, who is a writer/poet, was the director of the college. Pete Laska was another poet who was one of the teachers who was there from Beckley. Bob Baber ended up at Antioch; I'm not sure how. Gail Amburgey, Dave Morris, Joe Barret, Mary Jo Coleman. A bunch of folks.

Green: Was it already a group there when you arrived or was it just congealing? Because it seems like it was a real close-knit group of people who were involved.

Hansel: Well, there was a group congealing there: The Soup Bean Poets, which was what that group later became, particularly of the ones I have mentioned Baber, Amburgey, Snyder, Laska, and myself were the core. But SAWC was really something else, there were some members of the Soup Bean Poets who were connected to SAWC and others who weren't. There were a lot of things going on in little pockets throughout the mountains. Lots of little magazines all over.

Green: Do either of you have any theories or reasons? That's one of the

things that I have noticed, there used to be all these little magazines: Twigs, Mountain Review, Mountain life and Work, Plow, What's A Nice Hillbilly like You? And now it seems like the population of all these magazines has dwindled downward. Or maybe there are only a few of them I know. I was just thinking of Now and Then, Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel but I can't really come up with too many more than that.

Hansel: They're bigger, there are less of them but what's there is bigger.

Stamper: And more solid, what's there is less likely to disappear over night. I think it was partially indicative of what was going on in the country as a whole. I think it was a real time of small press activity and small groups of people empowering, is the word they use all the time now, coming together to publish themselves. I think there was more feeling that it was OK to be regional, that you didn't have to make the big time in order to publish, and they gave each other support. Do you think?

Hansel: I think that makes sense.

Stamper: I don't want to denigrate what was happening in Appalachia because I think it was really important, but I think you also saw it with women's literature, with black literature, with other kinds of literature, Chicano literature, with other groups coming together to publish and try to find a place where people could have a voice where they had never had one before.

Hansel: Also I think, just within the context of the mountains, that it was a time where people on the grass-roots level were beginning to become aware of cultural issues and positive things about being Appalachian.

Stamper: Ethnic groups were in.

Hansel: That's what I was trying to say.

Green: Can you all remember when you first identified yourself as a member of ethnic group? Let's say when you went to UK.

Stamper: I fought against it, Pauletta through that positive experience with a group of writers who were articulating all these things came to it a lot quicker than I did. I was ambivalent for many years about having an Appalachian identity. I didn't want to be pigeon-holed or stuck in with a group; I thought I was very sophisticated and European-- you know I just don't read regional literature I read all kind of stuff. I think it took me a lot longer to have an integrated view of who I was that incorporated that identity, to see how strong a part of me that it really was.

Green: What about you, Pauletta?

Hansel: For me it was clearly getting involved with a group of people who were forming an identity and finding what fit for me. I think it took me longer for me to find what didn't fit; I was young enough that I tended to accept it more whole clothe. As I got a little older I was able to look at it a bit more analytically and figure out what in my experience had been different and made differences in my perceptions.

You know the other thing I want to go back to now is that I think that it was a lot more than just ethnic groups being "in" although it certainly

helped that that had all of a sudden become acceptable. It was a time in the mountains when there was a lot of community around various issues. I think empowerment is probably a very good word for that, in that for the first time people were beginning to believe that they could do something about powers that had effected them all of their lives-- strip mining and coal companies, union busting. And they were looking to their history and their parent's history and finding those kinds of continuing powers and pressures from the outside as a strength. And SAWC and the southern Appalachian Circuit of Antioch college were very political. It wasn't art for art's sake, for better or worse, it was art as a voice.

Green: I want to read you something which I thought was very indicative of this. Have you ever seen this pamphlet, it is a pamphlet for the Southern Appalachian Writers' Co-operative.

Hansel: No I haven't seen it.

Green: And this is something that has got a great quote by Bertolt Brecht and it goes, "Now and days anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties: he must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed, the keenness to recognize it though it is still every where concealed, the skill to manipulate it as a weapon, the judgment to select in whose hands it will be effective, and the cunning to spread truth among such persons." Is that the kind of tone that people had?

Stamper: Yeah. At the time I also had real ambivalence about the interaction of politics and art. To me it was a problem when Pauletta was into all of this. I wasn't sure. I can remember getting real upset and angry and not being sure what the relationship should be between politics and art. I was afraid someone was trying to cram a truth down my throat that wasn't necessarily my truth and was distrustful of political rhetoric even if it was on the right side, or on the left side or whatever.

