

**Volume 7, No.2**

**Spring 2003**

## **TOM GRAY: A Unique Friend of the Roan**

Several days ago Gary Barrigar asked me to write an article for "Friends" about my father, *Tom Gray*. My first question was "*where to begin*". There was uniqueness in Dad that seemed to defy identification.

In terms of the Roan, the place to begin was right there, at the foot of Roan Mountain in what locals call "the village". On February 28th, 1918, it was as though the Roan itself gave birth to a son, *Thomas Marion Gray, Jr.*, it certainly gave sustenance to his life. It would be there a short 61 years later on a Good Friday, April 13th, 1979, that it would reclaim its own and he would rest in its beloved shadow until *Spring Eternal*. He never strayed far from the Roan, spending his life in its shade and Carter County.

I shared over half of those 61 short years with him, which meant that I spent a lot of hours climbing around the Roan, looking for wildflowers to photograph or *New Jersey Tea* to boil for the next Tour or *Naturalist Rally*. One experience some of you may have shared was to ride with him in his old blue truck; you probably didn't do it twice. As we would make our way once more to the Roan there would be a wild flower along the twisting road and Dad would turn, point at it and begin to tell what it was, never again looking at the road. It was as though he were in a "hack" heading for Cloudland Inn to deliver blackberries or produce he had picked as a boy to sell to the hotel.

That was long before autos had GPS and guidance computers but that truck had made those trips so many times it just guided it self along as Dad would take a quick picture and return to the business at hand. We, and the truck, survived. Now, over half Dad's age, it belongs to his namesake, my son Thomas "the III".

Still wondering how to define that "uniqueness", I read some previous articles from "Friends" that Gary provided me. There were the old names I recognized so well from my childhood and young adult life; Freddy Behrend, Lee Herndon, John Warden, Glenn Swofford, John Martin, Drs. Frank Barclay, Herman Odell and Gary Wallace. Then I realized the contrast was a part of Dad's uniqueness, especially as to the Tour and *Naturalist Rally*. These were learned men who saw the Roan as an intellectual laboratory, filled with wonderful specimens too numerous to count and discoveries yet to be made. Their homes had been far off countries and distant states. To Dad the Roan *was home*, filled with the plants and animals that sustained life, as he knew and loved it in childhood. They called it a lily and discussed its properties; he called it a *ramp* and ate it. They called it *eryngium aquaticum* and said it was "indigenous"; he said it was *rattlesnake weed* and chewed it as medicine. By instinct he knew the Roan and that all it held had to be protected, enjoyed, shared and passed on.

Compared to these men and today's standards, Dad was uneducated in the natural sciences. But he gleaned from them the knowledge he was never given full opportunity to acquire. To him they too were uneducated - in the cliffs, the coves, the forest and wet lands of the Roan where all these natural wonders hid to carry out life's cycle. They supplied the Latin, he supplied the colloquial, and if he didn't know the common name for a plant, not to worry,



with a "sheepish grin" he supplied one. This was another part of his uniqueness, a *personal drive for knowledge* derived from his love for the Roan. The Roan was his *laboratory*, the learned men who came there his *professors*, the Tour and Walks his *academy*.

He thought if he could just point the way to the Roan, or highlight it in some way, these professors, scientists, and authors would use this "natural laboratory" to educate the next generation, Gary, Jennifer, Steve, Rick, and even me. Dad was right. Now Gary and Jennifer are educating new generations who will "protect, enjoy, share and pass on" the joys of a place called "The Roan", to Dad "home". Steve and Rick are MDs, prescribing modern pharmaceuticals but remembering the lessons of the medicinal herbs of the Roan. And me? Well don't be surprised if someday you see me on an unknown trail with my head "in the clouds" of the Roan, lost in life's thoughts. Like Dad, the Roan is my place to ponder this world. Now we see another part of that undefined uniqueness, Dad's *instinct* to preserve and pass on the true value of life on the Roan.

