

# **A Study of Monophthongization of /aj/ -> /a:/ in Rural Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia Appalachian Regions.**

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## *Abstract*

*The linguistic phenomenon of monophthongization is one feature of the Appalachian dialect of Standard American English. The diphthong /ai/ has characteristically been shown to be pronounced as /a:/ in various regions of Appalachia. Some evidence, however, suggests that this manifestation of monophthongization is slowly receding in the area. In this paper, several sources of recorded speech from speakers in rural Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia Appalachia shows that monophthongization is far from receding.*

*This paper reviews select literature as regards this feature, analyzes transcribed samples of 12 speakers of the dialect, by means of three documentary video sources. The data is then analyzed against the current literature and discussed. I hypothesize that the diphthong /aj/ is still quite monophthongized and prevalent in many rural speakers, though there may be a slight phonemic receding in females over males (for reasons unclear).*

## **1. Introduction**

While regional dialects play an important role in defining socioeconomic status in many language communities, it has been observed that Americans generally pay little attention to regional dialects (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2005). People are of course aware that there ARE different dialects, but most would be hard-pressed to identify or imitate different variations, or to be able to articulate the differences from the standard. However, there are two exceptions to this precept of non-awareness: African-American English (AAVE), and Southern English. Focusing on the latter, ask any non-Southern American to produce a Southern accent and immediately, words like ‘ain’t’ and ‘y’all’ quickly come up, followed by an attempt at drawl, a lengthening of vowels; these are the stereotypical renditions of aspects of Southern English. And, though most dialects play little if any role in judgments of socioeconomic status or measurements of intelligence, this stereotype of dialect does carry discrimination with it, in that speakers of Southern American English (SAE) are often considered to be poor, uneducated, rural, and isolated (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004). Because of this dialect discrimination, rural migrants to urban areas of the south (and other urban centers) are faced with the choice of adapting their dialect to a more standard form of English, or potentially enduring prejudice from city denizens because of the southern shibboleth. As a result, some linguists have documented that select features of SAE appear to be receding, meaning that younger speakers are slowly beginning to change their speech patterns to more Standard English. However, this research has been largely focused on urban speakers who demonstrate greater conformity with Standard English, and not in extreme rural contexts. Just as the great Southern writer Mark Twain quipped that rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated, so too may be the receding of the Appalachian dialect.

This project focuses on one feature of the Appalachian dialect of SAE, reviews select literature as regards this feature, analyzes samples of 12 speakers of the dialect, and analyzes the

acquired data against the current literature. Specifically, I hypothesize; based on documentary evidence, the diphthong /aj/ is still quite monophthongized and prevalent in many rural speakers, though there may be a slight phonemic receding in females over males (for reasons unclear).

## 2. Background

Linguists have meticulously charted the phonology of regional variations of English across North America. Early linguistic studies of the ‘Appalachian region’ placed the Appalachian dialect in the Midlands region. However, phonological data supplied in the 2005 Atlas of North American English (ANAE) identifies at least portions of West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee squarely in the modern Southern Appalachian regional dialect, called ‘Inland South’. This is based on phonological similarities in 7 categories of 22 distinct characteristics which are featured in, though not limited to, Southern phonology. One of the most salient and wholly distinct features of these is what linguists call the monophthongization of the phoneme /aj/, which renders the standard diphthong /aj/, as in ‘time’ à /taim/ (ta+im) (sounds glide into one another) to /ta:m/ (the second vowel sound /i/, ‘the glide’, is deleted). With the off-glide absent, an item like ‘pie’ may be pronounced something like ‘pah’ (Wolfram & Christian, 1976). This is one part of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) (Labov et al., 2005), and one which is most advanced in rural areas of the Appalachian regions of the upland south<sup>1</sup>.

Some evidence suggests that the SVS is slowly receding in apparent time (Sankoff, 1986)(Fridland, 1998)(Thomas, 2003)(Hazen & Fluharty, 2004)(Labov et al., 2005). However, as these studies of the SVS in (respectively) Atlanta, Memphis, St. Louis, Charlotte, and the general region demonstrate, “much of the work in understanding the pattern of change focuses on urban speech, and as a result, the advancement of SVS is not easily determined or well-understood”(Irons, 2007, p. 121). Some researchers, in fact, highlight precisely this, in the linguistic and social division between rural and urban speakers:

“Growing up in West Virginia may or may not mean that you have Southern language variation patterns, depending on whether you grew up in suburban Charleston or Logan County. Around the state capital of West Virginia, high school students maintain strict social divisions between the suburbanites and those who live in more rural areas. The more rural Creekers follow southern language patterns (monophthongized/aj/) [whereas] the Hillers display more northern language variation patterns (full off-glide with /aj/)...the Hillers group contains the children of professionals from other states and counties; the Creekers are all native-born West Virginian whose families have been in the area for generations. The creekers want to live in Appalachia, while the hillers want out of their local community and Appalachia in general.”(Hazen & Fluharty, 2004, p. 55)

