

Concert Masters

It hasn't been without its bumps and bruises, this institution of ours. But with a much-lauded return to Robinson Center Music Hall and two feet firmly in the black to boast about, the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra's staring down its golden anniversary season stronger than ever. Here, a symphony in three movements: a look at its humble beginnings, a celebration of its momentous homecoming and a glance where they hope to be another 50 years from now

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RETT PEEK



Interlude

Taking the Stage

In the days just prior to the ASO's first performance at the recently renovated Robinson Center, any number of preparations—for the space itself, by the orchestra, by individual musicians—had been made, both over the long and short terms. And it all led up to one moment

BY JORDAN P. HICKEY



ASO Concertmaster Drew Irvin's violin, which he affectionately calls "his fiddle" (from the Yiddish "fidl"), celebrated its 250th birthday last year.

from among the strings, accompanied by the brassy ringing of a wing nut being twirled onto a screw as a young man leaning over the thigh-high guard rail installs a light. Elsewhere, mostly silent, there are other workers who form the complementary sonic colors of construction. They're the shadows of legs moving in the catwalk, a fluorescent vest glimpsed in the spaces between the shell and the curtains, the two men using a long pole to adjust something that must be 15 to 20 diagonal feet above their heads.

It's a reminder, first, of the work still being done in the space just three days before the weekend debut—and a display, albeit one not intended, of just how well the sound carries now that the renovation of the Robinson Center, almost 2 1/2 years after construction first got underway in July 2014, is nearly finished. For the musicians of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, who've spent that time performing at the Maumelle Performing Arts Center (aka the Maumelle High School auditorium), it's a welcome homecoming, to be sure, but it's not just that. It is, as their music director Philip Mann has been known to say, something of a "victory lap" for the organization, which has spent the past seven years coming back from the brink of dissolution, not only subsisting but thriving in the black.

At 12:41 p.m., as the last of the musicians are taking their seats, Philip, dressed in a dark sweater and a blue scarf with tassels on the ends, is speaking with a gentleman on the right-hand side of the

I.

here's sound. Not unified just yet, but on this Thursday afternoon, three days before the grand reopening on Nov. 19, it's there and starting to take shape. As the musicians warm their muscles and instruments on stage, there's some suggestion of what's to come. In the brief strobing of sounds, pitched across octaves and registers from the low brass to the strings, there are scraps of melody that'll soon be familiar.

In taking all of this in, as the rehearsal gets closer, as more musicians, dressed casually in jeans and button-downs and at least one pair of basketball shorts, appear on stage, as everything comes together, it's a little tough not to veer into the realm of the hyperbolic. Because in so many ways, this moment—the idea of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra filing onto a new stage—is largely because so many things have come together on scales both large and small, everything rejoined in the center after a sprawling diaspora like a supernova played in reverse. Considered in those terms, it might make a little more sense that loose ends in the space are still being tied: the occasional inchworm-long cuts of carpet, the dressing room furniture still sheathed in styrofoam sheets, the ladder curiously placed on stage right, the unseen sources of clinking and clanging as the last tweaks and touches are made to the structure.

As a trombone plays an arpeggio, so too is a brand-new, never-felt-a-tush seat being ratcheted to the ground by a man in a sleeveless black T-shirt. The lilting voice of a violin rises

stage. It's this man, Mark Holden of the East Coast-based JaffeHolden, the consulting firm brought in to advise on acoustics, who's largely to thank for how sound now carries through the space. After a few announcements from members of the orchestra, Mark steps to the dais and addresses the orchestra, explaining that they're going to be having "an acoustic rehearsal" this afternoon.

"The idea is to get feedback from you all—what you think about this position," he tells the musicians, referring to where they're sitting on the stage. "We're farther downstage than we were yesterday or the day before. This is about as far downstage as we can come, and we want to hear how it works from your standpoint, as far as hearing yourself."

So much of what they're doing, he goes on to say, is essentially a learning process for all involved. Over the course of the past few days, he and his associates have been getting a feel for the place with the orchestra present. They'd started Tuesday evening with the musicians posted near the back of the shell and on Wednesday had moved the cellos onto risers. And this afternoon, the musicians arranged near the edge of the stage, the acousticians will spend the day making tweaks to the settings of the space, the placement of the acoustic drapes, taking recordings they can turn into data, feed into computer models and make the whole place that much better. As Mark wraps up his spiel, he thanks the musicians for all their help and enthusiasm, after which he's treated to a resounding applause from the orchestra in the form of much hand-clapping and foot-stomping. Because this isn't just something where a few sound dampeners were tacked onto the walls. It's something that has been prioritized from the very beginning,

"Before, we had to work, and now we just let the music happen. ... Here's the thing: We've been working hard forever. Now the audience is going to get to actually hear what we've been creating."



Drew Irvin, who's been with the ASO since 2002, has been instrumental in the education of budding Arkansas violinists. Currently, he's training four promising musicians.

which means you get a complete reworking of how sound operates in the space. Although some elements of the auditorium are tough to miss—say, the stage floor being three stories lower than it was before—there's still so, so much more that isn't. Like the walls. Because just looking at them, you probably wouldn't guess there's three layers of drywall there, all laminated together and shaped and angled so that sound is efficiently distributed around the hall. Or that, to help sound circulate through the main floor, there are hundreds of square feet of openings under seats of the grand tier—what's called “a transparent balcony” as Mark will explain later—which, again, is

all about making sure the sound is getting to where it needs to be. And if you speak with most anyone who played the old Robinson (where the ASO's played ever since one of the earliest iterations of the symphony, the Arkansas State Symphony Orchestra, first accompanied the San Francisco Opera Ballet at Robinson's grand opening on Feb. 16, 1941), they're likely to tell you: It wasn't like this.

As Philip will say later that afternoon, the auditorium is an instrument. And as is the case with any instrument, it needs to be tuned. For a little under half an hour, the ASO plays through Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome*. With a trumpet soloist offstage and a six-piece contingent of brass players stationed in a second-floor theater box, the headlining piece is especially well suited for showing off the acoustic qualities of a space. (Case in point: in 2011, the Kansas City Symphony closed

its first concert in the Moshe Safdie-designed Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts with the same piece). And for all of this time, you can see the acousticians walking around the space. They sit on the orchestra hall, one side then the next. They sit in rows M, O, D, T, N, to name but a few, likely covering the bulk of the alphabet at one point or another. They stand, they rest their heads on their chins, lean on the seats in front of them, moving periodically and irregularly all around the space, disappearing into the upper parts of the auditorium as the orchestra plays. They're listening for how the sound fills the space. And while they won't know until opening night on Saturday how the space will sound when it's been filled to capacity—that'll take popping a 17-inch balloon with people in the seats and measuring the dispersal of the sound—they're able to do enough. It's why you hear, periodically, the harsh mechanical whine somewhere up above of a curtain being shifted just slightly.

Unfortunately, as *Pines* builds in volume, so, too, do the voices from the secondary orchestra of construction sounds. At a certain point, when what sounds to be a drill or something resembling a jackhammer starts making a sharp metallic clanging somewhere behind the band shell, Philip has to stop the rehearsal, saying they can't have all of that happening, which then prompts an immediate flurry of activity from the room.

“I just emailed the contractor,” Mark says, making his way through the seats and climbing the stairs to the stage. “I don't understand what's going on.” There's a brief moment as emails are surely being sent off and inquiries made before he says to no one in particular, “Guys, we can't have any work going on in the hall.” The statement is immediately answered with two brappy pulses of drill striking concrete somewhere backstage.

“This is totally unacceptable,” Philip yells from the dais. They've only got so much time there, he explains, so can't take a break now. “This is all paid time that we're losing.” An oboe plays three staccato descending notes, which are then immediately drowned out by the drill. Seeing a man he recognizes out in the auditorium, Philip then moves to the edge of the stage and yells out, “Gus, do you have Mark in your phone?” Coming off the stage, he moves halfway up the aisle and clarifies the question. “Do you have [Mayor] Mark Stodola in your phone?”

II.

The night before the public debut of Robinson Auditorium, the music starts without a word. It just goes—just is. At precisely 7:30 p.m., following a few administrative-type announcements, the concertmaster and first violinist, Drew Irvin, stands and plays a tuning note, the first of the dress rehearsal. After the last sounds from the orchestra have settled, Philip Mann steps to the podium. He raises his arms without speaking, and then there's music, and ...

What else could you say? Because it would feel strange to write, *Yes, it sounded like this*. The words later typed out on the page wouldn't seem to match the sound you heard for tone and color of the orchestra filling an empty auditorium with the sound of itself. Even to speak in general terms about the specific qualities of specific voices rising through the fray—the warmth of the cellos, the murmuring of the basses, the violin section speaking as one—would likely conjure something slightly different in each reader's mind, the character and timbre of the sound hinging on each person's past experience and imagination. Because, again, who could really put into words what it's like to be there as the musicians finally play for themselves in this setting tailored to their sound, to feel yourself lifted by music from the small of your back?

Though of course, you could try.

Taking stock of the music's tangible presence on the stage, where it'd been wrangled down from the ether and expressed in physical form, you might look first to the heavily annotated sheet music on Drew's stand. You could tally the carrot-shaped accents hastily scrawled above the notes, understanding that, yes, those are places where, as per Philip's instructions, the notes will be played pointedly and, to keep the line alive and bouncing through the auditorium, the phrase played all through. This is different than when they played here before. In the old Robinson, sound had a tendency to fade very quickly once it left the stage, so it required some degree of overcompensation to make the audience hear what was intended. But now? The sound carries. But there's still a challenge because the people in this group, many of whom have been playing together for decades, are having to relearn how they play together.

To properly describe the music, you might even look to Philip himself, who leaps up and down making grand sweeping gestures—more than a few of which are vaguely reminiscent of a sorcerer's apprentice attempting to fill a bucket of water—and is a reflection and amplification of what's there on stage. And ridiculous as they might appear in print, you could even transcribe Philip's actual words spoken from the podium to show what it's like to be there: “Actually start the Menuetto at the very end, the last four bars—da da-da-dee, da da-da-da, da da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. What I'm hearing is a little bit of yum-bum-bum-bum, yah-buh-buh-buh, like some of us are getting there a little bit early, and it doesn't have that crispy bite and the extra *marcato*.”

Sitting in the space as all of this happens—as the music is pieced together and polished—it's almost like seeing a face whose features are still shifting into place. And even if you're not able to hear it entirely in the seats, when the change is made and the phrasing is tweaked to carry the line to the end, you know that, yes, that's exactly what it needed to be, and the face becomes a little more clearly defined. There's the sense of being there for something very special. And at least in part, it's because of the space. Because it's where a piano really is piano, where you hear every breath that the soloist is taking when he's on the stage, where you feel like you can hear every fiber of the strings of the bow, the strings of the violin, the contact they make with the finger board of the instrument—where everything you're hearing is exactly what you're supposed to be hearing because the new hall allows for it. And where, from the vast swell of voices that have all come together, the orchestra speaks as one.

III.

On Saturday afternoon, almost exactly two hours before the first notes of the concert will be played at Robinson, Drew Irvin stands sock-footed on the carpet of his living room, and the sun comes in. His socks are black. The carpet is red-on-red-checked. There's a patina of dog hair from the three dogs sequestered by choice to the television room. From the kitchen comes the soft tinkling sound of the dogs' automated

water dish, which itself is masked by the hard knocking of the metronome that guides Drew's afternoon practice. And there is, of course, the music.

The music he plays is vaguely familiar, made more familiar as the afternoon goes on, one voice lifted from the thick of many voices heard at the concert hall, played and repeated a few times over in the isolation of his west Little Rock home. It's the third movement of the Korngold concerto, a piece featuring the celebrated violinist Philippe Quint as a soloist—and which presents a special challenge for the accompanying orchestra in that, unlike other pieces on the program, it's very rarely symmetrical and tends to be, as Drew says, rather “pushy-pully.”

He plays a line. He plays it again, hearing something that he doesn't quite like. It's played, slowed down, broken apart, played again, rejoined and strung along as the phrases, stronger now, again come together. Eventually, in varying degrees of completeness, he plays it seven times.

“I want that one, that's the one I want—that's the one I want.”

He plays it again.

“You don't just do it once the way you want it. You have to go back and do it so many times that it's You don't want to be batting a thousand. *Oh, I did it once, that's great.*” He plays it again. “Twice. You want to do it six, seven times in a row, maybe 13.”

Asked what he was listening for, what the problem was, he explains that it was a question of his bow arm and the tension going into his fingers. So, he adjusted, listened until the tension was right. Having explained this, he plays it again.

