

# LESSONS

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## An Interview with Rayna Green

*Interviewed by Betty Belanus*

I interviewed Rayna Green in her office at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History on November 30, 1999. My intern Tracy Clonts was also present at the interview. Rayna has had an extremely varied and interesting career which has toggled between, and often combined, academic and public sector work. Her work is always groundbreaking, whether it involves bringing together science and the humanities, injecting political sensibilities into large public exhibitions and performances, or collaborating closely with native communities. While she is in the category of "elder statespeople of folklore," her career having spanned over thirty years since her graduate school days in the 1960s, her energy, thoughts, and work are delightfully refreshing, and she is forever on to something new that pushes the envelope of work in public sector folklore.

BB: First I just wanted to ask you a little bit about your personal background and how it brought you into this field.

RG: How'd I get into this mess. It's probably, like most people, a complicated story. I grew up in a family that was very rich in traditions of various kinds. My German-Jewish grandmother immigrated when she was barely an infant to Texas. I've written about that family and most particularly her, but also about my Cherokee Grandmother and that part of my father's family. But my mother's family, in particular, were really the subject for folkloristic work; there's no question about it. In terms of oral tradition and in terms of all sorts of things that are still very compelling to me. I think I just lived in a world where the spoken word and where music and song and even dance to some extent and the material culture and foodways, a whole range of things, were so rich and so deep, that I was imprinted forever.

I can't escape that as a main reason. Although, of course, as I grew up I tried to do everything I could to abandon that life and

become—as one of my cameramen I work with all the time calls it—a smarty pants communist intellectual.

BB: Why do you think that is?

RG: Well I think for all sorts of reasons, obviously. The other thing that I got from the one grandmother, in particular, and to some extent from the other part of my family, was a passion, an absolute passion, for books. Reading was the most important thing ever to me. So, you know, growing up in a Texas and Oklahoma, both essentially rural and then post-war suburban family, what I wanted was anything but picking cotton and dancing the Cotton-eyed Joe for the rest of my life—although that remained very vital and real to me. I guess I headed toward the literary life and was encouraged in that by teachers and all those people.

The first thing I wanted most in the world to become was a doctor, always my whole life, but that just didn't work for all sorts of reasons. When I went to college I ended up in literature, which was my other love. A lot of folklorists are like that. They were all orphaned, abandoned literary people, or sometimes abandoned historians. In the early days that was certainly true.

I became a political animal in college. Particularly radical politics, what was then called rad politics. It turns out it's not very rad at all, it's rather conventional. But then, this is 1960. So, I became very engaged in politics and in political action in particular and in all of the sort of early movement stuff—civil rights. And I met a couple of people that became very influential to me. People like Clyde Warrior who founded the National Indian Youth Council and all these people who ultimately became sort of Red Power, Brown Power, all those.

So, Jack Kennedy's killed in the streets in Dallas. I taught high school, very briefly, when I graduated from college with a degree in literature and went into Peace Corps. In Peace Corps training at UCLA, an extremely interesting thing happened. I'm walking past the music building at UCLA late one night about 10:00 after language class. And I hear some interesting music coming out of the basement of the music building at UCLA and I wander into that building. And there is a white haired man sitting with a whole bunch of recording equipment and he is with people playing most peculiar instruments. And I simply—as people often did in the sixties—sat down. One wandered in and out of classes and they didn't seem to mind. I sat there for the next three hours and listened to this bizarre and marvelous music and to them doing recordings of it. And I came back the next night and the night after that and the night after that.

Well, that man was Charles Seeger and thereby hangs a tale! Eventually he noticed this strange little person coming in and being interested. He asked me what I was doing and why this interested me. I ended up telling him a lot about myself, and he was very interested in where I was going in Peace Corps. And he said, "You know, there's almost no recorded music from Ethiopia. Why don't you try to do something about that when you're there." So, he taught me how to use a Nagra, all 900 pounds of it. And somewhere with the Peace Corps we managed to acquire some recording equipment. When I did go to Ethiopia, for the time I was there, I did seek out and become friends with all sorts of interesting people.

We did some recording, all of which got shipped back to Charles Seeger. Anyway, while I was in Ethiopia I got very interested in culture, very. And came back and did a masters degree in literature simply cause I didn't know what I was doing when I came back and started teaching in a black college in Dallas and became the choral music advisor. Suddenly I found myself in a world that was very interested in traditional music and dance, and in the two years I was there I began to investigate academic programs. What was I going to do with myself? I discovered American Studies just barely in 1968.