Therefore, it seems clear that while southern Appalachian urban speakers modify to, or simply learn, Standard English, their rural brethren are not so quick to give way to urbanized vowels. And yet, some researchers suggest that “although /ay/ ungliding before voiceless obstruents is certainly a feature of many southern regions for older speakers, its rates are greatly declining for middle-aged speakers of these regions (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that though only the /a:/ variant of /aj/ is being examined in this project, this is only the first stage of the SVS, according to Labov et al. In this first stage, the /aj/ phoneme is removed from the subsystem entirely, along with backing of the long nucleus. In the second stage, the nucleus of /ey/ centralizes and moves in the space previously occupied by /aj/, and the short /e/ subsequently raises into the space vacated by /ey/. Finally, in stage 3, /iy/ lowers, and /i/ is fronted and raised, resulting in the complete reversal of /ey/, /e/, /iy/ and /i/.

My hypothesis postulates otherwise. I believe /aj/ is still quite monophthongized and prevalent in rural speakers, of all ages, and of both genders. To test this hypothesis from a distance, I sought samples of authentic, documented, rural speech to analyze for evidence of preference of /a:/ in /aj/ contexts. The samples include independent variables of age and gender, as indicated in Table 1, to test against the dependent variable of Standard English /aj/.

Table 1. Independent Variables: Gender and Age (number of samples)

	Age >30	Age < 30
Male	2	4
Female	4	2

### 3. Method and Participants

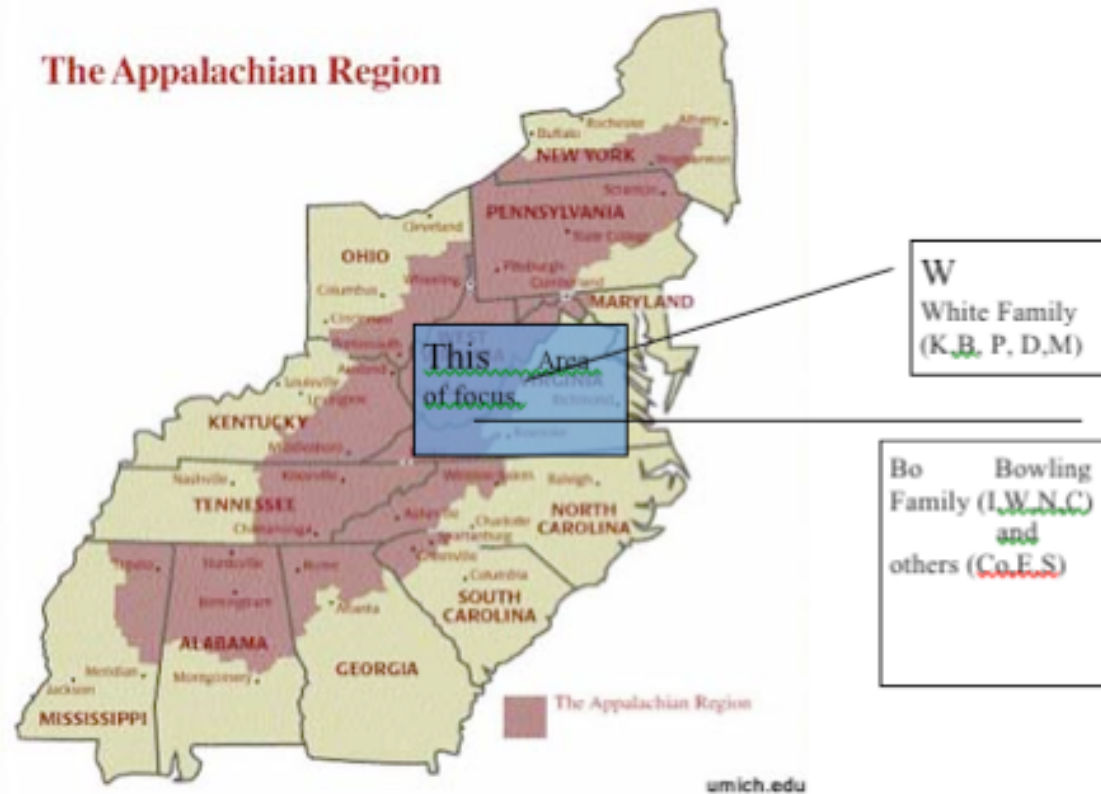
Data on 12 participants (6 males and 6 females) was collected from documentary source recordings from the following sources:

- 'A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains' Diane Sawyer Reports on America's Children Living in Poverty in Appalachia. Abc.com 2009.
- "American Hollow". Documentary directed by Rory Kennedy. HBO, 1999.
- "The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia". Documentary directed by Julien Nitzberg, 2009

