

Listening to Old Voices: Folklore, Life Stories, and the Elderly. By Patrick B. Mullen. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Pp. xii, 292. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.95.)

Like many oral historians and folklorists, Patrick B. Mullen is drawn to "tradition-bearing" elderly folk who enjoy nothing better than sitting on front porches and spinning tales as soon as the "record" button on a tape recorder is depressed. For Mullen, the experience is both rewarding and personal: "Ideologically, I am an advocate for the elderly, for their right to be respected, to be heard" (p. 8). *Listening to Old Voices* is a collection of what Mullen calls life reviews—very simply, old people telling personal experience stories—of nine aged people from Ohio and the Blue Ridge. Life reviews are no mere escapist desires for days gone by, however; Mullen believes they are a major part of aging well and dying well. But as oral historians examine the historical content of narratives, Mullen analyzes the folkloric content. His aim is to interpret the way folk traditions are called upon when an elderly person tells his or her life review.

Mullen has carefully chosen his narrators to reveal the diversity of folk traditions. Mollie Ford is a devoutly religious woman who preaches her values to the young; Bob Glasgow uses the material culture associated with a family I-house to explain his past; Alva Snell draws upon the occupational folklore of Lake Erie fishermen for his identity; and Quincy Higgins is a trickster who loves to entertain his listener. Although the people are different, they all function as teachers, preachers, or sages passing on their knowledge, interpretation, and values to a new people in a new age. Herein reveals a problem with the book. Reading the narratives is a wonderful experience, but the reader is teased with snippets from each interview (those wanting to hear the entire interview are not given its location). Mullen's methodological base is life review, but the reader does not get enough of each person's review. Others may also find his choppy way of quoting scholars intrusive. These are ironic objections: oral history has obviously come far since the days it was condemned for too little analysis.

Nevertheless, Mullen is an honest scholar never hesitant to admit ignorance or that tape ran out during a particularly revealing description. Quibbles aside, *Listening to Old Voices* demonstrates the extraordinary richness of oral history fieldwork and synthesizes literature from history, folklore, anthropology, and psychology. It will be valuable to scholars from these disciplines and may also lure into the field those reluctant to study people.

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