



## In Service to a Flourishing Appalachian Ohio

*A poem in honor of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

By Kari Gunter-Seymour

How do we praise the world  
and simultaneously be aware of its suffering,  
encourage and support philanthropy,  
lift words like hope and growth and wellbeing  
when representing a land burdened  
by extraction and underinvestment,  
a population who knows, sure as eggs is eggs,  
that disparity is not a moral failing  
or the result of not working hard enough.

I come to you speaking the language  
of foothills and hollers, of the mountains  
from which we were sprung,  
homesteads forged by mule, scythe and hoe  
and bone-weary backs,  
our people taunted for their twang  
and the soil, coal dust or rust red clay  
billeted beneath their fingernails,  
our colorful history passed mouth-to-ear  
one generation to the next.

I'm talking about pride and expectation  
in spite of the many ways we have been shamed—  
decades spent producing this nation's energy,  
coal, iron, oil, natural gas,  
the smelting furnaces firing ore and brick  
daylight to dusk, our word-of-mouth  
footpaths carefully carved into  
the Underground Railroad's trails to freedom,  
our deep and continuing legacy  
of military service.

You see where I'm going here, right?  
Sometimes life can take hope right out of a body.  
But let's consider what science teaches us.  
Hope rises when three elements are within reach:  
a vision, a pathway and agency,  
built on an understanding that money  
doesn't solve problems—people do,  
and abundance can be measured beyond currency.

By that I mean potential and possibilities,  
and change can begin  
with one unflinching spot of brightness  
nurtured, expanded and shared.

As we contemplate upon the breadth  
of twenty-five years—  
add in of all who have given,  
multiply the number of our people  
who once again proudly proclaim:  
*I Am a Child of Appalachia,*

subtract the negative stereotype  
as communities revitalize and strengthen,  
then divide the work that is still to be done  
among the able—doesn't hope shine  
like a big bold beacon?

On this landmark of days, this milestone  
of great good words and deeds,  
let us raise our cups, held fast in our hands,  
just as our ribs hold fast our hearts.  
Let the crickets take up their chirp  
and the dew dot diamonds on the vines.

Let each of us be a spark,  
a bastion of illumination,  
ambassadors of glow and shine,  
singers of the ballads,  
reciters of the stories:  
all we have been,  
all that we are,  
and all we are yet to become.

Sing:  
*This little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine  
Oh, this little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine  
This little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*