These sources were chosen because each featured authentic documentary footage of white, rural speakers of Appalachian English. To be clear, the terms "white", "rural" and "Appalachian" are as follows: "White" means that the sample includes only Caucasian speakers. "Rural" is conventionally defined as large and isolated areas of an open country with low population density. For the purposes of this report, the participant rural speakers live in remote areas, which are primarily accessible by one-lane roads. Finally, Appalachia is traditionally defined as a cultural region in the eastern United States that stretches from the Southern Tier of New York state to northern Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia (through the Appalachian Mountain range). For the purposes of this report, the participants all come from one area of Appalachia: Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: 'Appalachian' is not a term used by most people who are native to the region. When asked, they are indifferent to the term, and it may be important for us to remember that not only is 'Appalachian' a purely academic term for referring to this population, but that given the wide area of encompassed by this mountain range, it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to Appalachian Englishes (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004).



(Marshall, 2008)

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Each of the participants' documentary dialogue segments of more than 20 seconds was transcribed from the recordings (see Appendix 1 for transcriptions). This was an attempt to capture natural, unscripted speech as opposed to testing for formal/informal speech, or testing words in isolation in reading lists. The idea was to get the most natural day-to-day speech of the speakers. Each of the 12 participants' segments were analyzed for instances in natural speech of the /aj/ variable. The /aj/ variables in the recordings were compared to the standard /aj/ variant, and a determination as to the speakers' conformity with the standard was made.

A total of 335 samples were collected from 12 speakers. 197 samples were collected from speakers of both genders over the age of 30 (both genders), and 175 collected from those younger than 30 (both genders). The data includes 163 samples from females, and 211 from males. The number, age and gender of samples are broken down further in Table 2 below (Initial of participant, followed by number of samples of /aj/ variant logged for that participant). Subjects ranged in age from 11 to 68 years old, with an average age of 30.

Table 2. Summary of Number of Data Samples by Age and Gender

	Age >30	Age < 30
Male	N: 32 P: 27 Total samples for males over 30 years old: 59	C: 67 B: 38 D: 9 S: 38 Total samples for males under 30 years old: 152
Female	I:32 K: 79 W: 10 M: 27 Total samples of females over 30 years old: 138	Co: 5 E: 18 Total samples for females under 30 years old: 23

#### 4. Potential problems with the data

**Disproportionate numbers:** The number of female samples drawn under the age of 30 is quite low (20) related to the other samples. This is because two of the documentaries simply did not feature younger females, and the one which did had limited dialogue for the speakers. Similarly, the sample for males over 30, though not as small as the young females, was also low (59), as the male speakers in the documentaries were often featured for very short clips, or, the clips were not clear. However, the decision was made to include at least 2 speakers in each category, and to ensure that there were at least 20 samples drawn among the speakers. I believe this provides enough representation of the /aj/ phoneme in a variety of words to be able to make a determination of variation.

**Heavy sampling of specific lexis:** One problem with the scripts was the nature of the recordings, which were often centered on the story of an individual, speaking in the first person. While clearly the speakers did talk about others in their segments, the samples did draw out a preponderance of “I”, “I’ve”, “I’ll” and “I’m”, all “/I/-formed” words which contain the /aj/ phoneme. Such a marked input must be noted and discussed for its potential to affect the data analysis. Therefore, two decisions were made about “I”. First, for each participant, at least 50% of the /aj/ samples had to come from non /I/-formed words. This holds true for 11 of the 12 speakers. In one sample (Co, 5 samples), the sample was so small, that an exception was made in her case to be 40%. Second, the samples of /I/-formed words, though repetitive, are in fact samples of the monophthongization of the phoneme, and will be treated as such in the results. The mere fact of its over-representation does not change the results in that had all instances of /I/-formed words been factored out, there would have been no change to the analysis.

## 5. Analysis

Analysis of the 335 samples yielded results in keeping with the hypothesis. Of the samples collected, 100% samples of /aj/ from males and 95% of samples from females were monophthongized to /a:/.

Table 3. Gender, First Initial: number of /aj/ samples/ number of /a:/ monophthongizations

	Age >30	Age < 30
Male	N: 32/32 P: 27/27 Total: 59/59	C: 67/67 B: 38/38 D: 9/9 S: 38/38 Total: 152/152
Female	I:32/31 K: 79/73 W: 10/10 M: 27/27  Total 138/131	C: 5/5 E: 18/18  Total: 23/23