Meanwhile, of course, I'm up to my neck in political action of all sorts; very much in the black community in Dallas at the time. And very much with the nascent beginnings of what became the American Indian Movement. The tangential edges of early feminism. Typical red diaper kid of the times—well, I'm not a kid anymore, but I'm into all this. But we've now got Vietnam and everybody's doing anti-war stuff. All those things in the sixties were connected to all the other stuff that I became interested in.

I very much got interested in the folk music revival. I should say I was also singing at various places and doing all the sort of stuff that we all did in the sixties: long hair and the short skirts and the folk music revival stuff. And all that seems connected to me, it still does. It was; it is.

I discovered folklore programs. I discovered that folklore existed. I was teaching a summer camp in Maine for rich smart kids. I was teaching music. I thought maybe I would go to UCLA and then I realized I just wasn't going to be a music person. UCLA was just at the beginning of having a program that was beyond music at the time. I looked at Indiana and discovered that I could do American Studies and Folklore and somehow it just worked and so in '68 I went off to Indiana. I don't know why. I got accepted to Yale American Studies and other places, but somehow the Folklore thing—everyone thought I was crazy, but it stuck.

I discovered a whole world of people that were just like me. And then also lots of people that weren't at all. They were more academics: more people who came via anthropology. I had to spend the two years I was at Indiana playing "Fifty-two Pick-up"—learning to read everything and do all that. But that's what happened. And that's a long answer, but it does relate to what we'll talk about later without doubt. Not only why I got in that, but what I do and what I've always thought about and the connections that it makes for me.

I don't separate one's birth and one's education and the various influences of all those different things that we talk about: class, race, gender, and politics. Those are the connections I made then and they're the ones I make now.

BB: Who was at Indiana when you were there?

RG: Oh my God, everybody. It was wonderful for two brief glorious years. I was only there two years because I already had a Masters. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Frank and Rosan DeCaro, Elliott Oring and Cam Collins and latecomers Marilyn White and Barry Pearson and John Gutowski and John Brito. But that's when actually we started *Folklore Forum*; Frank and Elliott and all those guys. And we were also very close. It was terrific. We all bonded in some loony kind of way and learned from each other.

And we all were coming out of the sixties. Mind you we were still demonstrating, marching. I mean my God, Indiana from '68 to '70 was like all big schools. Some of us were out on the picket lines as much as in class. The war movement went completely bananas at that point. So, we're having TA strikes. You know, the old Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." It was an interesting time to be there and very positive.

People helped repair my intellectual shortcomings, which were considerable at the time. People like Linda Dégh, for example, who took me seriously and made me do what I had to do to make up for my grievous lack of knowledge about the subjects at hand. Dorson was there, Henry Glassie later, and Warren Roberts and other people. And I did become tremendously interested in the other content side. I've always remained an Americanist absolutely, firmly and will be forever an Americanist. I could not be swayed from that. But, I did become really deeply interested in material culture and most particularly what we call applied folklore. Over Dorson's dead body, was I interested in these things, and it was a great struggle to be interested in those things.

BB: That's what I was going to ask. It sounds like the student body was quite politically active, but I couldn't see the faculty being supportive of that.

RG: No, no not in the least. Well, and all of the student body wasn't politically active, but they were certainly all politically sentient. It was the times. You couldn't not be; the world was splintering. The summer that I arrived in Indiana Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King are killed. So, we were all politically sentient and also doing the typical of carving out turf that Daddy hadn't carved out before and rebelling against Daddy—"Daddy" being eminently and always Richard M. Dorson. Although he—I have to put it on record—hated everything we were thinking and doing. He couldn't bear it.

But, Dorson was very peculiar, he liked horses that would run, even if you weren't his horse and wearing his colors. He in some loony way (even apologizing for it, after the fact) supported those who were horses he thought would run. And then he devastated those he deemed would not survive. Even though he loathed everything we did, he hated the notion of applied folklore, he hated the notion of folklore in practice, and we were all doing that stuff. He didn't even like material culture much. But he had Warren Roberts there and he had to acknowledge that it was possible.

We all were just doing things that just appalled him, I think, including somebody he thought would be his star student but who failed him terribly: Bill Ivey. Going to this dinky little museum center in Nashville and abandoning his degree. Dorson later came to regret that and apologized and took bows for having raised people like Bill smart enough to do that sort of thing. A great number of us, as you can tell from the list, became academic folklorists, including the ones who are now rejecting the very term.