Here I must pause. Just as there was a Lois to Lee (Herndon) and Edna to Jim (Potter), there was Alma to Tom. Over 40 years together made them one. Whatever Dad's involvement with *The Spring Wildflower Tours* or *The Fall Naturalist Rally* there was beside him, behind him, before him and after him, my Mom, making *New Jersey Tea*, cooking over an open fire, feeding some ETSU student, or driving the truck, but always *there*. Raised on Beach Mountain, she became a "naturalized citizen" of Roan Mountain. She joined Dad in the shadow of the Roan on June 30th, 2000. There are now 12 heirs to their Roan: three children, "Wilb", Carolyn and myself; five grandchildren, Tammy, Tracie, Brian, Kim and Thomas; and four greatgrandchildren, Jessie, Allison, Skyler and yet unnamed. Somewhere in all our blood is a "unique metal" and the Roan is our magnet.

I always thought Dad was a visionary, he saw things no one else seemed to see or with a different twist; Tweetsie as a Carter County tourist attraction, the Overmountain Victory Trail and Shelving Rock as national historic sites, or the *Spring Tours* and *Naturalist Rally* as walking laboratories. In a tribute at his death, the late Lucy Ward pegged him, *The Rugged Dreamer*. So accurate was her label that it became his epitaph.

Do you see the tread that runs through, seemingly, all that he was? Yes *Tom Gray was Roan Mountain* and *Roan Mountain was Tom Gray*. They looked alike, both big and rugged. They embraced one another. And they cared about, and for, each other. If you knew Dad, you knew the Roan. If you know the Roan, you know Dad.

We buried Daddy on Easter, 1979, only three weeks before *The Spring Wildflower Flour Tours*. He had served the tours as only its second Chairman in 1978 & 79.

But so long as there is a Gary Barrigar who teaches the next generation to love and protect Roan Mountain or a Jennifer Bauer who displays its many wonders to the thousands of visitors to Roan Mountain each year; Freddy Behrend, Lee Herndon, Jim Potter, John Warden nor *Tom Gray* will never die for their dreams will travel through eternity in the lives of each new generation. Thank you for continuing their dreams!

Richard Gray

**The original Tom Gray Trail was located on the right side of the road driving into the campground. It was a boardwalk constructed over a wetland in the late 1970's. This trail continued to sink and was damaging and encouraging bicycle traffic in a very sensitive area. Thus it was moved in the early 1980's to the left side of the road, starting across from the check-in station, next to the horseshoe pits.**

**This trail now meanders up the Doe River, through beautiful patches of pink ladies slippers, various rare orchids, next to an old community swimming hole, and past old homesites that are noticeable only by the piles of rocks in the woods. It circles back near the park boundary, crossing a small stream near a nice grouping of Bead Lilies, and then either turns right out in to the field below the highway, or left, back towards the same section of trail that started the hike. The area is intermingled with mountain wetland with lush stands of cinnamon fern in many areas. (Information supplied by Jennifer Bauer)**

Phylis Rollins, from the University of Tennessee Vet School, will be the Friday evening speaker at the Spring Naturalists' Rally. Her topic will be Creating a Backyard Sanctuary

"Rehabilitating injured and orphaned wildlife is hands-on, skills based work, and the same can be said for creating sustainable habitat. As an environmental educator, I teach practical methods for the development of backyard habitat that meets the needs of wildlife and human alike. However, I have discovered that something else deeply internal happens when we work so intimately with nature - the arising of a sublime sense of peace and a centering of the self. For me, this epiphany was the recognition of the cleansing, nurturing and healing power of nature. And so, as my presentation will be full of how-to-dos, I wanted first to share with you an insight into the more mysterious work that occurs within us as we change the world around us for the better."