Only two speakers, both in the same group, had any other variation of /aj/, which will be discussed below. In fact, I found that for the other ten speakers, the /aj/ was consistently reduced to /a:/ not only before voiceless obstruents, as has been cited by numerous linguists (Wolfram & Christian, 1976)(Labov et al., 2005)(Hazen & Fluharty, 2004) but in all environments. According to the established pattern, words such as “ride” and “why” pose no problem (ra:d, wa:), but in words such as ‘like’ and ‘white’, the /aj/ phoneme is not followed by voiced obstruents (/b/,/d/, or /g/), or in an open syllable and therefore should not be pronounced as ‘la:k’ and ‘wa:t’ – but they are, time and time again. In many cases, the samples were listened to several times. However, this result is not as entirely at odds with linguistics patterns as initially thought: “Whereas for AAVE, Native American Vernacular English and lowland Southern European-American varieties, ungliding before voiceless obstruents is rare, Appalachian English has had at its masthead of marked socio-linguistic features /aj/ ungliding before voiceless obstruents”(Hazen, 2006). With 98% of the entire project sample of /aj/ conforming to monophthongization to /a:/, the hypothesis that the /aj/ phoneme is not receding among rural, white Appalachian speakers, according to these data, is quite definitively confirmed.

Of the outliers, the following /aj/phonemes were manifested as 3 other phonemes than /aj/ or /a:/, /ɜ:/, /o/ and / ə/. All outliers were samples from two female speakers, over 30 years old.

## 6. Possible Analysis of the Outliers

The entire sample of outliers is in Table 4.

Table 4. Outliers and Phonemic Transcriptions of /aj/

Sample Number	Speaker	Utterance	Phonemic Transcription	Single Instance? (Were there other instances of the same word pronounced with /a:/'?)
1	I	set it a-fire	sedɪt a-fɜːr	Single
2	K	many times	Tɒmz	Multiple
3	K	Fightin	fɒt'n	Single in this form
4	K	its hyping you up	hɒp'n	Single
5	K	the night	Nɒt	Single
6	K	hid the knife	Nɒf	Single
7	K	my cousin	mə cousin	Multiple

### Theory 1

Samples 1, 4, 5, 6, as single instances of these words spoken by these speakers, can be explained by either phonemic slips or by transcription error. However, samples 2,3 and 7 become problematic, as there are other instances in the sample in which the same speaker pronounces the /aj/ phoneme as the monophthongized /a:/. This inconsistency leads to curiosity of which the underlying phoneme form is. However, given the overwhelming evidence that most other /aj/ phonemes are monophthongized, we can be relatively sure that /a:/ is the underlying and surface form. Sample 7 can alternately be attributed to being a non-content word, and facing similar reduction that other non-content words face in English in unstressed syllables (theə th@; of@v). Samples 2 and 3, however, might require alternate explanation.

### Theory 2:

Theory 2 retains the explanation of single instance slip for Sample 1. Samples 2-7, however, could be attributed to another factor. Given that ALL of the outliers 2-7 were spoken in the same scene by a single speaker, one has to wonder if perhaps the speaker had some kind of impairment in her speech in the scene. It is entirely possible that the speaker was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time (she is quite open about her use of inebriants), which may have impaired her pronunciation of /aj/ to the more back /o/ phoneme. The problem with this theory, however, is that there are other samples in the same frame of the outliers in which the speaker does monophthongize the /aj/ phoneme.

Therefore, neither explanation of the outliers seems wholly satisfactory, and no definitive conclusions can be drawn. My preference is for Theory 1 if pressed to choose. I do not find that the variation of these two speakers supports the second half of the hypothesis, which held that women are reducing /aj/ more than men. Only two female speakers had a small number of instances of not monophthongizing /aj/, and only one of those, in the small outlying sample, had any consistency in alternate forms. The pattern of monophthongization in the rest of their samples was too strong to suggest that the outliers were evidence of recession.

## 7 Discussion

The results of this analysis open three interesting avenues of discussion. First, why do we find that monophthongized /aj/ is not receding in these speakers? Second, what is it about /aj/ that portends other linguistic changes? And third, where does the data on this linguistic community fit in the larger scheme of sociolinguistic studies?

### Why isn't /a:/ receding?

The current study is a small sample of speakers in this region, and as such, it cannot claim to be representative of a larger phenomenon without further data. However, the results are significant in that there appears to be virtually no reduction whatsoever of the monophthongized /aj/. As noted in the introduction, reports of the reduction of the SVS appear to be largely focused on urban populations at the expense of those speakers who have little, if any, contact with urban centers. A criticism has been lobbied against people who deliberately seek out “those who fit the stereotype of the Appalachian Drawl, ignoring nine-tenths of the community; these reporters then represent the community as comprised of strictly that one-tenth” (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004). To be fair, the criticism is legitimate, if the intention of the reporters is merely to exaggerate negative stereotypes of all Appalachian speakers. However, it can also be said that by suggesting that this 10% is NOT what should be considered when assessing Appalachia runs the risk of saying that the other 90% better represents the region. This may be true, if the percentages are correct. Hazen goes on to discuss rural families whose language has evolved/changed because some adult members have left the region for university or work, and come back with different language patterns (Hazen, 2006). However, the participants in this study for the most part, do not show signs of leaving their communities, whether by choice or by inability. Of the current sample, only two had left the region for any reason. ‘P’ moved to Minnesota to better his work chances, and works in construction (and still retains the monophthongized /aj/); ‘S’, a high school football player, tried to attend college but was unable to afford the cost of living despite having a scholarship, so he left his urban university and returned home. One other participant, ‘C’, considered leaving, but chose to stay in the area. The other participants expressed no interest in leaving their communities. Perhaps ‘rural’ is too broad a term to comprise the different socioeconomic groups of non-urban residents of these areas; one which has aspirations of upward mobility, and the other which doesn’t. Given the strong family ties, sense of identity and comfort in familiarity, I suspect that there are many in this region who will not leave. For people who are unable or unwilling to venture out from their communities, and little to no chance of an influx of outsiders moving in, there is little chance of language change in this area. Therefore, it is not surprising that /aj/ has not receded among these speakers, nor do I imagine it will anytime in the near future.