Green: Eventually you came back to work with Mountain Review, didn't you?

Stamper: Yeah, and I think as the years have passed I have become probably more of a . . . I believe the stuff you have just read by Brecht even more now than I did when I was 21 or even when I was working for Mountain Review. I think I have grown in that kind of political identity--the political and personal have come closer to me as I've gotten older. I think there are ways to hold them together.

Green: It is a very difficult task, a very important one. So this unity-- the strip mining, the Vietnam war, things like the flood at Tug valley. I remember reading a poem of Pauletta's called "Martyr".

Hansel: Actually that was written before all of this.

Green: How did you come to be involved in all of this? Let's say this publication is going to come up and somebody says-- Bob Henry Baber and Jim Webb get together and we're going to do this thing to fight back. What kind of contact did you have? Did someone say 'Pauletta, there's this magazine going on'?

Hansel: No, it was a lot looser than that. Some of us lived in Beckley, some of us lived in Virginia, some of us lived wherever, but people in the mountains are used to distances to see each other, and it was a closer knit community than the miles between us would have led one to believe. It wasn't like because Jim and somebody were living in Williamson they were starting this magazine in a kind of vacuum and people would hear about it: it was more of a group process that this magazine would begin. It may have begun as an idea with certain people, but when they took it back to the group the idea really blossomed.

I heard about Mountain Review, and that was something very separate to me, I heard about it and I sent poems off to it. But most of the rest of it after that time and after I went off to Beckley and became involved in all of this wasn't like hearing about something and sending something off to either be accepted or rejected, it was more of a process.

Green: What was the tone of getting together like? Was it like a bunch of friends getting together to talk about things?

Hansel: It is now. In the early days there was a lot more attempt at being formal about it, and having the coordinating committee.

Stamper: They had by-laws.

Hansel: Yes, they actually had by-laws incorporated as a non-profit corporation and annual meetings. This might of lasted. . .

Stamper: Two minutes.

Hansel: No, I was going to say six months. But then after the real connections formed it was impossible to remain that formal with each other. And the other thing I think is that SAWC has become both a lot more and a lot less than people thought it would be in the beginning. In the beginning people thought of it as being a corporation, a non-profit corporation, this fairly formal group that would publish books and that would do advocacy and would have this. . . We had the Appalshop model to look at too, which actually did incorporate and function as a non-profit.

Stamper: Right.

Hansel: And would have this solid, separate existence, and do all of this stuff. And that never happened. That wasn't the way it was to go. What did happen was that fifteen years later there is still something we call SAWC and that there are a lot of little things going on and some bigger things that are going on all over the region and outside of the region that have happened wholly or in part from the strength people have got from the connection with either SAWC itself or people who were involved in SAWC. But there were no by-laws or dues or card-carrying members, there is no corporation. And SAWC itself is no more closer to having joined the main-stream of published writers. There are individuals inside SAWC who have received some main stream attention, but for the large part people have carved out their own little niches or recognition. And I don't think people would have originally seen that as being an acceptable goal.

Green: Why not?

Hansel: Because the perception was that we need to find our place in the New York publishing scene, that we need to find traditional ways of making our livelihood out of this, we need to have a national basis of readership and there are certain ways in which this is done. But as people went on and as years went on what I think people discovered is this: no we can be successful and we can reject what we don't want out of and what we don't need out of the New York publishing scene. There are other ways to measure success.

Green: That's a long lesson to learn. I think everyone has to push themselves through. From the first issue of Mountain Review Gurney is talking about what he thinks the goals of this new mountain media, this new media all over the nation are. Its 1974 so I guess it's an old media at this point or one in it's maturity, and he talks about that O.K. "its our job to provide it, now let's see what people are going to do with it". "There was a growing reluctance of the mountain people either to join the national gluttony or to be the object of it", which seems to be the kind of lesson you're talking about. Looking a bit more down-scale at the relationships going on could you talk about the importance of some of the relationships to you or how it helped shape some of your artistic ideas, in your friendships?-- Particularly with Gail Amburgey and Mary Jo Coleman, that you guys did several small booklets together. Was there a real tight-knit friendship also underneath of all that?

