

Mountain Roots and Relics is made possible in part by the Union County Rotary Club through a 2017 grant bestowed upon Union County High School (UCHS) to supplement the publishing center. This is the ninth year of a collaboration with students in the UCHS Interact Club, Rotary's youth division, sponsored by Melissa Bridges, and sixth grade students in Sean Spade's ELA class at Union County Middle School. This year, our stories feature local people who work in or are connected to the trades.

Our students gathered stories and revised them from February through April. We are excited to share the copies with the participants and community. We always enjoy meeting everyone and learning about their lives! We would like to thank all of the participants for making this collaboration possible.

Cover art photo by UCHS Interact student Ava Turner; image credits: Canva
Logo by former UCHS student Allison Evans

© 2025

Interact participants included Jordan Beavers, Erin Beggs, Naomi Dajero, Jovannni Deparias, Nevaeh Elliott, Kaylee England, Wesley Landen, Ada Massey, Ashton Smith, Ava Smith, Madisyn Spooner, Chelsea Stanley, Jeannelia Toussaint, Ava Turner, and Jillian Turner.



Volume 9
2025
Union County High School Publishing Center



**MOUNTAIN
ROOTS & RELICS
PUBLISHING**

— Appalachian Heritage —

Mountain Roots and Relics Volume 9 is dedicated to all our tradespeople in the community who work hard every day to keep our lives running smoothly and provide us with functional items, whether through automotives, house cleaning, construction, bow making, fence building, and more.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	Jonathon Adams
Chapter 2.....	Brian Bell
Chapter 3.....	A.J. Cary
Chapter 4.....	Garran Crawford
Chapter 5.....	Jonny Floyd
Chapter 6.....	Marion Foster
Chapter 7.....	Chad Gibson
Chapter 8.....	Jeff Henderson
Chapter 9.....	Clayton Llewellyn
Chapter 10.....	Marcus Oneal Hughes
Chapter 11.....	Jonathan Pickelsimer
Chapter 12.....	Cody Shelton
Chapter 13.....	Justice Sparks
Epilogue	

Jonathon Adams

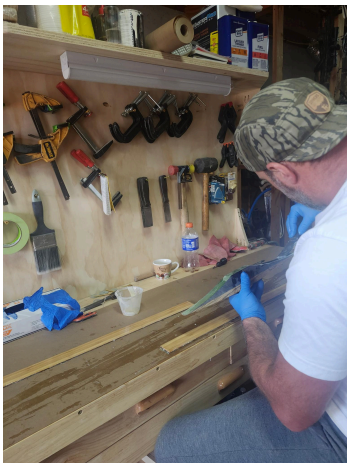
By: Maddie Moore-Townsend, Cameron Vanderhorst and
Madisyn Spooner



For Jonathon Adams, the greatest motto of all time is “Always live in God’s name.” This guiding principle has shaped his life, career, and relationships. Jonathon Adams was born on September 30, 1981, and has spent all 43 years of his life in Union

County, Georgia. He grew up in a two-story wooden house that his father built when he was born. The house, with its wooden windows and ranch-style charm, had four bedrooms and two

bathrooms. Though he no longer lives there, it remains a place of deep sentimental value.



His mother worked at a Ford dealership in Murphy, North Carolina, dedicating 20 years to the job. His father started out building

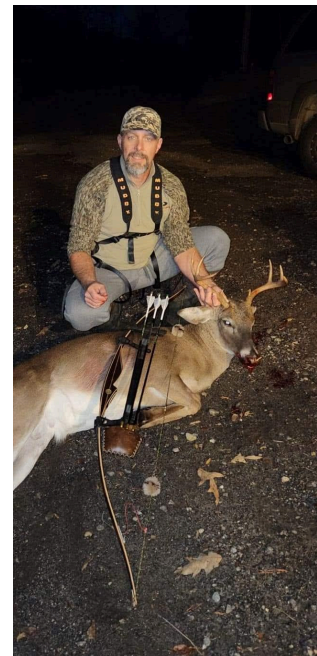
houses before moving on to work at Colwell Construction. As a child,



Jonathon found joy in hunting, fishing, and playing baseball. He played baseball for 10 years, making an impressive 198 hits in his career. His favorite fishing spot was Cooper's Creek, known for its abundance of great fish. Of all the fish he caught, his favorite was

crappie, but he still vividly remembers catching his first trout at the age of six.

Hunting was another passion of his, and he often hunted around Brasstown Bald, with the southwest region being his favorite hiking spot. One of his most memorable childhood moments was when he and his grandfather were out hunting and heard a cowbell ringing in the distance. While Jonathon enjoyed the sound, his grandfather did not, as it reminded him of the early mornings he spent walking miles in the winter to feed the cows.



Jonathon's first job was at age 12, splitting wood for his grandfather. While he loved the scent of fresh wood, he wasn't too fond of stacking it. He earned \$20 a week for his work. At 13 years



old, he started carrying lumber for \$10 per hour. Over time, he developed a deep appreciation for woodworking. At 22 years old, he started his own company—not as a business venture at first, but simply for fun. He crafted bows, and after people took notice, he began selling them for \$50 per bow.

Over the years, demand grew, and the price of his bows eventually reached \$950 each. Jonathon's career began with building houses, but as his passion for woodworking deepened, he transitioned into making bows. His craftsmanship quickly gained recognition, and his bows became known for their smooth performance.



His trade has had a profound impact on his life. It has given him financial stability, travel opportunities, and a wider social network. Before bow making, he considered himself just an ordinary man, but through his work, he has received invitations from all over the world. However, one of his biggest struggles is having to charge so much for his bows, as he wishes they could be more accessible.

