

# Roadside Theater performs before crowd at NRCC

Two ladderback chairs, an antique rocker, a bench and a bar stool were the only props Tom Bledsoe, Ron Short and Nancy Jeffrey used Tuesday night at Roadside Theater's "South of the Mountain" production held at New River Community College.

The production was sponsored by the Office of Continuing Education at NRCC.

The actors actively involved the nearly 100 persons in the audience. Using their mountain dialect and music, the audience was made to feel like they were sitting in the living room of the family of characters.

Spotlights were used effectively in highlighting the individual or the group while their stories unfolded. "South of the Mountain" is the story of two generations of a mountain family. Their history is traced from life on a small farm through the changes that shape the lives of the younger generation as industrialization and a modern way of life move into the mountains.

The first half of the program featured an aging mother and her two sons speaking about their life on the farm. After intermission, a young wife and the two brothers tell about the changes they faced when the coal mining communities arose in the mountains.

Many times bittersweet memories were portrayed by the three members of the cast.

Fine performances transformed the cast into the believable characters, people you may know.

The musical was based largely on the reflections of the author's kin. The production blends their stories with a dozen original songs accompanied by guitar, banjo, fiddle and harmonica to portray and experience common to many Americans.

Ron Short wrote the script and songs for "South of the Mountain", and was also an actor in the musical.

Roadside Theater is based in the coalfield of eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia. All of Roadside's performers were raised in this rural mountainous part of central Appalachia, and it is from the region's indigenous theatrical heritage--the mountains storytelling, musical and church traditions--that Roadside Theater draws the style and content of its performances. Roadside's repertory consists of four original plays: "Mountain Tales", "Red Fox Second Haning", "Brother Jack", and "South of the Mountain."

Ron Chaffin, director of Continuing Education at NRCC, said he was pleased with the turnout Tuesday night, and that he has asked the drama company to return next year to perform another of its plays.



ROADSIDE THEATER'S CAST FOR SOUTH OF THE MOUNTAIN  
From Left Tom Bledsoe, Ron Short, Nancy Jeffrey

## A look at the story

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Lifestyles Editor Joyce K. Taylor "took a notion" to write about the theater's production using a brand of her own mountain dialect. The following is a version of how she felt following Roadside Theater's performance at NRCC.

Nearly a hundred of us took a notion to go south of the mountain Tuesday night...and wouldn't you know all of us ended up at Maw's house.

It was like one of them Sunday-after-the-meeting dinners we used to have at their house so many a year ago.

You could almost smell the fried chicken, sweet taters and cornbread aromas coming from the kitchen.

Well, there was Maw with her first born Evert and another of her sons Thaddeus. Differnt as day and night 'cording to Maw.

Us visitors just sat ther-in the parlor listenin' to them talk about

thereselves. We sat there for an hour reminiscin with them three mountain folk. Ever now and then, them boys would pick up a banjo or gittar and they'd sing us a song or two. Some of em were haunting tunes, others jest as clever as an old hound that jest cornerd a possum.

Them old mountain memories won't leave you alone...was one thought they left us with.

They told us the land means as much to livin as breathin. Them farmin mountain folk never had much but they always had plenty, Maw said in her gentle way while adjustin her apron and pullin a wisp of hair back into place that had fell to her face.

She told us of Evert's fits he took as a boy, during which he sat in his ladder back chair trying to hide his face in shame, cause Maw was a-tellin near strangers about him. He sat there, head hung low, with them arms folded jest as tight against his body...his red beard jest a quivering.

Then ole Thad telled us of his school days bein differnt than the rest...being country. And, quittin at the age of 12.

He reminised about the Conservation Corps camps he worked in...makin \$ 30 a month, but \$25 of it was automatically sent to the farm. Havin' real money was somethin special in them days. It bought you a new look on life...even made you feel like there could be some changes made...changes in your life.

After about an hour, us visitors took a break for awhile...when we came back we done learnt that Maw had died...and Thad, his young wife, and Evert told us some more about their lives and the changes they seen.

T'tell you the truth, we didn't have as much fun a-listenin to them talk durin this second hour. We heard em talk about the coal fields, and the way John L. Sullivan treated them...about the "scrip" money they earned that

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11/4/84  
Dublin, Va.

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was only good in the company store. These were hard times stories...

But, we never thought much about what could happen in the mines, Thad said...while showin signs of black lung, coughin and a-blowin his nose in his hanker-chief...he told us about the time the mine roof fell and left him jest a-lyin there on the floor...his day's work covered up with a big rock.

The back breaking work bought a new refrigerator; the credit bought the electric stove and new cars...things them mountain folk never thought they'd have.

But it also bought pain and sufferin...until finally Thad had to leave the mountain, leave his job in the coal mines. He cussed the last day in the mines jest as he had cussed the first day in em.

This left Evert livin on the family farm alone...only with the memories of the past...lovin his old age alone without no woman to care for him. And he dreamed, "Take me back to the time when the dreams I dreamed were mine."

Us visitors left that place, south of the mountain wishin times hadn't changed the mountain people so...that maybe livin without many belongings...but having a lot of pride was better than livin the "good" life away from the farms in the mining communities.