“So, I feel like I'm hanging the sound as opposed to pushing the sound.”

He plays it again.

“See, it's warm on the last note when you do that,” he says. “That's what we mean by technique. Some people think about it; some people don't. Maybe they don't have to. I have to.”

In all of this, there's something interesting that feels very grounded in pattern and habit. Not rote, but something like it. Almost businesslike. For much of the day, this is what he's been doing. Nothing particularly out of the norm or exciting. Earlier in the day, around 11 a.m. or so, he'd done a soft warm-up, all the scales—major, minor and melodic. Just enough to get himself warm. Not enough to spend what he's saving for the evening.

Around noon, he'd stopped to eat a small lunch before returning to practice for another few hours. Around 2:30 p.m., he stopped, ran to the dry cleaners for his laundry and to Panera for salad and soup. And now, again, as the light starts to wane, he's here again in the room.

"Everybody in the orchestra knows their own pattern," he says as he finishes his practice for the afternoon, walking toward the case where he keeps his 250-year-old violin. "Some people don't even have to think about it. Our principal cellist, David, runs a marathon, then later that same day plays the Verdi *Requiem*. ... At the same time, my muscles, with all that lactic acid, and it's such small, small stuff we're doing—I can't do that. I know the math."

Half an hour later, he's sitting at the kitchen table with a green-goddess Cobb salad, an unsliced apple, a glass of water, the surface of the table partially covered with sketches his husband had done of the dogs. The dogs themselves, Suki, Keiko and Sam, are walking an erratic circuit, nails clicking against the wood floor, evidently aware d-i-n-n-e-r is just a few minutes from being served. Looking at a friend's Facebook post about that evening's concert, he says, mostly to himself, "Let's see who's coming." Under his breath, he says, "People I don't know"

"I am really getting excited," he says. "It's going to be fun. It's going to be ... now, coming down to it, it is another concert, just another concert. ... But if I keep it in my mind as just another concert, I'll feel better about it."

As someone who's spent his career auditioning and refining and retaining his technique, from the time he was a little boy growing up on a farm in central Missouri to his stints across the country (and the world, for that matter), he's quite familiar with the butterflies. But, as he said earlier in the day, they're good butterflies. He knows himself well enough, both as a musician and otherwise, to understand what he needs to do.

He knows he'll need to eat a banana 20 minutes before the first notes are played. He knows he'll need a second one at intermission if the show is a big one, as is the case this evening. He knows it takes about two minutes for the blood to circulate the system, for the oxygen to get around counteracting the adrenaline, and he knows that, if you're lucky, you've got the experience and the wherewithal to still play, as he says, fantastically.

A little later in the evening, a few minutes before he'll head back to the bedroom and don

On opening night, there were people. They were young and old and older. They congregated and milled and meandered, walking across the carpet, now clean and free, at least to the naked eye, of anything suggesting the auditorium's recent role as a construction site.

his tux and head to the auditorium, as we're standing in the kitchen, he again touches on this idea:

"Our entire career is a version of a pressure cooker. No one likes to know how the sausage is really made. The hours of work. [When I play something] six times, 13 times, I'm just going to be doing more of the same quality work. I might have to do more of my own practice. ... It's making me pay more attention to my violin. In the old Robinson and even in Maumelle, sometimes I could hear myself clear as a bell; sometimes I couldn't. And now you can hear yourself clearly. Which is great. Learning how to piece it together in an orchestra that's 90 people big—that's the challenge. That's why I'm grateful for a conductor."

"It's really weird because we don't have to work as hard, and it's all raw sound," he says a few minutes later. "Before, we had to work, and now we just let the music happen. ... Here's the thing: We've been working hard forever. Now the audience is going to get to actually hear what we've been creating."

IV.

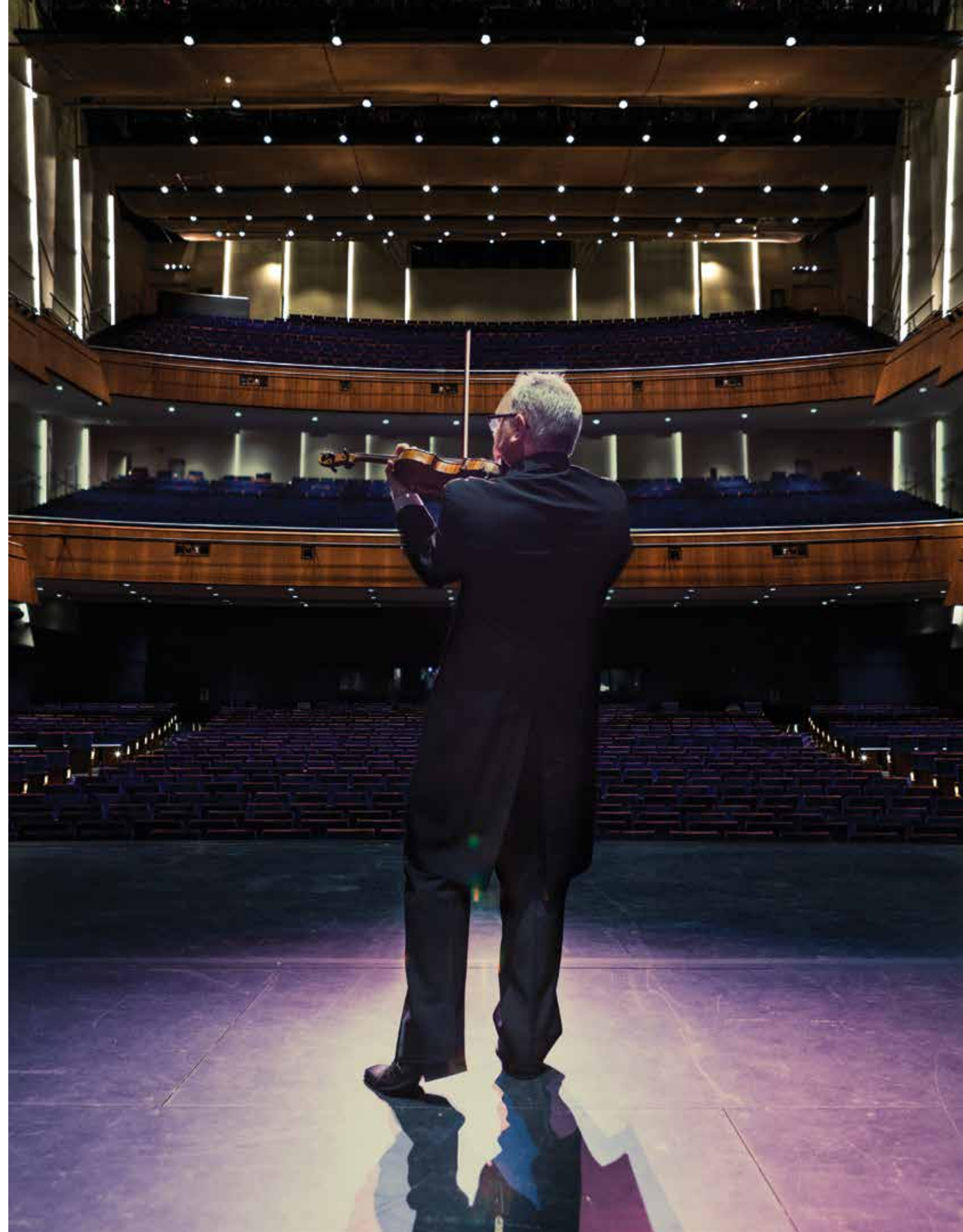
On opening night, there were people. They were young and old and older. They congregated and milled and meandered, walking across the carpet, now clean and free, at least to the naked eye, of anything suggesting the auditorium's recent role as a construction site. The people who came filled all three floors, and it was strange to see so

many people there—strange to hear so many voices rising and falling, contributing to the vast droning sound of conversation that hadn't been there before. And gradually, as the hour got nearer, the people took their seats.

To look down from the upper tier of the balcony, as members of the orchestra filled the stage, all the efforts to make the evening possible weren't immediately evident. It felt like the space already belonged to them. It was only when Richard Wheeler, chairman of the Arkansas Symphony Board of Directors, and Christina Littlejohn, CEO of the Arkansas Symphony, introduced the space and spoke about the collective effort to make it a reality that the extent of the collaboration was made clear. Gretchen Hall, president and CEO of the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, without whom, as Richard said, none of this would have been possible, was asked to stand in her box on the upper tier of seating. Mark Holden, the acoustician, was asked to stand where he sat on the orchestra floor, just across the aisle from where his team had monitored the sound a few days previous. After thanks were given—to the musicians, the board, the staff—they left the stage.

There was applause as Drew Irvin walked onstage and gave a tuning note. There was applause as Philip Mann walked across the stage from the wings and started without a word. And as the orchestra played, there were no sounds of construction in the hall, and there were no stops, and there were many voices there, all come together as one. It became very clear, for this reason, that all of these elements had been necessary to create the sound being produced in this moment. But of course, there had always been one thing missing.

After the first half of the show had concluded, and after a 15-minute intermission had come and gone, Philip appeared onstage with Mark. Mark was holding a large red balloon, 17 inches in diameter. It was not for a birthday, they clarified. Rather, they had one last test they wanted to do. Up until this point, the work had been incomplete. In order to understand how sound moved in the space, they needed bodies in the seats. So, Mark explained, he needed everyone to be quiet. Philip then jumped in, saying he was familiar with getting people to listen and said, "This is kind of my wheelhouse here, so I'll tell you when you can make sound. How's that?" As Mark raised the pin, there was no sound. The balloon popped, and then there was silence.



Maiden Voyage

By Jordan P. Hickey | Portrait by John David Pittman

On the night of July 22, 1958, a 16-year-old girl and her father left the port of San Francisco on a freighter destined for Japan. Among their personal effects were the normal trappings of travelers and tourists—enough clothes and so forth to get them through a two-month journey. Also in tow? Twenty heifers they'd collected across the Pacific Northwest for the organization that would eventually become Heifer International. To hear the story told nearly 60 years after the fact, you understand why it resonates—but it doesn't take long to realize it's not the entire story





The story is held in the dark at an even 71 degrees in a warehouse just across the road from where the piglets and alpacas live. Inside, there are hundreds of boxes stacked on metal shelves in rows across the floor. Financial records. Personnel files. Shipping records. Correspondence. For the most part, though the boxes lack a true sense of uniformity, owing to fact that a few are brown cardboard while the vast majority are white, each is labeled with a six-digit code—the white ones have barcodes, the brown ones with their numbers handwritten in black permanent marker. Taped inside each lid, there are sheets of paper with proper names, all written in the same hand.

In a sense, entering the room feels like walking through the brain of a person who is, generally speaking, fairly organized but has a secret proclivity for hoarding. Elsewhere in the space, on some of the racks toward the front, there are stacks of paintings that seem, at first glance, to be the work of children. A department-store clothes rack lined with the especially curious juxtaposition of zippered hooded sweatshirts and traditional Polish clothing is off to the side, just across the aisle from a pair of wooden ducks roosting on one of the paintings. A little easier to overlook, however, and more pertinent to the story at hand, there are a few boxes that do not have numbers and bear only the words “Seagoing Cowboys.”

In a word, this—all of this contained within Heifer International’s archive—is what it’s taken to get animals shipped clear across the world and into the hands of people who need them over the course of a 73-year history. In a word, this is Heifer. But of course, there’s only so much you can get just reading the files. They tell a story limited to what the boxes contain. For the full story, to the extent that any story can be considered complete, you have to look elsewhere.

Out the window there are mare’s tails. Wisps, long lines. Cold carried down from somewhere else to form there in the sky, she



After a week and a half on the 568-foot Hoosier Mariner, Kathy Moore (née Baldwin) and her father, Rev. Donald Baldwin, arrived in Yokohama on August 2, 1958, with the 20 heifers they’d brought from the Pacific Northwest.

explains, tracing the contours of the cirrus clouds with her finger from where she sits across the table. The air up there, it’s frozen, she says. For much of the first half hour or so, the conversation has lingered on the subject of the weather: how circular clouds of frozen ocean air ring the top of Washington’s Mount Rainier like a belt worn much too high, or how photos do not do justice to the lights of the aurora borealis, which sway in the night sky like a sheer curtain being gently shaken.

There’s little doubt that the second floor of the Heifer International headquarters just east of downtown Little Rock offers a fine vantage of the outdoors, of both the sky and the campus grounds alike. On a previous visit, sitting in the same booth, Kathy Moore, an archivist with Heifer, had given an extensive account of the moatlike pond that winds round the building and where, on one day each year, the building opens its doors to fishermen of all ages to try for the creatures lurking almost entirely undisturbed deep within the water’s murk.