### What’s so special about /a:/?

The Southern Shift (SVS), according to the ANAE, unfolds in three stages (see footnote 1), and the deletion of the /aj/ is the first step. It is this deletion that theoretically makes space for the others vowel shifts to take place. Therefore, if the /aj/ is entirely monophthongized in this community, the second and possible third stages of this larger shift should be underway in this linguistic community. In addition, the absence or reduction of /a:/ monophthongization in different rural and urban centers should be retarding the progress of the subsequent stages of the vowel



shifts in those areas. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the advancement of the second and third stages of SVS, the research for this project did seem to indicate that this was in fact the case: Stages 2 and 3 are well underway in the sample community, and less so in the urban or upwardly mobile rural centers.

### **How do these white rural Appalachian speakers fit into larger sociolinguistic studies?**

Perhaps the most interesting part of this project is what it can tell us about sociolinguistic methods. Being able to sample a community with apparent time (a sample of the current population over many age groups) and real time (samples collected with the same speakers, possibly over generations of families over time to chart the linguistic progression over decades) are both valuable resources for sociolinguistic research. However, while apparent time samples are relatively easier/less time-consuming to obtain, real time samples are difficult for a variety of reasons, the most salient of which are the mobility and linguistic influences which enter the community of the speakers. If speakers have general mobility, they do not stay in isolated communities – they may live in urban centers in their own regions or in any number of other linguistic communities for a period of time, which can change their linguistic patterns. In addition, the language of speakers can change due to changes in life circumstances; different life demands (jobs, families) can have an effect of linguistic patterns in the course of one's life. For example, we may want to model language for our children in different patterns from what we learned, or we may try to sound more 'standard' in our jobs to reduce stigmas or to sound more professional. Families, particularly intergenerational families, are ideal for both apparent and real time studies, but it is only in areas of relative isolation that families tend to stay together and avoid the trend of temporarily living elsewhere, such as in other linguistically 'isolated' communities in Martha's Vineyard, MA, Tangier Island, VA. or in Ocracoke, NC. (Labov et al., 2005) (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2005). The rural speakers in this study sample are not only intergenerational families with little propensity to leave, but are also seemingly unaffected by outside influence unlike the communities in Martha's Vineyard, Tangier Island and/or Ocracoke. The current sample charts two families in the region, and there several are other family studies of speakers in this region (Hazen, 2006)(Irons, 2007). Therefore, there appears to be a ready-made database for tracking linguistic patterns in this region with a special purity of form.

## **8 Conclusion**

In "The Final Days of Appalachian Heritage Language" (Hazen, 2006), Hazen not only suggests that the time of the Appalachian regional dialect(s) is coming to an end as the language quickly changes over time, but that the language (or dialect) should be considered a heritage language to preserve its form and structure. I would suggest that the most salient threat to the language is a precipitous decline in population in the region, not the influence of the speakers themselves. The speakers in this study seem unfazed by linguistic differences, and unaware that could be any reason to change their language patterns.

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## Appendix

### Transcripts:

All Instances of /aj/ in BOLD; outliers from monophthongization in red

Names, and ages/approximate ages of participants

1. American Hollow

Iree, (68) :

“I been around here 68 years , been gone ‘bout five months out the whole time. I’ve got 30 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren. Now I told you I been married forty nine years , and forty nine children! (music) Now we got the hard times, we’ve had good times, and we’ve had sad times, and sometimes, we catch up ground squirrels, clean ‘em up, row em’ and eat ‘em up. It ain’t been easy, but we survived”

“I’m sixty eight, he’s sixty nine and we still work. I plan on working as long as my hands’ll work, and my legs’ll go”

“They live aside a’ me . . .and David Bowling, he lives in Ohio . . .all the children live within an hours drive away from us”

“Sometimes I get so tired myself I don’t feel like staying and feeding, but Ill stay here a while”

“You playing hide and seek? Well, you are all cleaned up. Wanna show ‘em your little house? Yeah, its cleaned out now. She lives in the dark house. Joanie called and asked how you’re doing, I told him you were getting ready to put your garden out.”

