RECENT RESEARCH

The following article is a brief version of a collection and report completed by Catherine Klutz for C.W. Sullivan III's class in American folklore. The entire collection is the property of Catherine Klutz and the East Carolina University Folklore Archives and may not be used without permission.

Friendship Bracelets

Bracelets have been made by children throughout time, not only as part of a fad or for looks, but to be given as a symbol of friendship. Although there seems to have been little research done on friendship bracelets, I found, through interviews, a variety of friendship bracelets dating back to approximately 1973, and I found other items made to show friendship, such as bubble gum wrapper chains, dating back even furter.

Thy gymnasts of the Greenville Gymnastics Club were my major source of information. Because I coach these children and have become their friend, they were eager to tell me about their newest bracelets and even eager to make some for me. Also, some of the sisters of Delta Zeta Sorority provided me with information about the bracelets they made in grade school. This gave me a historical perspective on friendship bracelets. Through these interviews, I set out to find: (1) Why kids make friendship bracelets, (2) Who taught them to make the bracelets, (3) Whom they have taught, (4) How the bracelets are made, and (5) What does it mean to give one away (if they are given away)?

The response that best described the general attitude toward wearing friendship bracelets was: "I like the way they look, so I wanted one on my arm . . . . I think they're neat!" Some simply stated, "They are COOL!" Thus, the bracelets are a fad and a fashion statement.

When it came to the reasons why the children gave them away, the responses became a little more sentimental—at least in some cases. Eleven-year-old Jennifer Shaw said, "I send or give them to friends as a 'remember me' type thing." Dana Bailey, a college student, said, "When I was in the fifth and sixth grades, I would wear a bunch of them, around my wrist. You know how kids take everything to the extreme. I wore ten of them. When a friend asked for one of them, I would give her one with the color beads on it to match the intensity of our friendship. But if someone I didn't like asked me for one, I would say, 'They are all taken'."

Many of my gymnasts do the same today. There were many who said, "I make them because people ask me to make them for them. When I give them, though, I don't say, 'Here is a friendship bracelet for you.' I just say, 'Here'." The best respose I got was from a child who could make a macrame type friendship bracelet that most kids have not learned to make. She said, "I give them to friends to get the latest gossip around school."

When asked from whom they had learned the skill and whom they had taught to make these bracelets, the answers were divided by generation. The gymnasts usually answered that they had been taught by a friend of the same age or by a camp counselor. The college students had usually been taught by a younger sibling or a younger friend. While the college students just watched someone else make the bracelet and then went home able to make one themselves, the grade schoolers found that they had to have "hands on" experience with a friend guiding them through the process before they could attempt the skill alone at home. This may be due to the fact that friendship bracelets are more complex today, having gone from a band of leather that one ties around his wrist to a series of intricate knots made from cross stitch thread to form a variety of patterns.

The item that I found which dated the furthest back was not a bracelet, but something which served the same function. This was the bubble gum wrapper chain made by two people to show a bond of friendship. These chains, which date back to the 1950s or 1960s, were not worn as friendship bracelets are today.

The friendship bracelets of the middle 1970s were made of colored telephone wire. The wire was folded in half, leaving one side much longer than the other. The longer side would then be coiled around the shorter to create a coiled spring effect. These were worn by the maker or given to a friend, but many times they were made as group projects at school and then taken home to Mom or Dad as a gift.

The next friendship bracelet was made of safety pins or fishing lures. These were hooked together, end to end, and beads were placed on them. The different colors of the beads had significance. The blue meant "true blue frinendship." This was usually given to a best friend. Pink was also positive, but none of my informants could recall its exact meaning. Black meant "something bad was going to happen to you; though, of course, nothing bad ever did. If we didn't like someone, we would leave a black bead on their desk. We were nasty little kids," said Dana Bailey. A person generally wore several bracelets at one time and gave one to whatever friend asked; if someone the person did not like asked for one, he or she was told that they were all taken. These bracelets could also be used to show school spirit by using beads of the school's colors.

In the late 1970s, macrame bracelets became part of the friendship bracelet fad. They could be made with or without beads. Lisa Webber said that many people in her school made macrame friendship bracelets, but that her clique of friends made ones with an exclusive pattern which they would not share with anyone outside the clique.

Also in the 1970s a type of friendship bracelet that is still seen on the arms of many college students became popular. This one was made of leather and was tied onto a friend's arm with a square knot. In some cases, one could have each friend tie a knot in the bracelet and then have a best friend tie it onto the arm. Although this type of bracelet was typically learned at Girl Scout Camp, it is seen today on the wrists of male college students.

Today's friendship bracelets seem much more complex than those early ones, and they take much more time to make. Some of the more complex bracelets take approximately a week to make, and only a few people have been able to learn the craft. While the basic knotted one is not too complex for the average person to make, it is time consuming. The time it takes depends upon the number of strings used and the width and length of the completed bracelet. If only a little is added to the basic pattern, a great variety of bracelets can be made. The basic pattern looks like diagonal, parallel lines. Diagonals can be put together to make an arrow pattern, a diamond pattern or even a zig-zag pattern. The better and more complex the pattern, the more attention the bracelet gets.