But of course, Kathy and I haven’t met to discuss weather patterns, the ecology of the nonprofit’s campus or anything even remotely related to the present moment.

The story we’re supposed to be discussing deals with more terrestrial matters, a story that took place thousands and thousands of miles away, and nearly 60 years earlier—and which is largely contained in the unopened photo album sitting on the table between us. That’s not to say, however, that she’s putting off telling the story. If anything, the fact that our conversation has managed to hold strong to microclimates and cloud formations for the better part of half an hour speaks to her nature as a woman whose eyes and heart are held rapt and enamored by many things—with the outdoors being key among those, and those boxes stored just up the road from the alpacas right up there as well.

To understand why this is, you have to know a few things about Kathy. For one, as Heifer’s archivist, those are the materials she deals with on a daily basis: She works through the boxes, one at a time, scanning them in, cataloging and logging the information contained within each of them. Secondly, you need to understand just how long she’s been with the organization: She started Jan. 6, 1990, a date she recalls without the suggestion of hesitation, spending four years as a full-time volunteer sending out consignment materials to churches. Thirdly, you need to know that the archive as it exists today was, for all intents and purposes, Kathy’s doing. Which is to say: Those sheets of paper taped to the inside lids? That was her doing.

As she tells it, back in 1994, not long after she officially joined the staff, she spent nine months sitting on the floor sifting through records and papers that had come in from all over the country—from California



to New England—to prepare for the organization’s 50th anniversary. She sifted through each box, occasionally having to wear gloves and a mask if the files had been, let’s say, less-than-carefully stored, as was the case with the files kept in a barn out in Perryville. In fact, if you look at the inside lids of the older boxes, you can still find sheets of paper with her handwriting that provide keywords and proper names mentioned in the files.

If that all feels a little Russian dollish, with each layer yielding an increasingly intertwined history—well, that’s true. However, it’s only when Kathy reaches for the photo album placed between us on the table that the extent of those intertwined histories is revealed. She opens the album, and we pick up where she’d left off before.

Outside her window, the moon was bright, the ocean was indigo. The cows were quiet, penned up on deck in sheds made with steel beams and heavy plywood, loose straw bunched around their ankles. It had been no small task getting them aboard that afternoon. The longshoremen on the docks of the San Francisco port had balked at the idea of loading the cattle, so the task was largely left to her, a 16-year-old girl, and her father, the Rev. Donald Baldwin. One by one, they lifted each of the 20 heifers onto the deck of the Hoosier Mariner, a massive ocean freighter almost two football fields long, using a “flying stall” that was dangled in front of the truck’s tailgate. A crane then lifted stall and cow onto the ship, where Kathy, wearing high heels and getting dust and grime on her white cotton dress, then coaxed them out and into the enclosures on the deck. It took them two hours to get all of the animals onboard. That evening, on July 22, 1958, they watched as the Golden Gate Bridge receded into the purple gloaming behind the ship. It would be a week and a half before they saw land again—before they landed at the port in Yokohama, some 25 miles south of Tokyo, and the cattle were delivered.

The events of the next week and a half were guided largely by routine. Early each morning, at 6, they poured a fresh bucket of water into each cow’s manger and gave them a coffee can full of grain. Although the Pacific Ocean was fairly different than their home in the Pacific Northwest, the cattle, unlike her father, seemed largely untroubled by the motion. Members of the crew and other passengers—a pair of missionaries, several Korean doctors, a zoology professor from the University of California—came by and visited periodically. Ironically enough, on the third day of the voyage, Kathy would be banished from helping with the cattle after crew members complained that having a woman around was bad luck.

Although the setting was different, this wasn’t necessarily new, working with animals. Her uncle had a dairy farm roughly 50 miles



Top left: The Pacific Ocean may have been a very different setting compared with grass pastures in Washington state, but the heifers were by and large untroubled by the motion.

southeast of Seattle in Morton, the town where she’d been born and where the family often gathered for holidays because her uncle was unable to take time away from milking the cows. In school, she participated in 4-H, showing heifers and rabbits and chickens. She used her baby-sitting money—she and her older sister charged 25 cents an hour, 50 cents if it happened to be New Year’s Eve—to pay for feed and to shoe her horse. But yet, this was different, what she and her father were doing. Though not entirely unprecedented—this was the 443rd shipment of livestock that Heifer had made since getting started just shy of 14 years before—this was new just the same. Just 13 years had passed since two atomic bombs had been dropped on the place that was now their destination. What would they find? What would it be like?

She must have had some idea, however. During the war years, there had been no shortage of fear and animosity toward the unknown: The attack on Pearl Harbor had sparked the need to run drills for bombing raids and sirens, with students forced to huddle into the corners of their classrooms against the imagined enemy. In the years after, however, as the world struggled to put itself back together, and fear and resentment continued to linger—given the internment of nearly 120,000 Japanese residents during the war years, many of whom returned to their homes only to find them stolen, this was more than warranted—her family was somewhat different. The daughter of a Methodist minister, she’d spent her early years moving clear across the state, from Spokane in the far east, and Seattle and Tacoma in the far west. Eventually, she and her family found themselves south of Tacoma, a place home to a sizable population of Japanese refugees, many of whom she met and befriended through her father’s friendship with a man by the name of Alpha Takagi, a minister at the Tacoma Japanese Methodist Church.



Although delivering the cattle and attending the International Christian Education Conference were the main reasons for the trip, the Baldwins still had plenty of time for sightseeing—including a stop at the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

Although she was sailing clear across the world, there must have been some comfort in knowing the people she would find there were, in fact, people no different than her. And of course, she had her father. He was in a different part of the ship, lodging with the officers in a bunk with sheets musty with the high humidity. He was also, at the time, feeling rather under the weather, the beginning of a prolonged bout of nausea and headaches that would plague him for much of the two-month trip, both on the water and off it.

To hear Kathy speak about him, you would think he must’ve measured upward of 20 feet tall, though in reality, he was closer to 6 feet 2. He was affable and charismatic, the sort who would go out for folk dancing on Fridays, a passion he’d pass along to his daughter, but who was stern when it came to his children. Though he was always friendly and obliging with his parishioners, he was not known to smile much around the house. He was industrious and self-made, the sort of man who would fashion his own cross-country skis and, when traveling to Japan, tour the engine room with the chief engineer and make careful note of the ship’s propeller shaft (“laying in trough of oil—no lid—length of ship—22” of steel and visible for hundreds of feet which turned a 22” propeller. Burns 1 1/3 barrels of diesel oil per hour”). It should come as no surprise, then, that he was the sort of man who, when faced with a challenge—say, attending a conference taking place clear across the world—would find a means of solving it.

The previous fall, he’d gotten wind of a less-than-traditional, but arguably more cost-effective, way of attending the coming year’s International Christian Education Conference in Tokyo: If they were able to secure and help chaperone Holstein heifers, pregnant milk-producing cows, to Hokkaido, Japan, for the then still rather young Heifer Project, they would earn their passage across the Pacific. In many respects, the journey was not unlike those taken by other “seagoing cowboys” who had enlisted to help the organization. The first trip had been made when a ship of 17 heifers left from Pennsylvania for Puerto Rico on June 18, 1944. In the years since, other trips had been made to destinations all around the globe, from Europe to Africa—and in each case, the “cowboys” had been men. However, when he was deciding to take the trip, her father decided to bring Kathy along. For one, he knew that she’d long wanted to be a missionary. He knew she had an eye for livestock, having been trained as a dairy judge. He knew, finally, that she wanted to see the world—and when he asked her, he’d hardly finished his sentence when she answered, Yes. His wife was equally enthusiastic about the idea and bought him two suitcases for his birthday, even before he’d even put in an application with the Modesto, California, office.

Having settled that the two of them would go, they spent the next several months working with Takagi to promote their cause: They paid visits to local farmers and sent mailers to members of the Washington State

Holstein Dairymen, asking farmers to donate heifers or at least provide a discounted rate. At one point, Kathy and her father were even the subject of a write-up in the local paper. (Kathy was still in school, so she was only able to attend these excursions on weekends.) Eventually, after months of following leads, and a harried, whirlwind trip with the heifers to San Francisco, they successfully boarded the ship, chaperoning the 20 cows across the ocean.

It looked familiar. As the train wound its way from the fishing villages up into the mountains, they passed cedar and pine trees, foliage not unlike what she’d seen growing up in Washington. From the window of their uncrowded, second-class salon-style compartment, she and her father saw houses with thatched roofs, some trellised with sweet potatoes.

For Kathy, in particular, who’d spent the majority of their first week ashore baby-sitting for an American missionary couple who’d come to the conference from where they were stationed in Madagascar, the views from the window must have been particularly inspiring. This was Hokkaido, the second largest of Japan’s main islands, and the one farthest to the north. It was also where the majority of the cattle they’d helped bring over would eventually arrive. (At this moment, the cattle were still in quarantine. Brucellosis, a highly contagious disease caused by bacteria, had been found in several of the animals,



During the two months they spent traveling up and down Japan, Kathy and her father had an opportunity to see a place that most could only dream of. What they found, however, was a place with more similarities to home than differences.

Top right: Kathy stands in front of Heifer International's headquarters in Little Rock.



which required careful monitoring and eventually resulted in two of the animals being destroyed as a precautionary measure.)

Kathy and her father arrived that night in Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital, a city laid out along a grid of rectangular blocks in the Western style. The next day, they went to the Christian College of Dairy Agriculture, a 350-acre campus-farm located an hour's drive north of Sapporo.

Although their time was relatively limited that first visit, it was more than ample time to realize that the college and its supporting foundation, the Dairy-Farming Education Foundation, had played a considerable role in making their trip possible. Even long before the college was established in 1949, the school literature stated, its founders had been attempting to introduce dairy farming into the local rural economy. (Up until this point, it said, "the per-capita consumption of all milk products amounts to less than a pint a year.") The 80 students whom her father addressed—and, later that day, the young professors who would later be sent to study and conduct research at universities in the U.S. and Denmark—were particularly interested in this new form of agriculture, given the challenges they faced in that part of the country: Six months of the year were considered winter, and the past three years had seen 50 to 90 percent of crops all but wiped out.

The next day, they took a train to a place called Engaru. Accommodations on the train weren't nearly as comfortable as the second-class cabin had been on the train to Hokkaido. Crowded into the third-class cabin, there were people all around. People changed clothes in their seats, women nursed infants, and there were many children. In a word, the conditions were less than pleasant—dirty and smelly, as her father described them in his journal—but there were still many good sights to be seen from the windows. Rice, potatoes and grapes could be seen growing in the green, green fields. Hills rolled away from the tracks, and the rivers were muddy with rain. At each station, vendors approached

their windows selling boxes of rice and meat, tea and fruit. It was dusty that night when they arrived at Engaru.

When they toured the Kate Gako school, a boarding school for delinquent or orphaned boys ages 8 to 15, the following day, they saw some of the heifers from the previous shipment that had arrived just two weeks before. Here was one of their first opportunities to see for themselves the sort of place where the animals they'd accompanied over would make an impact.

Over the course of the next several weeks, they toured the country, from tip to tip, north to south. However, even as they were flooded with the novelty of the new and unfamiliar, one of the most poignant realizations came in seeing the farms where the cows would eventually end up. In seeing these people, the families putting their lives back together and who were just beginning to care for their land in a new and different way, she could not help but be struck by how similar they were to her: These people weren't any different. For starters, of course, they were people. But they were also pioneers in a way that her own family had been pioneers once. She was reminded of her own great-grandfather, who had crossed the United States in a covered wagon, traveling from Connecticut to Sacramento, California. Upon arriving there with a young and burgeoning family that would soon grow to 10 with eight children, he worked on a river boat up and down the Sacramento River, operating something like a floating grocery store for small communities along the banks of the river.

“So ... that's about it.” On one of the last pages of the photo album, there's a photo of her, face turned away from the camera, collar flared up around her ears like a supervillain's cowl with the white clouds billowing over the black rocks from some deep place in the Earth, well outside the frame. She's wearing a white blouse matched to the color of the smoke, looking down over the cliffs, her black skirt the focal draw of the photograph. She's just finished saying what it was like looking into the volcano. There wasn't any lava that she could see. Yellow sulfurous powder had covered the rocks.

