

DARE *Newsletter*

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Dictionary of American Regional English

Spring/Summer 2003



Richard Davis and Joan Hall on the terrace of the UW–Madison Memorial Union

Discovering Dialect Diversity

Richard Davis

It has been my experience that many of us—myself included—have certain prejudicial attitudes regarding the ways other people talk. I know that there are certain regions of this country where the “American tongues” really turn me on, but there are also a few where they really turn me off. I guess our standards are set by the places we grew up and the ways that we, our families, and our friends speak. But if we impose those standards on others, we are demonstrating a prejudicial attitude. That attitude can block out our appreciation and

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Funding Update

David Simon

Director of Development

There are many types of gifts in life. One gift that I received early in my life was an appreciation for words—the written word and the spoken word. That gift came primarily from my parents and early teachers.

DARE's founder, Professor Frederic G. Cassidy, had a particularly well developed and well trained mind for language. Based on his research in the United States and Jamaica, it is not an exaggeration

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understanding of places in the U.S. and other parts of the Americas that are new and different to us. Hearing and respecting the differences in the way people talk opens up a new and wonderful experience. Imagine staying in our own comfort zones all of our lives—what a loss!

My first recognition (in Chicago, circa 1945) of my own failings in this regard was hearing my father introduce me to his friends. He would say, "This is my son Richard, the musicianer." I would correct him time and time again, but to no avail, saying, "It's *musician*, Dad, not *musicianer*." I will share with you later how stupid and narrow I was.



My father was a self-made man with intuitive wisdom. Whenever I sought information from him, I would get a story that gave me the option to choose for myself which was the best answer for me. He was also skilled at one-liners, many of which I still use today. He worked for the city water extension until three of his fingers had to be amputated because of frostbite (caused by working on a broken water main line in sub-zero weather in the Windy City). I imagine that the disability claim provided him with monies to open up his extremely successful barbecue restaurant. His public-relations skills were tremendous. People thought he was a preacher man. His name was Robert

Johnson. He and his wife, Elnora Johnson, adopted me and two of my four older brothers immediately after my biological mother died giving birth to me. I followed my father around all the time in order to learn from him. My mother was an excellent teacher, too. She demanded that I get the best grades; by that, she meant one-hundreds only.

My parents both encouraged me in my musical pursuits, but the main influence was my cousin. June was eight years older than me. She wanted to play bass, but stated that women were not supposed to play the bass. She taught me a lot, along with my high school music director, Walter Henri Dyett. Living in a black neighborhood on the south side of Chicago provided me with lots of music to listen to, both in the community and at DuSable High School, where Walter Henri Dyett produced many talents. His most famous student was Nat "King" Cole.

My second recognition (in New York, circa 1955) of my own intolerance involved hearing the way a Jamaican friend would pronounce a certain word. I can't remember that particular word today, but at the time, the mere utterance of it would almost drive me nuts. I went to New York in 1954 for a two-week job with Don Shirley that lasted eight months. From that point on, I was engulfed in the New York performance culture and stayed there for 23 years. The great

bassist Milton Hinton was my mentor and friend and helped me to “get with the in crowd.” During that time, I performed and recorded with everyone imaginable, including Sarah Vaughan, Eric Dolphy, Frank Sinatra, Miles Davis, Dexter Gordon, Barbra Streisand, and Ahmad Jamal. One event I remember in particular was the time Igor Stravinsky put his hand on my shoulder after I had played three concerts and done a recording with him. I also played under the batons of George Szell, Leopold Stokowski, Pierre Boulez, Gunther Schuller, and Leonard Bernstein.

In 1977 I came to the University of Wisconsin–Madison as a professor of applied performance, teaching string bass through Euro-classical repertoire. It was there that I became aware of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. Editor Jennifer Ellsworth took me on a tour of *DARE* tapes at the Helen C. White Library. Ironically enough, the first tape she played for me had my Jamaican friend’s word on it. Jennifer explained that the pronunciation of that word was typical of third-generation Jamaicans. That event taught me how intolerant I had been of the ways different people talked. That was a lesson for me—who am I to criticize how someone pronounces a word? I was fortunate to be able to thank the Chief Editor of *DARE*, Frederic G. Cassidy, personally for this education. I thanked him again at his memorial service.

