



# NOTEABLES

ABLE Families

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## Appalachia:

*A place so rich and so poor*

Is it Ap-pa-la-chia--“long a” or Ap-pa-lach-ia--“short a” How do you say it? It doesn’t really matter. This region by any other name would look the same. Over twenty million people live in Appalachia, an area roughly the size of the United Kingdom, covering mostly mountainous, often isolated areas from the border of Mississippi and Alabama in the south to Pennsylvania and New York in the north. Appalachia has 397 counties in parts of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Ohio, and the entire state of West Virginia.

Appalachia is a region of contrasts. It is rich in beauty and natural resources, yet its people are among some of the poorest in the United States—35% of the population lives below the federal poverty level. It is made up of small towns and rural communities, yet there are metropolitan areas here and there. It is mostly white, Scotch-Irish and English, but there are pockets of Italians, Central Europeans, and African-Americans.

It is a land of beautiful rivers and sparkling streams, yet many communities do not have potable water because of industrial pollution in their wells or lack of rain. Its mountains are lush and green, but many of their tops have been blown off so that we can all get cheap electricity.

And it is the mountains, formed nearly 300 million years ago, that shape the culture and heritage of the people who live in Appalachia. More often than not, the people of Appalachia are characterized as *hillbillies* or members of gun-toting families who engage in feuds over pigs or backwoodsmen who run from revenuers who want to arrest them for moonshining.

But the people of Appalachia ought to be characterized as artisans, poets, singers, and musicians. They ought to be seen as people who are resilient and who find ways to make it against the odds. They ought to be known as people who fight injustice and make their voices heard when they have been wronged.



*Photo taken on Highway 119 near Logan, WV*

And they ought to be held up as people who have a deep love of family and country.

Appalachia has produced scientists. Remember Homer Hickam and the Rocket boys? It boasts of an aviation legend. Ever hear of Chuck Yeager who broke the sound barrier in 1947 and went twice the speed of sound in 1952? Did you know Appalachia is the home of the original Mother’s Day celebration? And surely you know that the region has given America great country music singers and highly recognized novelists.

And just in case you are wondering how to pronounce the name of this part of our country...the region, is said with the “short a,” and the mountain range is pronounced with the “long a.” But it doesn’t matter how you say it really, Appalachia is still wonderfully beautiful, widely diverse, and greatly misunderstood.

## *A Note from the Director*

Suffering and death are never welcome guests in our lives. They crash in unannounced bringing chaos and confusion. Here at ABLE Families these last few months it seems we have been visited more than usual. We have had two MIHOW mommies lose babies. One was still in the early stages of pregnancy and the other was just two weeks from delivery.

The latter mommy was devastated. Instead of bringing her baby girl home in a car seat to feed and cuddle her, she brought her home in a coffin to bury her. Our MIHOW worker was right there giving support where she could and helping to find resources to pay funeral expenses. (The Department of Human Resources pays some of the cost, but the family must raise the rest.)

Besides the two babies who died, we had two who had to be air-lifted out, one to Huntington (our nearest Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit) and one to Morgantown (our nearest specialty pediatric unit). It is always a trauma for a new mommy to stand there and watch a helicopter take her sick baby away and know that she can't go immediately. In an urban area there are hospitals that can treat babies in distress, and it is often a matter of walking down the hall to your baby. In our area, a mommy is

two to five hours away from her baby, and it is a matter of her physical ability to make a trip by car.

It is further complicated by finding gas money for the trip, finding a place to stay once you are there, and getting care for other children who are left behind.

Then a few weeks ago, a young man who is the son-in-law of Brenda Horn, our respite outreach worker, was in a terrible auto accident. As we go to press, he lies in Huntington in a coma, and his wife (another one of our MIHOW mommies) is due to give birth to their second child in early December.

