

# DARE Newsletter

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Photo: Helen M. Mullison

Sharon Huizenga, DARE Fieldworker

## On the Road in Kentucky

Sharon Huizenga

In the Spring/Summer 2005 issue of our Newsletter, Sharon Huizenga described her adventures as a DARE Fieldworker in southwestern Virginia. This article continues the story with an account of Sharon's experiences doing fieldwork in Kentucky from 1969 to 1970.

By the time I became involved with DARE, a large part of the fieldwork had been completed. There were only a small number of states that had not been done, among them Kentucky and Virginia. My first assignment had been in southwestern Virginia, which was a relatively small and more or less homogeneous area. Prof. Cassidy

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## Funding Update

David Simon  
Director of Development

*Special.* The dictionary on my desk lists the first definition as "Surpassing what is common or usual; exceptional." That certainly describes the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. The editorial and development work being done at DARE has truly been special in that sense.

It has been my pleasure to be DARE's Director of Development since July 1998. It has been an honor to represent this remarkable project, and I am grateful to the many people who have met with me, taken my phone calls, and supported the outstanding work of the *Dictionary*. You have been terrific and have meant more to me than you probably realize.

At this time, I am in the process of moving to a different development position at the University of Wisconsin Foundation. I will be working on behalf of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, and the *Dictionary* will be welcoming a new Director of Development this spring. I am confident he or she will enjoy the challenge and do a fine job. With the excellent support of the DARE staff and donors, I know the *Dictionary* will move forward and work will continue toward the upcoming publication of Volume V.

I am looking forward to celebrating the publication of Volume V with everyone when it is finished. That will truly be a historic moment. I will now join all of you in the role of DARE supporter. As a fellow supporter, I ask you to consider making a gift to DARE so the road to the end of the alphabet will be a bit more manageable.

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and his associate Jim Hartman liked what I had turned in from Virginia, so when I asked to work in Kentucky, I was given the assignment. It proved to be even more challenging and difficult than they had predicted.

The state is composed of three socioeconomic regions: the eastern mountains, the middle section (containing the Bluegrass and the Pennyroyal), and the western lowlands. Each of these in turn has its own subdivisions. The state is also smack dab in the middle of overlapping settlement patterns and their resulting dialectal variations. More than once I felt that I had bitten off more than I could chew. However, I did set forth with a list of contacts, and in late May of 1969 I headed for Bowling Green and Western Kentucky University, where I met Prof. Gordon Wilson, longtime *DARE* enthusiast. He in turn introduced me to Ken and Mary Washington Clarke, faculty colleagues. I talked to one of Mary's English classes about *DARE*. Some of her students agreed to introduce me to family



*Bowling Green, Kentucky—first fish ever!*

and friends when I came to their communities. Ken's specialty was folklore, and he and Mary introduced me to the elderly couple who became my informants for Bowling Green and my first Kentucky questionnaire.

Charlie and Mae lived in a log cabin that had accumulated various additions and ells over the years. They lived a simple lifestyle that had long disappeared elsewhere, electricity and telephone being about their only modern conveniences. I parked my truck and camper in their yard and became their guest. The Clarks owned property in the area and had built a fish pond which they had stocked with channel cat. I went fishing for the first time in my life and actually caught a small catfish. Charlie cleaned it, Mae cooked it, and I had to eat it. It was delicious, and I have had a taste for catfish ever since.

The first questionnaire had gone well. I looked forward to more of the same, but that was not to be. Good informants were hard to find, and when I did find them, they were busy with working, farming, gardening, or other early-summer activities. It was also difficult to find safe places to park the truck at night. Campgrounds and parks were few and far between. Getting around was also difficult that year. Major roads had ferries instead of bridges, but it had been a spring of heavy rains, with flash floods along the Green, Barren, and Cumberland Rivers that washed out roads, fields, and ferry ramps. The student contacts from Mary's English class proved invaluable. One of them was a young woman, probably the first in her extended family to get a college education. Her parents had gone in separate directions, leaving her to be raised by friends and neighbors in Turkey Neck Bend (a bend of the Cumberland River near Tompkinsville) who became my informants.