## My Religion is Kindness

There is a fable found in traditions worldwide that when life was first created on earth; all of creation was cognizant. The birds, the flowers, the rocks and trees, the creatures of the woodland and the rivers themselves. This ancient tale admonished man to treat creation as if this were still so: so that each form of life could hear and comprehend, and know intuitively if they were treated with dignity and respect. For, the story continued, the day would come when the animals would be called by the Creator to speak. And when their muteness turned to voice, they would tell of how they themselves were cared for by humankind, and go on to bear witness for their brothers and sisters (all the rest of life). Lastly, humans would be asked to speak and to answer for their actions if the animals expressed dismay and sorrow over the human's abuse of the great gift of dominion over the earth that had been entrusted to them.



The implicit message here is that it matters very much how we treat our common home, and that we act with reverence toward all life on this planet. Not towards only those few species that are somehow special, cute or uncommon, but all of them. For in truth, it is impossible for us to accurately label one form of life as valuable while labeling another as useless. It was Albert Schweitzer who described an ethical person as one who realizes the sacredness of all life. He "obeys the compulsion to help all of life which he is able to assist and shrinks from injuring anything that lives." And he continues,

"he does not ask how far this or that life deserves one's sympathy as being valuable, nor, beyond that, whether and to what degree it is capable of feeling."

Throughout history, most indigenous people have valued life for itself, intuitively understanding that truth was hidden within its forms. They were aware that all is not as it seems, that surface reality is treacherously misleading for the unwary. And, being in touch with the mystery of life, they respected and were in awe of its profusion and sublime variance. To the individual living so close to nature, each life form personified something archetypal and infinite and allowed the person to draw upon those traits. Attributes such as strength, inner vision and courage could be brought forth, awakened, developed and carried within the man or woman as needed. When an animal or plant that personified such was seen, either in dream or awake time, one felt graced by Nature, come as a wise teacher and mentor.

Unfortunately for us, as modern, civilized people, we are often profoundly blind to what is around us. We are not centered or grounded, but live in the world reacting without due reflection. We too often lack simplicity and clarity in our lives. Our vision remains clouded with preconceived ideas and disruptive thoughts, while our minds are incessantly noisy and demanding. We remain distracted and never learn to be still - to be clear and calm as a tranquil pool of water. For unless the incessant distractions of the mind ease into a peaceful and still surface, it is impossible to look into the depths and perceive the bottom, however murky it is at first. Therefore the surface becomes forever

confused with the reality of the vast below. And when that is the case, we continue to live in a world muddled by our own simple delusions.

And so, a pigeon may land next to you - iridescent, glistening, bursting with joy and life force, a delight to the eye and an engineering marvel. A creature that could quite possibly, if given just a glimpse through an undistorted eye, open the heart to the radiant joy and beauty inherent in all of nature. This is mindfulness. This is clarity. And, with such an opening, this common pigeon could quite possibly lead one to profound insight into the self and the matrix of life.

The pigeon is often considered a garbage species (such as rats, bats and opossums -- animals not found to have superficially aesthetic qualities). Some people feel this animal is not worth the time or effort to care about, let alone assist if found ill or injured. But this much maligned bird, the pigeon, is in reality a gentle spirit with a subtle effusive beauty. And for anyone willing to see and suspend judgment, the pigeon becomes for them on a convergent, fundamental level, a gateway to radical, personal transformation. For the moment that we see, we *know*, and can no longer deny the ineffable mystery found permeating life. At long last we are centered, our fulcrum balanced and our words resound with the force of truth.

In the end, what abides is how we do what we do: that we act with dignity and compassion and allow ourselves to be vulnerable to life. For when we honor the earth (and ourselves) we cannot close our hearts to what we do not understand. We are called, in fact, to do just the opposite. We must ensure that we close ourselves to nothing, that we trust the very process of life itself. Finally, as spiritual beings, we need to live more like the Dalai Lama who humbly yet eloquently professes that "my religion is kindness". For in the end, we have more than a given right to do as we please and feel as we may, we have an obligation to be vigilantly mindful and responsible residents on this planet.

Schweitzer, Albert, *Civilization and Ethics*, tr. C.T. Campion, London: Unwin Books, 1967.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Hyperion : New York, 1994.



