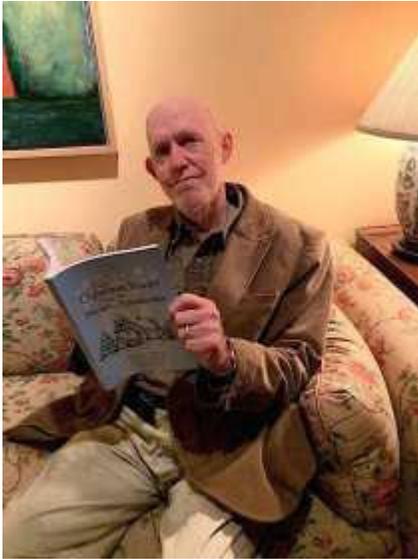


TIMES-GAZETTE

Woodruff adds his voice to new Christmas book

Wednesday, December 4, 2019

By DAWN HANKINS ~ dhankins@t-g.com



Charles Woodruff looks at a copy of “True Christmas Stories From The Heart of Appalachia,” which contains a story he submitted.

Submitted photo

Shelbyville-Bedford County Public Library will host a reading of “True Christmas Stories from the Heart of Appalachia” 1:30 p.m. Thursday. While he won’t be at the event, former Bedford countian Charles “Chock” Woodruff’s contribution to the book will no doubt be noteworthy.

Woodruff, a graduate of Shelbyville Central High School, attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville and later earned a Ph.D., in geology from the University of Texas at Austin, where he currently resides.

He’s now self-employed as a consulting geologist, and works part-time as a research geologist for the Bureau of Economic Geology at The University of Texas at Austin. He teaches a summer course in “engineering geology” in the civil engineering department at the university.

Yearly visits

“Chock,” as he’s affectionately known by his former classmates and local friends, says he gets back to Bedford County about once a year. His brother, William Woodruff, who lives here, was also a contributor to the newly published Christmas anthology.

The reading of the Christmas book will be conducted by Woodruff's fellow authors and local friends, Sharon McDonald, Linda McGill and Kay Bartley. (See the feature about the three women in Bedford Life magazine, currently available free at various locations around town and at the Times-Gazette offices at 323 East Depot Street.)

"I think it's very nice to have the essays from the various folks from Bedford County in this anthology," Woodruff surmises. "Most were close to my class at SCHS, as was Jim Gifford, who edited the volume. Sharon Shelton McDonald and I go all the way back as classmates at Central Elementary in 1956."

Woodruff notes how he actually wrote an outline and draft of his recollection years ago-not too long after the actual event. The title of his Christmas story is, "1967 — Another Christmas Journey," which is about his chance encounter that Christmas with a stranded soldier on leave from Vietnam.

Inspiration

A graduate student on Christmas break, Woodruff reveals he was trying to find a safe haven from snow and ice-laden roads while visiting his homestate. At the entrance of an unfinished highway, he recalls, stood a U.S. Marine in uniform, apparently trying to get home to Alabama.

Call the uniformed man a Christmas angel. Or perhaps just think of him as inspiration for this future anthology. No matter what, the author notes he will never forget that hitchhiker who became a solace to a young and stranded student.

Woodruff said in addition to having the honor of riding with the soldier, he's also considered many times the symbolism of the Christmas journey and his apparent "no room at the inn" encounter. The mysteriousness of the entire evening, he said, still haunts him.

Woodruff writes, "It's been more than 50 years now, but I still think of him on occasions, especially when traveling alone at night in bad weather. I have long since forgotten his name, and I cannot recall which town in Alabama he was from."

He continues, "About 20 years afterwards, on my first visit to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, I thought of him and wondered if his name had been etched on that black polished stone wall."

True honor

The author explains how he was honored to have been invited by Gifford to submit a piece to the Christmas anthology. He says he's submitted scientific papers that were parts of collections pertaining to specific subjects, but he's pretty sure there was only one other occasion when he submitted a piece to an actual "literary" anthology.

That was a collection of essays for Seton Cove, a local interfaith spirituality center, of which his wife, Patty, is executive director. Woodruff notes that his essay in that anthology was a reminiscence of a pilgrimage (sponsored by Seton Cove) to the Grand Canyon in October of 2001. His piece was a reflection on “deep time,” as embodied by the Canyon and its impact on his private spiritual life.

“As for my memories of Christmas in middle Tennessee, what stands out are the juniper trees (red cedar) that we typically cut and trimmed for Christmas trees. I especially recall the sweet smell of those cut trees. And of course, Christmas was a wonderful time of connections with family and friends, the recollections of which I cherish.”