“Her husband when he was living treated her real bad. He treated her in ways that he oughta been killed for. He had an old stick he kept behind the door. He’d beat her with that stick and then she’d say that he loved her. “

“Jody tied a curtain around her, set it a-fire and wanted her to burn”.

“Me and Bass work and makes the garden every summer and provide the food for the winter. There be somebody hungry we don’t need to turn ‘em away. Never have. I think it’s the right thing to do is teach ‘em children they have to work if they have to live in this world, they sure have to work”

Wanda Bowling, @35

“This is how we get to bath, every night, ain’t got no tub, Gotta use what you got. . . .Anything we wear in the hills, that’s the way they come out, socks clothes. . . I use rain water because I don’t like to use wellwater, got salt in it. I use the rainwater. I catch it in buckets. . . (to sister) Looks like getting your last load up here“

“There’s nothing here for children. There is lot of kids here who has got their high school diploma they’re doing nothing”

“Now they had him in jail a long time. I don’t know how he got out.”

Cliff, 17 (talking to his family)

“I’m getting married next summer. She’s going on to school. That’s not what I’m saying. What I’m saying is who’s going to support her while I’m in school? I’m going to her support her while she’s in school. See, that’s my problem. I can’t go to school and make money that I need now. See I can go back later, maybe, you’re not listening to me. Everybody wants to say that I don’t do shit around here, but I fucking try. . . .and until you say you’re gonna help me, you can’t say nothing. . . .well, I don’t want to be like him. Sure, he got his own ride when he was eighteen but he ain’t doing nothing now, ‘cept livin month to month, getting a check, digging roots, that’s great living, right? And everyone one of my uncles, ‘cept a couple, is doing the same damn thing, nothing. “  
 “I might just do that. . . .He thinks a lot like me. And for him to come and offer me a chance like that when no one else would made me feel like someone wanted to give someone else a chance”  
 Apparently, you don’t live my life. Really we’re just waiting till she’s 18, and a lot of there people was married before they was even 15, 14. . . I know that without her, I can’t make it.

“I miss her and stuff and it hurts cuz I think about it and all, but I can go do stuff because I don’t have all the shit that I did have to worry about. . . its’ over, its done, I don’t want to think about it. I can’t go nowhere cuz I’m broke. You can’t go nowhere without money. Why would we get in a big f’ing argument about that? Why?”

“I want to know why you’d do that to me? For real. I don’t want no damn lies. If you love in the first damn place, then you wouldnta done something so stupid like that. I’m ripping my jeans in half. Why? Cuz I’m mad. . . .could be a new style or something, I don’t know. I did everything I could for you, Shirley. There’s no way I ever done you wrong. Tell me one time that I didn’t love you more than you loved me.”

It would break my heart if you couldn’t accept someone I love as a family. She is going to be the one to make you grandkids. You never even took the time to talk to her. I’m trying to be calm, Mommy, I’m trying to talk to you, man to mother, Mommy.

“I have thought. Yes, that’s what she wants to do. I’m going to get a job and live my life. Im going to work. Its easy done if I set my mind to it. Wont be the first big mistake I’ve made. I wish you’uns and the family would have a little faith in me for once. Hell I’m not the only one in this family to make mistakes. It’ll be my mistake.

“I’m moving away today. I bet big money on it. I aint coming back here. This bad check’s gonna stick. “

Neil, @45 (talking about and with his brother Edgar, in jail)

“Sometimes somebody’ll tell you the truth no matter how bad a liar they are and whatever, but you know, I’ve never known him to go in nobody’s house and do this sort of thing. Cuz he’s always done like the rest of us, you know, dug roots for money or whatever” We’s gonna put it up for bond to get Edgar out of jail, which I’d do for any of ‘em, I mean dirt’s dirt, your brother’s your blood. You can get more dirt, but, uh, I got seven brothers, but still yet I’d like to keep em all, I’ve not got one to spare. . . .the deed is only 2000 dollars but I got five hundred cash . . . it needs to be worth five thousand dollars to go a 25 thousand dollar bond; I brought my ID and five hundred and they wouldn’t take it – its gotta be worth twice the amount, see right there“

“I tried to pay her 100 dollars not to marry him but she did. He’s a type of guy they show on TV that shows that men like that wind up killing their women, beating them to death or something. ”

“Got your pills here. . . come in from Cardinal Hill. Why did you buy some ? This stuff will straighten you right out”.

“He always had sort of a temper on him. You’d mind him. “

“Well, it can get tough. I mean, heck, they put a man walk on the moon years ago and I don’t have running water. I mean ain’t that way behind? Seem like it might never change.

