Free Table After neighbors have been seclusiveand on our eventual way to Boone,we pause where Rush Branch Road parts the Cable farm down the middle—wait on the car stopped ahead as at a drive-throughfor our turn to catch up on thingswith Sanford and Margaret.There, in front of the greenhouse, fresh eggs,all shades of Easter pastels, can be bought on the honor system,cheaper than at the grocery store,by placing bills or IOUs inside a vintage Band-Aid tin.At another convenient pullover, Sanford had stacked the acrobatics of blue plastic crates to form a table, draped with a handwritten cardboard sign—FREE.The table’s seasonal display of abundance changed colors like a Rubik’s Cube—carrots, green beans, yellow crookneckor flat squash with the bumpy roundness of the Millennium Falcon,peppers, eggplant, pickling cucumbers, zucchini big as Wiffleball bats, cabbage, heirloom tomatoes, and finally pumpkins full of themselves as princess dresses.Then, plenty ended.Floodwaters clawed away the bare fists of unharvested potatoes, then wrestled a culvert until the field yielded a canyon next to the barnthat annually displays Margaret’s lit-up Nativity scene and invite to sing Christmas songs together.Decorated for the Fall,old tractor tires, brimming marigolds and yellow mums,always dot the circle drive,and a jovial scarecrow’s shirt,empty of arms, waves at car wind—gone. Those first few days, neighbors on 4-wheeler, horse, or footchecked on each other—chainsawed fallen tree trunks that divided our isolation by half livesinto mere minus signs for firewood later.Sanford’s table switched gears, adapted into the community distribution center.Neighbors shared what they had—canned goods, granola bars, batteries, lanterns, towels, and tarps. A sack of feed, bent from exhaustion, leaned tenderly against the table base. Full gas cans on red alertstood at attention, confident in being selected quick as the few hay bales spared from becoming shredded wheat in the Watauga River.Above the table, Sanford mapped a potable spring,not easily seen from the road, with a vibrant green troughthat served double duty, holding waterso neighbors could dip buckets—*for flushing*, Sanford whispered. Weeks of no power for wells or cell reception,the table was our flag still there—a reminder to gather with gratitude for the thirst and the waterand all that is stillfree.Hilda Downer