Jonathon married Krystal Adams, who has been a pillar of support throughout his career. Together, they have three children: Reed (the oldest), Khloe (the middle child), and Roman (the



youngest). While raising a family can be difficult, Jonathon pushed through life's challenges and successes. Jonathon Adams continues to live by faith, hard work, and integrity. His journey is a testament to the power of persistence, craftsmanship, and a steadfast belief in God's plan.

Brian Bell

By Bentley Bell and Wesley Landen

Brian Bell's motto is the golden rule, "Treat others as you would like to be treated." He has lived by the golden rule for 50 years. Brian Richard Bell was born on August 1, 1974, in West Palm Beach, Florida, and moved to Georgia when he was seven. The same year, he moved to North Georgia where he has lived for the past 40 years.



Throughout his childhood, Brian lived in three different houses. The first was a trailer, and then he lived in a very nice four-story house that his dad built on 104 acres of land in West Palm. The house he considered home as a child is the one on Lake Nottley in Blairsville, Georgia where his sister now lives. It had cedar siding, and his bedroom was in the basement with a view of the lake! He got his first dirt bike at age seven, and he has many great memories of riding virtually all over Union County. To this day, he loves riding dirt bikes and motorcycles. Since age seven, both water and snow skiing were always a hobby that his whole

family enjoyed. In fact, the event from his childhood that impacted his life the most was snow skiing out west in Colorado and Utah. He appreciates those childhood experiences, and to this day he still makes a point to do so every year.

Brian's dad was a heavy equipment operator and land developer, and his mom was a stay-at-home mom. He has two sisters named Haley and Amy. In high school, he played basketball for Union County schools in Blairsville, Georgia. As a child and young teen, he worked for his dad doing miscellaneous

jobs such as weed-eating, bush-hogging, and operating equipment. He graduated from Union County schools in 1992. Right before college, he got a summer job working for a local surveying company learning



the trade. The job of a land surveyor is to measure and map land, establish property boundaries, and create accurate site plans for construction and development projects.

Since his dad was a developer, and he was exposed to land surveying through friends in the field, he found land surveying

interesting. He loves being outside, so land surveying makes sense, as it is a perfect balance of field work along with the business and office work side of the profession. He attended Southern Polytechnical Institute in Kennesaw, Georgia, and earned a Bachelor's degree in Construction Management. He began his career in construction work and home building in 2008.

He has been in surveying for many years, and over the years a lot of things have happened. The recession of 2007-2017 was the event that brought him back to North Georgia after 18 years in Atlanta where he thought he was supposed to be. But God had other plans, and he moved back home and met his wife, Faith Bell. With that move, he was able to begin working in surveying again, and he has been here ever since.

To the present day, he lives in a quiet town in Georgia. He and Faith have been married for 11 years. Surveying has been a blessing to Mr. Bell in many ways over the years, allowing him to send his daughter to college just as his parents did for him.

Mr. Bell says, "Professionally speaking, one of my mottos as a surveyor is we are 'protecting the public,' and I take it very seriously because I am working for my customer, but also each of the neighbors

that adjoin their property. Land is most people's largest investments, and I get to help them with that transaction."

Brian shares that his father is the person who impacted his life the most. It wasn't one piece of advice, but how he lived his life that impacted Brian greatly. He thinks the most valuable things are to work hard, save money, believe in God, and learn why Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. Lastly, study hard, and don't procrastinate.

A.J. Cary

By: Kendall Cary, Heath Hall, and Chelsea Stanley



For AJ Cary, treating others with kindness and respect has paved the way to a meaningful and fulfilling life. Born

in 1993 in Petoskey, Michigan, AJ has called North Georgia home for the past 22 years.

Though his home life wasn't always ideal, AJ worked hard to create a better future for himself. As a child, he moved frequently, making it difficult to feel settled. Stability finally came during his



freshman year of high school, when he went to live with his

grandparents from 2007 to 2010. He treasures the strong bond he



built with them during that time.

AJ's mother worked in home health, while his father did tree work. His childhood was filled with activities like football, bike riding, fishing, hunting, and building. One of the most difficult moments of his early life was losing his little

brother—a heartbreaking experience that deeply shaped his perspective.

AJ's work ethic developed early. His first job was picking up logs after they were cut, working alongside his father. He was always drawn to



building and experimenting, especially with boats and cars. This passion led him to a skilled trade in welding at Panel Built. He started

there in 2012 on the powder coat line and, through years of



dedication, rose to become the production supervisor over welders in 2023. In this role, he uses advanced technology to build more efficiently and effectively.

At just 18 years old, AJ became a father—a life-changing moment that gave him a profound sense of responsibility.

Raising a child at a young age came with challenges, but it also inspired him to work even harder.

Through life's ups and downs, AJ holds firmly to one simple but powerful belief: “Don’t work your life away. Treat others how you want to be treated.” With this mindset, he continues to build not just physical things—but a life rooted in purpose, integrity, and success.



Garran Crawford

By: Brantley Arrowood, Quinn Kizer, and Nevaeh Elliott



“Most people miss an opportunity because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work.” This motto has shaped Garran Crawford into the person he is today. He has always made sure to make the most of every opportunity that comes his way.

Mr. Crawford was born on October 8th, 1984, in Blairsville, Georgia, where he has lived his entire life. He grew up in a loving, middle-class household. He shared a room with bunk beds with his brother. However, when he finally



entered high school, he got his own room—a modest but comfortable space. Surrounded by trees, his childhood home offered him many hours of playtime outside. As an

adult, he built his own house right next to his childhood home, keeping close to the place that shaped him.

