From the Editor

Summer time and the living is easy, so they say. I don't know about the easy part, but I do know that summer is a great time for seeing old and new friends, visiting old and new places, and singing old and new songs.

This edition of the bulletin is sort of like summer: you'll find some old and new friends lurking between the covers (Oops! Not as suggestive as it sounds; sorry), some old and new places visited, and some old and new songs to sing.

Remember that the strength of this Bulletin is really due to you, the reader. So keep sending your reviews to John Leeder, your songs to Michael Pollock and Maureen Chafe, and your ideas for articles, interviews, etc. to me, your kindly ink-stained editor.

As can be seen from the cover picture, your editor spends a lot of time going around in circles. Sometimes even productively.

Have a few song circles for me...

Wherein Elinor Benjamin talks with Anita Best and we get to listen

Though I had never met Anita Best, she responded most graciously to my request to an interview. I had obtained her address from mutual friend, and storyteller, Katherine Grier. Katherine and Anita collaborated on evenings of storytelling and ballads at Cape Spear Lighthouse several summers ago. We planned to meet in St. John's in early July, but I was surprised one evening in June to receive a call saying she was in Corner Brook for several weeks working with the Anglican Diocese archives. We spent three pleasant evenings together - one of them in my attic studio/guestroom, and other two over good food and drink, first at our house, and then at Dino's pizzeria which overlooks the beautiful Bay of Islands. By one of those grand coincidences, Anita was pleased to discover that Dino's was run by the same charming Bulgarian couple who had run a restaurant she had frequented for lunch in St. John's a few years ago.

Anita was born on Merasheen Island in Placentia Bay in 1948, almost a year before Newfoundland joined the Canadian Confederation, making her a member of the last generation of native Newfoundlanders. She remembers leaving this outport community just prior to its being resettled. As a former teacher, she had much to say about the denominational school system and its shortcomings. We spoke, too, of the cultural dislocation and loss of community that resulted from resettlement.

Anita's respect for Pamela and the pride in Amber Music's accomplishment animated our conversation.

We also talked of Anita's work as an archivist and the vast realms of hidden stories that lie...
wonderful talk, I could choose only a little. I
Little Ball of Yarns.
Mr. Power's Harbour and Southeast Bight, and her CBC
archives awaiting discovery
decided to focus on Anita's remembrances of her
one of the most delightful
used to tell fairy tales, marchen:
Jack meets the
story singer
because I
Mr. Power was alive, and after that Pius [his son, and
Pius has died as well, and none of Pius's sisters
and so forth. I love
Cat, Jack and the Giants
imitation of his talent. Also it would never be
until then?
or even the community. I am telling them now
"correct" to tell his stories if he were in the room
singer and a listener and a singer of stories.
nobody else to do those stories. I grew up being
when she was young, but I really liked the kind of
people in the kitchen, or in the living room at the
time he was telling the story.

Kate [Best's daughter] used to like him to
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.trimming off their feet with their pocket knives.
the prince was coming around with the slipper to
see whom it would fit, and the sisters were
trimming off their feet with their pocket knives.
That was another thing I loved about him. He
always Newfoundlanded everything, so Jack had
longer, robbers, like Leboum. Does. Things took place
always Canada, and the King of England
came down to the gate to meet you, and stuff like
that. It was really great. The prince was coming
around with the glass slipper, and Cinderella saw
herself, she didn't really like the look of him
much that, so she went into the pantry and she
hid. She looked out, and he was talking to the
sisters; they were trying the shoe on, and it didn't
fit, so he asked, "Is there anybody else?" and they
said, "No," because they didn't want her to fit the
shoe. She said to herself, "I don't really think he
looks as good as he did the other night at the ball,
I think I'll just pretend that the shoe doesn't fit."
That is how the story ended. She stayed at home
with her parents and didn't marry the prince. He
gone. Presumably he's still looking for someone
to fit the shoe. She decided against choosing the
prince in the end, but it was her decision.

I found that fascinating. You'd never call
Mr. Power a feminist, not by any kind
philosophical choice. He wouldn't call him himself
a feminist. His wife got tea for him. When he was
on the boat, he got tea for himself. He was regular
Newfoundland man.

EB: You are a former teacher, a collector,
singer of ballads, a storyteller, a folklorist, an archivist and a source of all kinds of
amazing love, as well as a broadcaster and creator of the CBC program Little Ball of Yarns. Mr. Power's
storytelling was the subject of Anita's folklore research at Memorial University of Newfoundland
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connection.
Two wonderful talks, I could choose only a little. I could choose only a little. I Figure 1: The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne

The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne
Mr. Power could read, but he didn't read very much. He could easily read, but he'd rather do something else. He'd rather talk. We'd rather talk. I think knitting belongs to storytellers.

EB: It does make you talk!

AB: Because you're telling the story, you have a pattern going, different colours all woven together.

EB: I've heard of Jack meets the Cat, but have never heard it told, yet, or seen it performed as theatre.

AB: That was one of Mr. Power's stories but it got changed so it was really quite different. Mr. Power was really a good marriage teller. His stories are not full of estraneous drama at all; they're straightforward fairy tales, just like the Grimm's.

EB: Then this was the real article, the manuscripts? They're still telling the stories because the Grimm's could have encountered when they were doing their collecting, told to adults, with children listening eagerly at the edge as they always did.

AB: I don't know if you've really any Bengt Holbek but he became sort of my unofficial mentor. I never get him; he died before I was studying.

EB: He wrote a book called Interpretation of fairy tales.