## J. B. OWEN MEMORIAL AWARD

The purpose of the J. B. Owen Memorial Endowment is to honor the memory of J. B. Owen, longtime Tennessee Ornithological Society (TOS) member known to thousands in East Tennessee through his columns in Knoxville newspapers. J. B. Owen was an active member of the Knoxville Chapter of TOS (KTOS) from 1947 until his death in 2001. He was awarded the TOS Distinguished Service Award in 1990 (Nicholson, C.P. 2001. "In Memoriam: J. B. Owen (1915-2001)," *The Migrant*, 72(1): 34-35, Knoxville, TN, March). The Endowment provides funds for the annual J. B. Owen Award, with expected value of \$250 to \$500 per year.



The J. B. Owen Award is open to anyone with a project that promotes the welfare and conservation of birds in Tennessee. Applicants should submit the following information:

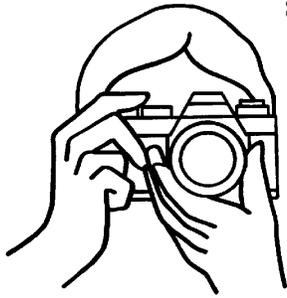
Cover letter with short project description and applicant contact information

Resume

Project proposal, of up to three pages, showing topic of the project, problem to be addressed, objectives, expected results and significance, deliverables (for example, written report, journal article, presentation), project location, and project schedule.

Each year, applications are due by May 1 and should be sent (preferably) by e-mail to [marieoakes@msn.com](mailto:marieoakes@msn.com) or mailed to Jerry Hadder, 18 Rockingham Lane, Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37831. The J. B. Owen Endowment Committee of KTOS will evaluate applications and will typically announce the J. B. Owen Award winner the following September.

# PHOTOGRAPHERS: YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!



Several years ago, after the Convention Center was built at Roan Mountain State Park, the staff began working toward making the Visitor Center near the green mill wheel into a regional museum representing the natural environments and history of the Roan Mountain area from the park to the top. At the time work initiated, Jennifer Bauer was the only one free to take on the project working with a consulting firm from Ohio. During the "great State Parks fiasco" engineered by our late governor in closing the State parks on Sunday-Monday and the continued low State budgets, Ms Bauer was also transferred to the Sycamore Shoals Historical Park. The museum project was dropped as the staff endeavored to take a day at a time.

At this time, Pat Gagan, with the assistance of Friends' member Julie Ensmiger [both Park rangers], have taken over the project and the Ohio consultant has been retained. Pat approached our Friends' president and myself about a month ago to ask for help from our Friends members in securing photographs of wildflowers, trees, leaves, reptiles, mammals, birds, fish, mosses, ferns that are part of the State park and mountainous environments.

Both our Friends' president and I were quite enthusiastic about helping in this endeavor and hope that you, fellow Friends members, will be equally excited. The park staff cannot pay for copyrights on photographs, but would hope that photographers will donate their work. Pat has promised that each picture will be credited to the photographer. This would seem to be an excellent way for amateurs to show their work, leaving a legacy, as well as a wonderful opportunity for our group to support the Park.

While at the Spring and/or Fall Naturalist Rally, look for Pat at the Park offices opposite the convention center or talk to me about what is needed. I have lists available. Below are some of the pictures Pat would like to have.

- |                               |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Hellbender                    | Warpaint or Saffron shiner    | Wood "frog sickle"     |
| Mayfly                        | Fantail, Swannanoa or         | Bullfrog               |
| Caddis fly larva              | Greenfin darter               | Spring peeper          |
| Water strider                 | Salamanders:                  | Green frog             |
| Dragon/damsel fly             | Jordan's, Weller's, Spotted,  | Snapping turtle        |
| Deer                          | Yonahlossee                   | Rock shrew             |
| Raccoon                       | Veery                         | Longtail shrew         |
| Bobcat                        | Northern junco                | Yellownose vole        |
| Bear (also wants clawed tree) | Rose-breasted grosbeak        | Red-backed vole        |
| New England cottontail rabbit | Red-eyed vireo nest with eggs | Starnose mole          |
| Northern Flying Squirrel      | (babies &/or adult)           | Woodland jumping mouse |
| Blacknose dace                | Barred owl                    |                        |