BB: When you first came out of Indiana what did you do?

RG: I always had a job as a folklorist. I was hired as a folklorist. My very first job was at the University of Arkansas and that's where of course I met Vance Randolph and did all the work to make *Pissing in the Snow and Other Ozark Tales* available. And then I was hired at University of Massachusetts immediately thereafter and had a job as a folklorist. I taught folklore full-time, 100%. I was very lucky, I lead a very lucky life.

And then I engaged in what caused me first to abandon it in 1976—not abandoning folklore exactly but abandoning academia. I became so restless with the strictures of the academic life, I had to go put

things into practice. I just couldn't do it. It was the story of a long twenty years of love/hate with academia. I went to AAAS [the American Association for the Advancement of Science] from there and ran the Project on Native Americans in Science.

More and more my commitments and interests to the Native side of my life had gelled in some ways. I was able to take all my old interests in medicine and in biology and in agriculture and in ways of thinking, scientific ways of thinking, and turn them into something in the public sector. I kept doing the parts that some people would call folklore through my interests in native science, native plants, agriculture, native medicine, all of those things. So, I had to get around to practice that way and felt really good about that.

Then I went back up to Dartmouth and taught in Native Studies and in the medical school there—cross-cultural medicine. I was able to, through Native Studies, weasel in a lot of the practice in that academic setting. But once again felt too constrained with academia. I just couldn't do all the things I wanted. I'm a dabbler. I have the shortest attention span in the history of humankind. I am interested in way too many different things, and I quickly lose interest in something. Once I've done a piece of something, I want to move on to other things. Academia just doesn't want you to and won't let you do that. So, I had to move on.

All those years I'd been doing more and more museum stuff, and they asked me to come down to the Smithsonian and initiate this project here at American History. Bringing, as Roger Kennedy [former director of the National Museum of American History] used to say, bringing Indians back into American History. I seized the moment. Having, of course, all these years worked with the Smithsonian, with Folklife Programs—I was on the advisory board of the folklife festival, particularly the Native American group (it was called NAAG, the Native American Advisory Group, can you imagine?) from '68, since I was a first year graduate student.

So, I guess all those years things kept biting at me and the Smithsonian kept biting at me, even when I was an academic. So, I have a really checkered career, but I've been here since '84. So, actually I've been here the longest I've been anywhere.

BB: How did you get back to the Native American culture?

RG: I'd never been any place that encouraged me to have an academic or intellectual interest in that stuff. I just grew up with the culture in Oklahoma. That was pretty much it. And then the political interests I

had. Even at Indiana, there were several people who encouraged me to do it. And I began to read and do more. And then my dissertation ended up being a subject that I did here at the Smithsonian, the research for which turns out to be my lifelong interest in representations: “The Image of the Indian in American Culture.” And I’ve written extensively about that and worked on issues related to that for years.

That gelled the intellectual interests, and the minute that happened, of course, I began to seek people out and meet more Indian people and try to put that piece of my life (which wasn’t as vivid and live to me then as my mother’s German Jewish immigrant Texas family was, ‘cause I lived more with them than with anybody else) all back together. As with all things, my intellectual interests and my political interests and my personal life gelled.

I began to be very interested in Native Women, at the time, in the early seventies and began to write about that as well. And with my political activism when I came here to Washington, in particular, I was able to make those cross-overs and really got engaged with all sorts of native communities and all kinds of people for whom I could serve the role that I clearly was supposed to serve—which was being the scribe for what was going on and what people were interested in.

**BB:** Well, talk a little bit about your present position.

**RG:** When I was asked to come here, of course, there was virtually nothing at the Smithsonian that was actively American Indian, in spite of the Smithsonian’s deep and profound history with American Indian content. It was all pretty much dead old anthropological scholarship that was moribund in several different ways. Nobody had been talking about the Museum of the American Indian, but a lot of people here knew my work from other places and from some work here with them and basically wanted me to come and do something that really would help redeem the Smithsonian’s history with American Indians. And do it with live Indians. So, that’s what I came to do. Natural History two years later did bring an American Indian program in to do the same thing. By then we were all—by ’86 (I came in ’84)—we were all talking about a whole range of serious issues.

More and more people came. We established the fellowship program and the internship program that started putting a face to that and doing training with American Indians from all over. People were talking about repatriation, people were talking about ancestral remains and all these hot ticket, hot button issues that became part of the museum

agenda in the mid eighties. So, a lot of those things congealed too, or converged while I was here.

