

DARE Newsletter



Photo credit: George Hall

IT'S A BOOK! The members of the DARE staff are proud to announce the arrival of Volume V (S–Z). The newest addition to the DARE family weighs 6.4 pounds and is 1,296 pages long. Look for it in a bookstore near you, or use the coupon on page 8 to order any volume of DARE at a 20% discount.

Let DARE Help You Get the Most out of Placebos

August Rubrecht

We are always pleased to present an article by August Rubrecht, whose accounts of his adventures as a DARE Fieldworker have delighted our readers over the years. The following essay is a revised and expanded version of a piece that appeared under a pseudonym in the "Bulletin Board" column of the St. Paul (MN) Pioneer Press.

To one side of his neatly mowed lawn, a friend in town has a rock garden filled with native plants. To me it looks like a patch of weeds, but not to him. He pulls the weeds out, and when I asked

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Let DARE Help You

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him how he tells the difference, he said, "If I didn't plant it there, it's a weed."

Our yard is filled with native plants, too, but by his definition it is a patch of weeds. I prefer to call it a plant succession experiment. We live at the end of a dead-end road, where appearances don't matter. Since I dislike pulling weeds and mowing grass, I don't, except to get rid of tree seedlings and briars. My motto is, "If I haven't pulled it up or whacked it down, it's a wildflower."

The upshot is that ginseng has crept out of the woods up to our back door, a circumstance that would have thrilled me as a teenager in the Ozarks. Back then, Uncle Floyd filled me with hope that I could get rich collecting and selling ginseng. He said it was so highly prized for export to China as a medicine that it would bring a dollar an ounce from the local fur buyer. Sixteen dollars a pound paid for roots free for the digging seemed a lot more inviting than the forty cents an hour I made shoveling manure out of chicken houses. Unfortunately, in those days I never found any ginseng. Now ginseng grows at my doorstep.

When the season for digging it opened last September, though, I didn't dig any because at the time I didn't need extra cash. I thought, "Those roots are valuable right where they grow; let them stay there as savings for a rainy day. In fact, the longer they stay, the bigger they grow. The bigger they grow, the more they're worth."

Now I am having second thoughts. Because of a real scare the other day, I plan to dig some roots next September and dry them to keep on hand. After reading an article about hypochondria, I became convinced I had an acute case of it. The preferred treatment is a placebo, and ginseng is one of the most highly regarded ones available. But what to do? That ginseng in my yard is completely

“My great-grandfather . . . was an intelligent man and an educated one, too, for someone who was born in a rural area in 1829. . . . We used *DARE* a lot in deciphering his letters. One of my personal 'great achievements' was figuring out, from using *DARE* and an online dictionary of somewhat archaic words, that his attack of 'grain gurget' that he mentioned was, no doubt, acid reflux!

Thanks again and I look forward to your next volume.”

Marjorie Zwickel
Madison, Wisconsin

inaccessible now for both physical and legal reasons. The ground is frozen and the digging season is closed. Fortunately, I managed to put the hypochondria attack into remission with a hot lemon toddy and several hours of bed rest.

Come to think of it, I may supplement next fall's wild ginseng by following Joan Hall's example next spring. She cultivates echinacea. If during my next episode the salubrious effect of hot toddies should fade, and if my condition were later to become ginseng-resistant as well, it would be smart to have a backup treatment.

Joan has a more efficient system for using placebos than my plan of adding a continuous string of new remedies. One time I strolled through the garden that she and her husband, George, maintain and admired the echinacea bed near the raspberry vines. I came into the house and said, "You know, I read an article that said echinacea has no more effect on colds than a placebo. How are we going to get the placebo effect from it now that we know that?"

She wheeled on me and declared firmly, "Nothing can make me believe echinacea doesn't work!"

If, like me, you can't muster Joan's steely resolve, maybe you'd better stick with a succession of remedies. Thanks to *DARE*, you don't need a vast pharmacopoeia to do so; you can get the desired effect by using the same stuff again and again under new names. Leaving aside all my joking around up to now, this ploy could actually work (within the limits of the placebo effect), as long as the patient is not in on the secret.