As she turns through the last remaining pages of the photo album, she finds a pair of photographs that have been taken out of order and placed in the back. In one, there's the silhouette of the Golden Gate bridge, a photo made the night they left. In the other, you see her and her father, just the slightest bit out of focus, eating at a Mongolian restaurant in Japan. It's one of the very few photos that he appears in, more often preferring the role of photographer. He's looking at the camera and wears an apron, a plate of food on his lap, a pair of chopsticks in his hand just to the right of the plate. He's smiling. Kathy, seated to his left, is wearing the same sort of apron, what must have been a standard issue for the restaurant, over her white dress, having some difficulty breaking up the meat coming off the grill set on their table. She seems unaware that a photo is being made.

“This picture doesn't belong here,” she says, “but like I said, I've had too many people in here. Actually, I have a lot more at home.

But they're in a big book, and I've taken out the best.”

Sitting in the booth, almost 60 years removed from the photos whose story she's just explained, she's very different from the young woman in the photograph. She's a small woman, wears a blue turtleneck with her Heifer lanyard on a black string. Her glasses are set with thick lenses that seem strikingly similar to the ones she wore as an adolescent. She flips the book closed so it lies flat on the table. It's unremarkable to look at, turquoise with a pattern of tiny sky-blue fleurs-de-lis.

That's the story. The same story she's been telling for decades. The same story told by the shipping records and correspondence held in a box in the Heifer archive. But—and this is so important to stress—this isn't where Kathy's story stops. If anything, this is where much of it starts.

It's about this time, when she's describing what happened when she and her father returned from Japan, that the story begins to shift. Specifically, it's when she's talking about the photos that she's just finished using to tell the story of Japan. They're copies of the slides her dad made to give presentations to churches, and the photos “were something that my dad had in his study all those years, available, so anytime somebody wanted to hear about [them], he had them available.”

In the next breath, however, she says, “but when my parents got to when they couldn't stay by themselves anymore ...” She pauses. “He was a minister. He didn't really retire. And he was a strong man. But when he got up in his 80s, he was having these tiny ischemic
Story continued on page 114

That's the story. The same story she's been telling for decades. The same story told by the shipping records and correspondence held in a box in the Heifer archive. But it's important to note, her story goes well beyond this.



Although the trip Kathy made to Japan as a 16-year-old girl was a brief one, its effects have rippled and resonated all throughout her life.





Yes, recovery may take 12 steps...

But The BridgeWay has always been the first.

As the first psychiatric hospital in the state of Arkansas, The BridgeWay has helped thousands of Arkansans recover from addictions. From legal to illegal substances, we have treated them all.

Under the care of a certified addictionologist, The BridgeWay was the first to offer multiple individualized treatment options:

- Abstinence-based treatment
- Medication-assisted outpatient treatment with Suboxone
- Individualized goal-based recovery

Whether you need inpatient care or outpatient treatment, The BridgeWay has always been the first place to call. We provide evidence-based services that treat addictions for adults, ages 18 and older, within a structured setting:

- Pet-assisted therapy
- Art therapy
- Yoga
- Nutritional guidance
- Computer access
- Visitation
- Medical detoxification
- Intensive Outpatient Treatment
- Support by AA and Al-Anon

Let The BridgeWay be your first call.
1-800-245-0011

Our assessment and referral staff is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Assessments are provided at no charge and are always confidential.

The BridgeWay is an in-network provider for Medicaid, up to 21 years of age, and all other insurance companies in Arkansas including Medicare and Tricare.



www.TheBridgeWay.com | f

Story continued from page 80

strokes. And in a few days, his speech would clear again; he'd slur for a while. But he was losing energy. You know, it would accumulate. ... It got to where he would just whisper. He knew what was going on. But he'd whisper, and he didn't have the strength."

For the next few minutes, the story follows a different vein than it had been previously.

She talks about how her youngest brother had brought her mom and dad down to Arkansas for a short visit. This was "way back when," somewhere in the '90s, the same year that he'd had a stroke. They'd taken him out to Pinnacle Mountain, her brother in front, Kathy in back ("it should have been the other way"), taking their father up the staircaselike path, all the way to the top. "Even with his weakness," she says, "he knew how to climb a mountain, so he was going to climb a mountain. And he did. But that was the last mountain he ever climbed."

From that point, though the conversation returns briefly to her trip (on the voyage home, she recalls dorming with Japanese war brides and looking up at the stars from the upper-class swimming pool, feeling like she was swimming in the Pacific ocean), it's only for a few moments. Instead, she tells stories about her father, her family, her memories growing up, the trips she took later in life. She talks about being 11 years old and seeing a local beach absolutely covered in Portuguese Man-O-War. She remembers being young and, with her mother's encouragement, learning how to catch a Dungeness crab by reaching over the pointy ends and picking it up from behind. She talks about Honduras as a terrifying place to land an airplane, and Cambodia after Pol Pot's mass genocide as a place of nothing.

In effect, she talks about what seems to be everything.

The last time we meet, we look out the window. There are the gingkoes and red maples, the albino redbuds that produce light-yellow leaves in the fall, white flowers in the spring. There are the first nascent shoots of *Rudbeckia maxima*—better known as great coneflowers but which she refers to using their Latin name—but which will grow to be 6 feet tall. She talks about the animals housed at Heifer's urban farm, describing how one of the turkeys fluffs up his plumage when he greets her, or how she's on a first-name basis with one of the alpacas ("Star"). She talks about the vegetables growing in the plots of the community garden, but admits she grows her own vegetables at home.

When we finally sit down to chat, I ask her to tell me about her early years with

Heifer—and she tells me a 30-minute story about how she aided a handful of Laotian refugees in the '70s, before saying, finally, that she reconnected with the organization at an international fair in 1989. At the time, truthfully, I fail to see the significance and hurry to get my last questions answered—however, it's only retrospect that I start to realize something: None of this would have happened had it not been for the trip she took as a 16-year-old girl.

Of course, one can never really know what course a life will take, but what's certain is this: Before she went there, she'd been sure that she'd become a missionary focused on agriculture. When she got home, however, she met with her adviser and told him she wanted to pursue a degree in anthropology with a minor in Far East studies at the University of Washington. Had she not gone there, she likely would have never worked for the U.S. Postal Service, never met her husband, whom she's been with for 52 years. In all likelihood, she would never have moved to Little Rock, never have met the Laotian refugees who moved to Arkansas in the '70s, and who became her family over the next several decades. Of course, all things being equal, it's impossible to say exactly what would have happened, but even if she somehow had found herself in Arkansas and stumbled across the Heifer International table at a street fair in Little Rock in 1989, she would never have been able to say: *I was there.*

Of course, there will always be more to stories such as these. A story will never be able to fit inside a box, in a photo album—much less be told over the course of two hour-long conversations. Even in those more thorough accounts, there will always be details left on the cutting-room floor. In this case, for example, with the amount of detail that her father was able to fit into his journals, there would be enough for another several thousand words of narrative color alone. An entire book could probably be written on what Kathy knows about clouds and the microclimates of the Pacific Northwest.

By their nature, however, stories have beginnings and middles and ends. They're limited to a certain stretch of time, which allows for drama and tension to be built, for there to be a resolution, for the story to be satisfying in the way that any story seeks to be. The reason we keep telling them, however, is that they're always changing, becoming more vibrant. No matter how many times we hear them, there are always elements that make us think we're hearing them for the first time. **AL**

The Fell Types are digitally reproduced by Igino Marini. www.ignomarini.com

CWM Empowers Your Choices



Conger Wealth Management gives you the confidence to make financial choices that get you where you want to go. Pick the Conger Wealth Management team for their experience and expertise in financial planning, tax preparation and asset management. You'll find team members who get to know you, your family, your business and your preferences.

To empower your financial choices, call the Conger Wealth Management team or visit their website today.

congerwealthmanagement.com



CONGER WEALTH MANAGEMENT
Pavilion Woods Building
2300 Andover Court, Suite 560
Little Rock, AR 72227
501-374-1174

Fee-only Wealth Management Customized to Your Financial Needs

ATTACK BACK.

RECOGNIZE A HEART ATTACK AND ACT FAST.

Heart attacks can be sudden and intense, but most start slowly. In fact, many victims aren't sure what's wrong – so they wait too long to get help.

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath

If you experience any or all of these symptoms, call 911 immediately.

WE CAN BEAT THIS. YOU CAN HELP!

Become part of the heartbeat of Arkansas. Donate online or schedule a speaker for your group by contacting Vickie Wingfield at **501.219.7305**.

ArkansasHeartFoundation.org
1701 SOUTH SHACKLEFORD ROAD
LITTLE ROCK | ARKANSAS | 72211



BIG-CITY COOKING, SMALL-TOWN ARKANSAS

Places that make you wonder how they got where they are (slash thank your lucky stars you found 'em)

DEVITO'S It's an old-school Italian place—spaghetti and meatballs and the like—but it's the charbroiled rainbow trout that packs the parking lot, owing to the family's trout-farm history. Think of it as an Ozark twist on your favorite family-owned restaurant in Little Italy. (350 Devitos Loop N., Harrison; (870) 741-8832)

LOCAL FLAVOR Owned by a sixth-generation Eureka, this downtown favorite is as eclectic and artsy as the town surrounding it. Grilled salmon, walnut-pesto pasta, pan-seared tilapia—it's all here, and all utterly delicious. (Don't miss the sister restaurant, Aquarius Taqueria, if you're craving authentic Mexican or a mezcal marg.) (71 S. Main St., Eureka Springs; (479) 253-9522)

FOX & FORK Here's something you shouldn't do: Browse this quirky Clarksville bistro's Facebook feed when you're hungry. Here's something you most definitely should do: Stop in for a spell on your next Interstate-40 haul. Then order the bacon-pâté-and-tomato-jam-topped BLT and start planning your next visit. (117 S. College Ave., Clarksville; (479) 647-5010)

SKYLARK CAFE This sweet-as-sugar cafe off U.S. 65 is helmed by a sweet-as-sugar young couple who are churning out dishes that we crave on the regular (namely, those green-chile pork tacos and that pulled-pork Cuban)—*annnd* that we often make the drive for. And don't even get us started on that strawberry pie. (401 High St., Leslie; (870) 447-2354)



Wilson Cafe

TO SPEND any amount of time in Wilson is to feel you've encountered a place that's fallen directly out of the sky. Heading north from Memphis, there are the wide, wide fields of the Delta that spread off like a blanket, uniform to the eye unfamiliar with the subtler cues and totems by which such a landscape can be marked away and defined. But then, arriving in Wilson, there is Tudor architecture, a company town all in one style, a place that, again, feels so disconnected from the elements that would normally tether a town to one place—that if it weren't anchored in place by the solidly built red-brick structures, it might drift up and away into the horizon.

Of course, this is wrong on several counts.

Do a little looking around and you'll find the town has been there for a *good* long while, going all the way back to 1886, when Lee Wilson founded his sawmill, and a company town rose up with it. But there's more rooted there than just history—something that is amply clear when you look to the 100-acre Wilson Gardens just a little ways up the road and across the train tracks. This gets all the clearer, however, when you stumble across the restaurant where so much of that produce is finding a home, (especially during the spring and summer months): Wilson Cafe.

When chef Joseph Cartwright—who runs the place with his wife, Shari Haley—talks about the produce that winds up on the table of the Wilson Cafe, it's almost as if all the vegetables were vying for placement in the sentence. “Zuchinisquashtomatookra” he says before noting that really, there's so much more than that. There are the fruit trees, for example—the many kinds of apples and pears, the nectarines, plums, the limes that'll wind up behind the bar. Or the green tomatoes. Or the carrots that, as of this writing, ought to be showing up any day now.

But of course, in order to get the full effect, you've really got to see the dishes that comprise those ingredients coming out of the kitchen, (even in the winter months, greens from the hoop still make regular appearances). You've got to see Shari in the kitchen surrounded by pecan and chocolate chess pies, and the traveling salesmen who linger over pie and coffee and lick their plates clean. Really, in order to see all the ways Joseph and Shari have decidedly made the place their own since opening in December 2013, you've got to eat there for yourself.


Although any discussion of Wilson is certainly incomplete without a pointed mention of the windfall the town received when Gaylon Lawrence Sr. bought the whole thing in 2010, thereby energizing a place that might have otherwise languished in the manner of so many small towns, there's an equally important point to be made: When you spend time in this place, it's clear a community is taking root in a new and exciting way. And you can taste it. —jph **AL**

2 N. Jefferson St., Wilson
eatatwilson.com; (870) 655-0222

HOURS:
Sun. - Tues., 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.;
Wed. - Sat., 11 a.m. - 2 p.m., 5 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

RECOMMENDED DISHES:
Strawberry Fields salad, good ol' burger, “steak and eggs,” scampi and grits, and pie. All Of. The. Pie.