Garran's parents had interesting careers. His mother, Sheliah, was an interior decorator for 35 years, while his father, Gary, owned a video store for 38 years. Garran has many fond memories from his



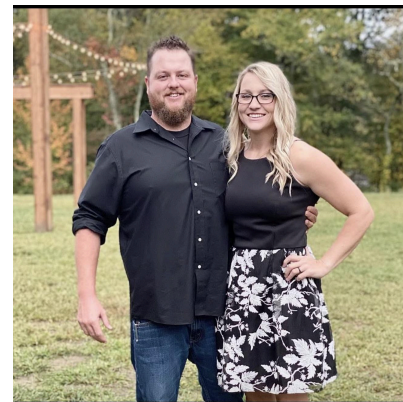
childhood. His dad loved to fish whenever he had extra time, even



catching a 35-pound catfish once.

Garran also enjoyed riding his big mountain bike through the neighborhood. However, not all childhood memories were smooth

sailing—he once fell off a football stadium while attempting to be funny, which resulted in a concussion lasting a week. He also loved helping his dad at the video store, learning valuable life skills at an early age.



Garran was not like most kids. He began working at his father's video store at the age of 12, earning \$6 an hour. This early experience taught him how to be a hard worker and how to interact with people,



valuable lessons that stuck with him throughout his life.

When Garran turned 35, the video store closed down. He then worked as a

parts orderer for semi trucks, a job that piqued his interest in big trucks and ultimately led him to become a bus driver. His time as a bus driver has not only given him a deep sense of care for others but



also instilled in him a strong work ethic.

He has met countless kind people throughout his journey.

Over the years, Garran has had many jobs. Aside from the video store, he worked in grading for 10 years, an experience he thoroughly enjoyed. He also helps his

father with Crowdaddy's Lawn Care, mowing grass and landscaping.

Garran met his wife, Hope, while hanging out on the Blairsville square about 20 years ago. She is a primary school PE coach at UCPS and loves raising her chickens.

The birth of his children has had the greatest impact on his life. Garran has two daughters and one son. His oldest daughter, Zoe, is 18 years old, his second daughter, Layla, is 15, and his son, Maddox, is 7 years old.

The best advice Garran has ever received came from his father:



"Work smarter, not harder." This advice stuck with him, especially when he was 18 and struggling to find his path. It taught him the importance of efficiency and working with purpose.

Though Garran's journey is already filled with rich experiences, he knows this is only the beginning of his amazing life.

Jonny Floyd

By: Houston Baker, Austin Gibson, and Ava Smith



Jonny Floyd has always lived by the saying, "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." He was born in 1995 at Union General Hospital and has lived in Union County for

30 years. Growing up in a cozy, two-story farmhouse behind a creek, Jonny found a peaceful setting that fostered his connection to nature. The house, with its two bedrooms and one bathroom, is filled with countless joyful childhood memories. He shares his





life with two pet dogs that provide companionship and joy daily, while his hardworking parents instilled in him the value of dedication.

As a child, Jonny spent many hours fishing at Cooper's Creek, enjoying the

tranquility and sounds of nature while waiting for a fish to bite. He loved exploring the surrounding woods, where he discovered a variety of interesting creatures and colorful stones. With limited video games or television access, the outdoors became his playground, filled with adventures like catching frogs and watching fireflies dance in the night sky.

Jonny's first job was as a busboy at Steve's Steakhouse, where he enjoyed cleaning



up after customers and discovering the value of hard work. Following this, he gained experience at Patrick Construction and Tony's



Plumbing before deciding to become a handyman.

Initially focused on finished carpentry, he now enjoys a broader range of tasks and is studying to become a general contractor.

A significant turning point in Jonny's life occurred

when he transitioned from homeschooling to public school. This new experience brought excitement, "alongside challenges," allowing for social interactions. He fondly remembers a fun-loving apple fight with his sister; they would throw apples at each other from their three apple trees until someone cried (usually his little sister would lose.) Key moments



that shaped Jonny's life include giving his life to Christ, getting married, building his home, and experiencing the loss of a family member, which deepened his understanding of life's brevity. One of



the best pieces of advice he has received is to "Watch where you spit on a windy day." Jonny believes in finding happiness and contentment in the present and cherishing life's precious moments without excessive worry about the future.

In conclusion, Jonny Floyd's life journey is a testament to the power of resilience, faith, and connection to nature and family. From his peaceful childhood in a farmhouse to the lessons learned through



various life experiences, he embodies the values of hard work and dedication instilled by his parents. Embracing the challenges of adulthood, like transitioning to public school and navigating personal

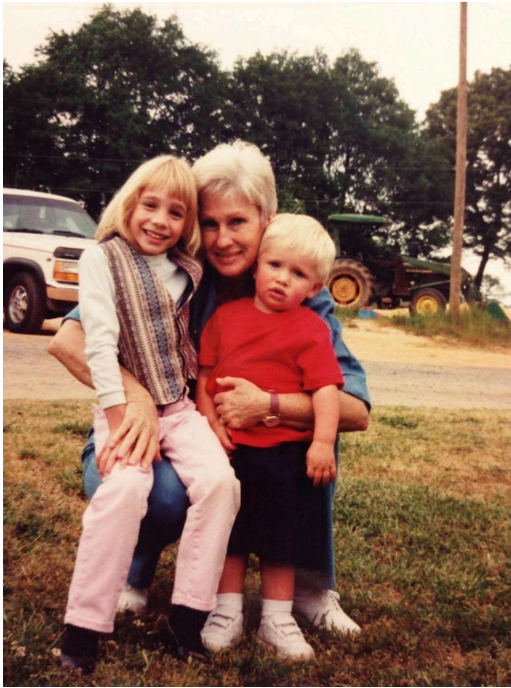


loss, has shaped his character and outlook on life. Through it all, Jonny continues to cherish the present moment, encouraging those around him to find joy amidst life's uncertainties. His story functions as an inspiring

reminder to live with intention and gratitude, always aiming to glorify God in every endeavor.