Hansel: Well, Gail and Mary Jo and I only did the one and that was never particularly a tight-knit friendship, which I won't go into. But Gail was a different story and we are still real close now. In fact, many of the people I count among friend now are people that I know from SAWC. Gail Amburgey, Peggy Hall, Bob Baber, Jim Webb. Those are connections that are still very solid and real to me; they will always be. I think what other than those friendships that I gained out of the experience with the Soup Bean Poets and SAWC is a sense of finding a common purpose with people that I like. And I have not written in that way for many years, but I continue to search for ways to make something with people I enjoy being with theater groups, environmental groups. My life has been kind of a constant moving from one little group to another, often with the same people in them but with different kinds of purposes as time goes on.

Green: Well let's do this, let's go through where you were, what was going on from '74 to now, I think that would be a helpful thing to show that this was just a small part of life: eventually both of you moved off and even moved back again.

Stamper: I've been running around in circles.

Green: I'm interested in that connection of leaving and of coming back. I notice that that is the theme of a lot of Pauletta's early poetry, a thread from then, a constant leaving and trying to find things and then coming to terms with that leaving. So lead me through some lives here. You first Renee.

Stamper: From 1974? How old was I in 1974? I'm 35.

Hansel: I was 16 so you were 19.

Stamper: 1974. I was 18. I guess I was really getting ready to leave home for the first time, in 1975 I went for two years of Junior College at Lees

where my father taught, came to the University of Kentucky at the age of 18. I lived in my own apartment, the first time I had been away from home, was an English major, met and married a musician, had a child at the age of 21. What are we up to? 1977?

Hansel: We're getting close to Mountain Review I guess.

Stamper: Yeah, we are. After the, no just previous to the birth of my child, my husband and I moved back to Jackson where my parents lived. And I took a job in my Mom's daycare so I wouldn't have to leave my baby when she was little. And I kept that job during the time I was nursing her and wanted to be close to her. And then I started to get the urge to go back to school. I never finished, I stopped with maybe only two semesters left to finish my BA: I had the kid by choice, I got pregnant on purpose. Then I started to think that I wanted to go back to school and got a internship type program through Union College. I was interested in literature, I knew all the stuff which was going on with Pauletta, and so my husband and I made a trip down to Appalshop to try to sell ourselves to them as interns. So they hired me as an intern with the magazine, and he was also with Mountain Review to begin with. They then lost their editor and I got the job, so I quit school again to take this full time job as editor of Mountain Review, and my husband became director of the show "Headwaters", which is still in existence.

I had, how to describe it, a valuable but also exasperating experience with Appalshop as an organization. I guess I'm much more comfortable with the way SAWC has turned out in terms of personal relationships and all that. The magazine was very under-funded, it had traditionally been hard to fund; in fact, they said I was to be their last editor. It was a lot of pressure on me, they said if you want to do it, to take it over we'll keep it, but otherwise we'll just let it go. And I had a hard time building a base of support for the magazine for a literary adventure even inside the organization. It was very frustrating.

There was much more emphasis on film and there was a board of directors but because Appalshop started out making films the board of directors were probably three-fourths film-makers, one literary person, one t.v. person, and two June Apple people. So it was really hard to get any support for literary ventures even within the shop I found, which was real heart-breaking I think. But SAWC has done a lot more to further literary endeavors in the Appalachian region than Appalshop ever did.

I got really frustrated, and I missed Lexington and we moved back to Lexington.

Hansel: When you were at Appalshop one of the things that was going on at the same time was that George Elia Lyon and Bob Baber had done this Appalachian Poetry project and you were one of the coordinators for that. You had a couple of meetings while you were there with some SAWC folks, didn't you?

Stamper: What we were getting unsolicited to the magazine was basically a bunch of crap, they were stories about grandpa and the barn and the front porch and all that kind of stuff. And so I tried to more actively solicit material, to get people to send me material, to take advantage of this community of writers that was around us, to ask people can I have this poem, can I do this, can I do that. And I don't know.

Hansel: Which was really kind of going more with the model which later developed, its not so much we are this magazine, send us your stuff, its more;

kind of, interactive.

Green: So did you end up meeting a lot of the people who you were writing to, saying I've read your stuff and would like to meet you.

Stamper: A lot of them I already knew through Pauletta, through her connection with Beckley and all that. They were people I had met to, though at the time I wasn't active in SAWC like she was. You look like you were thinking. . .