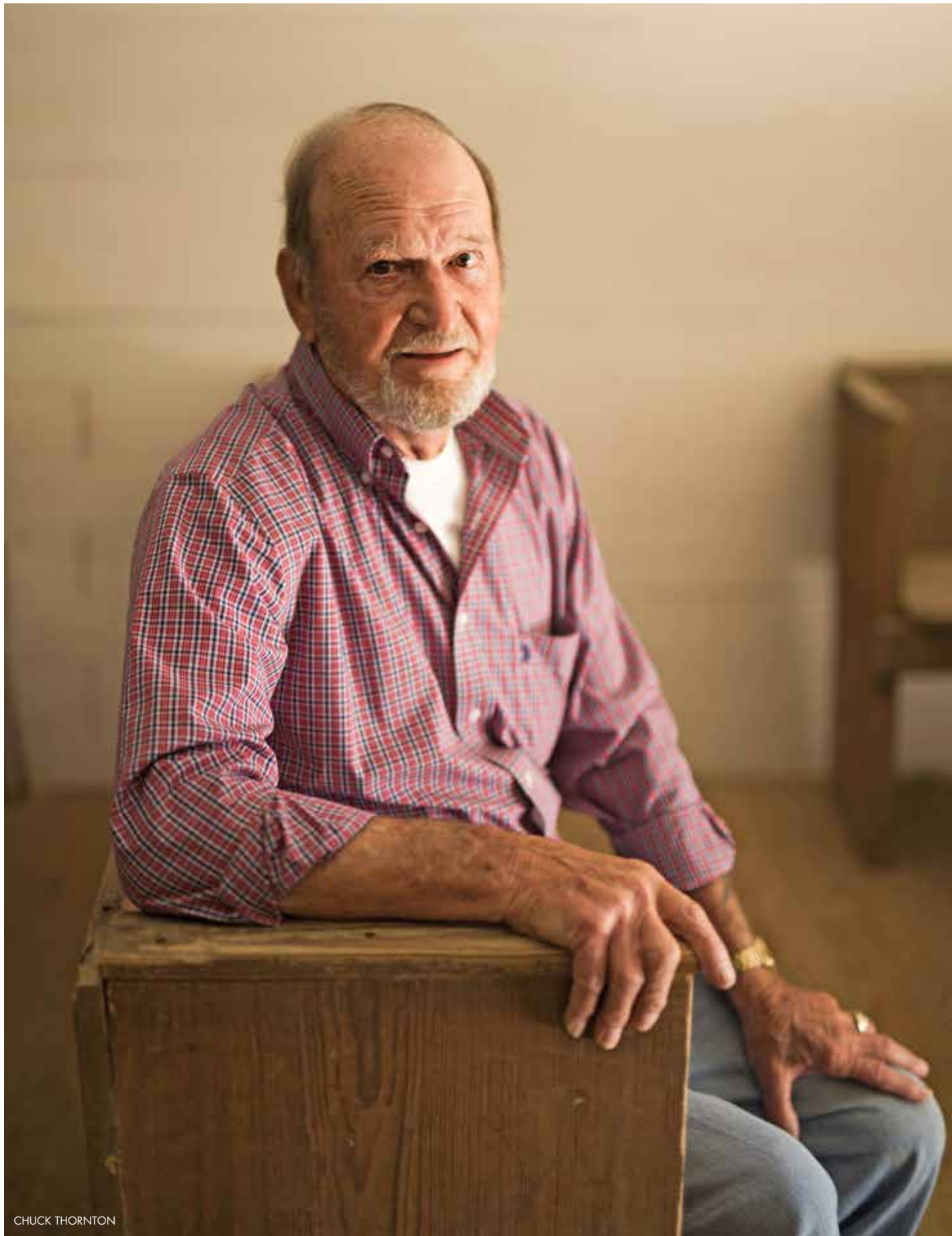




What Lies Beneath

Before the waters rose, those islands were hilltops. There were towns and generations of people who called them home. To stand on the banks of Lake Ouachita, it's tempting to say there's nothing left. But speak with the people who once called those towns home—who've come to this place each year for the past 75, the closest they can get to going home again—and they'll tell you there's more than meets the eye

By Jordan P. Hickey
Photography by Arshia Khan



CHUCK THORNTON

JUNE 12, 2016, 1 P.M.

THE LAST MAN TO LEAVE was well-dressed, wearing lavender, kneeling down, arranging flowers. His hair was white. His hands were red. His face was reddish. Above, there were dragonflies flitting against the gray sky threatening rain, a whole cloud of them, like particles drawn together and flung through the magnetism or attraction of something unseen. He didn't seem to notice them. Nor did he appear to hear the joyful cries and splashes drifting up from the banks of the lake some 30 feet from the cemetery. He walked among the graves, with two plastic grocery bags, one gray, one yellow, filled with flowers that were weather-resistant, beautiful and fake, the handles gripped tightly in his hands. There was a fine sprinkling of rain, unobtrusive as the dragonflies, making the slightest pattering on the tombstones.

The graves where the rain fell were mostly old, irregularly spaced, adhering to the shape of the bodies and their coffins interred below. In some places, there were just fist-sized chunks of stone used to mark the graves, and it was impossible to know whether it was a stray rock or the last tangible sign of someone who, at some time, had existed and been loved. Most of the graves were normal in size. A few, like an unmarked one just inside the chain-link fence nearest the church, were quite small. In looking over the 300-plus graves of the Buckville Cemetery, it was interesting to think what they would have seen as their small corner of the world changed—what it would have been like, looking down from the cemetery and seeing in that silent vigil not a lake, but a small, bustling town, where a generation of people had grown up knowing their home didn't have a future.

As the man fished the last of the flowers from the bags, he was joined by a woman in a navy-blue blouse who was many years his junior. Together they placed the last of the flowers on two graves near the middle of the cemetery and left, leaving the lake behind them and raising a cloud of dust that wouldn't settle for the better part of a minute. Not long after, the shouts that had before carried up from the lake spilled over. Two women, a young boy who couldn't have been any older than 10 or 11, wearing yellow and orange swim trunks, his hair slick with lake water, entered through a chain-link gate, followed by two small energetic dogs. The dogs ran, and the boy ran, too, the three of them running zigzags along the lines of gravestones, over the plots, the dogs charting wider paths in a broadening gyre that, if seen from above, might have been like the manic choreography of honeybees or the now-dispersed cloud of dragonflies.

Having crossed the cemetery, trying the syllables of the dead's names on his tongue as the dogs were running and the women idling, he walked up to a large black stone that appeared to be much newer than the others. It had a bright rainbow of flowers that followed the curvature of the stone. Hands hitched on his bare hips, he circled the stone and, with the flat of his palm, slapped its back three times where the flowers stopped. Almost as if to say, yes, you had a good run, old girl. Then, wistfully, he looked off somewhere till something else caught his eye, and he ran after the dogs again. Then they left, never coming close enough to read the historic marker just inside the fence on the north side of the cemetery.

"The Buckville Church and Cemetery stand as visible reminders of the communities that once stood on lands now covered by Lake Ouachita. The church was moved in the summer of 1951 to be above water level, and the cemetery is the only portion of the Buckville cemetery that remains in its original location. The church discontinued regular services several years before it was moved, but each June this site hosts a homecoming for hundreds of people who once lived in the area, their families, and friends. The Buckville cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007."

"Some of the [scuba] divers that went down there, they can still see the old railroad track [that] run right in front of our house."



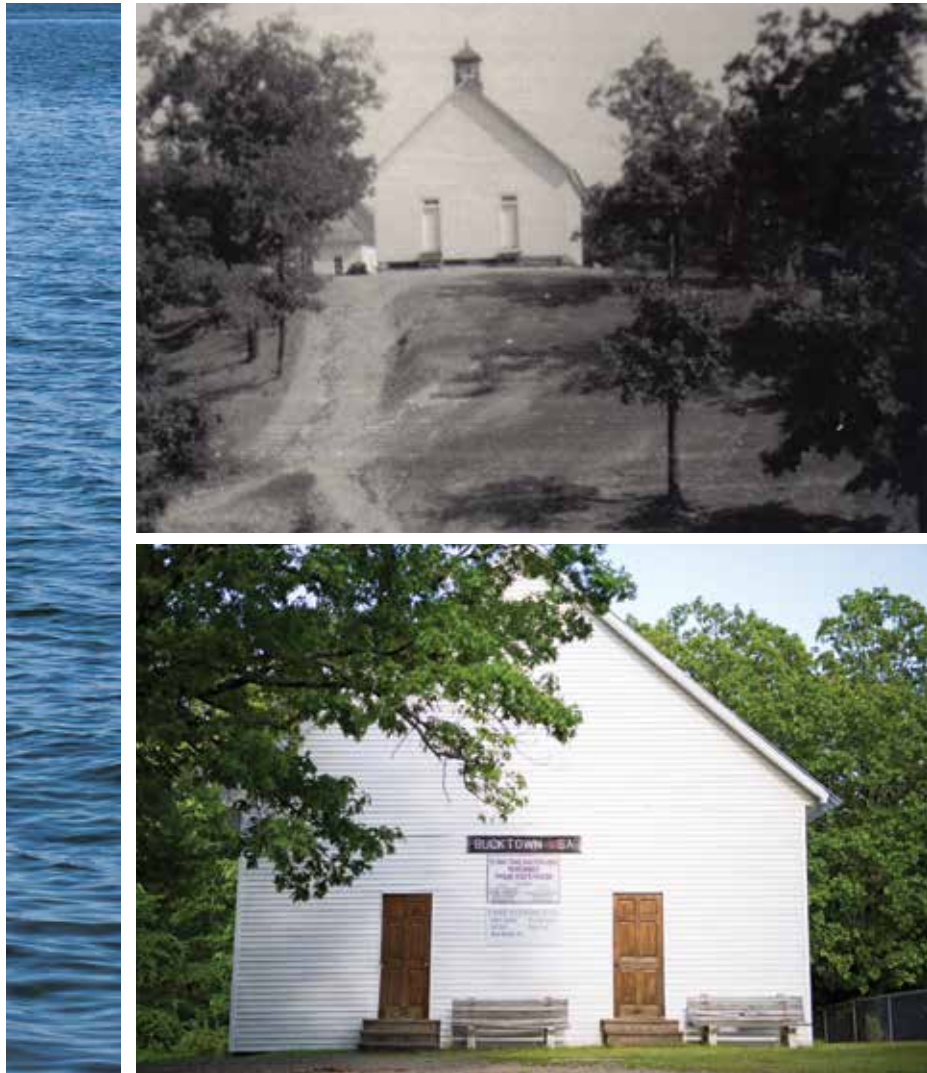
APRIL 28, 2016

Standing on the shore of Lake Ouachita, Chuck Thornton describes something he once knew well but can now only imagine. Hands spaced a foot apart in front of his face, palms facing each other as if he were about to pounce on a mosquito or tell a less-than-impressive fish story, he squints at some point maybe 100 yards or so into the lake, where two small islands bristle with trees. In that space between his hands, he says, in that rough spatial approximation, that's where the old general store used to be.

"You can probably see the island," he says. "I think that's where the old church and schoolhouse set, just between the cedar tree and the other trees right out there. ... And the town was right there in that valley, in the holler, in here and then here."

Because there's nothing. The water is a blue reflection of the sky. If you were to walk to the shore, where the water laps against the land, the rocks are brittle as candy shells, broken easily underfoot. There is no sand. There are polyps of algae and the plashing of turtles and chirping of birds and the regular undulations

of the water pushed by the wind ribbing against the shore. Not any sign of the places that had once been there: Buckville, Cedar Glades (once known as Harold), White Plains and Little Georgia,



small communities with farms and schools and general stores settled several generations before, largely untouched by the modernizing elements of electricity and paved roads.

But as Chuck says, before the waters rose, they had been there.

By the time he was born in 1933, the rumors had already been flying for the better part of a decade among the communities of the Upper Ouachita River Valley. Beginning in the '20s, a company called Arkansas Power & Light had been buying up land around Hot Springs with the intention of building three dams along the Ouachita River. They'd successfully erected the first two—Rommel Dam was built in 1925 and Carpenter Dam in 1931, creating Lake Catherine and Lake Hamilton, respectively—but hit a series of snags with the third and largest of the bunch: Blakely Mountain Dam.

