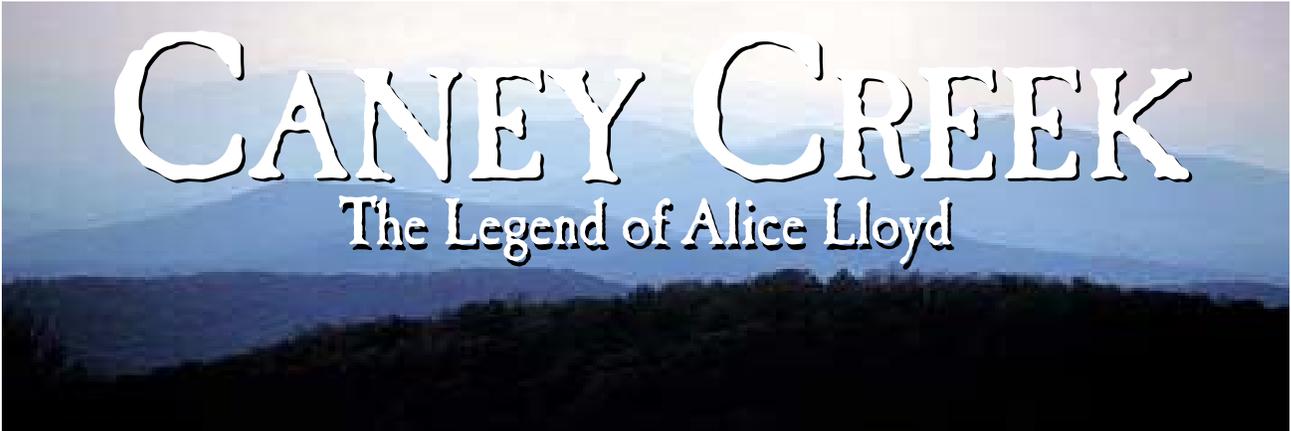


CANEY CREEK

The Legend of Alice Lloyd

A motion picture film proposal

www.caneycreekmovie.com



CANNEY CREEK

The Legend of Alice Lloyd

LogLine: The true story of a Boston woman who overcomes all obstacles to bring a better life to the Appalachian mountains, climaxing when her efforts are saved on live television on NBC in 1955.

Synopsis: This is one of the most fascinating and moving true stories of the 20th century. The year is 1916. Forty-one year old Boston journalist Alice Lloyd suffers a debilitating stroke and contracts spinal meningitis. Partially paralyzed, she is told by her doctor that she has only six months to live. He says she might extend her life a couple more years if she moves away from the harsh Boston winters to a warmer climate.

Abandoned by her husband and broke, Alice turns to her church for help. Her pastor offers an abandoned missionary home in a small Appalachian hamlet in Knott County, Kentucky. The suggestion, however, came with a warning: The mountain folks don't like outsiders. In fact, the missionaries were run off with shotguns by the locals.

With her health failing rapidly and no solutions in sight, Alice and her aged mother accept the church's offer and move to Kentucky in November, 1916. They find the abandoned, windowless property in great disrepair. The mountain folk know of their arrival but let them be, viewing the two women as "*strangers ... outsiders from Amerikay.*" Appalachia is a land of dark mystery, separate and isolated from the rest of the nation. It is a musical, passionate region of many contradictions.

A few months later, in February of 1917, fifty-five year old mountain man Abisha Johnson, father of eleven, has an uneasy night of fitful dreams and visions. He heard about the "*firren womin*" that have moved into the county. He dreams he sees Alice teaching his children to read the Bible, to be "*. . . unliken the hogs.*" His own health poor, Abisha crosses two mountains barefoot in a snowstorm, collapsing through Alice's cabin door, and begging her to come to his home on Caney Creek. He offers his only possession, *his land*, and to build her a cabin with windows if she will come.

On this night, the future changed not only for Alice, Abisha and his family, but for thousands of others for generations to come.

This is a story of Alice's struggle to be accepted into the close-knit, silent Appalachian community. It's told through the eyes of a teenage mountain boy who desperately wants to take advantage of Alice's opportunity but is denied by his father's prejudice and hurt. It is a story of a family's survival. It's a story of a handicapped woman who overcomes debilitating illness and finds a new purpose in life. It's a story of failure, romance and redemption. It reflects the spirit and life of America and Appalachia.

