

# Upcountry Carolina Homecoming

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Cousins talk and listen  
on parallel tiers,  
in acappella roundelay.  
Matching syllable to syllable,  
they sew words lightly,  
soul warming pieces of patchwork quilts  
stitched together with hugs.  
Conversation boils like cresting cusps of mountain rivers;  
tongues curl richly around native names,  
Tugaloo...Nantahala...Swanannanoa...Tuckasegee...Keowee.  
Crooning tones blend with the shade tree music  
of flattop guitar, banjo, fiddle,  
clacking spoons, and clogging feet  
on squares of wood. Sweet dulcimers sing  
above the feathery squeals of playing children.  
Kitchen smells,  
biscuits, chicken, ham, barbecue,  
braid and unbraid with scents  
of hibiscus, gardenias, purple thrift, roses, creamy lilies.  
Old horseshoe pitchers  
under the china-berry tree  
pause and think eagerly  
of the feast to come after the blessing.  
They laugh about their long childhood wait  
for the old-timey preacher  
to bless the green grass, bless the blue sky,  
bless the (cooling) food to our (hungry) bodies.  
The old men bless the young minister  
who sends God an e-mail instead of an epistle.  
Half-focused on target stakes, leaners, ringers,  
they listen for the signal; savor already  
respect due and given to the elders of the clan,  
there at the long table.  
Upcountry Carolinians  
are huggers, touchers, givers,  
dancers, singers, fighters, drinkers,  
hunters, tellers of stories,  
lovers of God and guns,  
children and country,  
of women  
and fierce freedom-fighting men  
in time misted Scots tartans,  
yesterday's gray homespun,  
and today's camouflage.  
Upcountry Carolinians  
are people-minded,  
mountain-minded.  
Beloved...