Ultimately, after many years of delays, the federal government wound up with the project; however, by the time the dam was formally dedicated on July 4, 1956, the people who lived in those affected areas of Cedar Glades, Buckville and others had been anticipating the losses of their homes for decades, as evidenced by a sharp drop in construction projects and burials. As the Great Depression stretched into the Second World War, more and more residents began to take flight, tearing down their homes, salvaging what they could of the materials, and abandoning what had in many instances been their homes for generations to put down stakes elsewhere. By 1947, nearly all of the structures were gone. That is, with the exception of the Buckville Baptist Church, which was moved a half mile up the road in the summer of 1951 to where it is now.

The Buckville Cemetery, there beside the church, is the only thing original to the site. There were another 16 cemeteries, but per an order handed down by the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, those were relocated over the course of three months in the late summer of 1951. (In doing so, the workers were instructed to dig 4 to 5 feet and, if no remains were found, to fill a box with dirt. "It is surprising how little there is," a worker was quoted as saying in a newspaper article from the time. "In one grave we found a man's watch, in another a

celluloid collar and cuffs, and in still another a mustache cup of ancient vintage. Only in about two dozen of the 1,200 graves we went into did we find any similar items of any consequence." The article goes on to say that "Visitors during the disinterment have been amazingly few, it was said.")

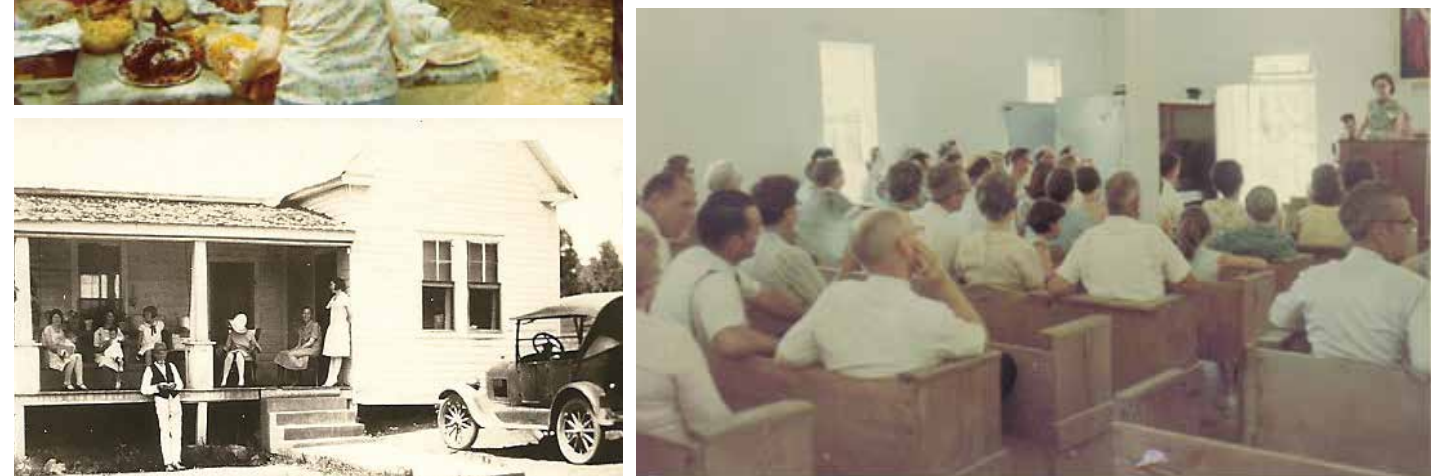
For their part, Chuck's family had left their home in Cedar Glades, just up the road from Buckville, in 1939 or 1940, moving to his grandparent's farm over in Piney, 5 miles or so west of Hot Springs. His dad used what lumber was left of the Blakely schoolhouse to build a house, and sold the school bell for a keg of nails. The family bopped around the next few years, moving to California for a time, where his dad worked as a welder in the shipyards, and then back to Arkansas after World War II ended. Eventually, after a few more moves and military service in Korea, Chuck found his way back to Arkansas. When he arrived home, he found that his home was underwater.

"You could smell the green stuff," he says, looking over the lake. "You know, with the water coming in ... just moldy. Rotten leaves and this stuff. I don't know how long it took to back up that full. But they'd had a hard time showing me where I was born down there. I know that. ... Some of the [scuba] divers that went down there, they can still see the old railroad track [that] run right in front of our house."

As he turns away from the lake to face the cemetery, he walks slowly. His knees, he explains, are all but shot, and he's scheduled to have both knees replaced in October, ("Doctor's making their money, aren't they? ... I get down, I can't get up, 'less I got something to pull me up.")

To look at him, you can see Chuck's never been a stranger to the sun. On his right arm, sun-chapped and leathery red, he has a tattoo, its finer details lost and faded to blotches over the years. He has to explain it's a dagger, and that the letters, somewhat obscured on the neck of the handle, are "CWT"—his initials. He got the tattoo when he was 17 years old, recently arrived in California, where he'd enlisted in the Air Force so as to avoid being drafted into the Army as the U.S. prepared to enter Korea. (His mother about "tanned his hiney," when she got wind of what her son had done to himself, he says.) It comes as no surprise, then, when he explains that he's been a caretaker here for nearly half his life.

"It don't seem that long to me, but I guess it has been." Walking along the side road up to the church, he looks up the hill that runs north of the church. "I used to take care of this up here"—he says, meaning the Cedar Glades Cemetery, one of 16 cemeteries moved when the waters rose—"but David Smith takes



Photos courtesy of BuckvilleUSA | Flickr

care of it now.”

“I guess it’s been longer than that, Chuck,” his wife, Nancy, says.

“I don’t remember, Mama. Too far back. I can’t hardly remember yesterday anymore.”

He explains that in 1967, around the time Nancy was pregnant with the younger of their two sons, he’d been approached by the trustees, a group of town elders who’d taken on the task of providing upkeep for the church and the cemetery grounds. They were getting to be older, however, and they needed someone younger who could help take care of things. He agreed, and he’s been helping to take care of things ever since.

In looking around the grounds, you can see the efforts he and others have put in over the years. There’s the chain-link fence that was strung along the perimeter back in the ’60s. There are the concrete steps he helped pour in the ’70s, leading down to the lake from the cemetery. There’s the new siding up 20 years ago. There’s the new roof that went on 15 years ago. You can see his initials written in concrete with others on the foundation of the old church, replaced in 1981 after it was found to be rotting.

You can see how well the place has been taken care of, but you don’t see the hours he and the other seven trustees—their names

*This year as every year,
the familiar faces number
fewer than they once did,
and everyone is older. Most
hair has gone shades of
gray and white, most voices
have gone a little hoarser.
Yet despite all of this, in
listening to the conversations
of people gathered in front of
the church, there’s the sense
that nothing’s changed, even
though it has.*

are listed on the front of the church alongside five other trustees who are now deceased—have spent weed-eating the grass that sprouts among the irregularly spaced graves or blowing the leaves into serpentine berms, which in recent years have been collected by Garland County inmates plied with Pepsi and chicken-salad sandwiches. You don’t see the spate of vandalism he’s had to deal with in recent years—the trash left in the church, the Bible that was burned, the spent 9mm bullet casings littering the ground around the old cedar tree and the branches that were shot off. But more than anything, you don’t see why it is that he and the other trustees come out here—what they mean when they explain they need to get things ready. You don’t see the people whose personal narratives and identities all have the rising of the water as the central tenet in the stories they tell about themselves, about

the place they come from—and who, for 75 years (the reunions started a few years before the waters actually started to rise), have come home to this place that, at least physically, no longer exists.

JUNE 12, 1977

Back in 1977, Hot Springs-born author Shirley Abbott came back to the church for just that reason. In a beautifully rendered account published a few years later in her book *Womenfolks*, she describes what it was like to visit this place when such a homecoming took place—when only 25 years had elapsed since the waters had first started to rise in 1952. On that day, she wrote, people filled the church (“simple as a child’s drawing” as she described it), sat themselves on the unpainted pews and listened as her “cousin Donna skillfully beats out some gospel music out of the tuneless old pile, while a man in a yellow suit and string tie (a Grand Ole Opry dandy) plays a banjo.” She then goes on to write:

Shoes pat the floor, Donna hammers the piano faster, and up go the voices, singing sharp and flat and in all keys. “Just like a tree that’s standing by the water, I shall not be moved.” My two citified little daughters look at me in astonishment as I sing out. The music stops and a very old man, his frame crumpled like a paper doll’s, one eye askew, stands up and voices his thankfulness at having been spared by the Lord to come here another year. And they read the long list, as they always do, of this year’s dead, and from the congregation come a few extra names—“Aunt Hannah Robbins passed in March.” “You never mentioned poor old Mr. Beasley.”

Outdoors, a mammoth dinner is spread on card tables or simply on old quilts laid down on the sparse grass—all the good eats of a country picnic, the vats of fried chicken, and 20 varieties of cakes and quickbreads, the potato salad everybody hopes had not gone bad in the 95-degree heat. We all go around sampling things, fixing plates for the very young and the very old, urging them to eat, trying to

get the toddlers to nap for an hour in the shade. We hug each other’s sweaty necks and smack each other’s cheeks. We grope perplexedly for names. “Why, you’re Velma’s daughter!” they exclaim. “Darlin’, I knew your grandma well.”

Over and over again, I tell my maiden name and my mother’s maiden name and Grandma’s maiden name, and they relay the same information about themselves, in the obsessive and peculiarly Southern quest for common ancestry, the urgent hope of discovering mutual cousins by marriage. Someone presses upon me the name of a former resident of the area now living in Scarsdale, New York—in case I ever badly need to see home folks and am unable to come all the way home at the moment. In the backwoods, you learned to love your own and mistrust foreigners, but you tried if possible to make everyone your own, seeking kinship bonds with any and all comers, trying by whatever means to connect yourself with the rest of humanity, raking up ancestral names (“Now, Great-Aunt Addie was a Holloway”), uncovering the secret network of cousinship.

JUNE 12, 2016, 9 A.M.

In most respects, this morning is no different. The cars still follow the same dirt road past the graves where the high grasses have been clipped to crest the same hill that leads to the church. The dust still rises in plumes. Cars and trucks are parked beside concrete picnic tables, some shaded by trees, some shaded by an awning that was procured from a Cadillac dealership decades ago. There are coolers and Tupperware containers and cardboard boxes filled with smaller containers and aluminum tins, all of which offer ample indications that no one will be leaving hungry.

As people arrive, they get out of their vehicles and walk directly to the cemetery, making it difficult not to notice that there are comparatively few young people in the mix. This year as every year, the familiar faces number fewer than they once did, and everyone is older. Most hair has gone shades of gray and white, most voices have gone a little hoarser. But yet despite all of this, in listening to the conversations of people gathered in front of the church, there’s the sense that nothing’s changed, even though it has.

“We come home, and our dogs had [the bear] by the tree, there by the deck. Then about a month and a half ago, I was coming home, and one [dog] ran behind where I keep those lawnmowers and everything. So we had two bears up there. . . .” Chuck says, addressing a small group of people who’ve already paid



their respects. Among them, there’s a man who, like most, if not all, of the older folks, is well-dressed in dark pants, a blue and white plaid shirt and a ball cap. His eyes are large behind thick lenses, his lips tremble just slightly when he speaks. This is Bobby Hatmaker, one of the cemetery’s trustees.

If you were to ask him, he could tell you more about this place than just about anyone else. He could tell you what it was like to be a 125-pound, 17-year-old kid lying about his age to get a job clearing timber. He could tell you what it was like to earn a dollar an hour. He could tell you what it was like to be one of the last two people out there, clearing timber from the floor of the valley that would be a lakebed, dousing piles of brush with diesel, six to eight at a time, that then burned bright in the night, explaining, in vivid detail what it was like coming across the former sites of people’s homes, and how you knew there had been homes there because there was nothing growing where the house had once stood. He could also tell you what it was like to see the waters rise, inch by inch, one night at a time. The family farm was right near the banks of the future lake, and he’d remember how you could put a stick at the water level, and then you’d go out the next day, and it’d be partially underwater. Of course, he could tell you more than that, too.

If you were to visit him at his home, you’d see that it, too, reflects the years. You’d find walls filled with photographs new and old of people he’s loved, and a porch with oxygen tanks stacked upright like milk bottles. Sitting at a table, he’d tell you that he’d been caring for the cemetery just as long as he’d been able to walk—or at least since he’d been able to hoist a rake and help his daddy clear leaves. He’d tell you what it was like, going out there to the cemetery—a place that is, by its nature, unchanging except when there are more people brought to it—and what it was like to find it changed, with the church now sitting beside it. If you ask him, he’d tell you everything. But of course, the folks at the reunion already know all of this, or most of it, so none of it comes up. Instead, they sit and

listen intently as Chuck tells the story about a bear. Midway through, a woman named Debbie Garner, Chuck’s niece, comes up to Bobby and says hello and asks if he wouldn’t mind sharing some memories.