Hansel: Well, I was just thinking was SAWC really even active at that particular time? Which would be around '80, which would be its dry period, but the people were always connected.

Stamper: Yeah, Baber and Snyder, I was publishing things by Bob Snyder and different people, Jim Webb, Hill.

Green: Did you ever get any feedback from any of the readers about any of the stuff you published?

Stamper: Yeah, we got some. And again it was like there were two different lines going there. There were people who were reading the magazine who wanted the stuff about gee-how-good-it-was-in-the-old-days and the old tradition thing, kind of the more sentimental type stories-- you know what I'm talking about? And went to the magazine for that, and then there were people who wanted to see the magazine reflect more of the diversity that I truly believe does exist in Appalachia too. To not once again present a stereotyped view of Appalachia. And when I took over the view of the magazine and it being my view that the goal of the magazine was the opposite of what the magazine was doing, it was perpetuating the very stereotype it had set out to break by making it look like all hillbillies did was-- if we were to paint a picture it would be a picture of a barn, or a horse or a mule or a guy with a plow, or you know. And in that way reflect our culture, but the mountains have always been a lot more, a lot weirder than that.

Green: So how was this effort received by people who were used to the other format? Was there-- "OH MY GOD! How can you do that?!"

Stamper: There wasn't an uproar. There were some comments but there really wasn't a furor.

Green: That's kind of sad.

Stamper: More of the uproar was in Appalshop itself.

Green: What were they afraid of?

Stamper: I think they were afraid of losing the blue-haired ladies who read the magazine and like to watch movies about people whittling-- their money.

Green: Well money is one of those thing, at least SAWC and Soup Bean were able to support themselves and were responsible to no one for their money and could do whatever they wanted.

Hansel: We didn't have any, that's one of the good things about not having any money.

Stamper: I don't feel that way about Appalshop. Now at the time, I did have some bitterness, some problems with Appalshop: I remember a couple of board meetings that I either left in tears or cried after I got home. Just because I felt they didn't understand what I wanted to do with the magazine.

Green: Was that the reason for the eventually last and final issue, the lack of energy, not energy but frustration?

Stamper: Well I didn't get much help from them for funding, there wasn't much help for literary projects, it's much easier to get money for a film, then and now than for a publication, from NEA or wherever, its just harder to get money for publications. And I didn't feel the support from them and I was homesick for Lexington. And so was my husband, and they said we told you before if you weren't going to do it we were going to let it drop so I just let it drop.

Green: Pauletta what were you doing at this time? Where were you?

Hansel: I went to Beckley in '75 and stayed there for four years. There were a lot of things that happened, a lot of shuffling and restructuring that happened during that period. SAWC as an organization fell apart after a couple of years; obviously, it didn't stay fallen apart but at that time it was. And there were other kinds of reshuffling and reformings, the Soup Bean Poets established their own identity and published a few issues of What's A Nice Hillbilly Like You and published Soup Bean. You know Don Askins, who was one of the big guys in SAWC and director of Mountain Review, left that area, left Appalshop and so there wasn't the same kind of Eastern Kentucky contingent that there had been. A lot of the base of operation of what had been SAWC turned to Jim Webb who was in Williamson and Bob Baber who was in Beckley part of the time and in Richwood part of the time. And they published a couple of little magazines you probably know about, Mucked, and Strokes. And then the other thing that happened was at the end of the 70's Bob Baber, Gurney, and George Ella Lyon got a grant to do something called the Appalachian Poetry Project. Has any one talked to you about that?

Green: Gurney has, and I've got an interview with George Ella to dig into that.

Hansel: In some ways that was kind of a resurgence of all of this. There was always kind of an up and down pattern, in the mid 70's there was SAWC and a lot of gathering and happenings and poetry reading across the region about that. And that all kind of died down, and then in the early 80's there was the Appalachian Poetry Project which got some people back together and also formed new connections as well.

During that period before I moved to Cincinnati I went up to Cincinnati to do a reading up there and met Mike Henson and Dick Hague. And after I moved from Beckley and the Appalachian Poetry project happened, Mike Henson and I were regional directors for a reading up there. And Dick came to that reading and met Bob Baber and Gail Amburgey and a bunch of other people connected with the old SAWC and some kind of new alliances began to form.

For a period of time what began to happen around SAWC happened either in Cincinnati or with a Cincinnati base, Dick Hague and I.