I was not fortunate enough to get to tell my dad that I had been wrong to dispute the way he introduced me as “the musicianer.” He died many years before *DARE* Editor Joan Houston Hall taught me that many people from Kentucky (where he was from) say *musicianer*. I put two and two together and realized that the suffix *-er* means “the doer” and the prefix is *musician*; so there it is. *Engineer, plumber, trainer*—you figure it out with an open mind.

Because of these eye-opening experiences, I continue to learn from and support the *DARE* organization. I hope that people affiliated with universities all over the world can grow through the wisdom that can be attained from *DARE*. I am surprised that so many people at UW–Madison have not heard of *DARE*. National Public Radio once called the *DARE* staff because reporters in Washington didn’t know what Bill Clinton meant when he said that one of his critics didn’t know him from *Adam’s off-ox*. [Editor’s note: Volume I of *DARE* has a really nice map showing that this

phrase is well known west of the Appalachians, but not in the District of Columbia.] I have become very sensitive in watching and listening to the way different tongues affect people. I have noticed the impatience that some people show when confronted with people who do not speak the same way they do. I have noticed that the intolerant ones will ignore people who speak differently, to the point of making them invisible. I have also seen the patient ones, who not only listen with compassion, but never finish another person’s sentences. A wonderful example is my friend Debra Williams, a postal clerk who exhibits infinite patience with all customers, no matter what language they speak or what difficulties they might have with English.

Once we realize the oneness of humankind, we will mature and realize that we all talk in the same way, with variations. ♦

Richard Davis is an internationally renowned musician and Professor of Bass (Euro-classical and Jazz), Jazz History, and Combo Improvisation at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Chicago-born, he came to UW–Madison in 1977 after spending 23 years in New York City establishing himself as one of the world’s premier bass players, equally at home in the worlds of Euro-classical music and jazz. Mr. Davis’s great versatility as a bassist keeps him in constant demand for worldwide concert appearances. For nearly fifty years he has drawn enthusiastic audiences in Japan, Europe, Russia, South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the West Indies, Hong Kong, Israel, and the United States. He has recorded a dozen albums as a leader and played as a sideman on over 2,000 recordings and jingles. His May 2000 CD release, The Bassists: Homage to Diversity (King Records), was inspired by experiences related to diversity dialogue and recorded in Japan. His second CD with King Records, So In Love, was assembled with the idea of embracing the oneness of humankind and to commemorate 9/11/01.

In 1998 Prof. Davis created the Retention Action Project (R.A.P.), which focuses on open dialogues in subjects that educate all of us to multicultural differences. He has been instrumental in bringing renowned speakers and social change activists such as Peggy McIntosh, Jane Elliott, Francie Kendall, Nathan Rutstein, Victor Lewis, Hugh Vasquez, and Allan G. Johnson to the UW–Madison campus.

Prof. Davis has received honorary doctorates in Musical Arts and Humane Letters, the Hilldale Award for distinguished teaching, and numerous humanitarian awards. For more information on his career and the Retention Action Project, please visit his Web site, <www.globaldialog.com/~rdavis>.



Notes and Quotes

We always enjoy hearing from our readers. You can reach us by "snail mail," telephone, or through our Web site at the addresses listed on the mailing page of this Newsletter.

"My copy of *DARE P-Sk* sits in my kitchen readily reachable so I can look through it whenever I have a minute. And be amazed at the American language. It makes one aware of how bloodless our academically accepted 'correct and proper' English really is!"

Beverly McGraw (winner of the Volume IV *DARE* quiz)
Williamsburg, Virginia

"I taught the class [on American dialects] during one week at a regional campus. My hostess at the B&B looked at my volumes [of *DARE*] and was determined to buy them for herself. . . . I'm finding that people are fascinated by the whole notion of our regional dialects and, I think, proud of their own. My students seem that way at least. I love it when families get involved too."

Stephanie Hysmith
Ohio University

"I love your project. . . . My parents grew up in southern Iowa and use many terms that are different from what most people know. Usually I don't even realize they are unusual until I see them in print in your dictionary."

