

DARE *Newsletter*

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Excerpts from a Fieldworker's Journal August Rubrecht

In a discussion once of some policy proposal or another, I remarked to a colleague that we could always depend on him when we needed a pragmatist. He shot back, "Well, yes, I'm a pragmatist, but not a doctrinaire pragmatist. If the pragmatic approach doesn't work, I'll try something else." I immediately adopted that line as my motto.

The conversation took place years after my *DARE* fieldwork [1967–68], but in retrospect I see the motto accurately describes my approach to that job. I didn't start out with any fieldwork theory, and I never developed one. Each stage of the process in each new community presented fresh challenges, and I muddled through them (as Robert Frost said he did with his poetry) by just trying to discover what would suffice.

You may be looking in this *Newsletter* for hints about how to do fieldwork. I am happy to oblige, but since I have no theory with which to validate them, notes about practice will have to suffice. In the anecdotes following each hint you may find things to emulate and things to avoid. Pay special attention to the latter; you can learn more from one bad example than you can from twelve good ones.

Make a plan, but prepare to change it.

A fieldworker can make great plans for getting work done efficiently, but things seldom go according to them. The following excerpts from sequential entries show what I mean. I tried to alternate between questionnaires (QRs) in St. Francisville, LA, and nearby Clinton during the same week, hoping to work with each informant (Inf) while the other was unavailable.

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"Portrait of a shrimp trawler—Cameron, La., March 1968"

[St. Francisville, LA, Nov. 12]

I have done no work on either QR since Thursday—Mr. B. needed Friday to rest for fox hunting on Friday night; he also had to recuperate on Saturday. Mr. P. at Clinton was busy during the day and visiting his wife at the clinic in the evening. I may have to get another informant. But his wife will be at home again soon, and now that I have found him I am reluctant to drop him. He is slow but I am getting good stuff from him. On Friday I went to LSU to scour the library for background reading and to milk some English classes for contacts [in communities to be visited later]. Then back to St. Francisville yesterday, where I spent a pleasant afternoon at Rosedown Plantation admiring the elegancies of former years and getting a number of word slips—more in an afternoon than I sometimes get in a week. To top the day off I got a magnificent tape from a former commercial fisherman about the fish and fishing methods here.

[St. Francisville, LA, Nov. 16]

I finished up [the St. Francisville QR] today; it's gone very slowly because Mr. B. had only a little time to spend each day. And I couldn't fill in extra time in Clinton after all because C.P. is busy during the day and, since his wife got sick and went to the hospital, he has been visiting her in the evenings.

[Clinton, LA, Nov. 19]

Mrs. P. is home from the hospital now and I am asking her parts of the QR in the daytime while [her husband] is grinding cane and making syrup. I watched him make syrup last Friday and got lots of word slips and had an entertaining time of it but got nothing done on the QR. I also tried and failed to get a Wildflower QR on Friday. Saturday the P.'s had a funeral to attend and Sunday they had church. It was useless for me to hang around here, especially when I needed a bath so bad, so I went to Baton Rouge and took showers in the dormitory, read a lot, ate a steak broiled over my last bit of charcoal, and got Xerox copies of my biog. data sheets concerning people who had made tapes. . . .

I think the P.'s, Mr. and Mrs., will finish the QR with me all right, but things will go slowly, I fear. Mrs. P. often has trouble catching on to the question and an-

“I watch with eagerness the progress of the DARE. I enjoy the newsletter and wish you well with the ongoing project.”

Bobbie Ann Mason, Writer
Lawrenceburg, Kentucky

swering it directly. And her husband (I work with him after he comes in in the evening) gets started after his garrulous fashion and it is hard to get him back on the subject. But then I never had a job that was easy all the time.

Enjoy success when it comes, but give credit where it is due.

In some places things went better than expected. Natchitoches, LA, was one such place.

[Natchitoches, LA, Dec. 15]

I finished up in Ruston today, came to Natchitoches, and secured an informant this afternoon. We will begin the QR tomorrow morning at 8:00. He is C.C., eight generations in Natchitoches, not one of the folk himself, as he is educated and rich. But [in his former job] he noted down usages peculiar to the area. This will be my first QR with someone who has made an objective study of the language of his region, and I am eager to find out how it will go. I have high hopes but then I have learned that high hopes are seldom or never fulfilled. Better to have low hopes and be pleasantly surprised when—if—things turn out all right.