No doubt you've got a friend or relative who frequently complains of a parade of debilitating symptoms, and the best explanation is an overwrought imagination. You can diagnose the problem this way: "You know, my grandmother used to suffer from the very same thing. She would say, 'Ooh, I've got the *collywobbles* again.' She always treated it with ginseng, and it never failed to make her feel better." Or you can claim that an uncle or neighbor used ginseng to cure *mulligrubs* or *pantod*. To sound scientific instead of folksy, you could say, "I read about that syndrome recently. You've got the *epizootics*. A lot of people get relief from ginseng. The medical establishment doesn't know why."

Ginseng is especially promising because it is so expensive. Some studies suggest that the more a placebo costs, the better it works. So let's say the ginseng works and the person stops complaining for a while. Eventually a true hypochondriac will start moaning again. You step up the treatment

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Staff Member Profile

In this ongoing series, Beth Gardner interviews Project Assistant Erin Leary, who is working on cutting the audio clips for the digital edition of DARE while pursuing a Ph.D. in English Language and Linguistics at UW–Madison.

Q: How did you first become aware of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*?

A: I'm a little bit embarrassed to say that I didn't know about *DARE* before arriving at the UW–Madison. I learned of it through my friend Alyssa Severn, who worked for the *Dictionary* while she pursued her M.A. alongside me. When she, upon our first introduction at the English Department welcome reception, told me about her involvement in the project, I thought, "Wow, that sounds wonderful. I want to do that, too."

Q: What are your primary job responsibilities at *DARE*?

A: I work almost exclusively with the *DARE* recordings, which is pretty darn neat. Those who are familiar with the *Dictionary* will know that, along with citations from various print sources, entries often have exemplary quotations taken from informants who were recorded as part of the original fieldwork conducted in the late '60s. I've been tasked with finding the instances that are cited in the *Dictionary*, clipping them, and saving them. These will then be linked to the online edition of *DARE*, so that word-lovers can not only see a particular word in context but can actually hear it, too. A corollary to this job is that I edit quotations that have, for whatever reason, been erroneously transcribed.

Q: What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work at *DARE*?

A: In addition to working with very kind and generous people—you wouldn't believe the frequency with which sweet treats are offered in the break room—I love that I get to spend the majority of my time here listening to people from a different place and time talk about, well, stuff. Some of the recordings feature conversations that are very unself-conscious, and even though as a listener you're so far removed from them, it doesn't feel that way. Also, thanks to my work at *DARE*, I know more about tobacco farming than I ever thought I would.

Q: What part of your work do you find most challenging?

A: The most challenging—which is by no means to say least enjoyable—part of my job is solving small *DARE* mysteries. Because of the longevity of the project and all of the different people who have had their hands in it over the decades, there are sometimes little discrepancies in data documentation. For instance, there might be a voice on a recording that sounds like someone other than the two informants who are documented as having participated in the recording. If that mysterious voice has contributed a quotation, then I get to go play detective, searching various archives in order to find a hint of who that other person might be. Another challenge (perhaps less sexy than those associated with being a Regional American English Gumshoe) is presented by those speakers who talk very fast, running from the end of one phrase into the start of another. These stinkers make it very difficult to get a clean audio clip.

Q: What aspect of working on the *DARE* project has been the most surprising to you?

A: Because the data I'm dealing with is from decades ago, I often encounter phonetic and syntactic forms that existed in regions where they have become more or less obsolete today. A feature like *a*-prefixing [*DARE* Ed: see Volume I entry for *a* inert vowel], which I had long associated with the South, shows up all over the map, so to speak.

Q: Have you encountered any *DARE* entries, quotations, or tape clips that you've found especially memorable?

A: I just finished listening to all of the North Carolina tapes, and on one of them I encountered an older woman who was talking about her grandchildren, who evidently were featured in a photograph nearby. The woman pointed her grandson out to the fieldworker, explaining that he was her favorite. "He's just my little eyeball," she said. I sort of have a thing for unexpected terms

of endearment (which perhaps originated with Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent*), and this one now tops my list.

Q: What are your primary research interests, and what would you like to do after finishing your graduate program?

A: I'm interested in language variation and change, particularly at the syntactic level, and linguistic approaches to the study of literary texts. I want to be the first to demonstrate that, contrary to both popular and scholarly belief, there are interesting linguistic things happening in my home state of Kansas.

Q: When you have a rare moment of spare time away from your studies and your work, what are your interests?