Steven D. Harsin, Head Librarian/Director
Iron Range Research Center
Chisholm, Minnesota

" 'Twas fun to hear you on the radio yesterday. I don't imagine there are many dull days playing with words."

Stephen Bazan
Madison, Wisconsin

"I found a copy of Volume I of *DARE* at a used bookstore here! . . . On one of the Louisiana tapes I have, the man refers to a 'five-plank bateau' and I looked it up and there it was! . . . It's fun to just flip through and look at a word I haven't heard before."

John Nelles
Toronto, Ontario

Funding Update

Continued from page 1

to say that Fred was one of the world's leading experts on language. His expertise was a gift that he longed to share with others, and it was important to him that as many people as possible have access to his valued linguistic treasures.

Professor Cassidy's often-quoted motto for *DARE*—"On to Z"—reflects that desire. He knew that a *Dictionary of American Regional English* that extended from A to Z would be especially interesting and useful to the general public, so that was the goal a 90-year-old Fred Cassidy set for *DARE*.

I am pleased to note three areas of progress that I am sure would have pleased him. First, Volume IV (P-Sk) was published in December and has sold more than 3,200 copies through the first three months of 2003. Keep in mind that Fred coined the phrase "On to Z" when the published portion of *DARE* extended only to the letter O. He spent hundreds of hours working on Volume IV because he was determined to see it finished.

Second, work has begun on updating *DARE*'s computer systems so that it will be easier for an electronic edition of the *Dictionary* to be produced after the letter Z is completed. An online version of *DARE* would extend the reach of the project to many more people around the world.

Third, many individuals are now supporting *DARE* financially and/or reading the *DARE Newsletter*. Your interest and support help to broaden the impact of *DARE* well beyond its home in Madison, Wisconsin. This is crucial to our work.

Your support has been terrific. Thank you for being so generous and thoughtful. The publication of Volume IV (P-Sk) would not have been possible without your assistance. However, we still have work to do to complete Professor Cassidy's dream for the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

I hope you will consider making a gift to honor Fred Cassidy and help us finish our current work on Volume V (Sl-Z) of *DARE*. You can do so by directing a gift to the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund. All gifts to the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund are tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. That will double the value of your gift. You can make a cash or credit-card gift by filling out the form at the end of this column.

Please give me a call at (608) 263-5607 if you would like to discuss the easiest way to make a gift of stock or a deferred gift. It is a very simple

process. Or you can send me an e-mail at <david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>. Your gift will be a meaningful tribute to Professor Cassidy.

On to Z! ♦

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Where Are They Now?

Every now and then we catch up with former DARE staffers. It's always a pleasure when we do, and we pass on their news to keep their friends and colleagues up to date.

Sarah Thomas was one of our student assistants back in the late 1980s when she was getting a degree in Latin American Studies and Portuguese. Finding the job market unreceptive in the early 1990s, she followed her interest in language in other directions: she went to Seattle and "the other UW," where she earned a B.S. in Speech Pathology. She also indulged her love of words by doing writing and editing for a local magazine, teaching English as a Second Language, and working in a bookstore.

The lure of the Midwest was strong, however, as was the desire to combine her interests in linguistics, research, and teaching. In 2001 she returned to Madison, where she enrolled in the Department of Communicative Disorders, and she is the very re-

cent recipient of a Master's degree in Speech and Language Pathology. Congratulations, Sarah! This summer she is taking the education courses that will certify her to work in the public school system.

Asked about her memories of working at DARE, Sarah remembered being impressed by the fields of expertise represented by DARE staff members, from botany to Latin to Sanskrit to anthropology and linguistics. She also remembered checking the original Questionnaires to verify phonetic transcriptions and look for comments by Informants, working with our Wildflower Questionnaires, and listening to our impressive collection of tape recordings. Of the tapes, she remarked that they could range from the "deathly dull" to the "hilarious," with every degree of interest in between! ♦

DARE Goes to the Czech Republic

In December of 2001, Fulbright grant in hand and preparing to teach at Masaryk University Law School in the Czech Republic, Joe Vosicky, Jr. had a chance encounter with DARE's Development Director, David Simon. Simon's enthusiastic description of DARE sparked Vosicky's already intense interest in language. As part of his Fulbright award, Vosicky had a book allowance that he had not fully depleted, so he purchased the first three volumes of DARE and shipped them to Brno, Czech Republic.