[Along the Sabine River, Dec. 23]

We finished up the [Natchitoches] questionnaire on the 20th, and I believe it is one of the finest QRs I have done—but really I deserve no credit. It is not fine because I did so well but because Mr. C. was able to give so many definitions and distinctions. He is a type III [=middle-aged, with college education] himself but is familiar with folksier types of English and I was often able to get responses at more than one social level. There were fewer NRs [=notations that the Inf gave answers of “No Response”] than on most QRs—of course some of the responses were learned words, but he was able to tell me which ones were native words and which were book words.

Take cues from the people around you.

A fieldworker should try to catch the rhythm of the community and match it, if possible. My upbringing fitted me better for rural fieldwork than for urban, but I tried to adapt.

[DeQuincy, LA, Feb. 23]

Things have developed slowly here but by not pushing anybody into anything I have got some friendly

people on my hands. This is another place like Caldwell Parish; you've got to sit and talk and let things sink in slowly—maybe not mentioning your business oftener than once every quarter or half hour. Mainly you just sit and visit. It's the old Ozarks horse-trading way of doing things. Doesn't work worth a hoot on high-powered decision-making executives, but in a lot of rural and some small urban places it's all that will work. I never traded horses, but visiting comes natural to me, so I generally do all right in little spots. I can go straight to the point when necessary. In Donaldsonville my lead turned out to be an insurance executive protected by an outer office. I was out of his office in ten minutes, having explained who I was, what I was doing, what kind of person I needed to see, and having made a sufficient impression of honesty that he gave me the name and address of his uncle—in fact made a phone call to introduce me.

Collaborate with the people you interview.

One reason for being sensitive to cultural differences is to establish a collaborative relationship with the informant. For me that meant we had to be, in some measure, friends. You can see what I mean from these widely separated passages.

[Monticello, AR, Oct. 14]

Mr. S. and I finished up the QR today. We got pretty tired of the thing before it was over with, and got a little tired of each other. But I think he likes me, basically, and I know I like him, basically. He was as proud of the finished QR as I was. His answers usually ran something like this: "Aah. Oh. Yes, I understand what you mean. Now wait a minute, let me think. Now let's see; wait a minute, what would I say?" And then half the time he missed the point. But he is a kind, patient old man, bless his heart, and I got a lot of information in his "office" even if getting it was like pulling teeth.

[Cameron, LA, March 5]

I don't know whether it's me or this community, but I seem to feel my manner getting less personal and more professional, something I want to avoid. I keep the QR [interview] going now better than when I first started and ask better questions on the tapes. But you've also got to keep up a friendly personal relationship with folks—at least I do. This is for my own sake as well as for the sake of getting good work done. In most of these places my informants are the only friends I've got. Most important, a traveling man needs friends, and second most important, a friend is more likely to feel that he [or of course she] and I are working together to come

Coming in Volume V

<i>slough/sluff school</i>	To play hooky. (Chiefly UT)
<i>sposh</i>	Mud, slush; hence adj <i>sposhy</i> muddy, slushy, mushy. (Chiefly NEng)
<i>swivet</i>	A state of anxiety, excitement, or nervous haste. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>swow</i>	To swear, declare—usu in exclam phr <i>I swow!</i> (Chiefly NEng)
<i>tanglewood</i>	Thickly entangled underbrush. (Esp NEast)
<i>thank-you-ma'am</i>	An abrupt dip or bump in a road. (Chiefly Nth, esp NEast)
<i>ticklebone</i>	The funny bone. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>ticklebox</i>	An imaginary organ of the body that causes uncontrollable laughter when turned over, tilted, or otherwise affected. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>ticklish-bender</i>	Flexible ice on a body of water; the act of running or skating on such ice. (Chiefly NJ)
<i>tide</i>	An often sudden rising or flooding of an inland river or stream. (Chiefly sAppalachians)
<i>tide walker</i>	A log floating, often with only one end at the surface, in coastal waters. (Coastal ME)
<i>tie-up</i>	A building or section of a building with stalls for cattle, esp milk cows; a stall or stanchion. (nNEng)
<i>tilt, tilt-up</i>	A tip-up for ice fishing. (Esp sNEng)
<i>tin horn</i>	A metal culvert. (Chiefly TX, OK)
<i>titman</i>	The runt of a litter of pigs; also fig. (Chiefly NEng, NY)
<i>toadstabber</i>	A large folding knife. (Chiefly Nth, N Midl)
<i>Tom Thumb</i>	A kind of large pork sausage. (Chiefly NC)

up with something accurate and valuable. If I am to my informant just “a guy taking a survey,” he takes less interest in the work.

