DARE Newsletter

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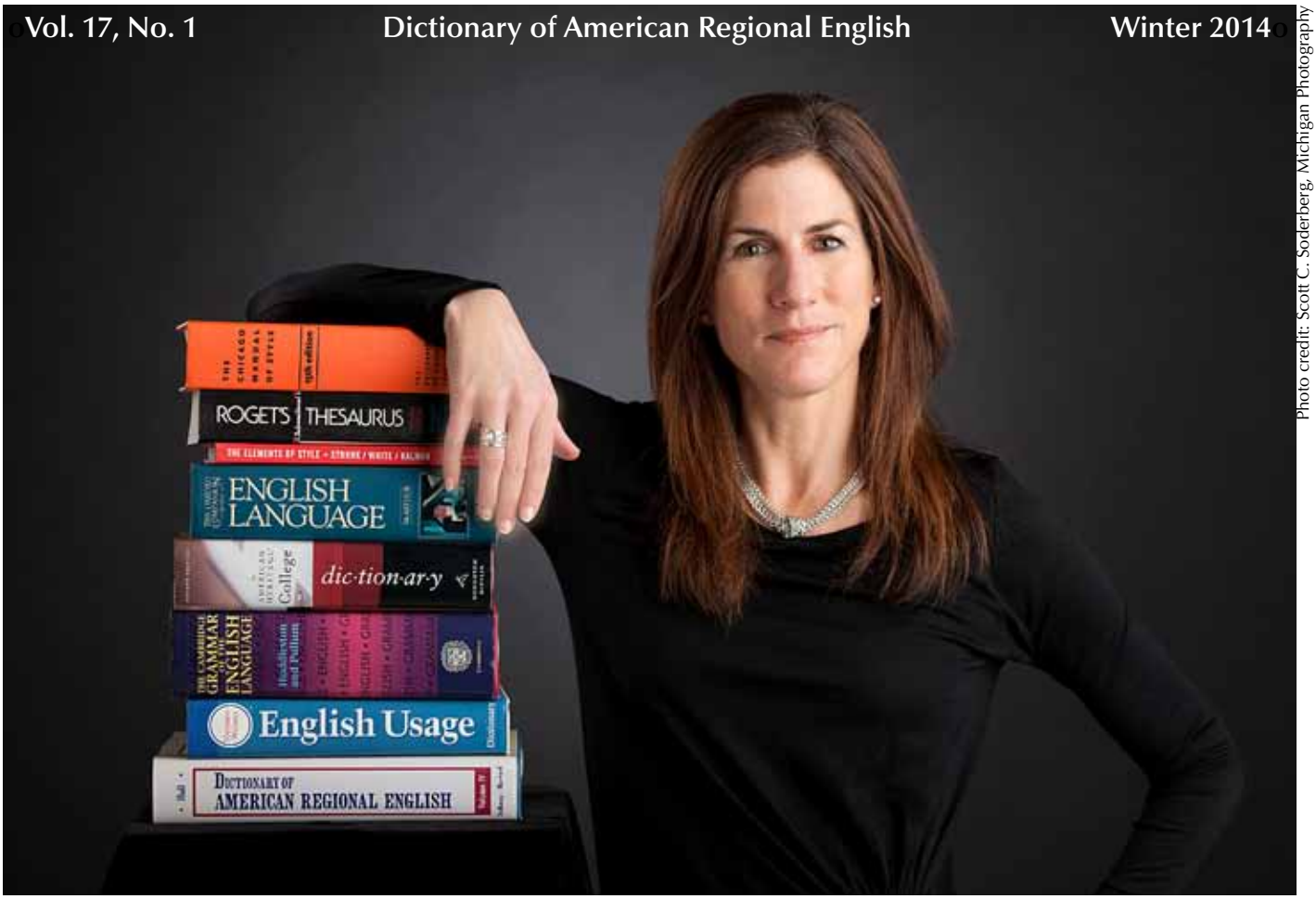

Photo credit: Scott C. Soderberg, Michigan Photography

'All Plogged Up' . . . Am I All Alone?