### 1. The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia

#### Kirk, @35

“My name’s Susan Ray White but everybody calls me Kirk. They tried to charge me with accessory, and I told ‘em, I said just go ahead and send my ass to jail cuz I’m not a snitch, I wouldn’t snitch nobody out. And I’ve been in trouble many **times**, **fightin**, cussin out the cops, I been to jail so many times I couldn’t count ‘em. If you started some shit with me, I’d fight you. I love to fight, I really do. “

“I think six cans of pop is too much, its **hyping** you up. . . . Now I met Dennis. I liked him cuz he let go around me. And you know, he aint goin away he got a job, and I love eighteen wheelers and he drove an eighteen wheeler, and then he ends up screwing **m@** cousin, and then I end up stabbin his ass. But the **night** I stabbed him, it was cool, cuz my grandma, she cleaned up the blood and hid the **knife** so they’s no evidence and they couldn’t take me to jail. **I** meant to slit his throat, and that’s for real. . . . I mean I’m a people person I can get along with anyone but I hate that son of a bitch. “

“I got pregnant before I stabbed Dennis. And when my baby gets older, I’d like for her to go in a totally different direction than what mine went. You know, finish school, do the right things, stay away from the wrong people. . . . to stay in Boone county, I don’t care how many dreams you have, its not going to happen. I’m trying so hard to stay out of trouble, and its, every time I turn around its hitting me the face worser and worser. “

“Now what? Some strange person might be holding her. (inaudible). I’ll just run up into traffic and they can just kill me. “

“My favorite verse is Matthew 21:2 “and whatever thing you ask in prayer by believing you will receive but you got to believe it. And that’s what I’m going now no matter how hard things is down on me. I’m still believing. I believe God is saying hey look how much you love this baby, 3 days, but try three months three years, get your shit together.“

“Regardless of one thing about it, I like to fight and I’m half a fighter. And I’m not going to give up. I don’t give up this easy.

I don’t care where I do it. That doesn’t matter to me, as long as I do it. . . . She’s going to get me straight in on Monday. If there was a pill laid out there, I’m going to do it, cuz I know I only got 48 hours to do it in.”

“I could stay three months, I could stay 6 months, I could stay up to two years. [who decides the time] Me. I aint got no other choice. “

“I’m not going to leave you. I’m not going to leave you! Why do you always remind me of that? I said I’m sorry like a million times! Ok, I’m really really sorry for ever leaving you anywhere. I’m really sorry for never playing your game with you. Mom’s really sorry. . . . will you ever

forgive me?...Boone County's my downfall. I love it, but if I'm there too long, it's like a hole, and it sucks me in....Kirk's got some problems, and that's it. Thank you Tyler, saved by Tyler. "

Derek, 17

"I killed a deer with this this year. It aint loaded; I just kicked it around a few times...oh I know that! Let me get some shells we're going to go blasting...that's how the rednecks done...mom can you get me some alcohol please? I need a butter knife. "

"What it was, Billy says it's over a broken down truck – no. Brandon sold him a gun for a truck, and uh, well, Brandon come back up here, you know, we was high, we was taking pills, you know, and Billy called back up here, he said, I tell you what you little bony bastard, and you know, Brandon's dad had just passed on. Billy called up here and basically said you know, I'll bury you next to your cold dead daddy, you mother fucker. And Brandon said, ok, we'll see. He hung that phone up, walked right out that door, and fifteen minutes later, Billy was sitting there trying to put his face back together. So you tell me, who got the better end of that deal, you know what I mean?"

Mousie, 28

"No more. I do not belong to the state no more. Let me show you my no good son of a bitch husband. His names Charles, he's a bastard and a cheater. Well I'm a hop out and finish smoking real fast. This time I'm free, no parole, no shit. See I was only out three and a half months when I got locked back up. Why you say I'll be back? I'm not on parole now, I'm free! Let me see your phone, Sue, for a minute...When I went to jail, he moved in with the lady he left to marry me for - he moved back in with her because of his little girl, and then I guess he cheated on her with another lady and got her pregnant, she's going to have this baby. When I was in prison a second time, he cheated on me with my cousin, moved her in my apartment for two months and then when I made parole he made her move out, cut up all my wedding pictures, all my clothes, destroyed my apartment before she left. I gotta a lot of things I gotta do this week, I've got to go get a picture ID made, contact my husband Charles, and discuss our divorce."

"Well, we're in Lincoln County on Bodger Road, going to pick up Charlie Green, which could be my husband, which is my husband, and here is the commandment he broke! I want to kill him is what I want to do."

"Well we went to Lincoln County looking for Charles, we did not find him (You don't tell me what to do, bitch!). So when we come back to Madison, we find \*\*, the one which he has the baby by...(on phone) Is Charles over there? Hi. The funs just getting ready to start, honey. Believe that."

