

Reflection on the Boom Days of Coal Oral History Project Herbal Remedies and Folk Medicine Interviews:

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Coming from a Chinese background where herb-based medicine is popular, I had very limited knowledge on herbal remedies before this oral history project. Therefore, it is really exciting to know that on the other end of the world, the Appalachian culture shares this wonderful tradition with my Chinese culture; and it has been a fascinating opportunity to learn more about the wonders in the woods. Moreover, the interview with Ms. Debbie Bostic, who is a Native American from the Cherokee tribe, reminded me of the uniqueness of each civilization and the importance to preserve our own identity and traditions.

Although some of the remedies appear to be superstitious and without scientific ground, such as the use of Bible verses to cure warts or to stop bleeding as mentioned by Ms. Loretta Watkins, Mr. Bob Farley and Mrs. Betty Farley, repeated mentioning has convinced me the considerable validity of those remedies; there must be a reason for anything that is passed down along generations and practiced by numerous households. Therefore, it was sad to hear that some of those traditions are gradually fading away as the new generation is no longer interested in those precious practices.

However, as much as I cherish the folk remedies, I also strongly think that herbs should be taken with extreme care and complete understanding, especially if various kinds are taken at the same time. Special attention should also be paid if herbal supplements are taken along with western modern medicine. One healing herb taken wrongly can be disastrous or even fatal. Both of the nurse practitioners, Ms. Debbie Bostic and Ms. Peggy Fisher, agree that patients should be honest with their doctors regarding their herbal and non-herbal medications. The best advice is to always go to the doctor whenever you are not sure about a sickness or a medicine.

Beyond gaining knowledge about herbs and folk remedies, it was also very satisfying to see the content and the animation on the face of the interviewees as they reminisced about their history. In particular, a lot of them remembered the intimacy of the old communities as everybody knew everybody and everybody took care of one another. While all the seven

interviewees come from all walks of life, with different backgrounds and living conditions, they are all attached to Cabin Creek. I was touched by their openness and their friendliness as they received me, as well as their love for this neighborhood.

On a different note, some of my interviewees are patients of Cabin Creek Health Center who were recommended by their providers. During the interviews, I hardly saw any slight sense of illness, pain, misery or worry in them as I had seen at the clinic; on the contrary, it was very encouraging to see excitement, dedication and energy. Furthermore, Mr. Robert Darby even took me deep into the woods twice to collect various kinds of herbs; while I was cautiously watching my steps, he was dashing through the forest in search of natural treasures. I felt that I was more fortunate than the doctors to be able to see the sweaty and energized side of a patient in the green mountains, instead of the helpless side within the sterile walls of an exam room.

In conclusion, conducting the interviews has been a highly rewarding experience for me. Listening to their stories has ignited my admiration to the Appalachian culture, as well as deepened my sense of belonging to my own Chinese roots. They have taught me knowledge about herbs, as well as touched me with their devotion. Moreover, going into the woods has reinforced my passion for nature and adventure; nature never fails to amaze me. I have come to realize that medicine is not confined inside a clinical setting, and that being a physician is not the only way to heal people.