

# DARE Newsletter

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Dictionary of American Regional English

Spring/Summer 2005



Photo: Helen M. Mullison

Sharon Huizenga, DARE Fieldworker

## On the Road in Virginia

Sharon Huizenga

*Sharon Huizenga was a graduate student in the English Department at UW–Madison when she landed a job at DARE working with the Questionnaires that were being sent in from every corner of the U.S. by our Fieldworkers. It wasn't long before Sharon was convinced that she, too, should be "out in the field." In this article, she shares some of her experiences in southwestern Virginia; her saga will continue in a later issue of the Newsletter.*

**M**y involvement with DARE began as a graduate student pre-editor in the fall of 1967. We were an energetic crew who readily absorbed Prof. Cassidy's enthusiasm and sense of mission. My co-workers taught me well, and by the spring of

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## Funding Update

David Simon  
Director of Development

**F**orty years ago the first DARE Fieldworkers left Madison, Wisconsin, in their Word Wagons to begin interviewing Informants around the country. It was 1965. The civil rights movement was under way, and the events of the Vietnam War figured prominently in the news. From 1965 to 1970, energetic and, in my opinion, brave young people like Sharon Huizenga provided much of the raw information that is analyzed and edited by the DARE staff and that often appears in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

While reading Sharon's reminiscence, I was struck by the strength it took to be a successful Fieldworker. First, an individual needed to commit weeks of time to travel to a place that, in many cases, he or she had never visited before. Next, it was the Fieldworker's responsibility to convince complete strangers to spend many hours answering personal questions about their lives and customs. No one did background checks on the Informants. Invitations to live temporarily with strangers were accepted. The Fieldworkers put their own safety at risk to complete the Questionnaire and help see that the *Dictionary of American Regional English* would become a reality.

It is important to remember the special contributions made by the many Fieldworkers and Informants to the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. They made a unique gift of time, energy, and talent. As I look at the four published volumes of DARE on my desk, I try to imagine the incredible efforts of each Fieldworker and Informant who

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## Notes and Quotes

Once again, we're pleased to share excerpts from letters to DARE and articles mentioning the DARE project. As always, we welcome correspondence from our readers (by "snail mail" or through our Web site).

"The reality is that "run" [for a stream] is used extensively . . . in Maryland as well as Virginia, not to mention heavily throughout Pennsylvania and the northeastern part of West Virginia' [said Roger Payne, head of the U.S. Geological Survey's geographic names program]. It's also found in Ohio, said Joan Hall, chief editor of the Dictionary of American Regional English, a cool reference book that shows where you're likely to hear various words describing different things."

John Kelly  
*Washington Post*

"My eldest son, Tom, who worked as a wrangler as a teenager on ranches in New Mexico, Wyoming, and Arizona, used the word *chouse* the other day. I found it in *DARE*, asked him to define it. He did it just the way *DARE* does!"

Donald Oresman  
New York, New York

"'Anymore' sometimes dangles in the winds of positive usage: It doesn't mean 'any longer.' Nowadays, it can mean 'nowadays.' My favorite browsery, the Dictionary of American Regional English (*DARE*), dates the usage from 1859 and provides contemporary examples: 'We put up quite a bit of hay anymore. . . . He's hard of hearing anymore.'"

James J. Kilpatrick, Syndicated Columnist  
"The Writer's Art," April 2005

"I haven't lived here 'from little on,' as some of you fellow Wisconsinites are apt to say. But I've been here . . . long enough that I can read the Wisconsin entries in the Dictionary of American Regional English . . . and actually recognize a few of them as having left my own lips. . . . One of the best things about the dictionary is that it not only has words used solely or chiefly in Wisconsin (and everywhere else in America), it also provides real-life examples of how they are used."

Mike Nichols  
*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

## On the Road in Virginia *Continued from page 1*

1968 I knew the Questionnaire (QR) backwards and forwards and had a sense of the kind of data it was designed to elicit. Madison was the farthest I had ever been from my hometown in Michigan, and I desperately wanted to wander the U.S. and see things for myself. Fieldwork for *DARE* seemed ideal, so I applied. After some lessons from Jim Hartman in the art of phonetic transcription, I was sent to southwestern Virginia in June.

