

The Woman Beside Wendell Berry by Unknown Yet

Standing in her modest kitchen, Tanya Berry explains that a bit of arthritis has made it harder for her to scramble up hills to pick flowers. But she's expecting black-eyed Susans will soon gather on her walks along Cane Run, and "I'll get them," she assures me.

This talk of aging knees is interrupted when she gestures to the vase on the wood stove, between the two rocking chairs that form a snug back-of-the-kitchen sitting room, as the late afternoon sun pours through the window onto the wildflowers. "Here's my daily thing—this happens once a day. Whatever's there gets lit," she says, chuckling about the pleasure she gets. "For any kind of bouquet, whatever you've got there, it gets lit up all of a sudden. It's kind of a wonderful moment."

Since 1965, in that kitchen, Tanya has had many moments—some solitary; others shared with her husband, the writer Wendell Berry; and lots with family (now including great-grandchildren), friends, and a steady stream of visitors. Lots of green beans canned, dinners cooked, stories shared in their house down the road from Port Royal, Kentucky.

And lots of flowers, because beauty matters, she reminds me, in a house full of paintings, fabric and stitching, and photographs. "It's an important thing that's left out of most people's lives."

That's the home Tanya Berry has made, in a rural community that endures—at least for now—because of people like her. Over those years, she has honed skills in farm work and the domestic arts, while serving as perhaps the most important fiction editor almost no one has heard of, married to one of the most important American writers almost everyone knows.

All this started more than a half-century ago with her leap of faith that an artsy city kid could learn, from scratch, what was needed to make a farm home. She grew up mostly in California, moving around often, and the early years of their marriage took them from Kentucky back to California, then to Europe and New York—part of what she once assumed would be a cosmopolitan life with a writer and academic.

But Wendell wanted to go home, and Tanya wanted to put down roots somewhere.

"He needed to be home, and I was flexible because I didn't belong anywhere in particular. So, I took this on with him," she says. "It's not always been perfect. None of it has been perfect. But it's been right. It's been the right thing."

That reflection appears in director Laura Dunn's film *Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry*, which began as a profile of the writer but expanded to tell the story of a rural community and its struggles. From the start, Dunn says, she was drawn to Tanya's view of how art and daily life can intersect in making a home. "I thought I was making a film about my hero Wendell Berry, and it turned out that Tanya is just as much my hero," Dunn says. "At screenings, I have said the film should be called *Bait & Switch: A Portrait of Tanya Berry*."

My interest in profiling Tanya Berry was sparked by the understated power of her insights in that film. After reading Wendell's work for nearly three decades, I was curious about the home she created with him, so distant from my city experience.

Here's my portrait of Tanya Berry: This white-haired 81-year-old is a fiercely independent thinker who embraces interdependence. Someone with a deep humility who gives others credit reflexively, and a self-confidence that makes her comfortable telling you what she believes she's good at. A kind person who doesn't hesitate to offer blunt advice. A woman who kept records of her prodigious canning in the kitchen while also serving as discerning first editor of every novel and short story written by her prolific husband.

"My mother," daughter Mary Berry says, "is a complicated woman."

Tanya also complicates assumptions people might make—not only about her relationship to her husband's work, but about homemaking, farm life, small towns, and a Baptist church.

Coming to a home

Tanya Berry was born in 1936 to Clifford and Dee Amyx, California artists who raised her to appreciate not only formal art, but beauty in everyday life. Her parents had grown up in Kentucky and become part of an emerging counterculture in the Bay Area's Mill Valley, sampling philosophies "from communism to Hinduism."

That life was a bit chaotic and included 20 different schools by the time she enrolled in community college in California. After a year she transferred to the University of Kentucky, where she majored in "everything under the sun," including music, French, and English. In the fall of 1955 she met fellow student Wendell, and they married in spring 1957. Their first child, Mary Dee, arrived a year later, and Tanya left the university six credits short of a degree. That fall they moved for two years to Stanford University for Wendell's Stegner Fellowship in the Creative Writing program, then back to Kentucky for a year and a half, and then to Italy and southern France on a Guggenheim Fellowship. Son Pryor Clifford (known to everyone as Den) was born when they returned in 1962, and the family moved east when Wendell got a job teaching at New York University.