And it is the story of Alice. She personally wrote over 60,000 letters to people across the nation on a clunky Oliver #9 typewriter, seeking help for her mountain school. She was spurned, shot at, burned down and went from near bankruptcy to finally being saved on Ralph Edward's NBC television show *This Is Your Life* after he read a chance story about her in *Reader's Digest Magazine*.

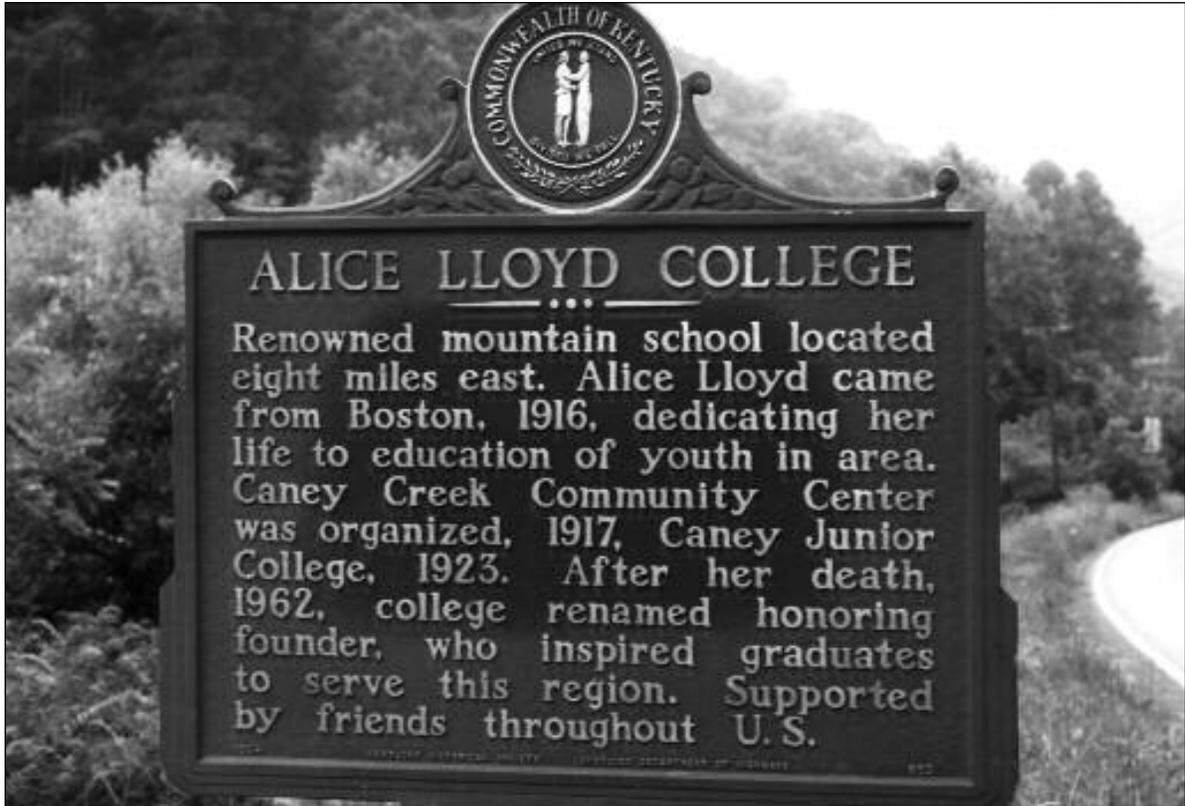
When she passed away in 1962, outliving her Boston doctors, her personal estate was worth only 16 cents. She left this world a true American hero, a wealthy spirit who enhanced the lives of thousands on a magnitude rarely found in modern day America.

THE CHRONICLES OF
Alice Lloyd

“Life begets life ... Energy begets energy.
It is by spending oneself that we become rich.”

*Quote from the French actress Sarah Bernhardt,
spoken the year Alice moved to Appalachia*

Let me tell you the true story about a real hero ...



While I lived in the Appalachian hamlet of Mousie, Kentucky I would roam the mountain hollers each day, keeping an ear out for unusual or moving stories. One afternoon while visiting a friend in Hindman, I happened upon a book which I found to be particularly enchanting. By sunset, I not only had finished the book, but also began writing a song called *Miracle On Caney Creek*.

This story is about Alice Lloyd, an extraordinary woman who settled into the Appalachian mountains and lived an astounding life. I'd like to share her story with you.