Marion Foster

By: Leyton McKeever, Odin Lee, and Ava Turner



Marion Foster's life has been shaped by a profound piece of advice that has guided him through both his personal and professional journey: "It's more important who you are than where you are." These words have had a lasting impact on his mindset and shaped his life's story before he even realized it. In 1997, Marion was born in Athens, Georgia. Marion grew up in Oglethorpe County, 15 minutes outside of Athens. This is a place where he considers some of the best years of his life occurred, filled with the love and support of his family.

Raised in a hardworking, loving, and humble household, Foster's parents set an example of selflessness and perseverance. His mother was mostly a stay-at-home mom, working hard around the house, while his father worked as a pipefitter on large construction

projects like schools and hospitals. Due to his parents' dedication, Marion's childhood was filled with happiness, warmth, and a sense of security. His parents always put the family's well-being first, and their work ethic instilled in him a deep respect for hard work and the importance of family.



The Foster family's first home was an old restaurant in the countryside, which had been transformed into both a jewelry shop and living space. Marion recalls these early years fondly. Living in this converted space for his childhood, the family worked together to turn it into a home. Marion has one sister, Annie, and together they spent their days making memories in this unique environment. Besides his sister, Marion and his friends spent plenty of time making memories together. Being so close to Athens, they were able to enjoy both sides of being a country and city kid. Along with his friends, Foster would spend time exploring the woods, shooting guns, and off-roading. They would also spend time at UGA sporting events and other conventions held in the city. These memorable moments offered a unique life experience and a place to create lasting friendships.

For Foster's first job, he took on smaller jobs like mowing lawns to help make extra cash in high school. These early jobs weren't always glamorous, but they taught him the value of hard work and responsibility. As a young man, he also enjoyed spending time with friends, often exploring the countryside and city events. The differences in experiences were important to his formative years, and they shaped him into the person he is today.

While attending Toccoa College, Marion met his wife, Meg, a



life-changing experience that would shape his future in more ways than one. However, Marion's journey wasn't without its challenges. He graduated with a business degree but was

unable to find work that appealed to his interest in using his hands. However, rather than being discouraged, these setbacks only strengthened his resolve in both life and in his career.

Foster's career took a pivotal turn when he decided to pursue carpentry. When he turned to carpentry, he fell in love with the trade. He found immense satisfaction in creating beautiful works of art, and

with each project, he felt that his work was not only a craft but had meaning. Marion has also found great joy in teaching the next generation of carpenters, sharing his knowledge and skills with aspiring craftsmen.

He talked about how the field of carpentry has evolved over the years, with new tools and techniques changing the way the trade is practiced. Also, the use of the internet and social media has dramatically impacted people being able to attain knowledge about carpentry. Due to this it has positively impacted the trade's popularity. Given this information, Marion still believes that there are some things that people can only learn once they have tools in their hands and start to put their knowledge into practice. The changes in the industry have impacted his own approach to carpentry, expanding his knowledge while also reaffirming his love for the craft.

At the heart of Marion's life is his Christian faith. He believes that his relationship with Jesus has been the most transformative aspect of his journey, and it continues to guide him in all that he does. To keep his relationship with God close, he attends the House of Prayer. Following that, his college years and the relationships he built during that time were also significant milestones, such as his

relationship with his wife who is “one of the most positive impacts” on his life. Marion has accumulated much wisdom throughout his life, and he is always eager to share it with others. A motto that gets him through his life is “It all finishes well.” This serves as a reminder



during difficult projects or times of discouragement, offering a sense of hope and reassurance that everything will work out in the end.

Looking back on his life, Marion

Foster feels grateful for all he has experienced and is optimistic about the future. With his faith, his family, and his passion for carpentry, he believes that the best is yet to come.

Chad Gibson

By: Justin Lackey, Walker Thomas, and Ashton Smith



“Never be afraid to take advice from other people.”

This is the guiding principle that has shaped Chad

Gibson's life. Born in the heart of Union County,

Georgia, on November 20,

1979, Chad has spent all 45 years of his life in the same community, learning to embrace the experiences and lessons that have defined his journey.

Chad grew up in a modest one-story wooden house with a metal roof. Inside, the home had two bathrooms and three bedrooms. His mother, a



hardworking woman, took on multiple jobs to ensure financial

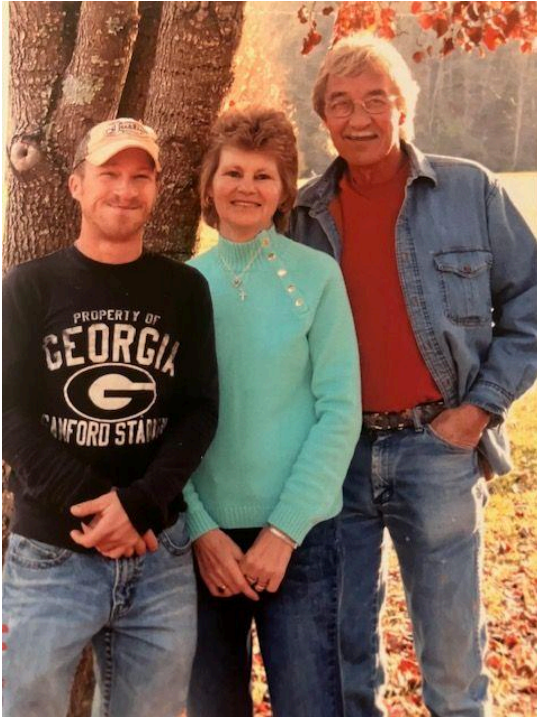
stability for the family. She worked at Georgia Boot and in Union

County Schools Cafeteria and

Save-a -Lot in Blairsville.