Several years later, we were all talking about the possibility of the Museum of the American Indian. By '89, by '90, it's beginning to take shape, those discussions. So, it was just the right time to be here, and we were able to do all sorts of things in those early years. Also working with Folklife Programs to bring expressive culture here that was a little bit on the edge. It wasn't what even folklife had been doing for years. It was pushing the boundaries of Native performance and expressive culture.

Part of my job here was not just exhibition, of course. It was creating programs and training. That was part of the deal when I came here. There were other parts of the deal: that we would not be doing this without Native communities. That we would be doing things in partnerships. The whole notion of even doing exhibitions in partnership with the communities that were being represented was new, and we've continued to do that, I think.

Working through Folklife Programs, bringing things that simply were on the outer edge of what people had been doing before, not only the real traditional stuff, not your average powwow drum, bead worker. We were looking at working with communities that were a little bit different. And that really, I think, was important. In addition, bringing young Native people here from communities to start working with people.

That created as much change as anywhere. We've got a lot of people out in this country working with Native communities as cultural resource officers, people who came through here. That was part of what we said we were going to do from the beginning here in '84, part of the agenda that other people accepted and thought was the right thing to do. And that we've managed to integrate in as part of the ongoing program.

**BB:** Do you think other division of parts of the museum have really taken that standard and done more outreach to communities in cooperation with communities?

**RG:** Some individuals have. I do not think for a minute that the institution has at all. Of course that is the agenda for the Museum of the American Indian, but that's because we all invented that agenda in the early eighties and even before. There are conservators who do things differently because we've been doing them differently. There are people who've had the experience of doing it who've worked on some of the exhibitions and projects and programs, who wouldn't do anything any other way now and who understand that. But institutionally no, I don't.



Historians, by the way, don't. Historians have just discovered oral tradition, oral history, that people talk and they ought to talk to people. Really, I hate being snotty about that, but it would appear to be true. In general they are slow on the uptake there. And the curatorial world and the museum world in general is very slow to think that one ought to work with the represented communities. I think we're lucky in this museum (i.e., American History) in that way. I mean we have lots of people here who do, like Paula Johnson and other people who have always functioned in that way and who try to bring that model in. Howard Bass, my regular co-conspirator in many of these things. Increasingly a few others really do understand that model and almost all of them are sort of folklorists, interestingly enough, almost all of them.

BB: A lot of them worked on the festival.

RG: With and on. A lot of them are musicians. A lot of them have been doing their own work for years, you know, material culture in communities. I often find that the people who are thinking that way are congenitally unable to think another way. And they too have collectively helped really shift the way some individuals here think.

BB: What are a couple of projects that you are particularly proud of that you've conceived of and carried out here, while you were here at the Museum of American History?

RG: Well, I think one of the first ones really was the eighteenth century show, the exhibit "After the Revolution." We worked with various Iroquois communities, primarily Seneca, but also Mohawk and with the Grand Council of the Iroquois and whole ranges of other people, to do that and to give things a voice and to establish some ethical principles on which one should do exhibitions and show objects or not show objects. We need to look at ways in which communities get back things that they need and want, from collaborating with projects like this.

We carried that into the next big one which was "American Encounters," of which I'm particularly proud. First of all, just as an exhibition and then secondly, as a process. It's always been process that I think is important. And that process was collaborative from the first day until the last dog died. The relationships we established and the kinds of work we did go on to continuing relationships with those very people. The actual process did what we said we ought to do, which was deliver a whole lot back to people in those communities, from the choice of objects,

to the choice of words, to the presentational dynamics of the whole exhibition. So, I think that's the biggest piece of it.

I think the Heartbeat projects [Native American Women's music], with Smithsonian Folkways have been things of which I'm particularly proud. For several reasons; one because they did what I think I'm supposed to do in all these things—function as an educator. I really believe that's the bottom line, that's what we're all supposed to be doing. Don't ask me if everyone here accepts that as their primary mission. I don't think so. I am a good scholar. I'm not a good academic. But the bottom line is I'm an educator. All these projects I measure against what I think of their educational value, both for the Native community and for the non-Native community.

The Heartbeat projects fulfill at least my standard of putting stuff out there that nobody expects and hasn't thought about and hasn't seen before and needs to know about, needs to hear because it will change their minds. For me, that's a bottom line. I just don't want to do one more thing that confirms peoples' images and notions about Indians. I don't want to do stuff that is the same old, same old. That causes a big yawn out in the Native community. I want to do stuff that they want to see. But I also need to do stuff that pushes what I think most people think they know about Indians.

