



## **Nothing Ordinary: Reflections From Nameless Creek**

Foreword (or Author's Note) draft 04 Jan 06

The short vignettes that make up these pages are mostly *from* rather than *about* the author. I hold up a very personal lens to look with care at one small place over a short span a time. But I trust in the reading of this account, you'll grow to feel you've seen these things with your own eyes and with your heart, and that some part of you lives here, too.

The energy source has most definitely come from the being here: at my writing desk in this old farm house; here looking up at the ridge tops in the shadow of this rough wedge of valley in a remote corner of a high, wedge-shaped Virginia county; here, deep in these blue ridges, forested ribs along a vaster spine of mountains.

Both the imperative and joy for the work has come out of the long and sometimes lonely search for a midlife identity and purpose that in the end has come from where it is that I live rather than from what it is that I do for a living. Taken together, these

pages narrate a fragment of time made up of smaller fragments of place. Its pages have been—and are still being—knit together one morning, one fallen leaf, one winter walk at a time.

While a few of these short pieces are drawn from memory, most were found each day in the ordinary sights, insights, sounds and sensations that slow living has shown me. And it is a story of fragments very much about home—longing for it, finding it, coming to know it, and about calling its inhabitants by name.

There is a small cast of characters here, and you should know them: our dogs—black, black and yellow labs—Zachary, Buster and (ruling at this moment) Tsuga. Our grown children, Holly and Nathan show up a few times, but our granddaughter was spared this time around. While I did my best (well, maybe not my best) to avoid the family as subject, wife Ann wanders haplessly into my sights more than a few times. Trust me: I've paid the price that writers pay when they draw stories from the people they know very well.

This collection is a patchwork set against an Appalachian landscape, so much so that I feel certain what I have written from here could not possibly have been penned at a desk in the deep south or far north. These stories are about and take their nutrients from the southern mountains and from Floyd County, Virginia, in particular. But why here?



While our home (which Ann has chosen to call HeresHome) is situated on a larger creek named on all the maps, it is from our smaller side creek — perhaps my single favorite feature within our boundaries — that I have chosen a title for this collection and I'll tell you why.

There is no name for it on any official maps, so over the years, I've given it my own unofficial label: it is Nameless Creek. This lesser branch doesn't follow the road; a casual passerby might not even suspect that there was a second creek at all. I think of it as our lost and private mountain stream. It is from this clear, hidden ribbon of cold mountain spring water that my most serene and moving moments have come, and it seems fitting to set the story just here on its banks.

Though the overall tone of the collected pieces is one of hope, wonder and celebration, the motivation for my first venture into regular and public writing was a time of personal and professional turmoil. Without this unexpected rocking of the boat, I feel sure I never would have had the need or the courage to write. I've chosen to include these 'tensions' in the larger story of finding home because for the most part, they become resolved in the end, and perhaps readers can be encouraged in some way as they face similar struggles common to all of us.

Hard decisions begin in this larger story with the difficult but necessary move north from my birth state of Alabama, after I learned long ago that I was meant to live among mountains. A dozen years later, so that I could start over again in a new profession of physical therapy at age forty, we left the security of good jobs in Wytheville—where we owned our first house, first farm and had our second child.

After a sojourn in Carolina, we gambled that the very tiny town of Floyd would become a place where we could thrive and find community. And then in 2002, just when we had grown comfortable in this wonderful setting on the creeks, I felt compelled to quit my job in healthcare—and perhaps prematurely end my profession—so that I could spend time at home with the Muse I had managed to ignore in all the moving and career changing.

Knowing some of the history of how we eventually found our place may give you hope of finding yours. It may rekindle your quest to trust and follow the invisible pull of home from the places that call to you.