“I’ve lost ‘em all,” he says, laughing in a way that’s definitely not ironic. “I have to ask [my friend] Peggy who I am sometimes.”

“And these are Hatmakers, too, aren’t you?” Debbie says, turning to two teenage girls near the fence, who are among the few young people to attend.

“Yeah, we’re granddaughters.”

“Granddaughters. OK. Are you Belinda’s or . . .”

“Kim’s,” the girls and Bobby all say in unison.

There’s a moment’s pause. Debbie sighs. “Next year’s number 75,” Debbie says.

“I wonder how many of us’ll be able to make it,” says an older woman standing nearby.

“Oh, I don’t know. I can’t guarantee me, either,” Debbie says.

“I’m afraid I won’t be able to, either,” Bobby says, leaning on his cane. “If my legs keep going along like this, I’m afraid I’m going to have to use a wheelchair.”

Although there are certainly moments when people reminisce about the days when the lake wasn’t there, conversation mostly circles the familiar. They’re the sorts of conversations you can only have with people whom you’ve known for more years than you can count, and which resume one year to the next without effort. It’s for this reason that it’s not terribly surprising when, a few moments later, conversation returns to the bear.

“Did you see that picture of my bear?” Bobby asks.

“Is that your bear?” Debbie asks, laughing. “Why you’d run him off to Thornton Ferry Road?”

“I got rid of ‘im.”

“Well, he was really traveling, wadn’t he?”

“He come across the hill, right there from my house, and come down in the road, come across and went all the way to my gate. And this boy that was sitting there with me, he had a camera, and he took a picture of it. And

then [the bear] went and hit that tree, and he started up that big pine tree, and boy, them old claws was tearing the bark up. I went up and started slapping my hands, and down he come and took off the other way. And he went out of the other side of the fence, and then he went back up to the pawnshop across over there.”

JUNE 12, 2016, 12 P.M.

A few minutes later, just before noon, Debbie announces they’re about to have the business meeting, her voice carrying across the grounds in lieu of a bell that’s evidently gone missing. As people file inside, it has to be said, it’s very different than it used to be—very different than the photos you’ll see from past decades. Structurally, the church is still the same, 30 by 42 feet, pews and an altar. The afternoon light pours in through the doors and windows the same way it did before. The piano is gone, and there’s not any singing, but the key difference between homecomings of the past and present is the number of people who now sit in the church. There are 15 people in the pews where there used to be hundreds, (though it should be noted, a fair number can be seen milling around outside). Looking around, there are many familiar faces. The Hatmakers and Meekses are off to the left; the Thorntons are up front. Dave Smith, the caretaker for the Cedar Glades Cemetery, comes in a little late and sits in the middle aisle, not far from an older gentleman and his daughter. The man is wearing a lavender colored button-down; her, a navy-blue blouse. They’re Leon Dinkins and Karen Dinkins Meredith.

After reviewing the state of the nonprofit’s finances, Debbie goes to read the names of those who’ve died. She says, “This was the first year that I had below 10 memorials. We had been averaging losing folks 15 to 20 a year.” As she reads the 10 names from the list, ending with, “And just the other day, Troy Tucker,

Continued on page 98

Excerpt credit: Abbott, Shirley. *Womenfolks*. Copyright 1998 by Shirley Abbott. Reproduced with the permission of the University of Arkansas Press, www.uapress.com

Kimball Office

Pettus
OFFICE PRODUCTS

2 FREEWAY DR. | LITTLE ROCK | 501.666.7226

Downtown Little Rock's urban oasis awaits!

These luxury high rise condos include incredible views, private balconies, parking, a fitness center, and a pool. Best of all, prices on remaining units at River Market Tower have been lowered - starting from \$344,000! Call or email our agents to take a look today. 90% have already sold!

RIVER MARKET TOWER

501.376.6555 or rmtcondos@mosestucker.com

MOSES TUCKER
REAL ESTATE

Continued from page 61

85, passed away June 6, 2016. I'd say that's probably the smallest memorials I've had to read in 15 years." As she says this, there's the sobering reminder that fewer people are dying because there are fewer people left to die.

JUNE 12, 2016, 12:30 P.M.

Sitting down to lunch after the meeting's been adjourned, there's the sense, the feeling, that it's been done many times before—that it's more than habit or rote, more something innate. There are some tablecloths, but for the most part, people place their paper and Styrofoam plates of fried chicken, ham, deviled eggs, salads, banana pudding and so forth on the concrete slabs. There are bottles of water and Pepsi. It's not at all difficult to imagine what it used to look like even a few years before, when hundreds of people were gathered along the benches, when some were waking up at 6:30 in the morning to fry chicken, and others were out here early, arriving with chicken and dumplings and putting out the ice chest. The reason memory is so peculiar is largely owing to the way people talk about the past. But the past and its memories are curious things at the reunion.

It's because, oddly enough, for as long as Buckville has been gone, there are still people who can see it, who were born decades after it was lost to the waters of Lake Ouachita and, despite or perhaps because of that, are able to form an enduring and meaningful connection to this place. They're people who want to see the memories of the place given shape and passed along to the generations that follow. Karen, the woman who later this afternoon will join her father to place flowers on the graves of people she knew and knows only by name, knows this better than most.

"I can imagine—well, I've been told so many times—the school was on that hill," she says, extending a hand out toward the lake. Standing in front of the church, she goes on to describe the layout of a place she's never known—how the road slopes downward when you get to the very end, and how if you keep going down, you'd get to her grandfather's cow pasture, and then beyond that would be the general store. And even though she's never laid eyes on the place that she now speaks of, she connects to it somehow. "So, I can imagine, but I really would love to have seen it."

"It is pretty incredible," she continues, asked how she connects to a place she's never known. "It was just instilled in me, just how

important it was—and you know, this place used to be so full. There's no way that you could even find a parking place. You'd park all the way down there, up there in that field. Full. And my mom knew everybody. And my grandparents knew everybody. It's even down to where you eat. Like, we always ate at that table (gesturing to one of the first tables nearest the church), and the Browns ate at this table. And we're still eating at the same table. And I don't even want to go up there because that's not my table." Gesturing at a nearby table covered with a tablecloth, she says, "That's my table. And that's my bench." As she's saying this, her father, an older man with white hair and a reddish face who's wearing slacks and a lavender button-up shirt, comes over from the cemetery. He's a tall man and speaks slowly and clearly; he bears a passing resemblance to Charlton Heston. "And this is my dad here," she says before turning his way. "I was just telling him about how we eat at the same table every time. And we sit at the same bench."

"Well, that's right," he says. "First time I came up here in 1958, spread out under that table. That canopy came from ..."

"... a car dealership."

"A Cadillac dealership in Hot Springs."

"A long time ago."

Though it goes unspoken or at least unremarked upon, in that exchange there's the realization that her father never knew the place, either. Her mother, Patsy Jean Bradley Dinkins, is the only one who did. She's buried here now alongside so many other members of the family. As they're speaking, there's a young family who makes their way across the far edge of the cemetery. They're carrying a long garland of rainbow flowers, which they leave over the curvature of a large black stone. It's newer than many of those around it. The name on the grave is Inez Bratton Brown, who died on July 24, 2015. To look at them, the father and mother and son and daughter, you can see they would have known very few people interred in the cemetery. But they knew her.

After a time, Karen's dad returns to the cemetery. She joins him a short time later. The clouds are threatening rain. There are dragonflies in a cloud. And as Karen and her father leave, and there are joyful cries drifting up from the banks of the lake, where there's been water for a while but not forever, there are ripples where there never used to be, and you know there will be people here next year, come once more to the lake.

Note: Those interested in learning more about Buckville and the other towns now under Lake Ouachita's waters should consider reading the exhaustive Lost Communities of the Upper Ouachita River Valley by Dr. Wendy Bradley Richter, available through the Garland County Historical Society. **AL**

Fairpark District Downtown

DON'T YOU DESERVE TO getaway?

Go it alone, grab a friend, or choose a family fun weekend, but **GET AWAY** from it all! You deserve it and **Tupelo, Mississippi** is an upbeat, happy city where the power of possibility is yours! **#MyTupelo**

Imagine what you can do here!

Put together your itinerary by visiting us online and clicking the "ADD" button on all the great things you find to do!

tupelo
tupelo.net

Yes, recovery may take 12 steps...
But The BridgeWay has always been the first.

As the first psychiatric hospital in the state of Arkansas, The BridgeWay has helped thousands of Arkansans recover from addictions. From legal to illegal substances, we have treated them all.

Under the care of a certified addictionologist, The BridgeWay was the first to offer multiple individualized treatment options:

- Abstinence-based treatment
- Medication-assisted outpatient treatment with Suboxone
- Individualized goal-based recovery

Whether you need inpatient care or outpatient treatment, The BridgeWay has always been the first place to call. We provide evidence-based services that treat addictions for adults, ages 18 and older, within a structured setting:

- Pet-assisted therapy ■ Art therapy ■ Yoga
- Nutritional guidance ■ Computer access
- Visitation ■ Medical detoxification
- Intensive Outpatient Treatment
- Support by AA and Al-Anon

Let The BridgeWay be your first call.
1-800-245-0011

Our assessment and after-care staff available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Assessments are provided at no charge and are always confidential. The BridgeWay is an in-network provider for Medicaid, up to 21 years of age, and for the insurance companies Missouri including Medicare and Blue Cross.

The BridgeWay
Children • Adolescents • Young Adults • Seniors

www.TheBridgeWay.com



Ho Ho Ho



Glow Glow Glow



Go Go Go

Fairy tale fun and excitement awaits at the Sugar Plum Ball, where every little girl is crowned as a princess, escorted by the Prince Charming of her choosing.

6 p.m. Wednesday, November 15

Wally Allen Ballroom, Statehouse Convention Center

Tickets, \$50 each

*A limited number of reserved tables for 10 will be available for \$1,000.


**Sugar Plum
Ball 2017**

A ROYAL EVENING BENEFITING CARTI

Presented By

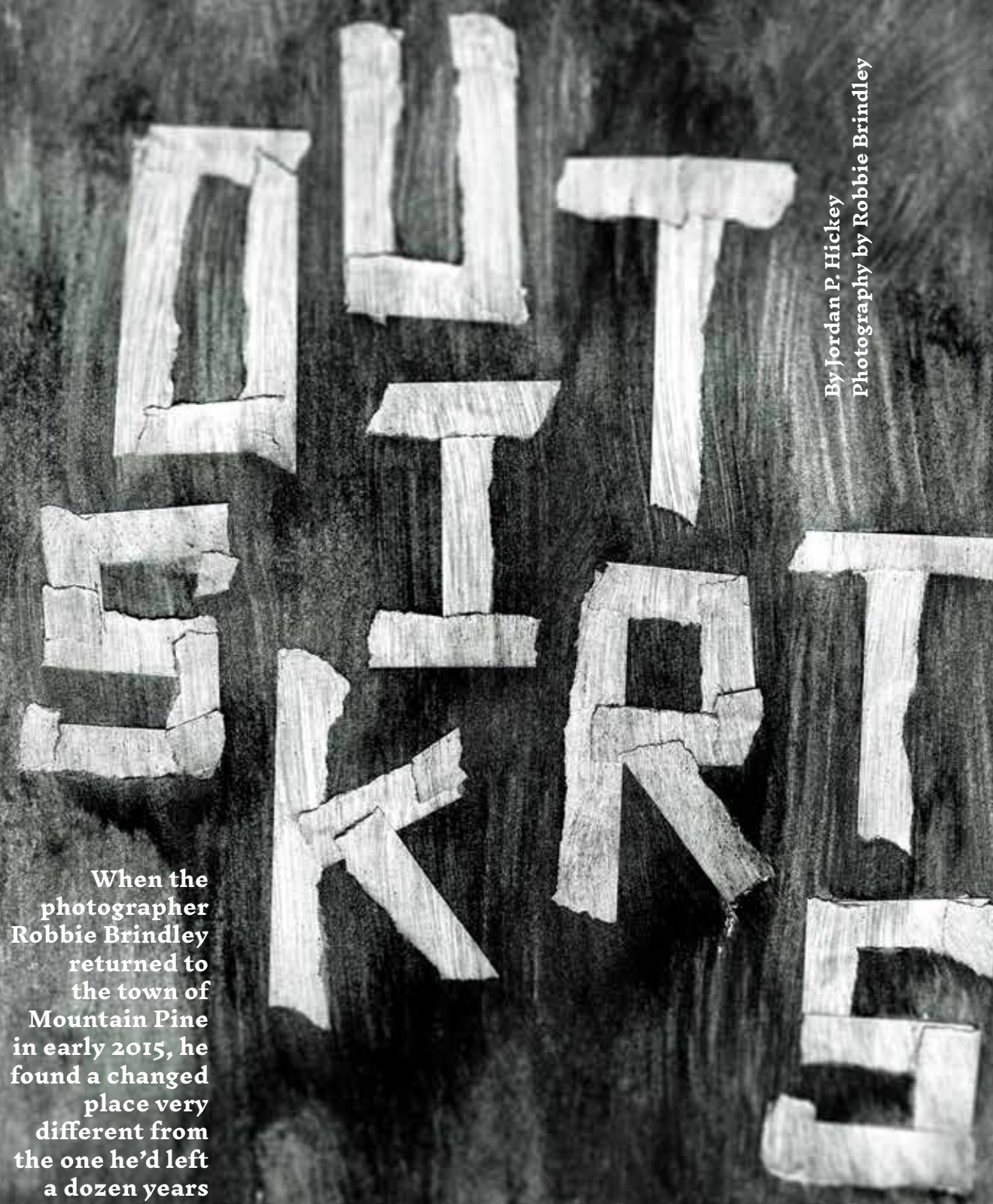
Arkansas Life

Edward O. Moody, P.A.