[Oxford, NY, July 10]

My first Inf in Roxbury . . . didn't enjoy the QR, so we called a halt on the third day, a third of the way through. He was suspicious and defensive, too, and refused to make a tape.

[Elyria, Ohio, Aug. 17 (This was written on my return trip to Madison.)]

[In Boonville, NY, after a series of leads failed to pan out, a woman in the library volunteered her husband.] She told me she would speak to him and I should go see him the next day—he would be at his furniture store. So I went and he felt more or less obligated so answered some questions but he didn't like it and I didn't like him so of course it didn't work.

[In Speculator, NY] Went to see V.K. and he said come back and he'd spend all the next afternoon with me. . . . [He] turned out to be one of the best informants



“Lagoon—enclosed body of fresh water of irregular shape. St. Martinville, La., March 1968”

I ever had, and we had good times and got the QR done in short order.

If you can't establish a good relationship, at least be nice about it.

I lost my temper twice, once with a businessman in Louisiana and once with a police sergeant in New York. In the Louisiana case, I had followed up numerous leads that proved unfruitful, then had come down with the flu just minutes after starting an interview with a woman who showed great promise of being a fine informant. After recuperating in a motel, I resumed the interview as soon as I was well enough.

[Mansfield, LA, Jan. 11]

Twenty minutes after beginning the QR again today, I was ungraciously and ignominiously thrown out by my Inf's husband—I name no names. What with the tension I have been under for the past week and a half or more, I was unable to control my temper and blew up at him. A bad thing to do. I drove around a while and then my rage eased off a little. After all, it was his place of business and he had a right to admit or reject whom he pleased and I had no right to be angry, no matter if he had been ungracious in ejecting me. My anger cooled some more and I went back to apologize. It was sincere at first, but before I was finished I had to grit my teeth because if possible he was ruder than before.

Take time to bond with your colleagues.

One disadvantage of Word Wagon fieldwork was the isolation from co-workers. On other jobs—those in a mill, a field, a construction site, or an office—I always had someone to help me gripe and exult, someone to swap advice with. But we *DARE* Fieldworkers were traveling around hundreds of miles apart. Consultations with members of the office staff by letter and phone helped, but couldn't replace taking coffee breaks and going out after work for a beer. So it was good to meet a graduate student at LSU to share fieldwork stories with.

[Baton Rouge, LA, Feb. 5]

I called B.H., who has just finished fieldwork for her dissertation, a word geography of one of the central Texas counties. We went out and got a beer and traded shop talk. That was a good thing. She is awed by the magnitude of my QR and I am awed by the fact that she is operating on little or no funds, which she sup-

plied herself. We decided that fieldwork teaches you two things of supreme importance: 1) to rely on yourself; 2) to rely on other people.

Whatever you make of the rest of my comments, you can take those two lessons to the bank.

I write these words using my office computer for the last time, sitting beside a stack of freshly packed boxes of books and desk contents, all capped by a badly stained coffee cup. It feels good. I am freshly retired. It is hard to realize that I have taught in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire for thirty-five years. Nor does it seem like my fieldwork year for *DARE* began almost thirty-nine years ago. But both numbers are right. That's the past.

As for the future, here's a change retirement has made already. Besides my motto about pragmatism, I have for years repeated another favorite saying, wistful rather than practical: "I am looking for a doctor who can discover in me the symptoms of some disease that will ethically justify a regimen of bird hunting and bed rest."