Through an existing exchange program between Masaryk University and the John Marshall University Law School, where he teaches in Chicago, Vosicky had already discovered that Czech students and professors are vitally interested in American English. They typically write down the new words and expressions they hear, look them up in dictionaries, and try to use them right away to impress them in memory. What better books could he bring than DARE, Vosicky wondered.

His gift was obviously appreciated by faculty and students alike, so as soon as Volume IV appeared in December of 2002, Vosicky, now back in the U.S., purchased it to add to the collection in Brno. Since most Czech university students are already trilingual—speaking Czech, German, and English—they are eager to be introduced to the flavors of American English through the pages of DARE. ♦



Jill Priluck, Project Assistant

Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, we profile Project Assistant Jill Priluck, who verifies the quotations used in the Dictionary by checking them in their original sources. Jill will be a third-year law student in the fall.

Q: The kind of work you do requires a very high degree of accuracy and attention to detail. I understand that this is not the first time in your work experience that those skills have been called upon. Can you tell us about the other occasions?

A: Before enrolling in law school, I checked facts for the *Village Voice*, *George*, and *Mademoiselle*, while freelance writing on the side. As a fact checker, I was responsible for ensuring that the articles I checked were reported accurately, from the spelling of names and the verification of titles to the corroboration of unnamed sources. I also vetted articles for legal problems such as libel, defamation, and invasion of privacy.

Like my position at *DARE*, the job required a nose for detail, but, unlike working at *DARE*, being a fact checker at a weekly or monthly at times called for the diplomatic skills of Dag Hammarskjöld.

Don't worry. His name is spelled right! I checked it!

As a writer, I contributed to the *New York Times*, *Artnews*, *Salon*, *Wired News*, and many other publications. Covering a story as a journalist is all about being accurate and attentive to detail, in terms of portraying people and events, which of course is different from what my job at *DARE* requires. However, there is some crossover between the two, namely staying error-free.

Q: I imagine that your law-school training has also provided skills that are useful at *DARE* as well as in your classes.

A: Law school has sharpened my analytical skills as well as my attention to detail, both of which are invaluable to my work at *DARE*. But probably the skill honed at law school that is most useful at *DARE* is perseverance. When a quotation I am trying to find does not appear on the page number indicated, I just keep looking.

Q: You've had a chance to get acquainted with libraries all across campus by now. Do you find that each one has its own personality?

A: Yes, and thanks to *DARE*, my quest for atmosphere on campus is now more informed. There's the Biology Library for coziness, the School of Library and Information Studies Library for wide lake views, and Art for a more urban aesthetic. Of course, it goes without saying that campus librarians are enormously helpful when it comes to my work for *DARE*. I have an insight into the inner workings of the library system that I didn't before, and, needless to say, a lot more goes on behind the scenes than I had imagined.

Q: Have you learned anything particularly unusual or surprising by checking quotations for *DARE*?

A: It's rare for me not to learn something unusual or surprising when I check quotations! Certainly the number of names for birds is rather astounding, as is the span of sources that the *Dictionary* uses. I still find it amazing that I may consult a description of "East Florida" from 1769, a nineteenth-century Army Corps of Engineers report, the first edition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and a modern dictionary of fashion all in one afternoon. I am exposed to a range of writing that is truly spectacular.