This tragedy broke into their lives because two young men arguing over a debt were ramming each other with their cars while they raced down the left fork of Marrowbone. Allen, the innocent victim, was on his way home and was hit head-on by one of the cars in the ramming chase. It was all so senseless, and it has changed the life of a family forever.

So suffering and death have touched our lives at ABLE lately, and it reminds me of John Donne's poem which I paraphrase. No person is an island. . . any person's death/suffering touches us all because we are all involved in humankind.

*Sr. Janet*

## MIHOW Starts a Teen Program



When Rosemary Dillon, one of our MIHOW in-home family educators, heard that there were three pregnant girls in Williamson High School and four who were already mothers, she was determined to reach out to these young women. So with the help of her son, who is the guidance counselor at the school, and Garnet Fitchpatrick, our MIHOW Coordinator, she set up a lunch meeting group, which she named "Mommy and Me."

All of the girls came and seemed happy for a chance to talk about motherhood and all its demands of them. The MIHOWs gave them some handy information and some personal care items that they can use to boost their self-esteem.

Not to be outdone, this motivated two other MIHOWs, Gail Muncy and Emma Sue Pack, to pay a visit to Tug Valley High School to see if they could start a similar group there.

While they are still waiting for approval from the principal and the guidance counselor, they already know that there are six pregnant girls they will invite to the lunch session.

The MIHOWs plan to hold these lunch sessions on a monthly basis giving information and support to these young women as they balance being both students and mothers.

## Meet Our New Staff

Every year at this time we welcome new people into ABLE's family. They come from our area and from other places as well. This year there are three.

Shannon Hoffman, our adult education instructor hails from Flint, Michigan. She is a graduate of Michigan State and holds her BA in journalism with a minor in Spanish. She is a permanent volunteer with the Christian Appalachian Project on loan to ABLE Families.

Christie Stroud, a new Ma-

terial Infant Health Outreach Worker, is from Kermit and was with the MIHOW program as a mom before she took on the role of in-home family educator. You can read more about her in the Spotlight column.

And finally, we have Adam Bankston, an Americorps member who is working with the afterschool program. Adam is aptly named here at ABLE because he is indeed "the first man." Adam hails from Williamson and is a student at

Marshall hoping to complete his BA in 2009.

Welcome aboard to all of you. You bring our staff to 15 strong for 2008-09.



Blessed Christmas  
to all our friends  
and supporters.

## Of Many Things. . .

### Lights on Afterschool a Grand Success

ABLE Families' fourth annual celebration of afterschool brought local politicians, county school officials, parents, and Department of Health and Human Resources guests to see our children show off some of the things they do in afterschool. Our guest speaker, Jason Najmowski, Commissioner for the Bureau of Families and Children, spoke of the importance of afterschool programs in our state and congratulated ABLE on its fine program.

### SUV Needed.

Anybody know where we can get a gently used SUV? The one we have has been the workhorse of our fleet, and it needs to be retired. We have a \$5,000 grant from the state toward the purchase of this car. If you can help, you can have the \$5,000 and take the rest as a tax write-off.

### Help ABLE Families (Free)

Create your **free** on-line iGive account and shop on-line at the 700+ stores. Every time you shop a portion of the money you spend helps ABLE Families. This costs you nothing more, but it helps us help others. Go to [www.iGive.com](http://www.iGive.com) today.

### Alternative Christmas Gifts

Every year some of our friends give Christmas donations in honor of various family members who are hard to buy for or who seem to have everything they need for their comfort. This is a big help to ABLE's program. If you have done this, thank you, and we hope you continue. If you have not done it, this is the year to start. We will send a card to you to put under the tree or in a stocking.

### Finally, Thank You

If it were not for your support throughout the year, we could do none of the things you are reading about here. Blessed Christmas and New Year!

## Spotlight on Staff member Christy Stroud



A few years ago, before her son was born, Christy Stroud was learning mommy tips and techniques from a MIHOW in-home family educator. Her in-home family educator brought her baby items like books, blankets and even a baby massage kit.