I will not be saying this any more, because when grouse and woodcock seasons roll around in a couple of months, I will not need a doctor's excuse. ♦

Newsletter Now Available Online

If you would prefer to eliminate some paper from your life and read this *Newsletter* online, there is now an easy way to subscribe electronically. The entire collection of *DARE Newsletters* has been posted in a UW–Madison digital repository called MINDS@UW, and subsequent issues will be added as they appear. (Please note that subscribing to the electronic edition does not automatically cancel your subscription to the paper edition; you must do that separately. If you have already followed the instructions given in our Winter 2006 issue, you need not repeat the process.)

To subscribe to the electronic edition: Go to <<http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/6511>> and follow the onscreen instructions. You will then receive an e-mail notification containing a link to the online *Newsletter* every time a new issue is posted.

To stop receiving the paper edition: Send an e-mail message to <vabormann@wisc.edu> with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line and your name and address in the body. ♦

From the Chief Editor's Desk

Joan Houston Hall

DARE staff members are breathing a collective sigh of relief, having just submitted major grant proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. (We won't hold our breath as we wait to hear, though, since results won't be forthcoming for months.) Generous support from these two agencies is essential to *DARE*'s survival, and we are extremely grateful for the steady assistance they have provided us. Their grants, however, account for only 55% of our total budget, so we must find significant help elsewhere. We're always on the lookout for private foundations that can help, but we also count on generous individuals who love language and appreciate what *DARE* is doing. Your gifts warm our hearts and keep us going.

In addition to making outright donations (whose effect may be doubled by a matching grant from NEH), there are other ways in which individual supporters can help us to reach the letter Z. These include making gifts of appreciated securities, personal property, or real estate, as well as including *DARE* in estate planning. For information about these opportunities, please call Jon E. Sorenson at the UW Foundation, (800) 443-6162 or (608) 262-7211. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation by check or credit card, please use the coupon that appears on the back of this *Newsletter*. Gifts of any size will let us know that you care. ♦



DARE Editor Honors Students

As President of the American Dialect Society, *DARE* Chief Editor Joan Hall had the privilege of designating three students as Presidential Honorary Members. She announced her choices during the Society's 2006 Annual Meeting in Albuquerque. The students, who will receive free membership in the ADS through 2009, are Jeannine Carpenter, a Ph.D. student in English and Sociolinguistics at Duke University; Patricia Irwin, a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire; and Rebecca Roeder, who recently completed her Ph.D. at Michigan State University and is currently a postdoctoral student at the University of Toronto. ♦



Ginny Bormann, DARE Financial Specialist

Staff Member Profile

In this ongoing series, Beth Gardner interviews Financial Specialist Ginny Bormann, who joined the DARE staff in November of 2005.

Q: What are your primary job responsibilities as DARE's Financial Specialist?

A: As my job title implies, my primary responsibilities are related to managing DARE finances, from the preparation of grant proposal budgets to the final reconciliation of grant and gift accounts. (I could go into a lot more detail, but only at the risk of putting readers to sleep.) I also perform the duties of an office manager, which means that I am a bit of a "Jill-of-all-trades" in the area of administrative support. In addition to serving as DARE's liaison with the English Department, College of Letters and Science, Graduate School, UW-Madison, and UW System administration, I am responsible for things such as ordering equipment and supplies, making meeting arrangements, updating payroll records, assisting with the hiring of new staff, and mailing the *DARE Newsletter*. I take care of the myriad details—both large and small—necessary to keep things running smoothly, allowing the rest of the staff to concentrate as much as possible on the work of writing and producing the *Dictionary*.

Q: What do you like best about working at DARE?

A: I enjoy the people immensely. As an individual with no college degree and a strong working-class background (I was president of a Steelworkers local union at the age of twenty-four), I have not always found the academic environment to be especially welcoming. The DARE staff is a wonderfully nice group of people who (though they all approach their work with great scholarly zeal) do not fit the stereotype of the tedious, stodgy academician. They have an amazingly diverse range of interests and talents; topics of discussion during coffee breaks can range from obscure texts to monster movies. Though I haven't actually seen it in anyone's job description, having a sense of humor almost seems to be a prerequisite for working here. We laugh a lot at DARE!

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

A: Navigating the maze of University, state, and federal regulations—and trying to make sure that DARE stays in compliance with all of them—is a constant learning process.

