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BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — Gardner-Webb alumnus and acclaimed documentarian Bruce Bowers ('68) was recently presented the 2012 National Media Award by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) in Washington, D.C. The award is for his documentary film, "The Blue Ridge Parkway: A Long & Winding Road."

The NSDAR National Media Award is given annually to various media that promote historical preservation, patriotism, and education. Recent winners include the celebrated HBO mini-series "John Adams," the popular TV series "Who Do You Think You Are?" and last year's Academy Award documentary nominee "Waiting for Superman." Past recipients include Ken Burns, Tom Brokaw and Charles Kuralt.

Bowers' hour-long "Blue Ridge Parkway: A Long and Winding Road," tells the story of the most visited segment of the U.S. National Park Service. It examines the Parkway's impact on people along the route and events and political controversies involved in building the 469-mile scenic drive through the mountains of North Carolina and Virginia.

The film is co-produced and co-written by Daniel Hayes. The project's director of photography was award-winning cinematographer Charles Shedd.

"The cabin where my mother was born in Miller's Creek, N.C., actually appears in the documentary," Bowers said. "I remember going there as a young child to visit my grandmother. It was a little two-room cabin with no electricity, no running water, no heat or air conditioning. I'd take baths in this galvanized tub that my grandmother would fill with water from a spring some 50 yards from the house. Of course, all that is lost on the audience, but this stuff is very personal for me."

The film also reveals a secret New Deal political arrangement between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and N.C. Mountain congressman Robert L. Doughton of Alleghany County, chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. The story goes that Roosevelt would see to it that the Parkway was built in North Carolina rather than Tennessee, and in turn, Doughton would see to it that Roosevelt's version of Social Security was passed in the House of Representatives.

"I was on the phone with [N.C. Judge Richard Doughton], and he sort of mentioned this Social Security deal and then the conversation just kept moving," Bowers said, remembering the conversation during which he discovered something the history books had missed. "I had to stop him and say, 'Wait a minute, hold on. What was that you just said about a deal?' As it turns out, it was a family secret that had never gone beyond the family."

A recent report from Trac Media Services proves Bowers' documentary is more than a regional phenomenon. It has currently been broadcast more than 1,136 times on 194 PBS television stations in 100 markets in 39 states. Bowers said he could not be more surprised and humbled over the national interest his film has received.

"It's really quite mind-boggling that the film has caught on the way it has. It's just had legs, I guess, that I didn't anticipate it having. When we first released it, we didn't even know whether UNC-TV was going to carry it. But states began airing it one-by-one, and all of a sudden it became like a landslide."

Bowers said he still occasionally gets a DVD order from a new city like Minneapolis or Orlando, and friends still say they see the documentary airing on channels around the country.

"I think people are drawn to it because it captures the stories of the people who live in the region, along the mountaintops, the folks the Parkway has touched. Their stories shine through." The film also features a Cherokee perspective offered by Gardner-Webb Cherokee alumni Freeman Owle and Faren Sanders Crews.

"I think it's essential that we don't forget where we came from," Bowers said, reflecting on the significance of his historical documentary. "The people who lived along the Parkway in those days were proud people. They were poor, but they worked hard and lived well, and they were proud. Sometimes we lose sight of that perspective, and I think there is a lot we can learn from them."

For more about the documentary, [click here](#).