Now Christy will have the opportunity to teach what she learned to new mommies as she makes the transition from being a MIHOW mom to being a MIHOW in-home family educator.

Christy says being a former MIHOW mom will allow her to understand the mommies that she meets and make them feel like they are Christy's equals.

"MIHOW is really good for first time moms. It gives them the information they need and they'll know what to expect," Christy said. "Even for me, I have three children and I still learned things I didn't know before."

Christy will visit 5 to 6 moms and attend monthly trainings that will help her educate mothers and to learn more herself.

Christy was born in Georgia, but raised in Kermit the majority of her life. She was pregnant with her youngest son, Keaton, when she was a mommy in the MIHOW program. Christy has another son, Christian, who is in our afterschool program and a daughter, Hannah, who is twelve.

## Sister Janet Called to Washington



No, she was not checking out a Cabinet position—though she might do as good a job as some have done. Neither was she picking out a dress for one of the many Inaugural Balls—and that's a good thing, since she doesn't dance well.

Rather, she was called by Share Our Strength, an agency whose mission is to end childhood hunger, to give a workshop at their national conference. The topic —

"Hunger in Rural America: Challenges and Opportunities for Impact."

Sister Janet was asked to speak to how food insecurity in a rural area differs from food insecurity in large metropolitan areas and to showcase the nutrition programs that ABLE Families has as part of its offerings. She spoke of ABLE's Supper in a Sack program, the Teen Cuisine experience, and the Jr. Chef Camps that are part of the summer program.

As part of the conference, the 200+ attendees participated in a day of service. Sr. Janet went to a Charter School in Anacostia—a section of DC—where she helped in making raised garden boxes that were placed outside each classroom in order to encourage students to plant gardens in the spring. (Watch

out, 4-H club. We feel an idea coming on.)

It looks like ABLE's connection with Share Our Strength could be a good thing. They have grants for nutrition education programs, and ABLE has already submitted a letter of intent to apply for some grant money.

Sr. Janet reports that a great bonus of the trip was meeting long-time donors of ABLE Families, Bob and Martha Boyd, catching up with a former eighth grade student from Omaha, Tom Schimdt, who is now the publisher of the Catholic paper of the Archdiocese of Washington, and having lunch with a friend and sister, Sister Jean Anne Zappa, who is interning at Network, a Catholic Social Justice Lobby based in DC.

# ABLE Families

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Sponsored by  
The Congregation  
of St. Joseph

*A Child is born to us this day. They shall call Him Wonderful, Counselor, Peacemaker.*



*From left to right, Walter Spurlock, Ethan Fletcher, Corrina Bowen, Bryson Bowen and baby Mckaylee Bowen (front) are all dressed up for their party.*

## Never Too Little for Halloween

Instead of the usual assortment of smiling children found at the bi-monthly playgroup, a mini-Spiderman tugged on his mother's hand and a small pirate waited patiently for her eye-patch. It was ABLE Families' annual Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker (MIHOW) Halloween celebration.

Playgroup, a gathering organized by MIHOW, is open to all mothers and children in the community. The group allows children to interact with each other and gives moms a chance to bond. "Moms form relationships and make new friends that they wouldn't have otherwise," said Emma Pack, MIHOW in-home family educator and playgroup coordinator.

For many of the children, playgroup is one of their few times to socialize with others their own age. Felicia Messer brought her only child,

Brayden, to playgroup for the first time at the Halloween celebration. "He has one other cousin and kids at church, but that's about it," Felicia said. "[This will help him] learn to share and get along with others. He has a problem sharing."

Pack says playgroup gives children and mothers an opportunity to interact creatively and to learn through play. Pack had one student whose mother would not allow him to use scissors at home, but activities at playgroup gave him the opportunity. After that, his mother felt confident that he could handle the job.

Playgroup, held the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at ABLE Families, brings in mothers and children from Williamson and Kentucky.