My student friend was very religious and had the certainty and forthrightness that come from being almost twenty-one. She had joined the Church of Christ at the age of sixteen and participated regularly until she left for college and could not attend the services. For her nonattendance, the Church threatened to excommunicate her unless she made a public confession of her sin. She did not think that she had sinned and anyway had begun to be dissatisfied with the Church's extreme conservatism in doctrine, morals, and manners. So, one afternoon, dressed in an old shirt and her dirtiest cutoffs and with her hair in rollers, she went across the street to the preacher's house and told him to take her name off the member-

ship rolls. At the time I met her, she and her uncle lived in a trailer next to the "church-house" of her story, whose parking lot I used for my overnights. She had a stubborn and rebellious streak in her (in which I recognized an aspect of my own personality). She was like so many young people who were rejecting traditional institutions and were finding new ways to live according to self-chosen values. Young people like her were often the topic of conversations with disapproving elders who were so often my informants.

It was 1969. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination was barely a year in the past. The war in Vietnam was still going on. In rural areas, the conflicts and forces of change in American society were not understood and were viewed with suspicion and fear. There were times I did not feel safe. One afternoon I stopped by the Mulkey Meeting House, an old log church and historic site. It was built in the form of a cross, with twelve corners for the Apostles and three doors for the Trinity. It had a puncheon floor and split-log benches with wooden pegs for legs. Hannah Boone (sister of Daniel) was buried there, along with Revolutionary War soldiers. A woods had grown up, transforming the graveyard into a quiet place for the dead to sleep. While I sat at a picnic table with a sandwich and some paperwork, a nearby table was occupied by some elderly local men. I could not help but overhear, as they were all hard of hearing and talked very loudly. First they talked about civil rights. Every sentence used the "N" word, and all of it was derogatory and racist. Then they went on to politics. They all had supported George Wallace, and as for student unrest on university campuses, "Why didn't they just kill a few?"

It was not always difficult or dangerous, and I did have good experiences with gracious and hospitable people. From time to time, my informants helped me with the questionnaire and afterwards I helped them in various ways, such as stringing and snapping green beans from the garden for the freezer or peeling and slicing apples for drying. These household tasks were also accompanied by lively conversation. Once, in a community where I had a particularly difficult time locating informants since it was tobacco-picking time, I spent an afternoon hanging tobacco leaves in a barn in exchange for interview time. The work was hard and it was very dusty handling the leaves, but it was the only way that the people could take the time to answer my questions.

In mid-July I was invited by the Clarkes to attend a pageant in Johnson City, Tennessee, cel-

ebrating the Shakers. I went with them and their special guests, noted Kentucky regional writer Jesse Stuart and his wife. The pageant was well done. It was hot and humid, but I had a seat in the VIP section, where there were seat cushions and free fans. The best part was the dinner in the old Shaker meeting hall. I got to sit at the table with the Clarkes and the Stuarts. Jesse talked about himself and his books. Mrs. Stuart said I could visit them in Greenup (which I was unable to do, as Jesse's health was not good). Mary bought one of his books and had him autograph it for me. I still have the book and the fan.

Some of my most difficult encounters with poverty and hopelessness came in the eastern Kentucky coalfields. The Barbourville questionnaire was done in a community called Stinking Creek. An investigative reporter by the name of John Fetterman had come here in the mid-sixties and had written a book titled *Stinking Creek*, which he published in 1967. My main informant, who lived with her husband (a disabled miner) and their family on Stinking Creek, was highly critical of Fetterman's efforts and had refused to help him with his investigation. She agreed to help with *DARE* when I denied knowledge of Fetterman and his book.

Stinking Creek did not stink. It was, and probably still is, a lovely stream. It sparkled in the sunshine as it ran over the stony creek bed beneath overhanging branches of trees and underbrush. It was also a lonely stream. There were no bird calls or noises of insects because there were no birds or insects. The water contained neither fish nor tadpoles. No water striders ran across its side pools. It had no mossy banks, just stones and packed clay. No one would dare to drink its water, and cattle were kept away. Children were forbidden to play in it, but they did anyway, and the water left their skin and hair smooth, silky, and sweet-smelling, like honey. Stinking Creek was sterile and toxic, since the sources of its water originated further up the mountain, where old mine shafts contaminated the springs with sulfuric acid and other poisonous mine wastes. There was very little work in the area, and the mountainsides were littered with abandoned coal tipples and mine shafts. People lived on subsistence gardening (where the soil was not too polluted), welfare assistance, and checks from family members who had left to work in other cities and states.

In spite of their hardships, my informant and her family were hospitable and generous with their time and resources. I was always welcome at the

dinner table, where they had a listener as they told me stories about themselves and their difficulties with the mining companies.

