



Lucy Cole Gratton
2012 recipient of the Holman Award

**She organized the accounting of grant funds,
jump-starting HRWC's work protecting streams**

By Tom Bennett

Looking out her living room window into the evergreen foliage of a hemlock tree free of the wooly adelgid (knock on wood), Lucy Cole Gratton lives in blissful retirement in a split-level hideaway. This rambling abode of cedar siding is a model of aesthetic blending-in with the forest. She has named it Quenvsv Tiukv, Cherokee for "House in the Trees." It clings securely to a bluff 65 feet above TVA's Lake Apalachia here in Cherokee County, N.C. This lady of the lake's commitment to her pleasant cove, to her dogs, and to all of nature's creatures of the natural world...it's rather intense. But I'll have more about that in a minute.

Gratton was the executive director of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition in 2001-02. A trained accountant, she was first to systematize reimbursement paperwork for grants. That's a critical requirement for environmental nonprofits like this one. The arrival of Gratton and her skills (and more about that in a moment) freed HRWC to go ahead and commence its staggering task. It is to protect, by hands-on activities and through education, the water quality in the Hiwassee and thousands of other streams feeding into it in four U.S. counties in two states. For those vital contributions, Gratton is a grateful board of directors' enthusiastic choice for the 2012 Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award. She is the fourth recipient, following the late Jim Dobson in 2009; Lamar Paris in 2010; and Silas Allen in 2011.

"I DIDN'T KNOW the first thing about running an environmental not-for-profit, but I was good at organization," Gratton told me. "After they were incorporated, Gil Nicolson served as

the first coordinator.” (In Sept. 1995 as Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, employing many Georgian’s spelling of the river’s name, the organization was incorporated, according to the Secretary of State’s public records in Atlanta).

The office of the nation’s newest environmental non-profit was the humble former headquarters shed of the Young Harris Water Dept. on Mining Gap Road. Water from a highway culvert poured across the floor when it rained, she recalled, and mice showing their contempt for computers moved about leaving their unmistakable evidence inside a printer.

In 1999, the first grant was received from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund in Raleigh. “Francine Durso who was (then CWMTF director) Bill Holman’s Deputy Director reviewed all the reimbursement requests and was a big help. Both parties, the trust fund and HRWC, were new (organizations).” HRWC had the confounding problem of receiving grant money but then needing to go out and convince some “Don’t Tread on Me” landowners to permit it to do stream restoration.

Gratton continued: “I had retired to Inagehi (the name of her property, from the Cherokee meaning “dwelling in the wilderness”) in 1998 but still made trips back to the Atlanta area, where my sister lives, and to Florida to help clients at tax time. What started me as a member of Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition was this: “Silas Allen (later Cherokee County chief building inspector and a Holman Award recipient) was the builder of my home and a good friend. One day we put the boat in the lake and then as I was heading back to my dock in the pouring rain, I looked and on the steep bank across from Inagehi, there was nothing but red clay running down into the lake. I couldn’t believe what was happening. A man, not a property owner but a local bulldoze person, was grading off five lots, leaving steep banks that were now washing down the hill.

“Well, eventually we had TVA, U.S. Forest Service and N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources out here. The USFS officer said, ‘Ma’am, we’ll have to do a survey, and since there’s just one enforcement person for this five county area, it could years.’ Asked why a survey was needed, he replied that they would need proof (before they could go to court) that mud was running onto adjacent property. Meanwhile I am standing on the side of the mountain ankle deep in mud, that was obviously running across the USFS property (that rims the lake), on its downhill rush to the lake itself.” I asked, what was the end result of it all? “They had the man hydro-seed,” Gratton replied.

At HRWC board meetings in that Young Harris shed, the perceptive directors came to realize that Gratton had accounting and organizational skills. “They had a grant from the state of North Carolina, a bank account out of balance, and no filing cabinets,” Gratton said.

In my environmental research and writing here, I often think about what would result if all U.S. citizens living downstream from here to the Gulf of Mexico, along the Hiwassee, Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi rivers and depending on them for fresh water, were polled asking, “Do you want skilled, visionary managers upstream guiding protection of water-quality?” Anyone along that path of water not certifiably insane would of course vote, “Yes.” And if their hectic pace of life ever led them to stop and look up the names in this watershed of Nicolson, Gratton and Callie Dobson (now Moore), who became executive director in 2003, they’d be thankful for them.