Along the way Wendell began publishing—his first novel in 1960 and first poetry volume in 1964—but he wanted to move home, not just to Kentucky, but to Henry County, where he was raised. Wendell was offered a job teaching at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and the family moved in 1965, settling at Lanes Landing in a house above the Kentucky River. What they expected to be a summer place—when they bought the saltbox house, it had no insulation, no running water, and one electric line into it—quickly became their permanent home.

The critical accolades for Wendell's poems, short stories, novels, and essays weren't translating into bestseller sales, and they couldn't make a living from such a small farm. Additional income came from his two teaching stints at the university and several years of editing and writing for Rodale Press publications. That job involved a lot of travel, while teaching kept him in Lexington three days a week.

Tanya was regularly in charge of two children and 12 acres (their property eventually expanded to nearly 120, mostly woods). There was a substantial garden to tend, along with sheep, hogs, and a milk cow. Wendell's fiction lovingly captures the agrarian rhythms and describes the work of the "Port William Membership," based on one of the communities he grew up in. But for Tanya, it was new territory, full of surprises.

"It seemed like every time he'd drive off to U.K. to teach, something would be out of the fence, on the wrong side of the fence," she says. "I had to learn, and at the start I had all the wrong instincts about moving animals around." She did learn, including how to "pull lambs," helping ewes with the birthing process when necessary.

Tanya offers a "you do what you have to do" shrug about the challenges, pointing out that neighbors and Wendell's relatives always offered advice and help. But the responsibilities of a farm were at times "pretty scary," she admits, complicated by the fact that "I didn't know anything about children, either, having been an only child."

Her farm cooking also began by trial and error. "I nearly killed the kids off," she laughs, recalling her interest in health food advocate Adelle Davis' recipes, including a brewer's yeast-heavy "tiger's milk" that she says the children finally refused to drink. (Wendell, passing through the kitchen during the conversation, suggests it was wheat germ, not yeast. Tanya is pretty sure it was yeast. Google suggests it probably included both.)

By all accounts, Tanya's cooking improved dramatically—family and friends enthusiastically endorse the flavor and heartiness of her meals, with frequent mention of biscuits and pies. She agrees that she ended up becoming a good cook and points to the advantage of having high-quality, fresh ingredients right outside: "You've got the gardens, and you've got the meat, Jersey cream for making butter and milk for cottage cheese, biscuits and hoe cakes with good flour and good corn meal."

Sitting at her own farm kitchen table in a neighboring county, Mary has a clear recollection of her mother's vegetable soup. Across the table, one of Mary's two granddaughters, 5-year-old Charlcye, offers an enthusiastic vote for her favorite dish made by great-grandmother: "Her chili is amazing! It's kind of spicy and hot. Not that spicy. Just a little spicy."

Did she develop a distinctive cuisine, maybe traditional Southern cooking merged with California culinary roots? She's not interested in the question. There's nothing that marks them as "foodies," no upscale cooking implements in the kitchen (at the moment, one of the stove's burners is not working) or high-priced designer coffee (it's grocery-store-ground drip). "I just cook what comes along," she says.

What makes a home?

Tanya has cooked "what comes along" for countless visitors. Until it got too big to manage a few years ago, she fed family and friends every Sunday after church, a tradition now limited to holidays.

That hospitality extends to strangers, a steadily increasing number of whom have passed through as Wendell's literary reputation grew. Not all are invited in; she draws the line at people who occasionally come to the door unannounced, hoping to take pictures or talk with the author. But people write or call for permission to drop by, which got to be common enough that the Berrys started reserving late afternoons on Sundays for visitors.