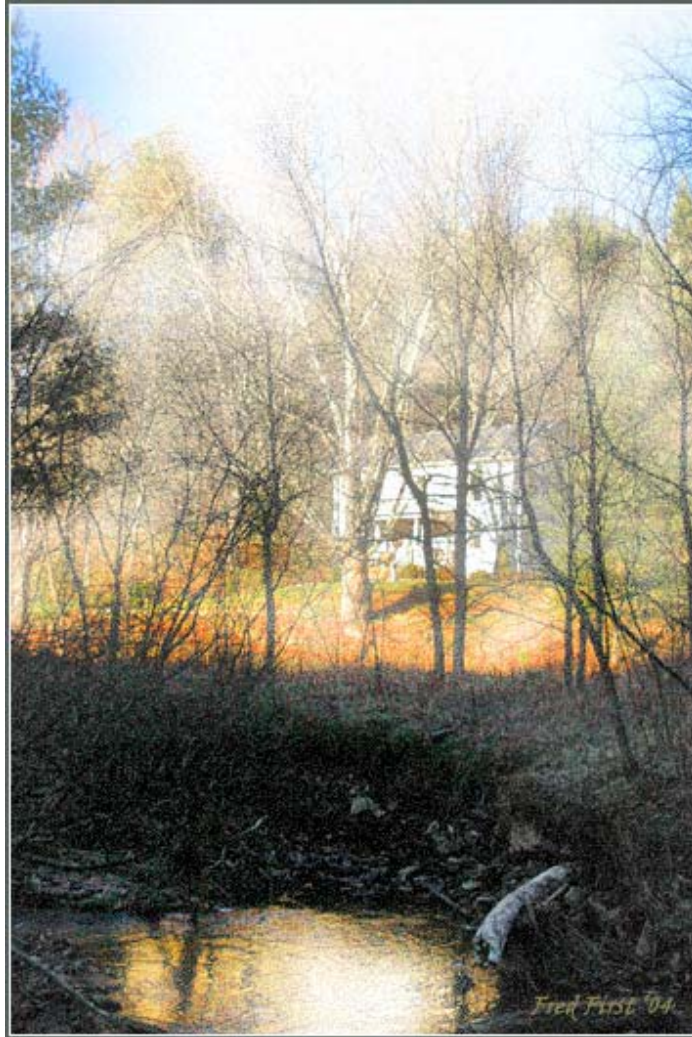
When you take the daring leap into the unknown from jobs that are no longer bringing you challenge, joy or purpose, you may land on your feet in a better place after all. I feel like this has turned out to be true for me. These daily vignettes and then the book were born only at the time when a life of busy-ness had come suddenly to an end, and good came from what turned out to be a crisis of opportunity.

Some of you are writers who have not yet written. I hope you will come to trust the surety of the path by which this book has come about: write every day, write from the heart, and write what you know. Begin your story.

Writing what you know is the hardest part when what you know as a hopeful author seems to you so

ordinary. But your ordinary may be another's remarkable.

From a remote rural corner of the Blue Ridge Mountains, ordinary is made up of simple things through the seasons: a pastel sunrise and pewter clouds that scatter before a summer storm. The local ordinary feels a gardener's disappointment and the warmth of wood heat. It holds the commonplace sounds of winter wind, ravens falling in a dive overhead and the babble of the creeks under ice. Everyday views bring images of pasture grasses that send mists of pollen into the breeze and sunlight slanting through valley fog; of moon shadows racing across the field and the reflections of starlight from Nameless creek.



But I have learned this from my writer's sabbatical: any image I take with my camera or with my writer's lens will be one of a kind. Each composition in light or in words is unique. The light will never be that color from that angle on that exact configuration of barn, tree or wildflower ever again. And this: that we often take for granted the extraordinary senses of vision and hearing, of touch and smell—our latent gifts by which with greater care we could better know the wonders close at hand, too often missed or dismissed in our hurried lives.

We have so little time in the present and there is so very much to comprehend and share. There are wonders all around. From our everyday lives, these too-familiar things may become unremarkable to us.

But in these precious instants in time, if we keep our eyes open and our hearts ready to know it, there is nothing ordinary.