



Shake Terribly the Earth: Stories from an Appalachian Family

Sarah Beth Childers

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Little did we know that Ohio University Press has a series of books on race, ethnicity, and gender in Appalachia. The latest, *Shake Terribly the Earth*, is a tightly connected collection of essays from Sarah Beth Childers's rural, challenging, Fundamentalist Christian childhood. Rather than lean heavily on a slew of positive adjectives to describe her writing talent, let's let her do the talking. The following excerpt is drawn from Childers's description of a family reunion, where a young Christian band is warming up:

"But then, while the singers were testing their microphones and the Pearsons were still loading cobbler onto their dessert plates, a man stood up in front of his folding chair. He had a prominent mole on his large nose, and his untucked shirt had a greasy stain. To my teenage eyes, this man looked repulsive, more like a cobbler-devouring Pearson than a vocalist whose music I'd buy on CD. 'I'm your dear sister Rita's pastor,' he explained, motioning toward the beaming elderly woman in the seat beside him. 'She asked me to sing "Beulah Land" for you all.'

The man paused while a few uncles shuffled to their seats, and then he closed his eyes and sang. He launched his unaccompanied baritone into that linoleum-tiled room, and I realized this was the way the song was meant to be sung. A pure expression of the spirit. ...

After the song ended, the man confided, 'When I think of that song, I think of my mother.' The elderly female audience chuckled with approval. Then he told us a story. The night his mother died, he drove her to the hospital, surrounding her emaciated body with pillows in the backseat of his station wagon. The road was long, winding, and potholed, and every bump jolted agony through her bones. 'Honey,' she gasped, 'sing "Beulah Land."' Her son's voice filled the car, and she imagined herself already in heaven."

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2014)

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