Tanya pulls out a guest book started in 1966 (the last entry is 2007, when she finally got tired of asking people to sign) that includes novelist Wallace Stegner and his wife, Mary, composer John Cage, and poet Denise Levertov, along with groups of farmers, journalists, academics, and foreign delegations studying U.S. agriculture—"Here's one from Indonesia," she says, paging through the book.

Many of the visitors have been loyal Wendell Berry readers, interested in how rural people have built lives there and how modern life has made that increasingly difficult. Many of them are searching for a deeper sense of home.

Tanya says the young people who visit sometimes seem "desperate for a place, desperate for a life." Dissatisfied with career-striving in a materialistic consumer culture, these young people ask, "What do we do? Where do we go? How do we make a place? They are questioning the path they've been put on," she says.

The Berrys don't pretend to have easy answers.

"We can tell stories about how it has worked for some people, but really there's no answer," Tanya says. "We always send them back to [poet and friend] Gary Snyder's saying: 'Go somewhere and stop.'" Tanya acknowledges that's harder to do without the family roots that make it obvious where one might dig in. A lot of these folks "want safety; they want something to enfold them and make a safe place to be," which she understands. "That's what I was looking for, to come back here, to be here for my children."

When people finally find a place to stop, what's the next step in making a successful home?

"Well, first, you have to be in it," she says, meaning that people have to commit to staying put, working together, eating together as part of their daily routine. That's not easy for people with one or more jobs outside the home or living in suburbs that make family and community connections difficult. She recalls the year Wendell was a visiting professor at Stanford, when she found herself in a Menlo Park rental with not much to do except chauffeur children and cook, her only period of feeling isolated and unfulfilled. She couldn't wait to get back to Henry County.

A big part of their successful homesteading has been the work that Tanya and Wendell have at home, what she calls their "given tasks." In addition to the labor on the farm and in the house, those tasks involve Wendell's writing, and her contribution was the catalyst for one of the few times she has appeared in print.

Editing Wendell

Wendell writes in longhand, with a pencil. With his short stories and novels, he reads aloud a first draft to Tanya for immediate feedback, and then goes back to work. From the handwritten pages, she types a draft on her Royal Standard, adding another round of editing. That's followed by revised drafts until a manuscript is ready for the publisher. (These days, Wendell pays a local friend to put the final text into a computer, a concession to digitized production.)

Wendell asks others for critique of work in progress, but Tanya has been first hearer on all his fiction and first reader on all of his fiction, poems, and essays. As Wendell's place in literature becomes more widely celebrated—he gave the National Endowment for the Humanities' prestigious Jefferson Lecture in 2012, and the Library of America is preparing its first volume of his work, due out in 2018—Tanya's contribution to American letters as in-house editor will be recognized more often.

In 1988, her contribution became a topic of public discussion after an essay by Wendell, "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," appeared in Harper's Magazine. He writes:

"My wife types my work on a Royal [Standard] typewriter bought new in 1956 and as good now as it was then. As she types, she sees things that are wrong and marks them with small checks in the margins. She is my best critic because she is the one most familiar with my habitual errors and weaknesses. She also understands, sometimes better than I do, what ought to be said. We have, I think, a literary cottage industry that works well and pleasantly. I do not see anything wrong with it."

Some readers were quick to find fault. One letter to the magazine mocked Berry's "handy alternative" to a computer: "Wife—a low-tech energy-saving device. Drop a pile of handwritten notes on Wife and you get back a finished manuscript, edited while it was typed. What computer can do that?" Wendell pointed out that those critics judged without knowing anything about the relationship and without the benefit of his wife's perspective.

Tanya never responded in public, but those condescending judgments clearly still annoy her. On occasion someone still will say, "Oh, you're the one who types." The responses to the Harper's article can still be a sore subject for family and friends, too.

Granddaughter Virginia Berry Aguilar runs the bookstore and is outreach coordinator at The Berry Center, a nonprofit organization that supports economically and ecologically sustainable agriculture through organizing and education. She bristles at how that criticism ignores her grandmother's strong will. "She's telling him what she thinks, and isn't afraid to say, 'You got this wrong.' She is a person who is going to do what she wants to do. And when she asks him to do something as part of their partnership, he does it, because he wants to."