Green: Give me an example of some of the things.

Hansei: I guess it started again in 1982 or 83 doing the yearly SAWC gathering at Highlander, where we get together once a year and do that. Pine Mountain Sand and Grave happened when Jim brought the idea to a meeting at Highlander and then doing it. Dick and I organized some readings in Cincinnati and got together around that. There was a reading at Appalshop that Jim Webb organized. The other thing that happened to bring kind of new groups of people together was that some of us went in the early 80's every year to the Hindman Center. And that's where I got to know Peggy Hall though I had known her before that. Peggy, Gail, and I were published in an article about Appalachian women writers in MS magazine, and at the time the article was written none of us knew each other but then when the article was published I met Gail and we just happened to go to Antioch, because she was not at Antioch at the time the article was researched, I think, maybe she had already been there for one summer, but I wasn't there at the time it was researched and written. Then I met Peggy a few years later. None of us know who the fourth woman is.

Stamper: I think you ought to hire a private detective.

Green: You will probably meet her later on in life.

Hansei: Possibly, she'll show up. And another person who went in the early part of the 80's pretty regularly to Hindman Workshop was Jerry Wayne Williamson who is the editor of Appalachian Journal, and then he started publishing a lot of the people who were in SAWC. In that time Dick Hague published there, I published there, Jim Webb published there. He did the bibliography, and George Ella published there, though I imagine George Ella published in Appalachian Journal before then. And so that kind of worked for a while anyway for people who had been involved with SAWC.

Green: I want to go back and talk about the final issue of Mountain Review where you dragged Pauletta into Mountain Review in the last couple of issues because she was poetry editor. And this is a poem from the final issue which I want to get Pauletta to read out loud which she had written which seems to me to catch every thing which was going on and we can talk about it a little bit.

Hansei: OK, you want me to read it now?

Green: Yeah, let it go.

Hansei:

Eastern Kentucky Road Closed

You said, I can't leave
if I did, one of these days
I'd be driving down that road,
thinking about home
and hit the county line and see a sign saying
Road Closed
Turn back, boy, you ain't going home
because it is no more.

You know I left once
but the mountains would not let me go
and I came home

like a child that heard its mother call,
like a bird that smells the scent of spring
but it was not there
just like Momma ran off with some no account man
and spring will not come again.

The land is sinking about me
all the while embracing
the hands that hold it down.
And I can't stand to stay
but I can't bear to leave.
before it's gone,
until the mountains disappear
once more forever.

So girl if you're leaving
just be sure to know
what you see then you will not see again.
Just be prepared as you hit that county line,
singing about home
that you'll come upon a sign saying
Road Closed.

Green: What kind of thoughts does that bring to mind? I'm curious.

Hansel: Well I think that to a certain degree, what we saw really wasn't there anyway. I think that I, during a certain period, romanticized the mountains even while living in them. And kind of had this fixed idea in my mind of kind of what the connections were, of what SAWC was, of what I was in connection to that. It could of been a figurative leaving as well as an actual leaving, but in kind of getting some distance from it and reassessing my connections and with the people there and what I knew it was really much stronger, but it's just with the increased view.

Green: Maybe it's something that came on with maturity too?

Hansel: And so I think that's why it could have been a figurative leaving as well as it was an actual leaving. But as it was it was what I chose to do was to leave and to stay gone. I don't feel any real sadness or any real sense that it would still be there if only I had stayed and kept it going or what ever, I don't feel any sense of that. I think that for an earlier generation that may have been true that people who left the mountains in the 50's or 60's or even before, definitely before, that there was something there that is gone now, for better or for worse. But for me it was already, mountain culture and life, was already such a state of transition that it wasn't like some fixed thing.

Green: Well, Renee?

Stamper: I guess that it's similar. At that point in time that that poem was published and the magazine was ending was a time of real disillusionment for me. I think that by that time Pauletta was starting to work through some of her ambivalence, she had gone from romanticizing about the mountains and that strong sense of community with other writers, I had gone from being real

skeptical with it to coming to terms with Appalachian identity. And then when I was trying to work through that was running up against brick wall with people who were supposed to have the same personal, artistic, political goals as I did. I felt a real strong sense of personal failure about the magazine. I was ready to leave, really ready to leave, but a lot of it was just to get the hell away from it, lick my wounds, whatever. And it was not until years later after my marriage broke up and all kinds of things had happened that I went to a meeting at Highlander, a SAWC meeting, and that period of time has been real nurturing for me, it has been real important to me in the last four or five years. I was running from that at the time, I really did have the feeling that this road was closed-- get the hell out of here.