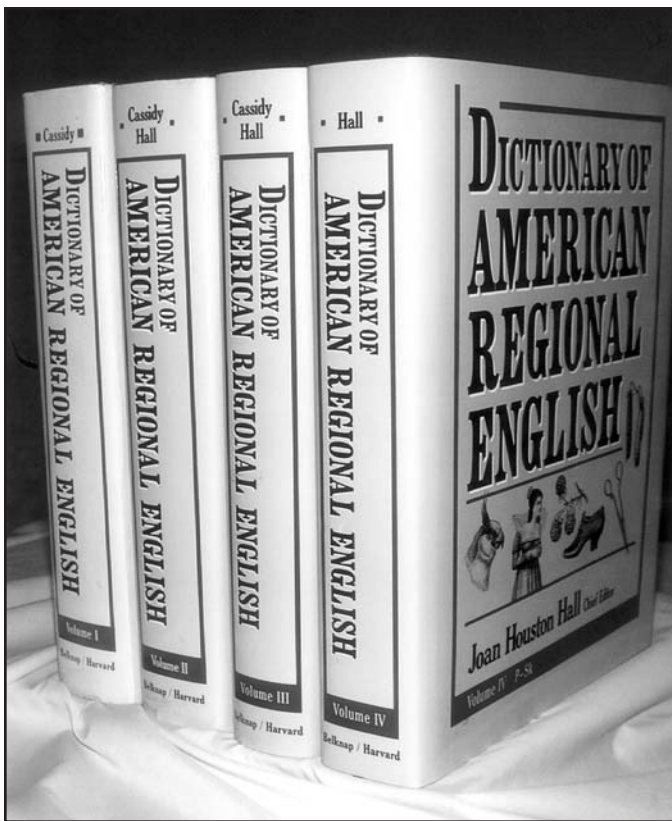
Another unusual thing about working at *DARE* is the response I get when I tell people what my job

is. Some people say that they have never met anyone who works at a dictionary. Others ask me whether I make up or look for words. Many, of course, want examples, of which one of my favorites is *square*, meaning cigarette, as in “Light me up a square, baby.” And someone once called my job “nerdy,” adding that her mother would love it.

It’s fun when “DARE words” appear when I don’t expect them. For example, I was watching the movie *Good Will Hunting* the other night, which takes place in Boston, and one of the characters said “statie,” meaning state police officer. The word is found most often in Massachusetts, so it makes sense that a character in that film would use it, but it was still fun encountering it out there in the world.

Q: How has working at *DARE* enhanced your law-school experience?

A: It’s made law school a lot more fun! ♦



DARE Receives Federal Grants

We are pleased to announce that *DARE* has recently received grants from both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. These two-year grants, which start on July 1, 2003, will help to support the work on Volume V, Sl–Z. ♦

Coming in Volume V

<i>slat</i>	Usu with <i>about, around</i> : To go about in an ostentatiously noisy way. (Chiefly ME)
<i>slaunchwise</i>	Slanting, oblique, crooked; diagonally, obliquely, crookedly. (Scattered, but chiefly W Midl, West)
<i>sleigh</i>	A child’s coasting sled. (Scattered, but esp Inland Nth, C Atl, S Midl)
<i>sleight</i>	A special skill or talent (at, rarely for, some activity). (Chiefly sAppalachians, Ozarks)
<i>slicky</i>	Slick, slippery. (Esp Sth, S Midl)
<i>sliding pond</i>	A playground slide. (Chiefly NYC, nNJ)
<i>smather</i>	To smear, slather. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>smell melon</i>	A small, sweet-smelling melon. (Sth)
<i>smollick (around)</i>	To romp, cavort, esp to engage in sexual play. (Appalachians)
<i>snub</i>	To sob. (Chiefly sAppalachians, Ozarks)
<i>spa</i>	A small restaurant, tavern, or soda fountain; a convenience store. (NEast, esp MA)
<i>spend the night party</i>	A slumber party. (Chiefly Sth, esp AL, GA)
<i>spill</i>	A pine needle. (Chiefly ME)
<i>spitting devil</i>	A stick insect (<i>Anisomorpha buprestoides</i>) that can eject a blinding chemical spray. (SE)
<i>spleeny</i>	Excessively affected by minor or imaginary illness, discomfort, or trouble; fretful, “poorly.” (NEng)
<i>tacker</i>	A little tyke. (DE, MD, NJ)
<i>tag</i>	A pine needle. (Chiefly VA)
<i>tag (of grapes)</i>	A bunch (of grapes). (sAppalachians? We still need more evidence on this one.)

DARE Newsletter

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