By that time the Word Wagons had been retired, and I had to arrange my own means of transportation. With my dad's help, I acquired a brown Ford pickup truck and camper. My friend Marlene Baas, whose fiancé was stationed in Guam for the summer, joined me, and we headed south. The first community selected was Big Stone Gap. Lyndon Johnson was president and the Vietnam War and all its issues were hot topics, but here it was the War on Poverty that people were most concerned about. The Maryknoll Sisters had established a community center to assist people in finding work or selling art and craft items made at home. These Catholic nuns were an unusual presence in this area, but they had earned the trust and confidence of the local people. I was able to park the truck in their yard at night (handy because my camper did not have a bathroom), and they introduced me to potential informants, the extended R. family.

The first QR went well. I was quite astounded by the hospitality of my informants. When it was mealtime, they always set a place for me. Food was simple, often just a pone of bread (corn bread) and soup beans (cooked pinto beans). Once we were served a plain red Jell-O for dessert. I could tell by everyone's delight that it was special and had been made because there were guests. This was not the last time I would observe that the poorer the people, the more willing they were to share what they did have, whether it was food on the table or simply time to help with the QR.

At that time, this part of Virginia did not have a lot of campgrounds; those we did find tended to be out of the way. Somewhere around Wytheville, we were camped on a lovely mountain holler farm along a creek. Not far downstream, a railroad track crossed the holler over a very high iron bridge. It was serenely beautiful, and I wish to this day I had some photos of it. Around 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. there was a knock at the door of the camper. A very polite voice said, "The creek's rising, and you ladies ought to move to higher ground." I stepped out of the camper into ankle-deep water! It had rained on the other side of the mountain, and we were

parked in the flash flood zone. I got the keys and drove to higher ground. By morning the creek had fallen to its previous level, but had we not been warned, we would have been in five or six feet of floodwater.

Churches were a good place to meet people. Marlene and I attended the Wytheville Christian Church. I not only met excellent informants, but we found ourselves invited to the U. family reunion at the family cabin, Coon Holler Lodge. This was an annual potluck dinner with about fifty people, all gathered to share the family stories and catch up on family gossip. They welcomed us and wanted to know all about us, our families, and especially *DARE*. I came away with a taste for beaten biscuits. They deserve their reputation for flaky tenderness, and with a slice of country ham, they really were a treat.

In Hillsville, I met the W. family. Their daughter worked for the Carroll County Social Services Department as a truant officer, finding rebellious parents who were not sending their children to school. Her mother was an elementary school principal. They took me around and introduced me to their extended family. Everywhere Mrs. W. took me, she introduced me as adopted kinfolk. I would not have been able to enter these homes or meet these people without her endorsement. I had met many people who were embarrassed by their mountain ways and heritage, but Mrs. W. was both well-educated (a rarity in the county) and very proud of her mountain traditions. She was able to convince her family elders that I was there to learn from them. I also learned all about the illegal liquor business (moonshining). The local brew was known as sugarhead because it was processed using refined sugar as a raw material to obtain a high alcohol content. Many people kept a Mason jar or two hidden in a cupboard or closet; if you were a relative or friend, you might be offered some. One popular way of drinking it was in a glass with a little hot water mixed with sugar. Some of that stuff must have been 200-proof pure grain alcohol.

Soon after this, Marlene returned to Michigan. I continued northeast, following the Shenandoah Valley and the Blue Ridge. One of the towns I remember quite fondly is Buchanan. Several people said to me, "If you could only talk to the H. family on Purgatory Mountain—they still live the ol'-timey way. 'Course, they won't let you near the place." I had befriended another town character, who agreed to introduce me. He did, and the family invited me in. We sat on the front

porch and did a number of QR sections. Much to my surprise, they asked me if I would like to stay with them, and I did. If I remember correctly, the household consisted of four unmarried brothers and their widowed sister, Mrs. K. Their house was a log cabin; built 170 years prior, it had been in the family ever since. There were living quarters in the house, with a separate kitchen behind it. Contrary to the older custom, they ate in the kitchen instead of the house. Their ancestors had owned a few slaves, and although the old slave quarters had been converted into a tool shed, the springhouse and other buildings were still in use. The H. family owned about 1,000 acres of land, most of it perpendicular! During the war, the cadets from Virginia Military Institute had hauled cannon up the slope of Purgatory Mountain to defend the area against invading Northern troops. I looked up that slope, and the incline had to have been close to eighty-five degrees. Animal power was useless, so the cadets had dragged the cannons up, one by one, with ropes.