Inconsequently my measure is whether this thing is worth doing as an educator. Does anybody learn anything in this process, including me? I have to be on a learning curve all the time. If I'm just doing the same old stuff I did last year and the year before, I can't stand it. So, I've got to push that envelope as well.

The other piece of it is that somewhere this has a political outcome. I think that sometimes what I think of as political outcome might not look like a conventional political move here in Washington, what most people think of as politics. It's not about mainstream politics; I'm talking about the various institutions and levers through which we all engage in political behavior. The stuff that I do has to have some sort of kick there. It has to make people think differently about economics and demographics and power and right.

**BB:** Being a political activist from way back, have any of your views gotten you into trouble here?

**RB:** Here? Well, here, there, everywhere! Yeah, all the time. It's constant. I had a momentary illusion, for about ten years, that I was brought here to make trouble. I was brought here to make change. Times changed at

the Smithsonian and we had all these encounters here that have made everyone uncomfortable. We've had "The West as America," we've had the "Enola Gay" [exhibition]. We've had some rather strong battles here about repatriation and about the ethics of what we do in the museum business. And those things have eventually made the things that I came to do seem like trouble. Now they're serious trouble.

I've had a major chunk of a major exhibition censored, banned, dumped, exiled. I call it "the second Cherokee removal." It's a section on Cherokee pre- and post- removal in the nineteenth century show, "Communities in a Changing Nation." And that had been censored, rejected, it is not up.

Basically I'm at this moment in my life here virtually paralyzed. I mean that quite seriously. Yeah, I have more than a sense that we are unable to engage in any historic or present day truth-telling. Indian history is particularly a problem, which I think it's going to be for the Indian museum. And I worry very much about them becoming a glorified art museum, because they will be attacked and assaulted so we don't offend anybody.

**BB:** Does the pressure always come from without or does it often come from within?

**RG:** Well, I think one of the political insights I've had over the years has been that—and people probably learned this in the fifties during the blacklisting and all the anti-communist activities—is a simple truth that people begin, as a way of responding to assault and political oppression, by censoring themselves. That is exactly what I have seen begun to happen here. We're very careful now. I don't think my job here is to do nice, safe things. For example, I could continue to do, as we have always done, performance programs, but I've gotten so annoyed about that being what seems to be safe to do that I'm almost reluctant to do them.

I did a Cherokee program this last week and so we sneak rhetoric about the Trail of Tears and Jackson's policies and the theft of land into the program, as one would have to do if one took Cherokee expressive culture seriously. Especially if you're going to have people sing songs that come from the Trail of Tears. So, we managed to lever that content in. But I can't see doing those as a substitute for doing the exhibitions and doing the long-term, more permanent projects.

So, I'm doing things with everybody else. I'm doing exhibits with The Heard Museum, a very exciting exhibit on the Indian boarding schools and the Indian school experience. And I continue to write about

those things. I can do a book linking Indian history and Indian material culture into lots of good history in there and do lots of material culture that pushes the edges. And even pushes the political edges, like using a Cochiti storyteller doll, a little doll that they call a "bathing beauty" to talk about the effect of dams on Indian life and lands.

So, I've had to become sneakier and try to figure out how to do the work I'm supposed to do, to take it elsewhere or external to the exhibition experience here or to sneak various pieces into my written work or my films or the recordings and try do those things in another ways. I've got to find ways to divert all of this extra energy and passion that I have for those things into something that works out there. I can't sit around and wait for the Smithsonian to decide to let me tell the truth in an exhibit.

BB: Do you see things changing in the future at all?

RG: We need a dose of courage around here at the Smithsonian. Will they suddenly develop one? I don't know. Will people stop looking to the Christian Right or the Republican Congress to tell us what we should be doing? I wish I thought that that would change abruptly, but I don't. There are no signs of it, so we'll see. I can be patient.

One of the reasons I've always liked working with big rich elitist institutions like Dartmouth College and the Smithsonian is that we've had the resources to get a lot of bang for our buck. We get six million visitors. A little article doesn't get it now for me. I can't use the power and influence of those big, rich, important institutions to get out there to a lot of people and get their attention, and that's a little bothersome. I really don't want to go back to the book that nobody sees. I want some bang for this. I want to see some change for what I'm spending my time on. And that's always worth it, always worth it. I think those are the big stakes for everything that we do, and I'm very reluctant to give those up.