Anne Curzan

This article was originally published on January 22, 2014, in the Lingua Franca *blog of* The Chronicle of Higher Education *(<www.chronicle.com>) and is reprinted by permission.*

It could be the fact that it is below zero outside here in Michigan or it could be the sniffles that I seem to have acquired in the past 24 hours. For whatever reason, I've been thinking about the word *plogged.*

I had a glimmer of hope that I could solve the mystery of *plog* now that *The Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* has gone digital. I knew that *DARE* did not contain *plog* or *plogged* as headwords, but I thought one of them might show up elsewhere in this amazing resource—in a quotation for another word, perhaps. But an advanced search of the full text of *DARE* came up with not a one (and if you're interested in other regional variants for that expression, *DARE* provides "nary a one" and "nary one" as other options).

I have used the verb *plog* and the participial adjective *plogged* (which is, in fact, more useful

than the verb) my entire life. I had never given it a second thought until about 10 years ago, when students brought the usage to my attention.

I was talking to the students in an introductory English linguistics course, and I apologized if I hadn't responded to any of their emails, explaining that something had gone wrong with my inbox. What I actually said was, "I'm sorry if I haven't responded to your email. My inbox is plogged."

Some students looked surprised, but I wasn't sure why, and then one asked, "What did you just say?" I repeated myself: "My inbox is plogged." The student laughed and said, "That's not a word!"

"Of course it's a word," I responded, and I turned to the rest of the class for confirmation. I got only confirmation of the student's position that this was not a word.

As I explained in teacherly way from the front of the room, it is a blend of *plug* plus *clog,* hence *plog.* And the adjectival *plogged* was stronger than *plugged* or *clogged;* for example, if you have a really bad cold, your nose isn't just plugged, it's plogged. The students remained unpersuaded.

After class I returned to my office and checked the several major dictionaries there, and I couldn't find *plog.* I talk often with students about how dictionaries don't determine what counts as a "real word," but the lack of confirmation of the existence of this word from multiple dictionaries, including the *Oxford English Dictionary,* and from 80 students was disconcerting.

I called my younger sister, as I was quite sure we had grown up with this word. I got her husband, who clarified, "It's not a word, but Kate uses it all the time."

I later talked to Kate, and it just so happened that my mother (who is from Michigan and has lived in the D.C. area for 50 years) was visiting her. Kate confirmed that she thought we had grown up with the word and asked my mother, who stated confidently, "I have never used that word"—loud enough that I could hear her. Kate got back on the phone and said, "Mom says she doesn't know it, but I'm sure she used it when we were growing up. I mean, your nose can be plogged, or the toilet can be plogged." Then I hear in the background my mother exclaim, "Well, of course the toilet can be plogged!"

The spell checker in WordPress has rejected the word *plog* throughout this post, underlining it each time with a red dotted line. And it may be that it is a Curzan-family blend, completely idiosyncratic—but I have a suspicion it is not.

I'm curious to hear from Lingua Franca readers whether any of you know and use the (in my humble opinion) wonderfully useful and evocative blend *plog*—and if so, where you're from and the contexts in which you use the word. Here in the middle of winter, can your nose get plogged? ✦

[DARE *Ed: We'd also like to hear whether any of our* Newsletter *readers have heard or used the word* plog!]

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Do You Speak Wisconsin?

Jenny Price (University Communications) and Joan Houston Hall

Between 1965 and 1970, graduate students from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and other institutions hit the road to capture the unique character of the way Americans speak. They recorded the words, phrases, pronunciations, and pieces of grammar and syntax that vary from one part of the country to another. That groundbreaking work provided the basis for the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

Some of those intrepid researchers traveled in "Word Wagons"—campers that were specially outfitted with stove, sink, and bed, as well as a large questionnaire asking about the words people use in their everyday lives and the reel-to-reel recording device necessary to capture the voices of Americans in more than 1,000 communities across the country. Only now are *DARE* researchers heading back into the field for the first time since the original survey was conducted, and they are starting in Wisconsin!