We begin in Boston in the autumn of 1916.

Alice is a 40 year old journalist who finds herself hospitalized after suffering a stroke, and then contracting spinal meningitis. Her doctor gives her six months to live. However, he adds, she could possibly extend her life another two years if she moves south to a warmer climate and away from the bitter cold of the Boston harbor.

Her husband, Arthur, looks upon his crippled wife with disdain. She has lost most of her ability to control her left side and can only hobble around now, using her right hand to aid herself.

Upon hearing the doctor's advice, her husband bristles and tells Alice,
"One life wasted is unavoidable, two lives wasted is senseless."
Arthur then abandons Alice to her ultimate demise.

Meanwhile, Alice's pastor in her Boston church learns of her plight and comes to her aid with a possible solution. It seems the church owns some property in a little hamlet in Knott County, Kentucky and had once used it as a missionary home, but it was now abandoned. Alice was welcome to have full use of the little cabin and property for as long as it was needed. Kentucky was certainly warmer than Boston, plus she could use it for free.

But the generous offer also came with a warning: The church's missionaries were not well received and the local men had run them off with shotguns. The mountain folks obviously did not take well to outsiders. Distressed by Arthur's unsupportive actions, her illness and the time limit on her life, she accepts the church's offer in spite of the pastor's warning.

Alice Lloyd arrives in the mountain community of Hindman, Kentucky in November of 1916. She is accompanied only by her aging mother, Mrs. Geddes. They find the little, windowless church cabin abandoned and in disrepair. They fix it up as best they can and settle in for a long winter.

In February, 1917, just a few months later, a very odd thing happens.

A mountain man named Abisha Johnson, who lives in the same county just a few miles away, hears about the two "*firren womin*" who had recently moved into the area. These two women, he was told, were educated ladies from "*Amerikay*", the land beyond the mountains.

Abisha is a sincere, humble mountain man, a hard worker with a large family. He is 55 years old and very ill. He's humpbacked yet still manages to support his wife and their 11 children on his small piece of land.

On this cold February night, Abisha has a fitful sleep. He dreams the "*firren womin*" will teach his children to read, making them, in his words, "*...unliken the hogs*".

You see, Abisha has a harsh view of life in Appalachia. He sees his family trapped, confined to the hills like farm hogs in a barnyard. He wanted to break free, but couldn't. He felt you were born, you bred and then you died just like animals ... all the while ensnared by the poverty of the "barnyard", or in his mind, the mountains.

He desperately wants a way out of that cycle for his children. He felt if this stranger woman could teach his children to read, they would be educated and able to lift themselves up from his poverty.

Abisha awakens from his dream and barefoot crosses two mountains in a snowstorm until he finds Alice's cabin. Freezing and weak, he collapses through her door and begs her to come help his children.

He offers her an unusual proposition on this cold winter night. He wants Alice and Mrs. Geddes to move across the county to his mountain holler along the Caney Creek. He begs her to come help his children and the children of his friends, teaching them to read the Bible. He promises to build a better cabin for Alice to live in... with windows.

If she does, he vowed to give Alice his land as compensation.



The only known photo of
Alice Lloyd and Abisha Johnson,
taken about 1925 after she settled
onto Abisha's land on Caney Creek.

His land... In the world of mountain life, Abisha offered Alice the most valuable, most precious thing he had. Land was life itself, and he offered it *all* to Alice. That's how much Abisha loved his children. Alice accepts his offer, and in the spring of 1917, she and her mother move onto Abisha's property on Caney Creek and begin a small community school. (*Today, Abisha Johnson's land is the campus property of Alice Lloyd College*).

What happens to them over the course of the next several decades is truly amazing. Alice and her mother start the little school, as she promised. The reaction by the mountain folks is immediate and positive.

Too positive, actually.

Dozens of families send their children to Alice and Mrs. Geddes for "*the larnin' at the Caney School*". However, an immediate problem they face is the fact that the local children are from very poor families. There is no money to buy the supplies they need to build classrooms, to obtain books and paper, or purchase teaching equipment, like chalkboards.

Their limited resources become strained to the breaking point, almost from day one.

So, Alice makes an agreement with the local men. She will somehow find the money needed to construct the school and teach the children *tuition free* ...if they promise to provide the labor she needs to build the classrooms and care for the school property.

The mountain men agree, but on yet one more condition:

Alice must also promise not to meddle in their religion, their politics, or their moonshining.

