**MIZ CORDIE’S PRE-ELEMENTARY SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS**

Allen Nelson Peltier

Close-cropped soup-bowl hair cuts

sat knee to knee beside tight-woven

pigtails. Farmers’ sons in stiff, boiled shirts,

and fresh-scrubbed farmers’ daughters

in Sunday-go-to-meeting aprons

gathered like baby chicks around

Miz Cordie Keesling. Each valley

Sunday morn, she faced her

half-circle of small

hard-bottom chairs,

an implacable rock

in a pool of

restless energy.

With as much flourish and fanfare

as the little left-of-pulpit classroom

would allow, Miz Cordie pressed

a little gold star beside each name

on the rear wall attendance chart.

The action prompted Clara Akers,

age four, to reach up to the chart

and trace her line of stars with

a stubby, jam-sticky finger.

Once the strays were collared and seated,

Miz Cordie began laying out her lesson,

threading through a Biblical landscape

peppered with stony outcroppings of

“begats,” Shalts” and “shalt nots.”

An intuitive teacher, she opted for

narrative pinnacles most attractive

to a child’s imagination.

Experience with the adolescent intellect led

Miz Cordie to populate the dry, dusty plains

and craggy mountains of her Bible lands

with steel-eyed prophets, warrior kings,

bloody tyrants and one

heroic shepherd boy…

Towering giants roamed her hills,

giant fishes silently plied the seas,

and the skies lowered a fiery pillar

to guide God’s chosen tribes.

The brothers Grimm and Mother Goose

languished in the wings while Sampson

flailed his jackass jawbone across center stage.

As Miz Cordie weaved her verbal tapestries,

Moses navigated the bulrushes and Noah

herded his aardvarks and ocelots aboard

a floating gopher wood hostel.

Before the end of each half-hour session,

Miz Cordie skillfully tied her tales of

Pharaoh’s drowned charioteers and

axe-cleaved Philistines back to the

manger birth of baby Jesus and the

common sense Appalachian morality

that bound the valley folk together…

Having completed her lesson,

Cordie tucker her worn leather bible

under her arm and began ushering her

charges toward their parents’ pews.

As little Clara exited the room, she

looked up at a Sunday School Board

poster depicting a bearded Jehovah

smiling down on the Bethlehem manger.

Clara opined the Great God Almighty

looked a lot like Santa Claus.