Unlike fifty years ago, the *Dictionary* won't be sending out researchers in Word Wagons. This pilot study, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, will use an online survey rather than face-to-face interviews to trace the ways language has either changed or stayed the same in Wisconsin since the first round of fieldwork was done.

In conjunction with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, *DARE* has begun using a web-based survey designed to gather data from the

original twenty-two Wisconsin communities where the project first did its fieldwork, plus thirty new ones chosen to reflect the state's current demographics. The research will include large parts of the original questionnaire, as well as new questions designed to reflect societal changes since the 1960s.

As was true in the original survey, *DARE* will be looking for lifelong residents of the twenty-two original communities. This focus allows a concentrated study of local vocabulary over a significant period of time. In the new communities, *DARE* will seek long-term residents (those who have lived there at least fifteen years, preferably longer).

Because it is important to compare vocabulary usage among different age groups, the researchers hope to include participants from three age ranges: 18–30, 40–59, and 60+. It's certainly possible that people who would be ideal participants might not have computers; if their children, grandchildren, friends, or neighbors would assist them on their own computers or those at the public library, they could easily take part in this investigation of our local lexicon.

This new Wisconsin research also includes the option of a telephone interview in which participants engage in conversation with a survey caller, read "The Story of Arthur the Rat," and read a list of common words (*awe, bag, pecan,* etc.) that may illustrate differences in pronunciation from one region to another. (A composite recording of "Arthur the Rat," by speakers from nine different areas of the country, may be heard on the *DARE* website at <http://www.dare.wisc.edu/?q=node/44>. Differences in regional speech patterns will be immediately recognizable!)

Publication of the last volume of *DARE* was a huge milestone, but not the end of the work. American English has changed over the last half-century, and it is important to document *how* it has changed.

***DARE* Needs Your Help**

For this new research in Wisconsin English, *DARE* is looking for people who have lived all their lives in these Wisconsin communities, which were surveyed in the original *DARE* fieldwork:

Algoma, Antigo, Bayfield, Belmont, Burlington, Florence, Janesville, Jefferson, Jim Falls, Juneau, La Crosse, Lancaster, Manitowoc, Menomonee Falls, Necedah, New Berlin, Pepin, Portage, River Falls, Superior, Washington Island, and Wautoma.

The project is also looking for people who are long-term (at least fifteen years, preferably longer) residents of these communities:

Argyle, Baraboo, Belgium, Boaz, Chippewa Falls, Delavan, Doylestown, Elderon, Elm Grove, Genoa City, Horicon, Howards Grove, Kewaunee, Linden, Madison, Marinette, Menasha, Milwaukee, New Lisbon, Ogdensburg, Oshkosh, Pleasant Prairie, Plymouth, Randolph, Richfield, Richland Center, South Milwaukee, Spooner, Watertown, and Webster.

Not from any of the places listed above, but still eager to participate? Responses from residents of other communities will be valuable as well. *DARE* welcomes all Wisconsinites to fill out all or part of the online survey at <https://study.uwsc.wisc.edu/dare>. ✦

Chief Editor's Funding Appeal

Joan Houston Hall

As you can see from the gratifyingly large donor list on pages 6 and 7, many friends of *DARE* responded to news reports of our financial crisis a year ago. Their gifts made it possible for us to retain our staff over the past twelve months and to launch the digital version in December. All of us are sincerely thankful.

While we have raised partial funding for fiscal year 2015, lack of a full year's support means that once again I am required to send layoff or non-renewal notices to staff members as of June 30, 2014. Our plans to update the digital version using the wealth of electronic resources now available to us are (temporarily, I hope) in limbo.

I am convinced that there are other language lovers, throughout the U.S. and beyond, who would support *DARE* if only they knew about it! Please help us by spreading the word about this project, which has been acclaimed from coast to coast:

In the *New York Times,* John Gross described *DARE* as "one of the glories of contemporary American scholarship." On the other side of the country, Bob Secter wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "In *DARE*, it's the speakers who get their say. A trip through its pages is part Trivial Pursuit, part scholarship, and part treasure hunt." And in the heartland, Henry Kisor declared that "*DARE* is evidence that American speech will never become stale and fusty, that the great linguistic homogenization of television is a myth" *(Chicago Sun–Times)*.