Sugar Plum Ball is part of Festival of Trees, presented by the CARTI Auxiliary.

Tickets go on sale October 10. To get yours, visit carti.com or call 501.660.7616.

When the photographer Robbie Brindley returned to the town of Mountain Pine in early 2015, he found a changed place very different from the one he'd left a dozen years before. On the surface, there wasn't much left—but he found what he'd been looking for



By Jordan P. Hickey
Photography by Robbie Brindley

He wasn't in the photos, though in retrospect I think he would have liked to have been.



Instead, on the evening we met, the photographer Robbie Brindley, sitting across a booth from me at a Waffle House midway between Little Rock and Hot Springs, was drinking coffee, looking over the sheets of photo paper scattered across and smothering the laminated menus, telling me about the fading town of Mountain Pine.

Owing to the blown-out quality of the photographs, the starkness of the black and white tones, the town felt very far, though in reality it was close, just west of Hot Springs, and the photos had been taken just a year before. It was difficult to say whether the mood of the photos, the melancholy, was a product of the fluorescent lights overhead or the images themselves. However, seeing the images collected on the table made me think that the town would have been a gray place even if the photos had been made in color.

There was no doubt a great deal to be said about the people who appeared there, and he said a great deal about them, but for the moment, he was the focus, the vital element—it was his story to tell. And as he remembered what it had been like to grow up there, what it had been like to go back more than a dozen years later, the town and everything about it

"They were working on their car when I walked up. I was like, Can I take y'all's photo? Like, explained myself. And it was like, they didn't care. He's just kind of nonchalant, things happen. And [the kids] weren't like kids. They were tougher than kids."

came into sharper relief as the din of clattering silverware and people eating breakfast food settled even further into the background.

Although the time he'd spent there had been relatively brief, just seven years of grade school before his parents pulled him out to homeschool him, his memories of the place were clear. He remembered the first time he'd gone, bused out there for kindergarten from Hot Springs, smelling the smoke from the mill, seeing the train pass so near the school yard that you could hit it with a football. There was smoke, there was fog, there were water sprinklers, there

was industry. It was during those years he'd gotten into punk music and skateboarding. He'd gotten his first kiss from a girl who, as he described her, lived in a trailer with her crack-head brother and mother who'd been married "like 20 times."

"It felt very American to me as a kid," he said. "It was like, look at these people, like, very

blue collar—very tough, very quick to say f*ck you. They just did their thing and didn't say anything about it."

That sense of awe, if you could call it that, only crystallized as the years went by, reaching a high point in 2006, when, after nearly 80 years, the mill that had for so long been the lifeblood and foundation of the town succumbed to the effects of a long economic decline and left the town. At the time, there were more than 300 people employed at the mill, most of whom, it seems fair to say, were drawn from the town, whose population now hovers around 770. As he saw it, this was a place that had lost everything, but yet when he looked at them he saw a group of people who had never allowed life to keep them down for long.

"I didn't realize I was in love with it, and I was," he said. "When the mill left, I was like, This place does not feel like home anymore. I need to do something over there."

Then: "How's your waffle?"

On that February evening, the young man sitting across from me wore a blue jean jacket and white cowboy hat, an outfit that remains the only one I've seen him wear. He was 25, a young man, though he looked older—and acted even older still, prizing comfort to the point of intractability, describing himself as the sort of person who holds fast to what he knows and keeps a dishwashing job for three years.

It seemed all the more remarkable, then, that he would have pushed himself to a place so far removed from his comfort zone. But he'd done so for a good reason. The reason he'd gone back to Mountain Pine after



having been gone for so many years was because he recognized in that place a quality he hoped to find in his own life: He wanted proof that it was possible to get up again after being knocked down.

"At the time," he said, "I was having a really hard time financially with my wife in school, and I'm working some shitty job, but I get to be a photographer, so that's cool. And then I've got all these family problems, like my parents are about to lose their house because my dad got hurt, and they're teetering on the edge. My grandma died and she had been living with my parents. My mom's having a complete nervous breakdown, and I'm like, I don't know how to deal with any of this."



With that, in early 2015, he went back. He spent several months worth of Saturdays walking the streets, throwing out an old football coach's name and speaking for hours with people who were doing nothing, before asking if he could make their photos. They'd give him a queer look, eyeing the bulky medium format camera that looks nothing like the cameras we have nowadays—a relic that might've been used around the time the mill was first operating. It was loaded with enough film to shoot a family or so a day.

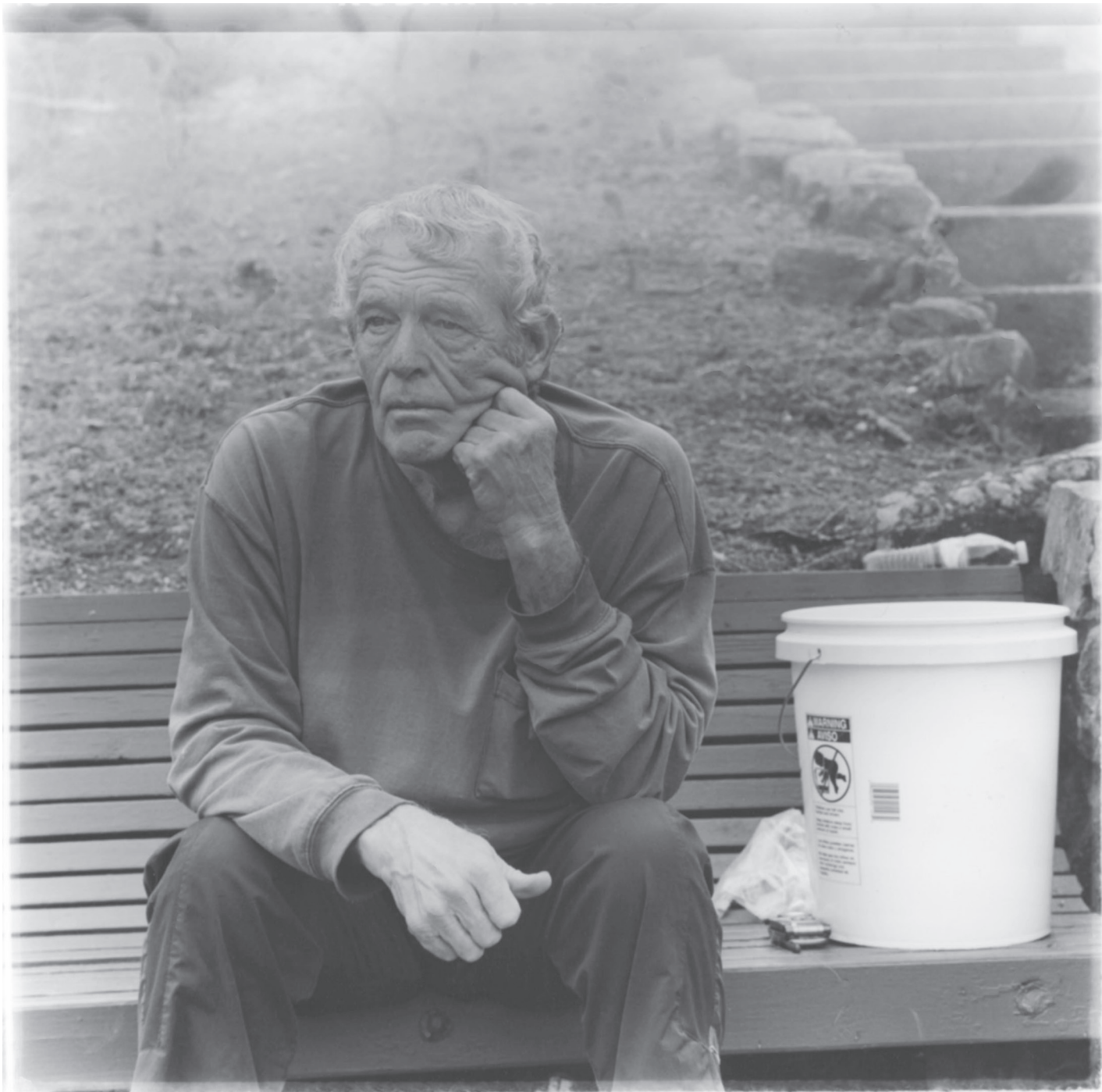
In the evenings, he'd go home and work in the crawl space of the house he then shared with his wife. For hours on end, he'd work in that unventilated space, the chemicals crystallizing on his nose hairs which made for chemically smelling snot, all the time watching for copperheads. There was no controlling for temperature or humidity and the tub he was using was the wrong size, making for a frustrating and time-consuming ordeal that often yielded disappointing results.

"It felt like how I felt," he said. "It felt and looked how I felt. Going out there, I was looking for peace and understanding of being in a bad situation. And when I got there, people are dealing with it like anybody would. Like, they're drinking, talking, having a beer and hanging out with their friends when

"These were all taken in the black quarters. These are the same family. He (bottom left) was actually going to school in Conway. So, he was getting out. She (top left)—she's pretty young. She wants to be a model in Atlanta. And she (bottom) was in the military for a long time. I think their grandparents worked at the mill, but they didn't? Like, she joined the military. Like normal."



"I don't remember his name. This is where I wish I would have had people with me. He was fishing, and I was taking his portrait, talking to him, and he owned a trucking company, and it went bankrupt when everything collapsed [in 2008]. And he's just living there, his kids all moved away. Just fishes. I was like, this project is going to be terrible on my heart."



"This guy's name is Jim. I do remember that. He was living in a trailer. I think he used to drive a log truck. He used to do something like that. And he was just living off his small pension, too. And he had his trailer paid off, but I don't think he had insurance on it. Like, home owner's insurance. And a tree fell on their trailer, right after they got it paid off. So, they were living in the trailer with the roof caved in and stuff, him and his wife. I took a photo of both of them, but it didn't come out. ... I talked to them for like five hours, him and his wife. He told me all about everything. It was beautiful."

they can. But they're just in a worse place than most people. It's strange."

As he elaborated on the particulars of each photo, it became clear that he could tell these people's stories—about arson and cancer and collapsed trailers and their children—but he didn't know their names. They were photos of people he'd met by chance; they were proxies for his memories. As he spoke about them, I got the sense he hadn't been terribly concerned with the outcome: He wasn't writing anything down, and there were many, many failed photographs. The purpose of the photos wasn't an invitation for the viewer to visit, nor, for that matter, a strictly documentary look at this community

on the brink of becoming something else or fading away entirely. If anything, to see those images felt like seeing a reflection of who he was in those months.

It was left unsaid, but I think he wanted to understand how this place that had lost so much, a place that he considered to have been so formative in his own self realization, a place that seemed in some ways to have mirrored his own difficulties, had managed to remain standing. And, along those same lines, he was looking to reconnect with a part of himself that might have been lost, too, when the mill left. For a time, it had been home. It had been more than a memory. As we parted ways, I wondered if it still was. ❖