BB: Do you think we can get away with more in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival setting because it's more transient? It's not going to be something that's going to be up here forever.

RG: Yeah, and because it's surrounded by all this singing and dancing. It has a more benign setting, but it's not in a museum and it's not the history museum and it's not Air and Space and it's not in the face of whichever Congressman from whichever state who suddenly takes exception. Ten years later you can't go read a label that will offend someone.

I got a little card from somebody just recently. One of those visitor forms that they fill out down stairs saying, "Wow, been through

American Encounters. I had no idea that these things had happened and what an interesting way to tell the story.” We get those cards as well from our visitors. Actually we’ve never gotten the same kinds of feedback we’ve gotten from our visitors that we get from Capitol Hill. So, something we were doing was working as far as our visitors were concerned. That’s what I want to keep doing more of. I’m figuring out how to do that. Do I call any of this “folklore”? I don’t know.

- BB:** I was going to ask, sort of in a bigger picture, you’ve been involved in advocacy from various points of view—what kind of marks are folklorists getting in the whole, in political advocacy? Should we be doing more? Could we be doing more?
- RG:** You rarely see the folklorist connecting the community-based work that they do with poor people, with poverty and/or with issues of race or in the larger issue. We do it in those communities and maybe that’s always the best way to do it; in the smaller ways in which those issues and the conflicts around those issues get played out. I’m trying to ask myself if a lot of those of us who work in foodways do much with hunger. Probably no, but we do do a lot with things like the restoration of traditional forms of agriculture and sustainable agriculture and the restoration of traditional food based or food production occupations. And they’ve been really active and really engaged with all those people who are doing food cooperatives and chefs cooperatives and raising traditional crops again, which are deeply connected to land use and environmental disaster.
- BB:** Right. Another example might be people that are working with communities to get supplies they need.
- RG:** Like the basket makers. Oh, yeah absolutely: working with communities to look at environmental and ecological disaster to restore and prop up their traditional practices. And also in that particular instance—with the California basket makers, the Nevada ones and Washington and Oregon—really working very hard on issues of health and health care in those communities. The very thing that has devastated the basket making materials has is also devastating to humans when they use them.
- BB:** If you could do anything in the future, what would you do? What’s your vision of the future of your work in an ideal setting?
- RG:** When you can do an exhibit like American Encounters and work with those communities and have it last and tell a great story with voices

that are alive—there is just nothing better. That's why the museum business is so wonderful, because you can make people use all of those senses and it can engage everything. I want to be able to make those films about important issues. I'm very involved, for example, in the whole movement to restore traditional agriculture and traditional agricultural methods and traditional land use all over the country. Of late I've been incredibly interested in American wine and wine making and the revolution in American wine making, which involves sustainable agriculture and involves very different land use. I should say that I love to do all these things, because the aesthetics of doing this work is also terribly important. I think that's the part of me that also continues to be a folklorist. The aesthetics of that culture and history and the expression of it drives my little train as much as the politics of it. We have to take it digital, and take it electronic, and make it into film. That means being able to get to lots of people.

Part of my discomfort as an academic was that I kept thinking that the emphasis was on me making it happen. Just my little mind and me and my little article and my little book and this little that. But you really have to de-invest in that little self-centered view of your own power and authority. Here I really see my job as making other people make it happen. When it's you and your book, you're in control, nobody else. You don't have to watch a community fall on it's face and you don't have to watch your students fall on their face or anything else, and maybe that's the difference. It's very comforting to be in control of things, but you have to give it up. If you're going to do this kind of work, you have to give it up. You have to somehow put it out there and hope that other people will take it up and run with it.

But that's the best work we do, which is why all of our work has to be applied and all of our work has to be about practice 'cause when you work with human beings you're in this obligation here to care about them and care what happens to them and care what their lives are like. I don't think we have any choice. And there are plenty of people who do work that's not about human beings, it's about ideas and concepts. I think they've forgotten that those came out of human experience. But that to the extent that applied folklorists or public folklorists get to work regularly with other human beings and produce wonderful things, it's the best stuff you can do. It has truth and reality, some of which isn't very pretty. I wish we told more of the other parts. I wish we weren't so afraid of talking about the other pieces of the lives of our banjo pickin' friends. I think that's when we do our best stuff, when we're able to put it all out there. Everything that comes with it.