Between the updating of the text and the recent initiation of a new round of fieldwork in Wisconsin, there is still much work to be done! We welcome your gifts, large and small, and we look forward to enlarging the circle of friends of *DARE.* ✦

DARE Essay Contest:

An Invitation from Simon Winchester

For all you word-lovers, dictionary mavens, and lexicographers manqués, here's a doozy of a prize.

Win a free three-year subscription to the digital version of the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE):* the monumental, six-volume, half-a-century-in-the-making treasure house of American-as-she-is-spoke throughout this immense (and linguistically immensely varied) nation.

We need from you just 500 well-chosen words, fashioned into an essay of elegance, logic, and persuasive power that will answer the simple question: how would you use *DARE* to enrich and improve your writing?

Draft your contribution, hone it, make it sing, and you will have a chance to win online access to the dictionary of your dreams!

What better offer have you had today?

—Simon Winchester, *DARE* Board of Visitors

Contest Rules

Sponsor: This contest is sponsored by the *Dictionary of American Regional English,* or *DARE,* located at 6125 Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706.

Who May Enter: Only residents of the United States of America may enter this contest. Contest is void where prohibited. Employees of *DARE* and the Harvard University Press are ineligible to participate. Contestants must be eighteen years of age or older.

How to Enter: Submit an original essay, written by the contestant, via e-mail to <jdhall@wisc.edu>. Essays may be no more than 500 words, and only one entry is permitted per person. **Contestants must submit their name and preferred e-mail address with their entries.** Please see deadline below.

Contest Duration: Submissions will be accepted from 12:01 a.m. Central Standard Time on February 1, 2014, until 11:59 p.m. Central Daylight Time on April 30, 2014.

Prize: One prize of a free three-year subscription to the digital version of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (retail value: $450.00) will be awarded.

Selection of Winner: The winner will be selected by a committee of the *DARE* Board of Visitors based on the writer's explanation of the value of dialect variation in effective writing. The winner will be notified via e-mail by June 30, 2014. The name of the winner may be made public in accordance with local laws.

Limitation of Liability: Neither *DARE* nor the University of Wisconsin–Madison or any of its superior agencies or institutions accepts responsibility for any damages incurred in connection with submission, nor do they assume responsibility for any contestant's inability to enter the contest due to technological malfunctions or any other reason. Contestants will be notified that their entry has been received.

***DARE*'s Use of Entries:** Submissions become the property of *DARE,* and excerpts may be used for publicity purposes. *DARE* will make every reasonable effort to attribute the writer of the essay in any publication in which it is used.

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Digital *DARE* Quiz: A Scavenger Hunt

Julie Schnebly

What are the reasons to do a digital scavenger hunt at <daredictionary.com>?

a) To discover all the features and resources that are available at no cost and get a taste of what a subscription provides

b) To enjoy exploring all the nooks and crannies of the new site, whether or not you have a subscription

c) To try for a chance to win a one-year subscription to the digital version of *DARE*

d) Any or all of the above!

If you answered "d," you have the ability to answer really easy questions—which is just the skill you need to do this digital scavenger hunt! To enter to win a subscription, please send your answers, along with your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address, to Julie Schnebly, 6125 Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706. Your entry must reach us by April 30, 2014. A drawing from all entries with the correct answers will be held, and the winner will be announced in our next *Newsletter.*

Let's hunt! Start by going to <daredictionary.com>. Then follow the instructions marked with bullet points as you go. You don't need a subscription to do this scavenger hunt, but if you already have a subscription, it won't interfere. [Tips: Before you begin, you may find the How to Use DARE section of the About DARE menu helpful. Also, using your browser's Find tool (Ctl + F) will speed up the process considerably for some of the questions. Watch for other tips in brackets to help you out along the way.] Good luck!