I do not remember which of the H. brothers could read or write, but they all played musical instruments and none of them could read music. After supper, they gathered on the front porch to play guitars and fiddles and sing hymns and old tunes. Alas for the lack of electricity—the tape recorder I had was not battery-powered, and I was unable to record any of the stories or songs. It was a taste of life from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Meat from a few pigs. A couple of cows to provide milk and butter, which were kept in the springhouse. Home-canned vegetables. Very few purchased food items. Light from candles and lamps. Wood for heat and cool mountain breezes on a hot summer afternoon. Music on the front porch in the evening. Local people were quite surprised that the H. family had welcomed me and helped me so much with the QR. It was only later that I learned why. Mrs. K. had had a daughter who had died of a brain tumor when she was about my age, and I reminded them of her. I still think of them fondly.

Then there was Warm Springs, where I was stopped by the Virginia State Police for kidnapping! I had been working with a very busy informant, Mrs. Lucille B. When I arrived for my appointment, I discovered that she had left to attend a funeral. In the meantime, family of hers from Maryland had driven up to spend vacation time with Aunt Lucille in the mountains. I met the parents and their four children and told them about my work for *DARE*. I had to move the truck and camper, and the kids wanted a ride in it. They

were bored, and I needed to do something while I was waiting for Mrs. B. to return. I suggested a trip to the Blowing Springs Recreation Area in the nearby George Washington National Forest. I told the children to tell their parents that we were going for a drive. That was a mistake! I should have done it myself, because they forgot. We hiked and waded in the creek and had a lot of fun. On the return trip, we stopped at a store and I bought sodas and candy bars. While we were sitting in the camper, enjoying our snacks, an irate Aunt Lucille pulled up. She was furious and dragged the protesting children into her car. I could only make mild apologies, since she had arrived with the police right behind her. As she quickly departed, I was left trying to explain what fieldwork for *DARE* had to do with taking off with four kids whose parents had no idea where they were. After taking down my driver's license number and looking at other papers I had with me, the officers let me go. No one had expressed any interest in pressing charges, and my accuser had gone home.

When I returned to the B. residence, they were all apologies. The family hadn't been worried about my kidnapping the children—one maybe, but all four? Not likely. Their aunt had been more worried about an accident. She had seen my Michigan plates and assumed that I was new to mountain driving. I assured her that I had been driving on mountain roads all summer, many much more dangerous than theirs. My intention had been to provide the children with an enjoyable afternoon, and I was a responsible and skilled driver who knew her way around. They apologized for getting me in trouble with the police and asked me to reassure the crying children that I would not have to go to jail. With all that settled, the members of the B. family were excellent, though slightly guilt-motivated, informants.

Before heading back north for the fall term, I visited the W. family again in Hillsville. Mr. W. took me squirrel hunting. He got a grey squirrel and a mountain boomer. I hit a tree limb. Breakfast was squirrel gravy and biscuits. Mrs. W. invited me to a family picnic so I could be sent back home in style. I returned to Madison, hoping to do fieldwork again. As it turned out, I was privileged to work in Kentucky and eastern Virginia, where I carried a camera and kept better notes on my adventures. ♦

*After working for DARE, Sharon Huizenga resumed her graduate studies. She left Madison in the late 1970s and moved to Milwaukee.*

## Funding Update

*Continued from page 1*

contributed to the information contained in the pages of the *Dictionary*.

As a reader of the *DARE Newsletter*, you are expressing your interest in our work and in our quest to reach the letter Z. That is terrific! I hope you will also become a *DARE* donor, which will directly help our effort to finish Volume V and the journey of more than four decades to complete the alphabet. Your support is vital to our work.

Any gift that you decide to make is tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This 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.

If you are interested in discussing a gift of stock or a deferred gift, please give me a call at (608) 263-5607 so we can discuss the easiest way to make that type of contribution. Or you can contact me by e-mail at <david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>. On behalf of the thousands of talented people who have worked on the *Dictionary* in one way or another, I thank you very much for your interest in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

On to Z! ♦

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Photo: George Goebel

Tamara Milbourn, former DARE student worker

## Where Are They Now?

We enjoy hearing from past staff members, and recently caught up with a former student worker whose career has taken her across the globe and back again.