Green: Let's go to the nurturing times then.

Stamper: Let me just say too that it was a personal failure too, it was real important to me and it just didn't work out. It was a real crucial time in my young adulthood.

Green: And you just got caught up in things that were happening. It seems whenever we take on a project that it is ALL OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

Stamper: And I was the project director. I had to do just about everything, lay out, paste up, just about everything.

Hansel: I think that that's a real important thing to talk about, both in the sense of personal failures that people had along the way but also just the disillusionment and bumping up in a negative way against people who were working for the same thing, because it has certainly happened throughout the history of SAWC as I know it. There was a sense of community and support but there was also a lot of anger and in-fighting. There was a real rift for a long time between a lot of the people who were involved in SAWC and the Soup Bean Poets because of Bob Snyder's poems were inadvertently left out of New Ground.

Bob never did believe that it was inadvertent. I think that he was probably wrong about that, but at any rate it was already kind of a tenuous relationship between them and some of the stronger forces within SAWC and it was enough to send them over the edge. Antioch Appalachia faltered during that period as well with Antioch pulling back and pulling its funding from pretty much all of its branches. But the other thing that happened to the Soup Bean Poets was that Bob Snyder and Pete Laska had a major blow-out. There was never a real easy alliance between many of the people at Appalshop, the people who were doing film and music and the writers in the region who felt that they were being over-looked. You could go on and on about those kinds of personal struggles and then professional or political struggles; but when I look back I tend to not so much forget that, but to not place a whole lot of importance on it because of how it's all kind of evolved and mended. Snyder and Laska's struggle was a major breaking point at that period of time; last year they published another book together.

And Jim Webb is now at Appalshop having made whatever peace that he feels like that he's need to make, and I think feeling certain support now for certain of his publishing efforts as well as his efforts as someone trying to make a living in the mountains. Over time those things mend and it's not as if you can't see the cracks--the cracks just add to the strength and the particular phases this organization has had.

Green: It seems to me to be a family even: you disagree with people, you hate them at time, as you hate your best friends at times, but at the same time it is those schisms and coming back together again that really allow us to know each other.

Hansel: And coming back together in new ways.

Green: Well, lets look a little bit beyond the time that some schisms were starting to appear and that Mountain Review had collapsed: now you were saying that this was the time that you came to Cincinnati and that SAWC was being joined there with yourself and Richard Hague, this was new era of reforming-- where did that lead to?

Hansel: Wherever we are now, and I'm not sure where we are now. I think what it lead to was a place where there are a lot of people doing a lot of things, either with or without the help of the people who have been involved with SAWC, but in generally being supported, drawn, drawing and helping each other. It's not an easy group to describe, I don't know if it is even a group. But there is still a sense of connectedness, and I think that connectedness with each other now and also connectedness with the history of how people came together-- not much of an answer.

Green: Renee, you were talking about how four years ago you started going to the annual SAWC meetings and how that was a real important aim to you. Speak.

Stamper: I think that after the experience with Appalshop that I was still pretty young. And it was just sitting here talking about and thinking about it that I have realized how devastating it really was to me. It took me along time to believe that I could be creative in that way again.

I think I decided after that that I was really a fake. It didn't work.

Hansel: Couldn't even be an Appalachian!

Stamper: Couldn't even be a good Hill Billy! Can't do shit. And there were some really bad years for me personally, financially. A real turning point for me was when I went to a meeting at Highlander with some friends of ours, it must of been just when I had turned thirty. I felt, even though I didn't have anything there to read or show off with, so accepted and nurtured and felt like it was a place to talk. I got so excited about what other people would read and what they were doing that I felt my little editor blood start, because I have always had a sense of being able to identify and work with other writers and nurture in that way myself, that I had lost and was regaining.

I went back to school, I started the year after that. I took the plunge, took the loans out, I was a single parent by that time. Stayed more in touch then, Peggy Hall was my roommate, she came here and lived with me and went into Social Work Program and I went into library science. As I've grown in the connections with these people and the writing and connections that I made in the university, I even feel stronger about stuff that is ready to come out of me in my own writing. I don't feel my role will be just to find and nurture other voices, I feel more a sense of my own voice and what I want to say about what being an Appalachian and a woman and a bunch of other things that are all just tangled up together personally and politically.