Wendell has pointed out that it's difficult to make a public defense of one's private life, but he asks to weigh in (the only time he does in the four days I'm there). "I want to give you a little of my testimony," he says. Tanya's role in his writing starts long before he reads that first draft to her, because as he writes he is thinking about her reaction. Knowing he will read it aloud to her—"to somebody I care about and am trying to impress and cause her to love me"—is especially intimidating, he says.

"I haven't worked alone in any sense," he says. "I've been by myself a lot, but I haven't

been alone. I've been accompanied by her, and I think our companionship has left me very willing to accept the companionship and criticism of other people."

Wendell says his wife's lack of interest in literary reputations also has been beneficial. He recounts a story that sounds often-told but authentic: "I brought in a review, somebody praising my work, and I said, 'Look at that.' Tanya said, 'It's not going to change a thing around here.'" Because she's not particularly concerned with reviews, he finds it easier not to take literary fame too seriously. "She's not going to be impressed by it. Why should I be?" he says, "I'm trying to win the affection, all the time, of an intelligent woman. I don't want to be married to someone who would be impressed by my reputation."

Wendell credits both their relationship and homesteading for making it difficult to indulge the conceit that writers are special people to be shielded from everyday labor. "I've heard writers say, 'Nothing should interfere with your work, nothing should come between you and your work.' Well, the way we've lived, everything that has wanted to has come between me and my work—lambing ewes, work to do, Tanya's got something she needs from me, babies when the time came. [Literary] work came second, and I think it's been very good for the work."

Women's work

Some critics of the Harper's article invoked feminism, while Tanya's family and friends speak of her as a strong, independent woman and role model. So, the inevitable question: Is she a feminist? Mary described her mother as a complicated person, and this is one of those complicated things.

Leah Bayens, director of the Farming Program at The Berry Center, begins by dispelling the myth that "farm wives" are confined to the home; women have always been involved in farm labor. Pressures to differentiate roles sharply based on gender—men in the fields, women in the kitchen—came from outside the farm, such as post-World War II extension programs, attempts to "modernize" rural life, she says.

Tanya says she understands that "women have needed really badly to have a better sense of their worth and their rights, to not be defined only by their partner." But the term "feminist" doesn't speak to her experience, especially not "lean-in" feminism that embraces the corporate culture's definition of success. Moving to Henry County, "I got a whole other picture of 'women's work,' and I changed a lot and got more pleased with the idea of women's work being good. And when they worked hard, they deserved to be noticed for working hard and for doing good work."

"I was working here, I was on the farm. I didn't have a career," she says. "And I've never felt guilty about not being something, not having a label." For Tanya, "not being something" doesn't mean not having important work, just that "I don't have a title that I can retire from."

Beyond the farm, the other part of Tanya's "important work" has been making a place for herself and her family in Port Royal.

Community connections

When listing her "given tasks," Tanya includes activities outside the home. Homesteading and homemaking don't take place in a vacuum, she emphasizes, and she has obligations to neighbors, community.

Paula Perry Sanker, a younger cousin of Wendell's, has known the family all her life, and Tanya was a constant presence in her early years. Sanker's mother and Tanya did laundry together in a wringer washer, shared recipes and produce, and worked on community projects. In the early 1970s, when homemaker groups were going out of style, Sanker's mother and sister and Tanya decided to start one, producing the Port Royal Homemakers Cookbook and holding craft bazaars to raise money for local projects. "She was just always there," Sanker says of Tanya, "showing up and doing whatever job had to be done."

Tanya holds no official position in Port Royal, but after five decades she sees herself as a community coordinator of sorts. "I do see a lot of connections that need to be made. I'm just that kind of person. It's kind of an art that you take part in." She has served on the local library board and helped start a group called the Foundation for Excellence in Education, which sponsored lectures and dinners to raise money for special projects for schools and arranged for summer courses taught by local people. In those early years, Tanya says she noticed some folks had trouble getting to the doctor and started driving them, eventually helping to set up a network that could organize the transportation.