**Tamara Milbourn**, who worked at DARE from 1995 through 1997 while completing her M.A. in Applied English Linguistics, has packed more adventures into the last eight years than many people have in a lifetime. After leaving Madison, she taught English in Taiwan (where she experienced an earthquake so severe that she could hear the buildings around her swaying in the aftershocks) and in Matsuyama, Japan. During breaks and between teaching jobs, Tamara had the opportunity to indulge her passion for travel, visiting over forty countries. Although she maintains that her favorite destinations are “too many to mention,” she does admit that riding the Trans-Mongolian line of the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to Moscow (a five-and-a-half-day journey) was a definite highlight.

In 2005 Tamara returned to the United States after spending nine months in Benin, West Africa, under the auspices of the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), an Arizona-based nongovernmental charitable organization. Serving as a volunteer with the Teachers for Africa Program (which sends American teaching professionals to Africa to design and implement teacher education programs), she participated in the training of primary school teachers and occasionally taught English to their students. Since French is

the official language of Benin, Tamara was pleased to be able to put the French courses she took at UW–Madison to good use.

During a recent visit to the *Dictionary* offices, Tamara recalled that her favorite tasks at DARE involved listening to our audiotapes. She remembers with particular fondness the tales recorded by a DARE Informant who returned from a Prohibition-era trip to Cuba with bottles of liquor concealed in her coat. Tamara plans to stay in the U.S. “for at least a couple of years” and is currently seeking employment, preferably in an education-related field. ♦

## Coming in Volume V

<i>swamp pump(er)</i>	The bittern ( <i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i> ) or least bittern ( <i>Ixobrychus exilis</i> ). (Chiefly Nth)
<i>swarp (around)</i>	To go out in search of illicit pleasures, “raise hell.” (Chiefly Appalachians)
<i>swarthy</i>	Sallow, sickly-looking. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>sweet soup</i>	A soup made of cooked dried fruit. (Upper MW)
<i>swinge</i>	To scorch, burn. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>Swiss barn</i>	A bank barn. (Esp PA)
<i>telephone</i>	To catch fish by stunning them with an electric current, usu generated by an old-fashioned crank telephone. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>telescope house</i>	A house consisting of several sections in a row, each slightly larger than the last. (Chiefly eMD)
<i>telly pole</i>	A utility pole. (Chiefly PA)
<i>tempest</i>	A violent storm, esp a thunderstorm. (Chiefly seNEng)
<i>tendable</i>	Of land: arable. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>toot</i>	[rhymes with <i>foot</i> ] A paper cone or bag. (Chiefly PaGer area)
<i>topsy stove</i>	A small stove with a flat, overhanging top. (Chiefly KS, NE)

## Staff Member Profile

*In this continuing series, Joan Hall poses some questions to Senior Science Editor Sheila Y. Kolstad, whose association with the DARE project spans forty years.*

**Q:** I understand that you were *DARE*'s first official employee. How did you learn about the project and get involved in it?

**A:** In the first semester of 1965 Professor Fred Cassidy gave his History of the English Language course. (His frequent and wide-ranging digressions into such things as Old Norse manuscript reading made the course much more than a simple progressive study.) One morning Fred came into class with an extra spring in his step and began to describe the *Dictionary* project he would undertake in a few months. After class I talked to him about this "dictionary" and asked to work as a volunteer when things got under way. Fred knew that I was a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Germanic Philology with a minor in English Linguistics and that I had a long-standing interest in regional language and dialect—after all, I had first met him when I was sixteen and needed his permission to take Old English! Fred accepted my proposal, though he insisted I come on instead as a Project Assistant. As it happened, the grant money for *DARE* was not immediately available, so Fred paid me my first month's wages from his own pocket.

*DARE*'s first "home" was the lower level of a building at 2218 University Avenue, a place entirely familiar to me, as I had been part of the project which had just finished there—a study of the possible domestication of bumblebees. The *Dictionary* inherited some of the leftover office furnishings, including a file cabinet with a drawer labeled "Dissected Bumblebee Brains."

I began by searching out unpublished diaries, journals, and other sources of regional language, and was sent off to libraries and repositories to look at and evaluate these things for *DARE*. A month after Fred and I "set up shop," Professor Audrey Duckert arrived in Madison. We then began to work on a Questionair (Fred's preferred spelling) to be used in fieldwork throughout the country. Because of my wide background in natural sciences, I was responsible for drafting many of the questions dealing with plants, birds, animals, and fishes. At the same time I began to construct a comprehensive data file of regional terms for these same things. That latter file became the basis for the continually updated science database (now on computer and accessed to begin every new science entry).