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

A: It's been very interesting to learn about the people who find the *Dictionary* to be an invaluable resource and the variety of uses they put it to—everything from assisting in criminal investigations to writing Hollywood screenplays. We often receive inquiries from journalists around the country who are working on stories for local media outlets about regional dialects. And then there's the occasional phone call from someone looking for information about the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program!

Q: What are your interests away from the *Dictionary*?

A: I've been a social activist and something of a rebel for many years, but six years ago I became active in electoral politics, and that seems to have pretty much taken over my life. I am the Treasurer of the Wisconsin Green Party and also a member of the Coordinating Council, which is the group that oversees day-to-day operations of the Party.

When I'm not trying to save the world, I enjoy going tent camping with my spouse, and to blues festivals with my sister. I am a confirmed "dog person," though we do have two cats who allow us to share their home. Our current motley canine crew consists of a miniature dachshund, a beagle mix (a Hurricane Katrina refugee), and a retired racing greyhound. ♦

DARE Staff News and Notes

Senior Editor Luanne von Schneidemesser, with the help of a UW Academic Staff Professional Development Grant, took part in the Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX), held in Helsinki, Finland, March 17–19, 2005. Her presentation, “Using the Internet as a Resource in Writing and Updating Dictionary Entries,” related *DARE*’s experiences up to that date in starting to systematically use students and volunteers to update and expand *DARE* entries. The paper can be accessed free of charge at the Cascadilla Proceedings Project Web site (<<http://www.lingref.com/cpp/hel-lex/2005/index.html>>).

Luanne has also had a paper on *DARE* accepted for presentation at the EURALEX Conference in Turin, Italy, in September 2006. EURALEX is the sister organization of the Dictionary Society of North America, for which Luanne volunteers her time as Executive Secretary. The two organizations hold meetings in alternate years.

Scot LaFaive, Project Assistant for 2005–06 and graduate student in Applied English Linguistics, has received a summer internship with Oxford University Press in New York City. He is working with Grant Barrett on the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, doing Internet research similar to the work he performed for Volume V of *DARE*. (Despite reporting that everything is going well in the Big Apple, Scot has a bone to pick with the New York Public Library: “Any library that bans coffee drinking is sinful in my book.”) Two volumes of *HDAS* have been published by Random House (A–G, 1994 and H–O, 1997); the two final volumes will be published by OUP and are expected to be available through *Oxford Reference Online*.

Project Assistant (and doctoral student in Library and Information Studies) Erin Meyer has left *DARE* to accept a position as Reference Specialist at the Boulder Public Library. While thoroughly enjoying living in Colorado, Erin is happy to maintain a Wisconsin connection by teaching an online class offered through UW–Madison. ♦

“One aspect of your dictionary that I admire is its resurrection, as it were, of terms I could find previously only in my 1901 *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*. Well, I quite envy you your occupation.”

Shawn J. Sturgeon, Poet
Atlanta, Georgia

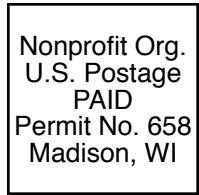


Jon E. Sorenson, DARE Director of Development

Sorenson Joins *DARE* Team

Our new Director of Development, Jon E. Sorenson, is pleased to return to the UW–Madison, where he earned a B.A. in Art History in 1985. After pursuing graduate studies at Williams College, Jon worked in art galleries and museums, owned his own art consulting business, and even taught fourth grade in an inner-city school. These jobs took him to Los Angeles, to San Francisco, and most recently to New Zealand, where he was Manager of Education and Public Programs for the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch. This spring he accepted a position with the UW Foundation; his other development responsibilities are the Chazen Museum of Art, the School of Music, the Art History Department, and the Theatre and Drama Department.

Having parents who were writers, Jon grew up with a dictionary in the dining room, where family members were encouraged to consult it at every turn. He credits his love for language to the influence of his parents and to this early acquaintance with dictionaries, and his enthusiasm for the *DARE* project follows naturally. In his spare time, Jon likes to travel, cook, and keep up with friends and family. Jon looks forward to bringing *DARE* before the public eye at every opportunity; readers of this *Newsletter* can look forward to hearing more from him in our Fall issue. ♦



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