But rural communities are not homogenous, and while the Berrys were certainly part of the Port Royal community, they were also different.

It wasn't only Wendell's growing fame as a writer that set them apart, but also their politics, such as opposition to the Vietnam War, and some of their "hippie ways." That included having a composting toilet that got mentioned in a story in the Louisville Courier-Journal, much to teenage daughter Mary's embarrassment. Wendell was from a prosperous family, and some people in the area "couldn't understand why someone with a college education would have a privy," Sanker recalls. "Those people had spent their whole lives wanting a flush toilet."

Tanya's approach is not to start with politics. "You don't always ask people, 'Did you vote for Trump?'" she says. What's her strategy when she knows she will be on the opposite side when the conversation gets to politics? "You just love them, and you kind of wait."

And there's church, important to Port Royal community life as it is in many rural places.

Wendell was raised going to church but is today an irregular churchgoer, preferring his own solitary Sabbath routine in the woods. Tanya didn't go to church in her first years in town, but eventually saw that the Baptist church was where the community was, and so she went there.

As is her habit, she threw herself into the project—teaching Sunday school, working with the choir, contributing to lunch after church, serving as a deacon, playing the piano during the service.

Music is important for her. She likes the way in church one can "learn through the music," and how that music affects people. A big part of it, she says, comes when "you're not doing it for yourself anymore," not trying to perform perfectly. "You're doing it as a worship experience, so if you screw up, it's OK." She pauses. "It's a deep pleasure."

For Tanya, getting along with others is the key. "You have to quit being so picky, and so fault-finding, and so snotty about it. You take people and their gifts, and you enjoy them and honor them." Sunday services help develop those skills. "How else are you going to

learn to get along with people if you're not doing it week after week after week after week?"

Has her longstanding skepticism about conventional theology changed?

Port Royal Baptist Church left the Southern Baptist Convention and then the state convention, and later became part of the more progressive Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Kentucky. In the 1990s, Tanya helped start, served on, and chaired the board of the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky, which emerged from people's dissatisfaction with the Southern Baptist seminary in Louisville.

The Port Royal church isn't big on membership tests. Tanya says she's interested in what the tradition has to offer ("I started going to Sunday school and actually reading the Bible") and tries to listen carefully to others. "I'm with them, and I'm trying to learn from them. I'm not figuring they're learning from me. I'm learning from them, trying to figure out how they made it through their struggles."

The summer Sunday that I visit the church, the children in her Sunday school class are gone and Tanya joins the adult discussion group. There's assigned scripture (Ezekiel 24: 1-13), but the conversation covers a lot of ground about responsibility, the role of chance in our lives, the struggle to understand why bad things happen to good people, and vice versa. Most of the hour is talk about the things that tug at most everyone's heart and conscience, circling back now and then to scripture. And there are reports about the week's activities and discussion about who is sick, who just got a cancer diagnosis, who's going for treatment. That part of the conversation, for Tanya, is as important as the philosophical. "I look on church as where we go for holy gossip. We find out who needs what, including ourselves," she says.

"The rhythm of my life is connected to it now, Sunday to Sunday. It's wholly different than what I thought, when I was younger, that a church would be."

Next generations

Since Tanya's work of making a farm home as part of a rural community doesn't fit in the modern economy's markers of success—salary, status, size of one's house—how do we evaluate such a life's work?

Pulling an assessment out of son Den is challenging, given his tendency toward quiet understatement. He agrees that his father's fame as a writer meant their childhood was "unusual" at times, but says his parents created "a fairly normal life" for the children. Some of the intellectuals in that stream of visitors were interesting, he says, but he preferred time with farmers.