Meanwhile, Chad's father was employed at Moog for 40 years.

Their dedication to providing for their family instilled in Chad the values of perseverance and resilience.



From a young age, Chad

enjoyed playing ball, riding dirt bikes, fishing, hunting, and spending time with friends and family. He also contributed to farm work, earning \$5 an hour.

His passion for building structures led him to work independently in construction for 10 years since 2015. He found it to be a good job and an invaluable experience in

developing a strong work ethic. His dedication ensured he could

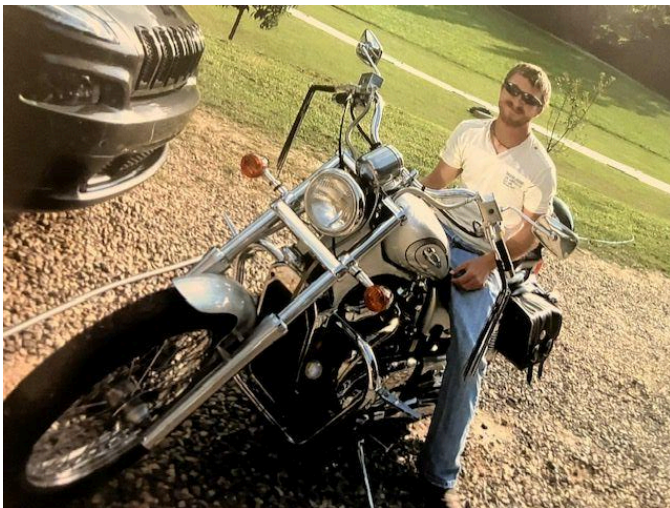


provide for himself, put food on the table, and pay his bills. Chad remains grateful for the opportunities his hard work has afforded him.

Living in Union County has provided Chad with countless learning experiences. During high school, he took construction courses, which paved the way



for his career in the field. Throughout his journey, he has embraced the advice of others, worked tirelessly, and upheld strong moral values. He believes in treating others with kindness and respect, just as he hopes to be treated. Chad Gibson's story is a testament to the



power of perseverance, learning, and the impact of community support.

Through the years, Chad has lived by his values. He says, “Never be afraid to take advice from others. Work hard and be a good person.

“Treat others as you would want to be treated.” With a strong work ethic and a willingness to learn, Chad Gibson has built not only a career but a meaningful life—one that continues to inspire those around him.

Jeff Henderson

By: Carson Lovell, McKenzie Toth, Naomi Dajero, and Ada Massey

“Treat people the way you want to be treated.” This is one of the best pieces of advice that Jeffrey Henderson has ever received. This advice showed Jeff that



if he showed kindness to others, people would show him that same kindness and respect. Jeff was born in 1974 in Blairsville, Georgia, and he has lived in the wonderful land of the North Georgia



Mountains for his whole life.

Jeff’s childhood had a huge impact on the person he is today. He grew up in a two-story farmhouse with a tin roof, and his bedroom

had a door going out to the back porch. He shared this beautiful

house with his mom, grandparents, and brother. His mom worked at a factory and ensured all the hard workers had comfortable boots.

When he was a kid Jeff would ride bicycles, go fishing, go hunting, and play in the woods building forts.



Mr. Henderson's teens and early twenties had a lot to do with why he started his trade of automotive body work. The events that most stand out in Jeff's life are when his family would get together and camp and play. The



reason this stands out so much is that it only happened about once a year, and his family would

come from all over the United States.

His first job was working in the Georgia Boot Factory right here in Blairsville. This factory was later torn down in 2025. Jeff took this

job because it helped him attend a technical school in Jasper, Georgia. During this time, he would go to work until 4:30 pm because technical school started at 5:30 pm, and he would get home around 11:00 pm.

What brought Jeff to his trade is he has always liked cars and has enjoyed taking things apart and putting them back together. His involvement in his job has impacted his life because there are a lot of chemicals that you have to watch for and be aware of. To Jeff, his trade has changed a lot because when he started, almost nothing was electronic in cars, and now almost every vehicle has some.



Jeff is especially proud of one truck remodel project, a 1965 Ford F-100, pictured at left, which he spent over 3,000 hours on. There was no bolt on the truck he did not touch during the process. Bill Kuykendall's dad bought the truck from Jacky Jones' dad in 1965. This truck has even been

featured in a magazine due to the extensive and pristine remodel!

Jeff's family, mottos, and advice keep improving the man he is today. Henderson's event that impacted his life the most was learning from his Grandpa Fletcher's teaching about the automotive industry,



and this information from him helps him today. One of the greatest pieces of advice that he ever received was “If you get paid for an hour, work for a

solid hour.” The motto he lives by is “Everybody is human; it doesn't matter what color they are.” If you ever want your vehicle remodeled call on www.OrganizedChaosAuto.com.