With that simple understanding, she embarks upon a quest that spans the next several decades as she searches to find the money needed to keep the school going. She begins by writing letters to friends, colleagues and wealthy people across the country, asking for help. She writes dozens of letters each day on an old, cumbersome Oliver #9 typewriter.

If you visit Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes, Kentucky, you will be able to go into Alice's small cabin office where she spent most of her life. In that office there is a large file cabinet which contains the documented records of *over 60,000 letters* Alice herself wrote to people all over America, searching for gifts of money, books, paper, supplies, volunteer help... anything to help support the school on Caney Creek. For years, Alice Lloyd could be seen hunched over her desk, laboring away from dawn till dusk, pecking away on her typewriter writing letters.

One of the letters finds its way onto the information board in a woman's dormitory at Wesleyan College, located in upstate New York. Among the readers is a student, Miss June Buchanan. She is moved by the idea of teaching kids in Appalachia and volunteers to help during the summer of 1919 (*June stayed until her death in 1989. She was 99 years old*).

Miss June brings a wealth of art and energy to Caney. Her generous personality helps compliment the more reserved, business-like tone of Alice Lloyd. One of Miss June's major contributions to the school is the writings of Robert Browning. His poem *Pippa's Song* becomes a staple of the students educational menu through the years. It is from this poem that Alice eventually finds a name for the college post office (thus the name *Pippa Pass*, later changed to *Pippa Passes*).

During the next several years, the school and the local community grow and flourish together. But not without some dramatic moments. There are a few people in the region who deeply resent Alice's "outsider" presence and show it, often violently. She is shot at, harassed and spurned on many occasions. Someone even burned a dormitory building down. But through it all, the community at large rallies to her aid, and the school presses on. Alice never gives up, nor does she forget her promise to Abisha Johnson. She tells the students after each crisis "*...You must have aspirations as high as the mountains, and faith as firm as the rocks*".

The school makes its way into the early 1950's. America has just survived a turbulent global war, atomic bomb explosions, a massive depression and drastic social upheaval. Now the war is over, and the nation breathes a huge sigh of relief as it gets on with the business of making America materially rich again.

The mountain communities, however, find no relief in this new found national confidence. The war years were hard enough, but during peacetime demand for coal that fueled the great war machine becomes virtually nonexistent. As the rest of the nation goes back to work, the coal mining region of the mountains plunges into its darkest economic quandary of all time.

The financial fortunes of Alice's school rise and fall along with those of the mountain community. By 1953, Alice is no longer able to pay teachers' salaries or workmen's wages at the school. Simply put, Alice runs out of money.

Most of the school's workers and teachers are willing to stay on, but the future looks bleak. Volunteer attorneys for the school recommend drastic action. Alice must file for bankruptcy, soon.

The Caney School? Bankrupt?

There is no choice. That spring, at the Knott County courthouse in Hindman, papers are drawn up that will eventually end her promise to Abisha, made in faith so many years before.

However...

About this same time, a very wealthy man dies in New Jersey. Years ago, the man had received a letter from a certain Alice Lloyd from a place called Pippa Pass, Kentucky. It was a simple, direct and bold letter that moved him to financially help out the school. So, every year since then, Lamont DuPont, chairman of the mighty DuPont Chemical Corporation, would send in his personal gift to Alice Lloyd at Christmas time.

After his death, Mr. DuPont's personal accountant began the task of closing his personal affairs and kept coming across a yearly entry of money sent to some unknown woman in a small, obscure Kentucky town.

Well, well, well ...

It was "obvious" to Mr. Accountant that ol' Lamont left behind a bit of a surprise for his widowed wife and family. Not wanting to give this unaccounted-for "heir" a chance to cause damage by making future claims against the DuPont fortune, DuPont's widow sends the accountant to Kentucky with a suitcase full of cash to "...pay the little hussy off".

Days later, the accountant makes his way by car into the mountains. He travels along the cramped, curving roads past coal mines, lumbered mountains and small cabins. He steers his motor car along a small creek as he nears Pippa Pass. Soon, the road bends around a sharp curve and the cramped, narrow holler suddenly expands before his eyes.

There before him is his destination: a school, 600 students and a crippled old lady named Alice Lloyd. No words can describe the surprise of this little bean counter. He discovers that the yearly entry in his late employer's ledger was nothing more than Mr. DuPont's response to a letter Alice sent him nearly twenty years ago. So, he sheepishly leaves behind the suitcase of cash as a final contribution to the school and returns to the equally surprised, and relieved, DuPont family.