"C'mon, we're getting ready to take you in the store where we got married in. (we picked up) Lorzin 19 and 60 purple Xanax, we get the medicine, we come out here to the truck and crush four up, snort 'em. The pharmacist was a preacher, a pastor or whatever, and they took us over to the flower department and married us. What the fuck, I wanted to get married. Do you regret it? He thinks he's going home when we get back to Boone County but I got news for him, he's not. Holding him hostage."

Poney, @40

“Hey I’m Poney White, Minnesota bound. Raven Street. Don’t get no better no less. Highway to heaven. I’m from Boone County, WV, that’s where I was born and raised, and I thought, well, I’ve gotta go. So I come to Minnesota, where I really like to work I been working on my life, and I always work till I leave this earth. And I dropped out of school in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Van High, I learnt more in the streets than I did in school. ...[didyou ever get arrested?] Yeah a few times; I did eighteen months over at Charleston work release, and three years probation and I pleaded everything. That’s why I come to Minnesota, I have a better life for myself, and for my kids. I want them to have better than what I had.”

(About mining): “When you go in that hole, man it’s going cave in or could have blown in or I could have drowned or get electrocuted. That’s four things that may could happen to you.”

### Brandon, 18

“It’s a long story, but I’ll let you know. Pretty much what happened was I was buying my drug of choice, Xanaxes, a little bit of coke, and weed, and I was buying a shitload of guns.... Yeah, after my dad died, I got on the hard stuff. I was doing it all, coke, pills, whatever I could get my hands on pretty much. I thought I killed Billy, and I didn’t know for sure where I shot him. But I thought he was dead, so, I thought, no, they aint going to take me out alive. I ended up shooting at the cops, from Nov 21<sup>st</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, till 4:30 that morning when they apprehended me. It was one hell of a night. I just went on a rampage pretty much. You Know I wasn’t thinking, my family, I don’t know why I did it really. I, it just happened. They say they forgive me, but you know, I shot dude in the face, and then again, you know, they helped, I been around them all my life, so I’m sure they still got love for me, but I terrorized them pretty much, and I’m sure they hate me for that. I’m getting sentenced on the 16<sup>th</sup> and its really up to the judge what happens to me. But my judge likes me, we get along good, and I think somethings good gonna happen, I think I’m gonna go home on an alternative sentence.”

### 3. Hidden American: Children of the Mountains (eastern KY and West Virginia)

#### Shawn Grim, 17

“These are all my clothes for school in my truck cuz I aint got nowhere to go right now. Got my jersey, some jogging pants. My toothbrush and toothpaste are in my glovebox. The whole entire hollow is just family and all of them hate each other, so its all fighting. If they own a chicken or who thinks they are the god of the hollow its all fighting about it. I want to go ahead and make everybody proud of me and I want to make everybody happy that I am actually trying something and doing something with my life and I don’t want to mess up. Its in the middle of nowhere, you know this, right? I swear to you. Everything that’s outside, they’ll steal it. Yeah, there’s thieves around here. That’s the reason you don’t leave your purse down.”

“I drink one beer, to flush out my kidneys, and that’s it. It cleans them, I guess. Its what I was told, and I read it in a magazine.”

“Oh, they hate me. With a passion. Her daddy told me if I ever set foot on that porch of his, he’d bust my jaw. I hold all my anger in until Friday nights, I go out and give it my all and release it on the field.”

“I don’t know the dance, seriously, I don’t.”

“Us hillbillies don’t want to do nothing, but drink and do drugs the rest of their life? Is that what you’re saying? Stereotype?”

“I aint got a lot of money. What did you live in back home? I slept wherever I fell asleep. Failing is probably the biggest thing to ever scare me. I guess I’m just going to have to work harder and try harder. Found out I couldn’t pay for the college, had to come home. No one’s perfect.”

### Courtney, 12

“Can I be honest? Our mommy used to be hooked on drugs, and we did not like it one bit. There’s 12 people living in this house altogether. Honestly, I would love for me, my mom, Bill and us girls to have our own home but we do not have the money to do that. Bill is wanting to get a job but we can’t because we aint got a car to get him back and forth. Honestly, we can barely afford food. Whenever her food stamps are all gone, we run out of food. We don’t have bread, we don’t have meat. Last week we was out of food; the only thing we had in our fridge was butter and ranch. We’re not like other people, we can’t afford food after food after food.”

### Erica, 11

“She drinks sometimes but that’s not right for me. But I love it. She’s almost 50, and if I don’t get her out of this town soon, then she’ll probably die any day. Our relationship is like, oreo and ice cream.”

“The reason I go on these walks is because I want to get away from my mom when she’s like that. I had an F before, then I brought it up to a C, and now its two points away from an A.”

“No, she wouldn’t let me see her. But I knew it was happening. She had that look in her eyes when she lied to me. [why do you think she does it] Pain, misery. You gotta make the better of it. She’s still alive. Just keep holding on tight.”

“Its just a wake up call from God, saying it’s a new start.”