A: If I have an open weekend and can get my hands on a car, I almost invariably go antiquing. I'm typically not looking for anything in particular, but I do have an affinity for vintage skirts and taxidermy. In addition to spending money I don't have, I also enjoy team sports. I have a couple of soccer teams that I play on, and I'm the first base-woman for the English Department kickball team. I play golf and tennis poorly, and I'm a lapsed runner who vows every day—to myself or to others—to start running regularly again. ♦

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DARE Represented at ADS Meeting



Photo credit: George Hall



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▲ The 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Dialect Society was held January 5–7 in Portland, Oregon. DARE Senior Editor and ADS President Luanne von Schneidemesser introduced luncheon speaker Roger Shuy.

◀ Papers by (left to right:) Grant Barrett, Michael Adams, and Thomas Purnell comprised a session celebrating DARE, moderated by Chief Editor Joan Hall.

Let DARE Help You

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with a more aggressive herb that costs even more than ginseng. After all, you want the remedy to be as effective as possible, and besides, you deserve reimbursement for pickup and delivery—and for your expertise. Never mind that your expertise is linguistic and not, strictly speaking, medical. You give the patient ginseng but replace the name with one of the others DARE has found for it. For best results, pick a name that fits the person's predilections. A seeker who dabbles in Eastern religions? The sound of *ninsin* evokes ancient Chinese wisdom. Someone with faith in pharmacological research? *Garantogen* sounds scientific and furthermore suggests the product is guaranteed. A Whole Foods customer? *Redberry* may sound too bland and generic, but *groundnut* evokes a natural earthy origin that should fill such a person with faith in its healing properties. Possibly *five-fingers* and *devil's walkingstick* won't help anybody—unless you leave open the possibility that *devil's walkingstick* refers to the insect known by that name instead of a plant. For some people, the prospect of ingesting as a medicine something they would find disgusting as a food enhances the placebo effect.

After you've played out a particular patient's ginseng string, you can shift to echinacea. Capitalize that first letter; *Echinacea* indicates it's the name of a botanical genus and makes it look scientific. When that stops working, switch over to another name. Forget *coneflower* and *purple coneflower*—too mundane. Maybe, for the right patient, *hedgehog coneflower* will do. Try *Sampson root* or *black sampson*, which suggest the power to demolish an ailment. *Indianhead root* evokes the intimate knowledge of healing arts indigenous peoples are said to possess. To reinforce the "disgust" enhancement with an even more powerful "danger" effect, go for *snake-root* or *rattlesnake weed*.

If your hypochondriac lives long enough, you will eventually need to switch to yet another plant. This is not the place for a whole herbarium; you can find other vegetation with intriguing names and healing reputations on your own. But let me suggest one: my grandmother's favorite remedy of gravelweed tea. Most people find the name evocative just as it is, but when your patient stops responding to it, you can switch to *ground laurel* or *arbutus*. If the patient requires something that sounds scientific, you can call the plant by its genus name *Epigaea*, or for a real knockout blow, the full scientific name *Epigaea repens*, which intensifies the healing potential by suggesting a religious act of repentance and atonement. The

best thing going for gravelweed, though, is that it has an actual physiological effect. The plant is a diuretic. Patients readily put wholehearted faith in a medicine that produces noticeable side effects; think how the sensation of heat generated by a mustard plaster comforts cold and flu sufferers. The frequent and copious urination following a dose of gravelweed tea also tends to get a patient's attention. Add the linguistic boost of a quotation cited in the DARE entry for **gravelweed**, and I defy any hypochondriac alive to keep up the pretense of feeling bad. It reads, "It is stated that in lithic acid gravel, and some forms of nephritis, cystitis and vesical catarrh, its use has often been of greater benefit than uva-ursi or buchu."

Rubrecht's Disclaimer: It is foolish and often dangerous to take a placebo in lieu of proven treatment for a serious disorder. Placebos are indicated only in known cases of hypochondria, for conditions that will get better on their own (such as common colds or warts), or as a palliative to augment other medical care. ♦

After obtaining a copy of Volume V of DARE, August Rubrecht added the following postscript to his article:

Vol. V is just as impressive—and lovely—as I–IV. I have been browsing through it without looking for anything specific, just oohing and aahing over it. What a job you and Fred and the whole editorial staff did, all the way up through Z.

*One entry that caught my eye was **squirrel whiskey**. I never heard anybody use that term in ordinary conversation, but it brought to mind a joke I heard once (told by Homer Mahurin, co-worker at the stove mill in Seligman, Missouri, in the summer of 1960, in case you have a folklorist's interest in provenance).*

A man went into the drugstore in Seligman and asked for a bottle of squirrel whiskey. The druggist said, "No, sorry. We don't have any of that. Closest we've got is Old Crow."