The accountant can't get his experience out of his mind and he tells the story to many of his friends. Among them, a writer named William Bennett. Bennett, in turn, takes the story and writes an article. He sends the manuscript to his close buddy who happens to be the editor of a national magazine.

A few weeks later, a story entitled "*Stay On Stranger*" appears in Readers Digest Magazine. Alas, neither a suitcase full of cash nor a national magazine article is enough to cure the financial damage done to the school, and bankruptcy proceedings continue at the local courthouse.

Meanwhile, across the country on the west coast ...

... a pretty blonde secretary carries in the day's mail and places it on her boss' desk. In between meetings and phone calls, the man sorts his way down the pile and comes upon the new issue of his favorite magazine, *Readers Digest*. While half-listening to the conversations of other executives in his Hollywood office, he reads the incredible story of Alice Lloyd and her little school in the mountains of Kentucky.

The man is Ralph Edwards, executive producer and host of the popular TV show "*This Is Your Life*" on the NBC television network. His decision is swift and immediate.

He wants that woman on his show - *Now!*



Alice at her typewriter about 1937

Co-producers scrambled to locate this woman from the isolated mountains of Appalachia. They contact an attorney in Hindman, Dan Martin, for help. Dan also happens to be a former Caney student.

They get him on the phone.

Yes, he knows Alice. Yes, he could ask her.

Dan Martin explains the situation to June Buchanan and Commador Slone, two of Alice's most trusted friends. Getting Alice to Hollywood, California will be no easy task. Not only is she frail and very ill, *but she hasn't left Caney holler in 26 years!* But try they must. Putting Alice on national television is probably the last chance they have to save the school.

So, they approach Alice ... and lie.

They tell her a very wealthy man wants to donate a large gift to the school, but he's too busy to come to Kentucky. She must go to the benefactor and thank him for the gift.

To save her school, Alice loads her crippled body into a car and heads to the nearest train depot, two hours away. She painfully boards a train in Hazard, Kentucky for the three day ride to California.

Soon, the moment of the TV broadcast arrives. Alice, unaware of what is happening, sits on a couch in what seems to be a rather odd looking living room. The large curtain in front of her suddenly parts to the glare of bright lights and the sound of applause. The voice of an unseen announcer tells her through the large studio speakers,



Ralph Edwards and Alice on NBC

“Alice Lloyd of Pippa Pass, Kentucky ... This Is Your Life!”

For the next 30 minutes, Alice listens to the account of her life as told by friends and former students. People like John Hall, chairman of Armco Steel, Carl D. Perkins, one of the most powerful congressmen in Washington, DC, June Buchanan, Commador Slone and others. The story of her school, her dreams and her promise to Abisha Johnson is disclosed in full on network television. Ralph Edwards is so moved by the courage of this frail woman that, at the end of the broadcast, he turns to the camera and spontaneously addresses his national audience face to face and says:

“Please, let's all send a dollar, or five dollars or whatever you can afford. Let's all help Miss Lloyd's dream stay alive”. As he speaks, Alice's address is flashed on the TV screen.

Two days later, as Alice and company are enroute back to Kentucky, the sheriff in Hazard gets a frantic phone call from the postmaster in Lexington. Slamming the phone down, the sheriff rushes into the street and grabs the first fourteen men he finds. He deputizes them, arms them with shotguns and has them surround the Hazard post office to wait for a large shipment of mail coming in from Lexington.

About late afternoon, several trucks lumber into Hazard carrying bags of mail addressed to Alice Lloyd.



The students of Alice Lloyd College responding to the thousands of letters received after her appearance on NBC's *This Is Your Life*

Today, hanging on the office wall of Mr. C. Vernon Cooper, the president of Peoples Bank in Hazard, is the photo of a table piled high with *268,000 dollar bills* ... money mailed in to Alice Lloyd by caring people from around the nation, people who wanted to help keep her dream alive.

PROLOGUE:

The afternoon that I read Dr. Jerry Davis' book about the history of Alice Lloyd College, I recall walking to a nearby swinging bridge stretched across two hollers. I sat on the bridge with my guitar and envisioned this spectacular, true story that I just read about. I began to write a melody that reminded me of the feeling I had while reading the book. But the words didn't come. The next day, I looked up "*Alice Lloyd College*" in the Knott County phone book and called. The receptionist answered and I asked for Alice Lloyd.