This year at Highlander was real important to me. The theme of dangerous writing that Pat Arnow, the person who organized it, had just worked really well. Once again it wasn't real structured; there wasn't a program or

anything like that, there was just the unifying theme of dangerous words. And I think the adrenaline and energy that we all got from her letter that she and Jo Carson sent, that was so passionate about continuing to speak and the things that people talked about and read were from all over the board, from the Jewish experience to the experience of an older woman, Aileen Austin, who has been active in socialist party and active politically for years and years thinking about the summer that was the turning point for her, sexually and politically and having been afraid to share that chapter of her memoirs that she has been working on. Short stories and poems from just all over the board and I just found what they shared really moving and exciting.

And one thing that we decided was that next time we were going to have a week-long retreat before it, that the lady I was just speaking of and I are going to organize it for people who want to have a week to work on stuff before a weekend of reading and being real social. I am almost ready of feel like I am one.

Hansel: We don't know what you is!

Stamper: I don't know what I am but it's coming more together and it really is, a lot of it, because of these experiences that I carry around with me. For example, I met Aileen Austin, who I spoke of above, for the first time at Highlander and I haven't seen her since then. And she was there this time so there was that sense. . .

Green: A lot of good things, you knew you'd be in trouble and you'd see her. Well, what about the last four or five years for you, Pauletta?

Hansel: I had continued to be very involved in issues around Appalachian Culture, there is an organization in Cincinnati called the Urban Appalachian Council and Cincinnati's population is estimated to be about one third Appalachian. Some first generation but also some second and third generation people whose families moved up for jobs and who ended up staying. And I've been up on the board there since '82 or '83 since I moved to Cincinnati, and finding that many of the same issues that people in the mountains dealt with (probably still dealing with them), are also being dealt with by Appalachians in urban communities.

On a cultural level, I think issues of trying to define what it means to be Appalachian in the age of television, in the age of homogenization. And in some ways, I think, that for the people of lower income living in identified Appalachian neighborhoods that there are more distinctive in the sense between urban Appalachians and the wider Cincinnati culture than there are between rural Appalachians and the wider culture in that people have to band together and have ended up not really assimilating in the same way that Brethed County school kids may have been assimilated with the wider culture by modeling themselves from whatever the teenage television programs are now.

And then just social justice issues. One of the larger issues in Appalachia has remained environmental issues, strip mining, but now on a whole other level around that such as toxic waste dumps. And those are similar issues than lower income people have living in urban areas because a lot of the lower income population of Cincinnati is Appalachian then it's become an urban Appalachian issue. Poor people live around the factories and have to live with that.

That has been how I have stayed connected, and it has been real helpful to me to draw upon people who have been dealing with those issues in the mountains, not just at the SAWC level, but I have begun to connect with people

in other communities so I still feel like, no matter what I do, I continue to draw upon the strength of the mountain people.

It's an interesting organization.

Green: This is my first encounter with it. I have the conflict of now going into graduate school in Social work or in English. I don't know which is stronger. I started off an undergraduate in social work and moving into English because I couldn't resist the writing. But it's in an organization like that which I undoubtedly find myself entangled in. Is there information on it down here in the Appalachian Center?

Hansel: I would think so.

Green: Do you act as an advocate?

Hansel: I am a board member, so that means that there is not a whole lot I do in terms of direct advocacy work. Also over the last year and a half I have been working with a group of mostly volunteers on an issue that is important to a particular Appalachian neighborhood, environmental issue. So that has got me more connected with everyone in the neighborhood, being an advocate for this issue.

But one of the things that the Urban Appalachian Council has done, over the last couple of years, which I've had a lot to do with is to start defining what we want to do with our cultural work, which would include the arts. So that has brought me in touch, not so much on an advocacy level but more in terms with thinking these things through-- what is Appalachian culture, how do you define it, and how can you promote it if you can't define it?

And I don't have a definition to give you, I think we're in the process of defining it, but in some ways you do have to define it before you promote it, if you don't know what it is and what it means to people then you go to the people who are living it to try and figure that out and you do that by helping people create indigenous art. And that art tells you something about what that culture is. So that's what I think this institution is about.

Green: It will be fun to see how it turns out.