Clayton Llewellyn

By: Jaylynn Anderson, Vivian Llewellyn, and Kaylee England

Initially, life was tough, but Clayton Llewellyn never gave up on his passion. Through dedication and hard work, he built a successful career and life. Clayton was born in Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1979. He later moved to Florida, where he lived until he had two children. Wanting a small-town environment for his kids to grow up in, he moved to North Georgia, where he has lived for seven years.



Clayton grew up in an old stone farmhouse built in 1787, a historic home dating back to the Civil War era. His family was extremely poor, but they always had food on the table. The house was historic, sheltering three children, and featured a worn-down rock that women would use to step down from the horse-drawn carriage. His mother drove a school bus so she could be home with the kids,

and as a side job, she cleaned houses. His father was an 18-wheeler truck driver and also worked in flooring.

As a child, Clayton loved hunting, fishing, playing in the woods, jumping in the creek, climbing trees, and playing soccer and baseball. He joked that he and his two younger sisters would spend time playing with a simple stick and hoop, rolling it down the driveway for entertainment.

Every day after school, he would go hunting with his father. At the time, he thought it was just for fun, but in reality, it was a necessity to put food on the table. They mostly hunted rabbits,



spending several hours each day in the woods. These experiences, despite the hardship, became some of his most cherished memories.

Summers were spent working with his uncles from the ages of five to 20, learning valuable skills that would later shape his career.

Clayton's first job was at Hagerstown Ford, where he worked washing cars at 15 years old. It wasn't much, but he took whatever work he could get. Later, when he attended college, the college he went to was one for the Army; it was called VMI (Virginia Military Institute). He would then

return in the summers, working in the manager's office running credit applications. Originally, he planned to be a civil engineer, but after learning about potential earnings in other trades, he decided to change his career path. He started



out as a finishing carpenter, when he first got into his current trade. Most people start off with framing, but he decided just to skip that and be a finished carpenter with the old guys.

When the 2008 recession hit, Clayton adapted by working for farmers, building barns and fences. He quickly discovered that he enjoyed fence-building, which led him to start his own business,

Phoenix Fence. He realized that working for himself allowed him to determine his earnings and build something truly his own.

Clayton's fencing business flourished, largely due to the lack of competition in his area. He emphasized the importance of finding a town or region in need of a particular service, stating, "If you want a successful business, you need to find a town or area that needs your service." His business continued to grow, and over time, he rebranded it as Iron Mountain Fence.

One of the most impactful moments in Clayton's life was getting married and starting a family. His wife played a crucial role in their success—while Clayton worked 80-hour weeks, she stayed home to take care of the children, ensuring they had the support they needed to learn and grow. Due to his wife being supportive of his ideas, he



opened three online businesses where he learned valuable lessons. The potential growth for online business seemed endless, and this

experience also sparked Clayton's interest in online marketing.

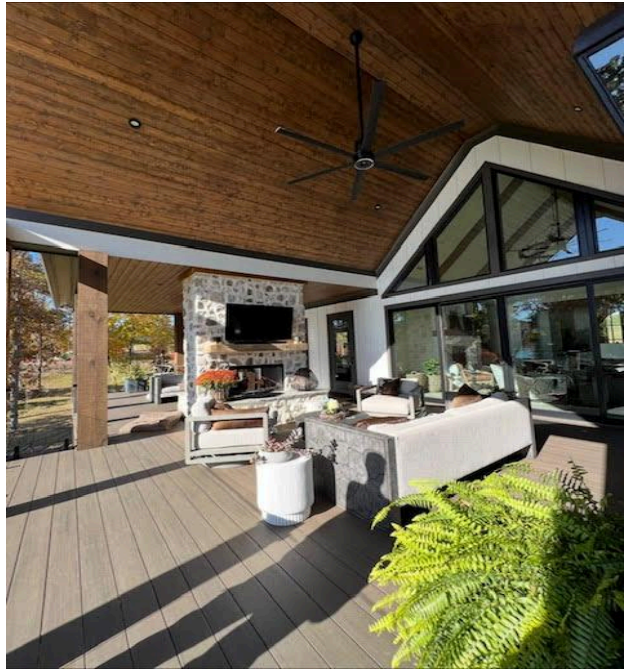
A piece of advice that deeply influenced Clayton came from someone who told him, “Let your employees meet expectations in their way; it doesn’t always have to be your way, as long as they get there by the end of the day.” When speaking to his children, he often shares a motto from the Bible and the movie *Seabiscuit*: “He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing. He does not shy away from the sword; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.”

Now, Clayton has expanded his business, and life has improved significantly. He is happily married to Meredith, and they have two daughters: Charlie, who is 14 years old, and Vivian, who is 11 years old. They also have pets that are part of their loving household. Clayton hopes his daughters will grow up to be even more successful than he is, and he is dedicated to providing them with every opportunity to thrive and excel. His journey proves that hard work, determination, and perseverance can turn even the toughest beginnings into a story of success.

Marcus Oneal Hughes

By: Kaylie Moore, Lorenzo Orellana-Irvin-Sparks, and Erin Beggs

“Never give up, try your hardest no matter what, and you will succeed.” This is the greatest advice Marcus Oneal Hughes has ever received—words that have guided him throughout his life and helped shape the man he is today.



Marcus Oneal Hughes was born on June 29, 1994, in beautiful Athens, Georgia. He lived in middle Georgia for two years, then moved to magnificent North Georgia, and he is still living here.

Oneal has fond memories of his childhood. He grew up in a classic, ranch-style house made out of bricks. The house had white painted shutters and a stained front door. On the inside, the house

had three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and a double carport. It had no attic but rather an unfinished basement.

His mother worked at Dollar General most of his life, usually arriving home around the same time he returned from school. His father, a lifelong construction worker, provided for the family and would be home in time for dinner.