LUCY COLE GREW UP in Decatur, Ga., adjoining Atlanta to the east, and the family frequently visited Thurman and Caldwell Cottages on Lake Chatuge in Hiawassee. Vogel State Park was also a favorite. "I even remember when the road over Neel Gap wasn't paved," Gratton recalled. Later, her parents George and Jura Cole owned a summer home at Lake Burton.

During the summers of her high school years, Lucy Cole attended North Carolina summer camps at Montreat and Lakebrook. "We'd go on forty-five mile hikes, up Mt. Graybeard and then to the top of Mt. Mitchell and back," she said. "I lived in Decatur, but the mountains were my home. Here, I could be independent."

She graduated from Agnes Scott College and received a master's degree from the University of Florida both in mathematics, later adding two years in accounting at Florida Atlantic University. She was married for six years to a Fonts, 31 years to a Gratton. She taught high school math in Florida public schools.

In Palm Beach County, Gratton had an innovative idea. It was to permit her geometry students to learn and make progress individually at their own paces, then self-test themselves. Imagine her disappointment the day Palm Beach County Schools announced that hereafter all schools will follow a standardized curriculum! Furthermore, the school chiefs will schedule hard-and-fast a school year in which all students must have reached the same points in lesson plans each day as all other students in the system. "That was the end of my teaching career," Gratton said, and the number of that state's tax-accounting corporations soon grew by one. She became a partner in Taylor & Gratton, CPAs, of Boynton Beach.

"INAGEHI", the name of her 45-acre property and home, is also the name of a self-published work of poetry that she recently turned out from her printer for family and friends – revealing that at the time she was 69 years old. It's getting harder each year to make it down a narrow path to the dock with a can of gasoline for the outboard motor of the pontoon boat. She's reluctantly thinking about putting parts of Inagehi up for sale, but the bulk of the property is to be gifted for environmental awareness.

The lady of the lake still grieves each day over the recent death of her Doberman, Rob Roy. The mastiff mix Matilda, or "Tildy," and the rat terriers Skeeter and Sassy console her.

Nature poetry in this unpublished work by Gratton is of some quality – and I've read a fair amount of poetry. I hope the two examples that follow get into the banquet program. As I was enjoying her work, I kept thinking, I wish everyone coming up here from Florida and Atlanta and other places had the same love of the water and land as Lucy Cole Gratton.

SEASONS

By Lucy Cole Gratton

Once upon a time
not so long ago
the snow and ice melted
the stream ran free

In the beginning it had fought
to break from ground beneath
pushed its way to light
as it struggled to be free

Through spring's thaw, the summer heat
it cavorted happily down tree lush groves
over rocks and rills 'til it reached the lake
where the wild wind was blowing free

Autumn arrived, the rains made it swell
on its surface it carried the fallen leaves
on a glorious unexpected grand tour
to see the curious world, wild, free

But winter blew in hard and fast
piling snow and ice in its way
the stream never realized it was itself
that strangled the need to be free

And so it goes with you and me
as we meet the seasons of life
at times we tangle our very way
then work to cut ourselves free

RETURN OF THE SUN

By Lucy Cole Gratton

A thin rain of sleet blowing through the dark trees
sent small shivers across the silent lands.
through blackness, thick and stifling close,
nothing could be seen, not even hands.

Plugging through wet mud, water lapping slowly,
sounds of the night echoed sharp and quick—
hoot of an owl, the cry of a crane, soft rustles of mystery;
then, loud as a shot, the break of a stick.

Through the barren and ghostly trees,
black shadows broke forth to roam.
across the bare and desolate ground
silky fog bathed it as soft foam.

The stench of smoke
smothered most scent.
sorrow hung from the
skeletons of cypress.
Whiffs of burnt rosin wound
in the still air.
Someone had been
inconceivably careless.

Grey dawn rose like smoke
to the east;
sunlight broke over desolate trash.
Before day's end,
a small green sprout
rose tentatively from the
shifting ash.