"I'm sorry," she explained, "Alice Lloyd passed on over twenty five years ago."

So, I hesitantly asked about June Buchanan. "Yes, Miss June is here," she says, and I was put on hold. Miss June finally answered and I told her what I was doing. "Well, well," she replies, "Why don't you just stop by for a visit, then?"

That afternoon, I headed to the beautiful mountain campus of Alice Lloyd College. Among the mix of new buildings and rustic cabins was the small fieldstone home of June Buchanan. We sat on her front porch, sipping hot tea and nibbling blackberry muffins as she told me the story of her life on Caney Creek. Dr. Davis, then the president of Alice Lloyd College, joined us, too. I was so taken with the story and the events of the day that I walked over to the campus coffee shop after my visit with June and wrote the lyrics to a song called *Miracle On Caney Creek* on the back of a napkin.

About two years later I decided it was time to bring the song and Alice's story to life. So, I approached Pepsi USA with an idea: I wanted them to finance a project to make a music video of the song *Miracle On Caney Creek*, even though their company logo would not be shown or bottles of pop would not be seen in the clip.

They said "Yes."

We made the music video on 35mm film and, with the help of actors and volunteers from the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville, also produced a 25 minute docu-drama (*an acted-out documentary*) on Alice and June's life. Ralph Edwards donated the actual footage of Alice Lloyd and Miss June appearing on his TV show for use in the docu-drama. We distributed the finished video with a lesson plan free of charge to nearly 2,000 schools and libraries in Appalachia. The music video was shown on TNN, PBS, VH-1 and went on to become the number 12 video on Country Music Television.

SUMMARY:

In 1916, Alice Lloyd was told she had six months to live.

She could have shriveled up inside herself and drowned in her own self pity, but she didn't. Alice found a purpose for the time she thought she had left, and invested every moment with great passion and success. Over 3,000 of her students became teachers in the 118 mountain schools that she helped start. Her students became doctors, lawyers, poets and professionals. They became powerful congressmen, gubernatorial candidates, heads of major corporations, and administrators.

They all received a *tuition free education*, from grammar school through college. If they did well, she even paid their way to better schools like the University of Kentucky. All of this was financed by Alice's unceasing efforts on her old Oliver #9 typewriter, sending letters around the country looking for donations to pay her students' way through school. For all the years of work and dedication, Alice asked only one thing in return from all her students: She would teach them for free if they would *promise to stay in the mountains with their education*, making their homes and communities a better place to live.

She made them promise to be *mountain leaders*.

Alice Lloyd passed away in 1962, nearly a half century after doctors told her she was dying. When she died, her personal estate was worth only sixteen cents.

Sixteen cents! But her life was rich in accomplishments and blanketed in good work. She made a contribution to life around her of a magnitude rarely found in modern day America.

And she kept her promise to Abisha Johnson.

Alice Lloyd, my friends, is a Hero.

HISTORIC DISCLAIMER:

As with many stories, some facts become embellished with time. Most of Alice Lloyd's story is well documented and factual. One particular matter, however, was altered by Alice herself.

The accounts of Abisha Johnson, the money problems, life in the mountains, Lamont DuPont, Reader's Digest and the appearance on *This Is Your Life* are completely true. The depiction of her marriage is not. In reality, her husband, Arthur, moved to Kentucky with Alice and her mother in 1916. He was miserable there, and missed his life in Boston a great deal. He eventually began an illicit affair with a female volunteer who was recruited to help at the school. Alice soon found out about the relationship and confronted Arthur. This is when he tells her "*One life wasted is unavoidable, two lives wasted is senseless...*" The affair so humiliated Alice that she divorced Arthur immediately.

Strangely, he never did go back to Boston. Instead, he settled down with his new girlfriend just a few miles away near Prestonsburg, Ky. From then on, it was Alice's decision to completely wipe away Arthur's presence by claiming *he never came with her* to Kentucky to begin with. This is also the account she presented on national television during her NBC interview with Ralph Edwards.

Even so, this is a spectacular woman's story set in the most mysterious and romantic places in America. It is the spellbinding tale of a handicapped woman who overcomes insurmountable obstacles to help those around her.



Contact: 859-255-5700, info@caneycreekmovie.com