The customer said, "Hell, I don't want to fly, I just want to jump around a little bit."

(I'm sure the association of squirrel whiskey with Old Crow was purely linguistic, not intended to imply that Old Crow is almost as bad as the homemade stuff. After making the comparison myself I concluded that, although Old Crow is perfectly fine for making my favorite cold and flu remedy of a hot lemon toddy, illegally distilled liquor is not fine at all. I'd rather stay sick. Whether called squirrel whiskey, white lightning, or moonshine, it is unpalatable either alone or mixed with anything else.)

Volume V *DARE* Quiz Key

The Volume V *DARE* quiz in the Fall 2011 issue of our *Newsletter* must not have been too *hilly* (difficult or obscure; see Volume II)—five people answered all the questions correctly. We broke the tie with a drawing, and Dale Coye was the lucky winner of a copy of Volume V. Others achieving perfect scores were Jodey Bateman, Laurel Brinton, George Downs, and Stephanie Hysmith. We thank everyone who entered the contest! The answers appear below. ♦

1. H **slow-walk** (chiefly South Atlantic)
2. O **smart** (especially New England)
3. N **sneaky** (Pennsylvania German area)
4. L **sometimey** (especially South Atlantic)
5. M **spa** (Northeast, especially Massachusetts)
6. B **spouting** (chiefly Pennsylvania, Ohio, Great Lakes)
7. J **squeeze the apple** (West)
8. S **stand in with** (chiefly South, South Midland)
9. U **sulter** (southern Appalachians, Ozarks)
10. K **tavern** (northwestern Iowa, southeastern South Dakota)
11. P **tear the bone out** (especially Arkansas)
12. T **tee-nincy** (chiefly South, South Midland)
13. C **thunder egg** (chiefly West, especially Oregon)
14. E **thunder pumper** (especially western Great Lakes, Upper Midwest)
15. V **uff-da** (Norwegian settlement areas, especially Minnesota, Wisconsin)
16. D **vamoose** (West)
17. I **veiller** (Louisiana)
18. X **wedge, wedgie** (chiefly southeastern New York)
19. Z **whay** (especially northern New England, Upstate New York)
20. Y **wicked** (New England, chiefly Maine, Massachusetts)
21. R **wonder** (especially Pennsylvania German area)
22. F **wreck pan** (West)
23. W **wrist** (Upstate New York)
24. A **X's-and-O's** (especially North Central, Pennsylvania, West Virginia)
25. Q **you betcha** (chiefly North, North Midland, California, Texas; now especially Upper Midwest, Northwest)
26. G **zori** (especially Hawaii, West)
- A. Tick-tack-toe.
- B. A roof gutter or downspout.
- C. A geode.
- D. To leave in a hurry.
- E. A bittern.
- F. A receptacle for dirty dishes.
- G. A thonged sandal.
- H. To pursue slowly but persistently.
- I. To pay a visit.
- J. To hold on to the saddle while riding a horse.
- K. A sandwich made with crumbled ground beef.
- L. Fickle, moody, inconsistent.
- M. A small restaurant, tavern, or soda fountain.
- N. Fastidious, particular (about food).
- O. Healthy; chipper, spry.
- P. To make an extraordinary effort.
- Q. Yes, indeed; certainly.
- R. To surprise, amaze.
- S. To side or be in league with.
- T. Very tiny.
- U. To swelter.
- V. An expression of surprise, aversion, disgust, or pain.
- W. An ear of corn whose husks have been pulled back.
- X. A large sandwich.
- Y. Very; extremely; really.
- Z. Go, go on—used as a command to a cow.

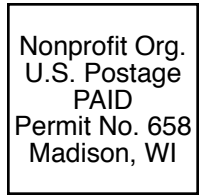
Volume VI Is in Press!

We are extremely pleased to announce that Volume VI has been submitted to Harvard University Press! It contains three sections: Contrastive Maps (Geographic and Social); An Index by Region, Usage, and Etymology to *DARE*, Volumes I–V; and Sections of the *Data Summary: Responses to the DARE Questionnaire*.

This will be an extraordinarily valuable volume for research and teaching, and it will be a browser's delight.

Volume VI will be on HUP's Fall 2012 list and will appear early in 2013. ♦





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