Oneal had an exciting and active childhood. He loved playing sports—especially basketball—and spent his free time riding four-wheelers and dirt bikes, playing GTA and basketball games on his PlayStation 1, going to the skating rink, and occasionally visiting



the lake.

Some of his most memorable childhood experiences involved his love for dirt bikes—both the thrills and the dangers. He once suffered a serious dirt bike accident that required knee surgery. Another terrifying moment occurred when his scarf

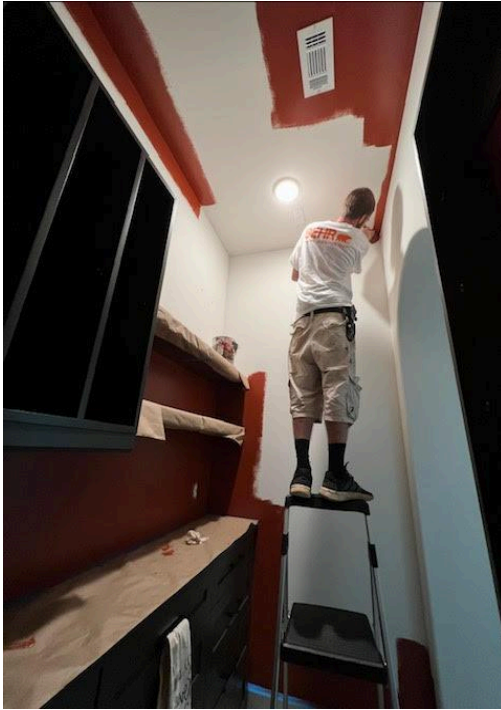
got caught in a dirt bike chain, putting him in a life-threatening situation.

At 16, Oneal started his first job as a loader at Ace Hardware, working alongside his grandfather. His responsibilities included loading bags of feed and soil. After a year, he decided to move on to new opportunities.

Several factors influenced his decision to pursue a trade. He wanted to earn more money, see the immediate results of his work, and have the freedom to work for himself. Owning his own business allows him to set his schedule, spend more time with his kids, and take well-deserved vacations.



Over the years, his trade has evolved significantly—new equipment, better pay, and invaluable connections with people he might never have met otherwise.



Life is full of surprises, and for Oneal, every challenge has shaped him. From starting his own business to learning from past mistakes in school to becoming a father, each experience has contributed to his growth.

His motto is simple yet powerful: “If you want to be good at something, you have to practice, and you always have to give it 100%, no matter what you're doing.” With this mindset, Marcus Oneal Hughes continues to push forward, building a life defined by hard work and resilience.

Jonathan Pickelsimer

By: Maximus Laney, Ellie Pickelsimer, and Jeannelia
Toussaint

"Work for God, not man," and
"Work smarter, not harder"—these are
the words Jonathan Pickelsimer lives
by. As a dedicated mailman, he takes
pride in his job because of the way his
parents raised him. This also applies to
the love and support of his wife and
children, who have shaped him into the
person he is today.



Jonathan was born on August 3, 1980, in Athens, Georgia. He has spent a total of 14 years in North Georgia—first for four years, then returning for another 10 years. His parents had fascinating careers: his mother, Barbra Pickelsimer, worked for Southern Bell as a switchboard operator, while his father, Johnny Pickelsimer, was a Marshal for Forsyth County and later spent 20 years working for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI).

Jonathan's childhood was filled with adventure. He loved playing video games and riding his go-kart. One of his fondest memories was a Christmas when all he received were Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles toys—something that made the holiday



incredibly special to him. He also had a beloved German Shepherd named Trouble. Back then, he could walk a mile to his friend's house,



something that seems nearly impossible today.

His first job was as a bag boy at Ingles, where

he often wore his favorite piano keyboard tie. The factors that led him to his current career included good pay, the opportunity to work

outside rather than sit at a desk, and the chance to build relationships with people in the community. Over time, he learned every road in the county and developed great relationships with local shop owners. One major change he has noticed throughout his career is the dramatic increase in Amazon deliveries—showing how quickly the county was growing.

The biggest influences in Jonathan's life have been the values instilled by his parents and the love of his wife and children. His father



and mother taught him about the power of prayer, encouraging him to seek all the answers, not just one. His guiding principles remain "Work smarter, not harder," "Don't take life too seriously," and "Work for God, not man."

Despite his love for delivering mail, there's one thing he can't stand—dogs. He has had a few close encounters, including one where

he was nearly bitten. However, he does have one unique pet: a pet squirrel named Rose Marie Wilson.



If you're wondering how many mailboxes he handles, the answer is 640—each one a

part of the community he proudly serves.

Cody Shelton

By: Kayden Card, Jayce Yates, and Jovanni Deparias



"Overkill is underrated; everything is better overbuilt." This motto has guided Cody Shelton through the first 37 years of his life, pushing him to pursue his goals with confidence and determination. Cody was born in 1987 in Gainesville, Georgia, and has always loved living in the North

Georgia mountains. Having spent his entire life in this beautiful region, he holds deep appreciation for its landscapes and community.