There is also a type of friendship bracelet called a rope bracelet because it is round rather than flat like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraphs. These take much less time, a maximum of an hour, and are much less complicated to make. Macrame bracelets are also popular today and continue to be the root and basic pattern for all other forms of bracelets. The easiest type of bracelet to make is the braided type. With these, one uses thicker strands, or rope bracelets that one has already made, and braids them together just as one would braid hair.

The materials for all of the fabric bracelets can usually be purchased from the closest sewing and fabric store. The material

continued on page five

used in usually called embroidery, cross stitch, or floss thread. As with all of the materials used to make all of the friendship bracelets through time, these materials are very inexpensive to purchase and come in a variety of colors.

I concentrated this research on those friendship bracelets made by children from grade two to grade nine, but the bracelets now in fashion are worn by people age six through forty and are made by people in the same age groups. The tradition of wearing and giving friendship bracelets will certainly continue among children for generations to come. Making the bracelets will be an activity to keep children from boredom in a dull class, on a rainy day when they cannot head out to play, or on those dreaded days when they are kept at home as punishment. The bracelets will vary in materials used, in design, and in the shape of the finished product; but they will all serve the same purpose. These bracelets will be something inexpensive to make for friends and to be worn as a fashion statement.

— Catherine Klutz

International Playground Association

For those of you who weren't at the last Children's Folklore Section, IPA stands for the International Playground Association who now calls itself the International Association for the Child's Right to Play. It is an advocacy organization devoted to the safety of playground activity and design. For the folklorist, the work of the IPA can be of interest to those of us interested in the material culture of children as well as the creation of environments for children's traditions.

At the last Children's Folklore Section meeting, I described the work of the IPA and was then asked to report on the activities of the organization. Here is what the December newsletter was about.

The December issue was dedicated to the IPA/USA meeting that took place in Cincinnati in January of 1989, a short article on adventure playgrounds, announcements of meetings and call for papers, and summary of resolutions passed at the IPA conference in 1986 and in November of 1988.

1. **The Resolutions** passed at the above meetings are all associated with the creation of standards for safe and well monitored playgrounds. These resolutions call for the use of equipment endorsed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and for playgrounds designed with children's desires and needs in mind. The resolutions also call for trained play leaders and a closer relationship with the American Association for Leisure and Recreation (AALR)

2. **Debra A. Johnson's paper on Adventure Playgrounds** was published in this newsletter. "Adventure Playgrounds in After School Programs" surveys the history of adventure playgrounds from their beginning in Scandinavia in 1943 to their presence in the United States today. An adventure playground is based on the observation that children like to play with scrap materials on construction sites. The adventure playground is an outdoor environment in which these scraps are "transplanted" so that children can play in a safe place. They are also monitored by play leaders who are trained to advise without usurping the child's creative energies and abilities.

3. **Announcements**

   a) **Meeting:** Association of Childhood Education International, 5-8 April 1989, Indianapolis, Hyatt Regency hotel. Contact: Jerry Odland, Association for Childhood Education International 11141 Georgia Avenue, Suite 200, Wheaton, MD. 20902 (1-800-423-3563)

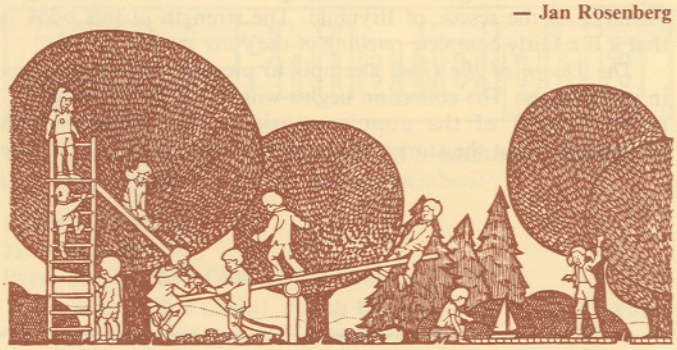
   b) **Call for Papers:** for a special issue of *Environments Quarterly* on "The Design of Community and Family Environments for Children with Disabilities." Contact Elaine Ostroff, Adaptive Environments Center, 621 Huntington Avenue, Boston 02115, or call (617) 739-0088

   c) **News from the Consumer Product Safety Commission:** on a suit settled between the Miracle Recreation Equipment Company and people affected by the dangerous design of certain equipment.

   d) **PLAE, Inc. has launched " The Playful City"** — "a national effort to create guidelines for the development of urban communities to support the needs of children, youth and their families. The program is funded by the National Endowments for the Arts." The guidelines are to be developed at a workshop-conference to be held at Stanford University in the Fall of 1989. For more information, contact PLAE, Inc., 1824 Fourth Street, Berkeley, CA. 94710, or call 415-345-7523

Anyone interested in joining IPA may contact: Helen Stapel, 36 Deerfield Lane, Simsbury, CT. 06070, 1-800-553-2446.

— Jan Rosenberg



CFS Members' Publications

Simon Bronner. *American Children's Folklore.* Little Rock, AR: August House, 1988. A survey/study of contemporary children's folklore. Also available in an annotated edition. Contains a picture of five-year-old Simon Bronner.

Bengt af Klintberg. "Black Madame, Come Out!" *Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore* 1988 (44): 155-167. A study of the spiritual; seance in which the Black Madame is called out of a mirror.

C.W. Sullivan III. *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy.* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1989. A study of several authors' use of Welsh Celtic myths and legends in literature.