"My home was, is, and will be among the people of this community," says Den, who worked a few jobs in Indiana and Kansas after high school before returning. On 165 acres, which was once one of his grandfather's farms, Den raises beef cattle and grows hay for his stock and to sell. His wife, Billie, works full time in a nearby post office (family farms with one off-farm income are common in the United States).

Daughter Mary, the executive director of The Berry Center, isn't hesitant to offer an evaluation. After completing a geography degree at the University of Kentucky, she came home and never left. As a teenager, she loved farm life, and also loved to complain about how her parents "seemed to always do things the hardest way possible." She felt

deprived of television and junk food that was available in other homes, especially the brick ranch homes that she thought marked success.

Today, she has no television in her house.

Mary says family roots on her father's side are a big part of her connection to the area, but she attributes her rootedness just as much to Tanya. If her mother had not been happy here, Mary says, she doubts that she would have stayed. "If she had been dissatisfied at all, if she had found the place less than what she hoped to have in her life, I think, we would have felt dissatisfied in some ways," Mary says.

"She absolutely accepted this place, the limits of this place, and in accepting the limits she has experienced—and I'm taking this from her, I'm not trying to put words in her mouth—a fullness that I don't think she thinks she would have had anywhere else. And I would say that is certainly true for myself, that I also accept the limits of this place and can't imagine wanting to be anywhere else, and have never wanted to be anywhere else."

The five grandchildren have all been to college (that last one's about to finish), and are living in Kentucky and working as teacher, photojournalist, and auto factory worker active in the union. No one in that generation is farming, yet.

Granddaughter Virginia and her husband are scouting farm properties in Henry County. Virginia loved the life and work on the farm with her parents, and remembers the confidence that work inspired. "I knew that if I didn't milk the cow, there were serious consequences," she says. "I was part of the home economy. I felt needed and necessary in a way a lot of my friends didn't experience."

Like any family, the Berrys have had struggles and rough patches, and Tanya reminds herself, and others, that whatever success they've had in homesteading and homemaking is partly because of a lot of luck.

But it takes more than luck to nurture values and teach skills, which continue to be passed down. She said that when Charlcye (daughter of Katie, Mary's oldest) was asked once if she was going to be a farmer, the girl said proudly, "I am a farmer!" That response clearly pleases Tanya. "Somehow or another," she says, "Charlcye is now connected to this chain of dealing with animals, and land, and food. Who knows?"

Young farmers

Tanya doesn't try to predict the future of rural America but worries about young people who want to find their place on the land. Rural communities aren't as strong, profit margins are narrower, and high-tech consumer culture is more seductive than when she and Wendell started out. But young people are trying, and she's grateful for their work to combine tradition and new ideas. "Thank goodness there are a few of them, who will continue taking care of us when we need funerals, and need a meal after church, who are going to visit if somebody's sick, and keep the knowledge going."

The day I'm at The Berry Center, Jenny Vaughn and Justin Owings from the nearby Pink Elephant Farm stopped by with out-of-town friends. The two sold their houses in Nashville to finance a CSA, subscription egg operation, and "seasonal micro-dairy" with a herd-share program (technically, people buy shares of the cows that entitle them to milk) on 27 acres. They came with experience in gardening and professional kitchen work but have been learning farming on the job.

Both were ready to work hard but didn't predict how exhausting it would be, mentally and physically. But they're dug in, not just to make a living, but to leave something for children they hope to have someday. "Being here, very early on, it has felt to both of us that this is a generational project. What we envision this property being and becoming, we will not be able to finish in our lifetimes and would love for someone to keep working on it," Jenny says.

At Port Royal Baptist, I meet two couples farming together at Valley Spirit Farm, renting 118 acres they hope to buy, raising grass-fed cattle and pastured pork, along with an acre of vegetables to sell wholesale, at farmers markets, and through their CSA. Joseph Monroe and Abbie Scott-Monroe have one child and another on the way (Angus Wilder was born a few weeks after my visit, on Sept. 2). Caleb and Kelly Fiechter have two children, and her work as a nurse provides an off-farm income.