When I located a copy of Fetterman's book and read it, I found that he had selected the poorest and grubbiest as representative of the whole area, which actually had a wider social and economic range. I thought he used his data to emphasize poverty, squalor, hunger, and disease. His descriptions magnified the despair and the absence of help and bordered on the melodramatic. He seemed to see everything through black-colored glasses. But he was writing for a particular readership, contentedly affluent and not accustomed to seeing the lives of the poor as the lives of people like themselves, differing only in circumstance.

My experience of eastern Kentucky was not all of poverty and despair. I encountered gracious and helpful people on farms and in towns who were better off economically. The London questionnaire was done with the help of a delightful couple who lived in what first appeared to be a run-down, unpainted shack surrounded by overgrown brush. However, it turned out to be a cottage-like house that fit into its surroundings. It was a house that had grown over the years into a collection of additions and ells, all wood-paneled—one yellow pine, one chestnut, another yellow poplar, and so on. The walls were covered with prints and photos. My informant's family, along with one other family, had been the founding families of the town, and my informant was a gold mine of stories. His wife had Parkinson's disease, but both were lively and intelligent. They thoroughly enjoyed the questionnaire. We all laughed at the question asking what you say when you don't hear what someone else has said, because they were both more than a little deaf.

Break times consisted of a cup of tea around the kitchen table, from which we had a good view of the couple's rose garden. This gave them the chance to share their stories about the well-bucket company (it now sold not well buckets but plumbing supplies) and the old picnic grounds at Laurel Falls which were lost when Highway 25E was built. They frequently gave different answers to the same question (at the same time, of course), and then for the second answer gave the other's first response, again at the same time. The wife occasionally overruled her husband's answer by saying, "That's just a dictionary word, and this lady's not after dictionary words." Once in while he would answer with a word he had picked up elsewhere, and she would say, "But they don't say that around

here, and this lady wants what people in this section use." She remembered many old-fashioned words and phrases, while he remembered the old customs. They had worked hard all their lives, had looked with hope for the good wherever they could find it, and their lives were more beautiful for it. When we finished the questionnaire, he gave me a bouquet of roses from his garden and carried my questionnaire and tape recorder to the truck for me as a final courtesy. I have never forgotten them.

After continued encounters with people living in extreme poverty, I found myself in the area of Hindman and Pippa Passes. The local librarian recommended that I try to locate a family that lived in the hills along Turner Branch. I missed the turnoff three times. Finally I decided that the little building really was "the big barn" and that the lane next to it was the road and not some cow path. About a hundred yards into it, there was literally no turning back. The lane became a narrow bulldozer track along the side of the mountain. Wild flowers bloomed everywhere. It was beautiful, but slow going. About two miles further, I came to a fork in the road. One road went to a small cabin near the branch; the other continued over the mountain. I called down to the cabin's occupant, who happened to be in the yard, and asked if this was where my informant lived. The answer came back clearly, "Next place," and the man pointed over the mountain. I drove on cautiously and found a farmstead at the end of the road.

The owners were quite surprised to see me and my camper coming 'round their mountain. They welcomed me and made me feel right at home. My informant was a natural-born talker and loved telling jokes and tall tales while we worked on the questionnaire. Two things he had no use for were strip miners and "happy pappies" [DARE Ed: see Volume II]. He "studied about" my traveling and gave me some warnings about the dangers of traveling alone. His wife was also concerned, though she imagined that it was exciting. My informant was a retired carpenter who was recovering from a heart attack and tended to use that as an excuse to avoid chores.

One afternoon that week, his wife went to do chores. As she bent over to pick up some eggs, her dress split down the back. She put the eggs down and went into the house to put on a skirt. While she was gone, the pony ate the eggs. The day was not over. After supper we were sitting on the porch, when from the kitchen there was a kaboom and the sound of shattering glass. A jar of freshly canned

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applesauce had exploded, and the glass and hot sauce had spewed out all over the kitchen. The son was sent for some baking soda, and when he ran back into the kitchen with it, he slipped on the applesauce and slid across the floor on his backside. All four of us howled with laughter. Together we cleaned up the kitchen, and the others went outside. Then I looked up, and on the ceiling was a ring, two feet in diameter, made of applesauce. It looked so funny that I couldn't help but burst out laughing. The others ran back into the house. All I could do was point at the ceiling. When they saw it, we all laughed together. The questionnaire was soon finished, and when the weather began to look like rain, my informant advised me to take the truck back over the mountain before thunderstorms washed out the road.