I also helped develop the computer coding needed for pre-editing of the returned Questionnaires, developed and oversaw the pre-editing program, and trained the pre-editors. There followed a period of several years when I was away from *DARE* but continued to be associated with it in various ways. In January 1976 I came back on staff as a General Editor. After a time it was clear that science editing had special requirements, including a broad knowledge of natural sciences. I then took on the job of Science Editor and developed the needed methodology and formats to deal with this area.

**Q:** You also had a chance to do some fieldwork for *DARE* in Illinois and Kentucky. What was your most memorable experience in that role?

**A:** Perhaps the most memorable occurred in the coal regions of eastern Kentucky at a time of bitter labor unrest. Near Whitesburg, we stopped to have a closer look at an apparently abandoned coal tipple. As my husband and I walked towards the structure, a shot rang out. We thought it was just a stray bullet, perhaps someone poaching in the hills, and continued to approach. Then there was a second shot, this one throwing up dirt some thirty feet away. Just as we began to comment on the unlikelihood of two stray bullets, there was a third shot, which hit the ground almost at our feet. My husband said dryly, "You know, I think they're shooting at us," and grabbed me to run back to the car. With our out-of-state license plate and city clothes, we had apparently been taken for coal company representatives or labor agitators. The shots were meant to warn us off. We were lucky—there were numerous instances where the violence was less polite.

**Q:** As Senior Science Editor, you've written many thousands of entries dealing with natural science. How do you approach the analysis of a new headword?

**A:** The first step is to try to see what the thing is and where it is, then go from there. *Buttercup*, for example, might appear to be only the standard name of a common plant, but our evidence shows that the term is also used of six other flowers. *Mayapple* is broadly used for *Podophyllum peltatum*, yet *DARE* has documented the regional use of this term for certain species of *Rhododendron* in the Northeast. And *swamp robin* is not only a name of one or another thrush, but also of a towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) and even of a plant, the wild calla.

**Q:** *DARE*'s system of "collector" entries for plants and animals is unique in lexicography. How does it work?

A: "The folk" have been very prolific in assigning names to the natural world. The ruddy duck, for example, has well over one hundred folk names. It would have been futile to define each one of these again and again; the constant repetition would not have been efficient, nor would it have given any indication of other contrastive terms. To get round these difficulties, I devised the "collector" entry. First of all, the most commonplace name is determined—this is sometimes in itself regional, but also sometimes known everywhere, hence "standard." This is then defined in terms of scientific nomenclature and a brief description, and the many variant names are listed (or "collected") there. Each of the variant terms is then defined as this "collector." For example, the second sense of **swamp robin** is defined as "**=rufous-sided towhee.**" At this last, there is not only a list of some

twenty-four other names for this bird, but it is also seen that **rufous-sided towhee** is further a "sub-collector," as it is defined as "A **towhee** (here: *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)."

Q: I understand that you've also had the chance to contribute to lexicographic projects in New Zealand. What have you worked on there?

A: I have been involved in an ongoing project called *Origins of New Zealand English* and have done research in the incidence of HRTs ("high rising terminals") amongst speakers of N.Z. English, documented the usage of the words *snib* and *nibby* in N.Z. English, and contributed to dialect studies on local plant names such as *matchheads* for grape hyacinth in Otago. I am an associate of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre and hold adjunct status in the English Department of the School of Culture, Literature and Society, University of Canterbury. ♦

### DARE Staff Photo



Photo: Bob Rashid

Luanne von Schneidemesser, Elizabeth Blake, Roland Berns, Elizabeth Gardner, George Goebel, Leonard Zwilling  
Sheila Kolstad, Joan Hall, Catherine Attig, Erin Meyer-Blasing

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### **DARE Showcased at International Meeting**

When the Fourteenth World Congress of Applied Linguistics meets in Madison at the end of July, conference-goers will have a chance to learn about *DARE* from its beginnings through its projected electronic future. Editors Joan Houston Hall and Luanne von Schneidemesser will be joined by Fieldworker August Rubrecht in a three-hour session that will explain the history and evolution of the project, describe its interviews and audiotapes, report on its findings, and survey the uses of the *Dictionary*. Hosted by the American Association of Applied Linguistics, the conference will feature nearly 1,200 presentations and be attended by approximately 1,500 language scholars from around the world. ♦



### **DARE Staff Members**

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Leonard Zwilling, General Editor

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