Joseph loves farming but says he also wants to create a home in which children can learn skills, not just farming, but things like patience, "skills of the spirit." After babysitting in homes in which children seemed to be "filling time" in ways that lacked meaning, Abbie says, she looked for something beyond conventional suburban life.

Together they are "striving toward a more minimalist life, trying to move away from consumer culture," Kelly says, which they hope will be easier in the country. Caleb agrees, but says even when you actively resist a materialistic culture, "modern society kind of creeps in."

That's part of what Tanya seems to mean when, in expressing her concerns for young homesteaders, she says "they're bucking more." She surprises me by dropping the term "evil" into the conversation.

"The signs of evil are these places you put your extra stuff. What do you call those?" she asks, searching for the term. "Storage units, yes. They're all over the country now, where people have their extra stuff. The fast food industry—you eat as fast as possible, and alone. The push to make money, to have the vacations, to have the things—it's ever present."

This awareness of the social and ecological consequences of modern America's materialism is not new but spreading.

She's skeptical about the claims that digital technology brings people closer together, and most new technology doesn't interest her. Their house has no computer or internet service, still no television, and she has no interest in a smartphone. "You're never alone when you're hooked up that way, when you have that in your pocket," she says, and the ability to be truly alone with yourself is an important part of life. It makes it possible to be truly with people; it makes creating a home and being a part of a community possible.

A definition of home

In a short note confirming her willingness to be interviewed, Tanya wrote to me, "The strength of a profile/interview so totally depends on the interviewer. I'm at ease with it all." I take her to mean that any attempt to understand another person is greatly influenced by the interviewer's life. My motivation is straightforward: I grew up without the sense of home the Berrys worked hard to create, and their children and grandchildren are working hard to continue. Whatever I have built in my adult life, I will always be, in

this sense, homeless.

Over the four days I interviewed Tanya, I kept circling back to the question of home, pestering her several times for a definition, which I never really got. But given the cascading social and ecological crises of the modern world—especially the affluent industrial world, especially the United States—it's a crucial question. Our society is out of touch and out of balance, and needs to find a way home. We need to know what meaningful, sustainable home looks like.

I asked other people, and granddaughter Virginia's definition of home seems a gentle place to stop the search. "It's a safe place," she says, "where people are good to one another."

On my third day with Tanya, I had an experience of that sense of safety and decency, one of those moments that linger in memory. It requires a bit of my backstory.

The idea to write about Tanya Berry and her ideas of homemaking started nearly three decades ago. When the criticism of Wendell's computer article in Harper's appeared, I had just made a new friend who would turn out to be the biggest influence on my life (I eventually wrote a book about him, *Plain Radical*). Jim Koplín introduced me to the sustainable agriculture movement and suggested I read Wendell Berry, and through our work in the feminist anti-pornography movement, he became my model for striving to be a feminist man. I asked him what he thought about the Harper's essay and the criticism.

Before making any judgment, he said, "I would want to take a long walk in the woods with Tanya."

Koplín—who was born three years before Tanya on a Minnesota farm—died a few years ago, and he was never far from my mind during my visit to Henry County. Many of the questions that came up in conversation with her I had first explored with Koplín years before, and the two have much in common—an appreciation of everyday beauty and love of flowers, the joy of cooking for friends, a critique of a society out of balance. At the end of the trip, I miss not being able to call him and tell him I had taken that walk in the woods with Tanya.

Driving with Tanya along Cane Run on Ford Lane on a Saturday morning, as she explains the local landscape to me in the detailed way Koplín often did in Minnesota, I feel a surge of emotion, crying gently, but visibly enough that Tanya can't help but notice. I can't speak for a few seconds, and finally I tell her that there are moments when the presence of my friend overwhelms me, usually without warning. In those moments, I tell her, "I remember what I lost when he died." We are quiet together.

Down the road a bit, she points, is one of the places where she likes to walk to pick wildflowers. I think, to myself, "I am in a place where people are good to one another."