March 1970 found me in western Kentucky, where I combined work on the last two Kentucky questionnaires with visits with former DARE staffers Phil and Leah Miller in Martin, Tennessee. It was good to be with people who did not need an explanation of what I was doing. I was tired, and their hospitality was just the boost I needed before I left for the Virginia Tidewater. I had found the task demanding. I had encountered more racism and socioeconomic bigotry than I had expected, especially in the Bluegrass and the more affluent areas.

I have been back to Kentucky only once since I completed my DARE assignment, and the drive over the Ohio River into Louisville felt like a homecoming. Someday I would like an excuse to revisit some of the towns that were selected for questionnaires and see what changes have taken place since I was their inquisitive guest. ♦

*After finishing her DARE fieldwork, Sharon worked for three years as an elementary school librarian in Hillsville, Virginia, then as a substitute high school English teacher in Mount Airy, North Carolina. She returned to continue her graduate studies at UW-Madison, but in 1980, finding herself in serious need of a paycheck, she moved to Milwaukee. In the mid-1990s she returned to graduate-level studies, this time in theology. (When pushed, she will admit that Greek and Hebrew were among her favorite classes.) She graduated in 2003 with a Master of Divinity degree and now works as a chaplain for the retired School Sisters of St. Francis, where she is able to put to use the listening skills acquired during all those hours of DARE questionnaire interviews.*

**Funding Update** *Continued from page 1*

On page 5 of this *Newsletter*, you will see our 2005 donor list. Thank you to everyone who made a gift last year. Please do so again in 2006. Your support is necessary to the successful completion of the *Dictionary*. If your name is not found on page 5, please consider becoming a 2006 contributor. That would be an outstanding way to become a part of the DARE effort.

Any gift that you decide to make will be tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. You can make a cash or credit-card gift by filling out the form at the end of this column. All gifts will be appreciated very much and will move us one step closer to completing this wonderful project. Your gift will make a difference. I thank you for your interest in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

On to Z! ♦

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Scot LaFaive, DARE Project Assistant

## Staff Member Profile

*In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews Project Assistant Scot LaFaive, who searches the Internet for possible DARE citations. Scot is working on his M.A. in Applied English Linguistics at UW–Madison.*

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

**A:** My role within *DARE* consists mainly of expanding the previously defined dates for entries in Volume V. Essentially, I surf through the waste of the Internet every day in the hope of finding treasures, which in my case are usages of *DARE* headwords that predate (or postdate to the year 2000 and up) the dates previously found. I do this by searching through a smattering of Web sites (some more helpful than others), usually digging through old newspapers and books. I am sort of like a modern-day Quincy or Matlock, just without the gunplay and courtroom drama.

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

**A:** Reading newspapers from the nineteenth century is often quite entertaining. That extravagant brand of wildly subjective journalism is too often absent in the news of today; only the bravest of news organizations is bold enough to carry that mantle of flair and quasi-facts.

**Q:** What part of your job do you find least enjoyable?

**A:** As my co-workers will attest, the most frustrating thing in any day is dealing with the randomness of certain Internet databases and how easily they seem to fall apart. It almost makes one believe in mischievous gremlins gnawing through wires and sabotaging machines from within. Or maybe it just bolsters the notion that monkeys are indeed running the world.

**Q:** What is the most unusual or surprising thing you've come across in searching the Internet for *DARE*?

**A:** Most of my answers would be unfit for printing in any respectable publication. Nevertheless, I have learned many interesting things from my searching. For example, due to my frequent need to search the Internet for plant names, I have discovered many a magical use for certain plants. (The next time you need to exorcise those demons from a loved one, be sure to grab some Solomon's seal.) I also come across some nifty items in the old newspapers. My favorite so far is this handy Irish curse: "May the seven terriers of hell sit on the spool of your breast and bark in at your soul-case!" You won't find that in the *Wall Street Journal*.

**Q:** What is your primary academic research interest?

**A:** I am interested mainly in syntax, but also in language histories and phonology.

**Q:** What kind of employment do you plan to seek after finishing your graduate program?

**A:** After this degree, I plan to throw myself into the world of either editing or lexicography. I have an interest in book publishing, so I may try to wiggle my way into an editing position for a publisher. I might also decide to shun the sun once more and reenter the field of lexicography. As of now, I could go either way . . . or even both.

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

**A:** Aside from developing theories on spatial-temporal quantum fluctuations and their effect on the integrity of gravitational bodies in wave form, I like to read, do puzzles, amuse myself with games, and spend time with my wife and two cats. ♦

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