He spent seven years of his childhood in a 100-year-old farmhouse on a sprawling 400-acre property called The Carter Farm, now owned by Tom Phillips. This land holds a special place in his heart and will remain part of him forever. A unique historical connection to the farm is that in 1980, President



Jimmy Carter visited—making him the only U.S. president to ever

visit Towns

County,

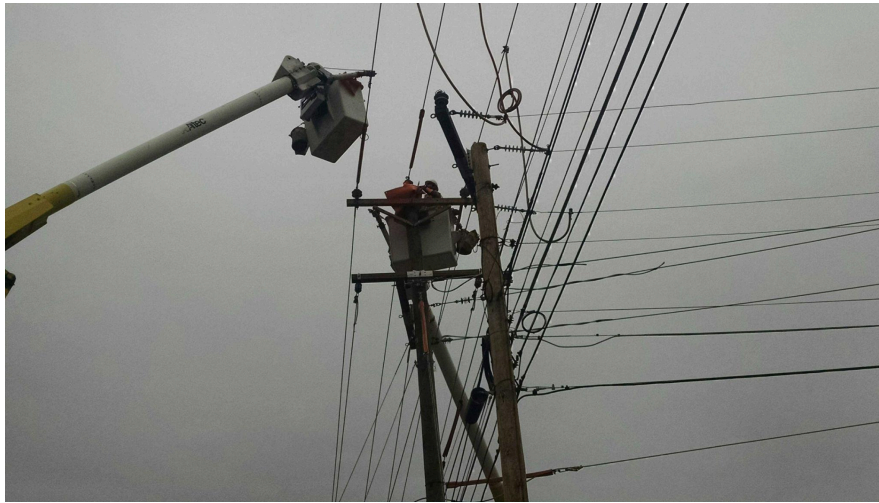
Georgia.

While living in

this house,

Cody's father

built



landscape walls, and his mother worked in landscaping as well, while also working at a restaurant called Steve's Place.

As a child, Cody enjoyed playing baseball, basketball, and

football. He played on

the same team as his

best friends, and they

were greatly

influenced by their

coach, Darren

Berrong, who taught

him the value of good



sportsmanship—a lesson that has stayed with him throughout his life.

Two events stand out as the most memorable and impactful in Cody's life: The 9/11 terrorist attack, a day that deeply affected the entire nation, and a head-on collision on Franklin Mountain, an experience that left a lasting impression on him.



Cody's first job was as a carpenter, where he framed houses for three and a half years. However, he never anticipated ending up in the industry he works in today, at Blue Ridge Mountain EMC. The 2008 housing market crash changed everything. Before the crash, Cody built spec homes and worked as a carpenter, but the economic downturn forced him to find a new path—one he never expected to take. Despite the challenges, this career shift strengthened his desire to help people in ways he never had before. Over the years, Cody's trade has remained consistent, but his experiences have shaped his outlook on work and life.

The happiest moments of Cody's life came in 2018 and 2021, with the births of his two daughters: Hazel (6 years old) and Eliza (4

years old). Even before becoming a father, Cody was someone who valued good advice. The best advice he ever received came from his father, who told him: "Act like you know somebody and act like you have been somewhere." Cody lives by this mantra and hopes that Hazel and Eliza will grow up carrying the same values of confidence, respect, and ambition.



Justice Sparks

By: Eli Brumfield and Chase Gray and Jordan Beavers

The best advice Justice Sparks has ever received came from

Jordan Beavers: “Don’t grow up too fast. Enjoy childhood. Don’t focus too much on adulthood, and try not to live in regret.” These ideas have shaped how



she navigates life’s challenges and triumphs.

Justice was born in 1995 in West Palm Beach, Florida. She spent the first four years of her life in a place she loved deeply. However, her life was filled with constant movement—living in Florida, Las Vegas, North Carolina, and Tennessee, sometimes relocating multiple times in a single year. At 15, she moved to North Georgia, a place that felt vastly different from the fast-paced cities she had known. Over time, she grew to love North Georgia far more than city life.



Throughout her childhood, Justice's mother was a stay-at-home mom, while her

father worked as an electrician. Some of her happiest memories were spent at the beach, where the water and fresh air helped clear her mind.

The biggest event that shaped Justice's life was the tragic loss of her parents. On July 4, just after she had turned 19, her father took the life of her

stepmother before taking his own. In the midst of this unimaginable



tragedy, Justice managed to save herself, her siblings, and her

children. Despite such a heartbreaking experience, Justice found the strength to move forward.



Justice got pregnant at 16, and by 17, she had her first job at Wendy's, where later, a contractor asked her to help clean construction sites, eventually leading to their business growth. Justice took a leap of faith in 2018 and started her own business. Over the years, she built a loyal clientele and expanded her services to include pressure washing and window cleaning. Today, she is proud to have her own billboard—an achievement that symbolizes her hard work and dedication. Through this business, Justice has been able to provide for herself and her three boys: Lorenzo, Xavier, and Jordan.

Some of the most defining moments of Justice's life include being kicked out of her home at 16, becoming a mother at a young age, and learning to provide for her family on her own. This

experience taught her many difficult lessons, but she is grateful for the opportunity she was given and learned that only through hard work and determination can one improve. Despite the hardships, she has persevered.

In 2023, she was married in her husband's grandparents' backyard, marking a new chapter in her journey. Now 29 years old, Justice continues to inspire others with her resilience and determination.

She lives by the motto: “Live your life as if you would die tomorrow.” Justice Sparks has faced incredible challenges, but her story is one of strength, perseverance, and hope.



With so much life left to live, she will continue making her way through it—one step at a time.

Epilogue

As Colin Powell said, “A dream doesn’t become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.” Nearly every one of the tradespeople featured in this volume of *Mountain Roots and Relics* mentions the value of hard work and perseverance. Each of these stories tells the story of how the individuals found their unique place in the world through the trades in which they work, be it designing one-of-a-kind bows or cars, delivering mail, or creating something unique in the construction field. Indeed, our country could not survive without people like those featured in these pages, and we are grateful to them for the hard work and dedication they pour into every day.