- Start at the Dictionary Homepage. Type "bear" into the Search bar.
  1 How many results (items) are there?
  2 Of these, how many have maps? [Use the Refine Search feature on the left sidebar.]
  3 Click on "bear claw." What regions are listed on the right side of the page?
- Just below that list, click on Browse by Region. Select the region "Rocky Mountains." [Move your mouse off the map to see the region.]
  4 What states (or parts of states) are included in the Rocky Mountains region?
  5 Now view all entries for Rocky Mountains. How many results (items) are there?
  6 Of these, how many entries *also* have a regional label for Great Lakes? [Use the Regions filter on the left side of the page.]
- Go back to the Dictionary Homepage again. Using the Word Wheel [on the right side of the screen], type "antony" in the Jump To box. Now click on the up arrow to "spin" the Word Wheel. You will see four words that contain survey data [denoted by a clipboard icon].
  7 Name one of these words.
- Now spin the Word Wheel again by clicking on the down arrow. Click on "Antony-over" (highlighted in orange). In the actual entry, locate the two audio clips by informant KY41.
  8 How long is the audio clip at sense A?
  9 Is KY41 male or female?
- Head back to the Dictionary Homepage once more. Click on Browse 100 sample entries. Choose "water out."
  10 What color is "water out" on the Word Wheel?
- Using the Word Wheel again, type "flying jinnie" in the Jump To box.
  11 What color is it highlighted in?
  12 What happens when you click on it? (Where does it take you?)
- Now go to the DARE Survey tab [upper left main menu, next to Dictionary]. You should see a list of Topics from the DARE fieldwork.
  13 How many question topics start with the letter *F*?
  14 Is there a topic about weather?
- On that same page, just above the Topics list, click on About DARE Survey. On the side menu, click on Text of the DARE Questionnaire.
  15 What is the text of question EE3? [It's in the Children's Games section.]
- Next choose FAQ: Getting Started from the top About DARE menu.
  16 How does a word qualify for inclusion in DARE?
  17 The answer to which question contains a quote by Samuel Johnson?
- On that same page, click on How to Use DARE and go to the Survey Questions section. [Note: This section of the tutorial demonstrates a feature available to subscribers.]
  18 What question is used as an example?
  19 What response is being mapped?
  20 What's another response that you could choose to map?
- Now click on Resources in the top main menu and go to DARE Maps. Go to the Index to Geographic and Social Maps. Find "beau dollar" in the Index and click on the link for (A silver dollar). [It will take some time to fully load all the maps; please be patient.]
  21 Including "beau dollar," how many maps are shown for the concept "A silver dollar"? [You may need to scroll up a little to see the concept heading.]
  22 Now click on any of the maps. What happens?
- Now use your browser's back arrow and head back to the Homepage/Dictionary tab. Go to the Bibliography.
  23 How many different titles by Theodore Roosevelt has DARE cited?
  24 How many entries have quotations from Theodore Roosevelt?
- Go back to the Resources menu again. Select Introduction to DARE Volumes in Print.
  25 Who is in the photograph?
- Last but not least, go back to the About DARE menu and select Credits and Acknowledgments. In the left side menu, click on DARE Staff, Students, Volunteers, and Other Contributors. Try to find your name.
  26 Is your name listed? If not, would you like it to be? [To find out how you can help DARE continue to be "the great project on how Americans speak," go to <www.dare.wisc.edu>.] ✦

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The *Dictionary of American Regional English* is profoundly thankful for the support of these donors in 2013. Gifts were received by the *Dictionary of American Regional English* Fund and the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund. Because this is a national project, it is particularly meaningful that donations were received from supporters in thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia (and advocates in Belgium, France, and Germany as well).

We are especially grateful to the many people, both new contributors and longtime friends, who responded to the news of our critical funding situation last spring. Please read Chief Editor Joan Hall's article on page 3 and consider joining the ranks of *DARE* benefactors in 2014 by using the coupon on page 8. ✦

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