Beyond these, requested are pictures of trees, wildflowers native to the area, picture of a pinebeetle and woolly adelgid. There are, of course, photographs of many of these in books or available from other sources. Rather than utilize these alternatives, Pat thought of using the incredible talents of Friends' members for the project. Jennifer Bauer has graciously contributed much information from her books and photographic collection.

— Anne Whittemore, Treasurer, Friends of Roan Mountain



## 45th Annual Roan Mountain Spring Naturalist's Rally scheduled for May 2 - 4, 2003

— Jennifer Bauer

Mark your calendars now and plan to attend our 45th spring gathering in Roan Mountain, Tennessee! All of our leaders are returning to share their expertise with us, along with several new folks and new experiences. We have planned a wide variety of hikes, tours, workshops, and demonstrations ranging from wildflower and bird walks to natural dyeing demonstrations and nature sketching.

We welcome two wonderful speakers to our area on Friday and Saturday night. Friday, Phylis Rollins, Wildlife Rehabilitator will be speaking on Creating a Backyard Sanctuary for Native Plants, Animals, and Ourselves. Her talk will be packed full of "how-to's" and great ideas for planning, growing, and building a great habitat for many living things.

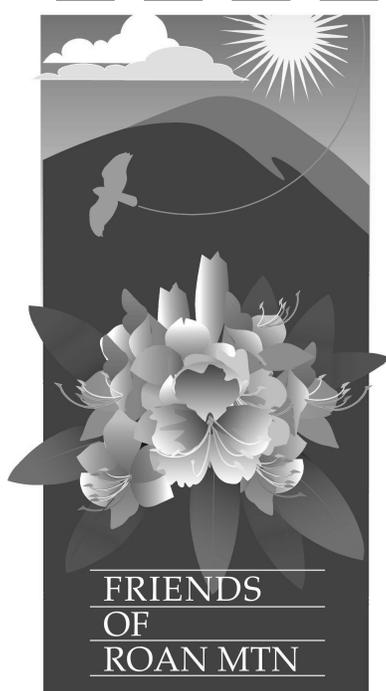
Fred Bradley, retired Naturalist from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Native American Story Keeper will speak on Saturday night. His program, Fungi of the Smokies, will take us on a tour of the many and varied forms of fungi that can be seen in our region.

Both of these talks are preceded by an excellent meal, catered by City Market of Elizabethton. This time offers a great opportunity to visit with old and new friends. *We do ask that you **send your reservations in as early as possible**. We can only guarantee meals to those who have pre-registered for the evening meals. This also applies to the box lunches available mid-day Saturday.*

Also, be ready for our Raffle on Friday evening and the Silent Auction on Saturday. These two fundraising activities will help us get started on our latest educational and scientific project! Bob Whittemore, President of Friends of Roan Mountain, will be sharing more with us about plans to provide research grants to college students wishing to study the flora, fauna, and ecology of Roan Mountain. If you have any items you'd like to donate to either event, please give me a call at 423-772-4772 or email [highlandlady@naxs.net](mailto:highlandlady@naxs.net).

A non-Denominational Worship Service is planned for 7:30 am on Sunday, May 4 in the Campground Shelter. If you are staying Sunday for the programs (and we hope you are!), please join us in worship and fellowship prior to the 8:30 am Bird and Wildflower Walk.

If you need a brochure for yourself or a friend, or if you have any questions prior to your arrival, give me a call!



Editor  
Nancy Barrigar  
708 Allen Avenue  
Elizabethton, TN 37643  
(423) 543-7576  
[barrigargn@earthlink.net](mailto:barrigargn@earthlink.net)

Find us on the web at

<http://www.etsu.edu/biology/roan-mtn/>