AB: If there was ever an academic who liked the folk tales, another one called Peg Bearskin. Peg Bearskin is the ugly daughter that's born to the world. They're beautiful; they don't want her to come and she wants to come. She chances them and they throw rocks at her and she sneaks after them. They get into the woods and they're really frightened. She rescues them from their fear and they're happy to go and bring their house and escape somehow with three magical gifts. Because of these three magical gifts, she gets the power to wish that she would marry her two sister. One of the things is a horse that gallops so swiftly that he outstrips the wind, and there's one that sheds a hundred square miles of light. Great gifts!

EB: That's a new one to me.

AB: She wants them to marry her son to marry her, and the younger son is not that keen. It's a Gawain and the Green Knight sort of story. He does marry her because his father (wants the magic gifts.) After they've been living together for awhile, she gets him to throw her into the fire and then she emerges as a beautiful girl.

EB: Of course!

AB: Johnson and the Fellow Traveller is the ghost, the dead body, that Johnson pays for the burial of early in the story; the dead body is the guy who helps him out all through the rest of the story, but you don't know that until the end.

EB: And you wouldn't want to know it, would you? Even you knew it, you wouldn't want to know it, would you?

AB: When I married in 1977, and went back to The Bay [the Newfoundland town for] any place beyond the outskirts of St John's to live, it was a place not very far from Newfoundland. They were just beginning to get electricity in place beyond the outskirts of St John's to live.

EB: Anita also described the way of life in Placentia Bay when she was listening to, and collecting, Mr. Power's stories.

AB: When I married in 1977, and went back to The Bay [the Newfoundland town for] any place beyond the outskirts of St John's to live, it was a place not very far from Newfoundland. They were just beginning to get electricity in Placentia Bay, maybe even in Newfoundland or Southeast. Mr. Power and Pies had a schooner, the last working schooner in Placentia Bay, maybe even in Newfoundland or Southeast. He worked and lived on it. He worked on the schooner when I was pregnant with Kata, and when she was a small baby, until she got up and started moving about [and I had visions of her] plunging overboard in April.

When you live your life, if you're fishing in a schooner, you think about time in different ways. For instance, you don't have a clock because the wind might not be fair for you to get from A to B at 3:00 pm. When you're living on the water the time is made for you when the water's high and when the water's low. There are things that you can do when the water's high that you can't do when it's low, and there are things that you must do when the wind changes, and things like that, so you really pay attention a lot to the rising and falling of the tide, and really pay attention to the direction the wind is blowing, and the actual weather conditions. In modern urban life, we just don't pay any attention to that at all. There is a different sense of time.

Your whole concept of time becomes very relaxed. Ways of spending your time are different. When you're on the boat with no electricity, you don't run to the TV. You'd converse and conversing leads into telling stories, and into Mrs.类型 of stories, then longer stories, and then if you're lucky, you'd get one of those really longer fairy tales. Or you'd get one of the big long ballads being sung.

EB: This talk of time reminds me something that was said at a storytelling conference I went to several weeks ago at the University of Cape Breton. The speaker was Winnie Van Deuren, who had spent quite a bit of time with the Tuna people in Siberia, learning about their stories, and publishing a book of their stories. Once, when she asked someone to tell her a story, he replied, "Do you have 10 days," because that's how long a story can go on, with breaks here and there for refreshment course!

A further meditation on the topic of time started me to think of Little Ball of Yarns, the program that was created by Anita and broadcast early Sunday mornings on CBC Radio. Among the many definitions contained in the Dictionary of Newfoundland English for a time, this most flexible of Newfoundland words, is the following example of usage:

"In the smaller places during the fall and winter months almost every night there is some kind of a time on, as any social function is called. It might be a dance or a concert, or a church supper or so on; whatever it is, it's called a time."

EB: For me Little Ball of Yarns captured something of the mood of a kitchen party or a time on the radio. How would you describe it?

AB: It was a Newfoundland folklore hour. I didn't use the word folklore, but that's what I wanted to get across. I started out theologically.

One interesting thing about that show were the comments that I had from really younger people in their early 20's. How many letters did I receive about that show? Evenyou knew it, you wouldn't want to know about the fact that we know this part of their culture? They didn't get it in school. It makes me angry.

EB: I think our listeners might like to hear a few stories about how we went about collecting the stories that you used in Little Ball of Yarns - the stories of the stories.

AB: Myself and Kenny Goldenst [another MUN folklorist] went up the South Shore one time looking for songs, and we got it from Margaret Hyde in Bay Bulls. Somebody had told us that she could sing. We walked in the door and she was so frail, small, and short. She was sitting in a rocking chair very quiet. Her daughter was sitting at her, so we thought she was partially deaf. Her daughter introduced us, I said, "Mrs. Hyde, we were wondering if you knew any of the old songs." We didn't even have time to turn on the recorder. She started singing those really old songs and she got right into the whole thing. She told that great story; it's a cante-fable, Little Dickie Milburn - only she called it Dickie Melvin, which is interesting because Melvin is a name up there. These are Malvina from Lanesboro. Instead of going to the end of the world to get the bottle of Sweet Absalom, Dickie Melvin was going to town, and the universal Newfoundland name for St John's. She had this huge voice, this huge blasting voice, and it was really surprising for such a tiny woman.

Time spent in the presence of such a dynamic and sophisticated human being like Anita Best passes all too quickly, and soon it seemed as though the tide was high and the wind fair, and each of us had got on about the things that had to be done. I am looking forward to the next time. Maybe I will finally get to hear Jack meets the Cat, or the long version of Peg Bearskin or who knows?

Notes:

1. Resettlement was the official Newfoundland government policy to get people to relocate from their outport communities to larger settlements where they were promised a brighter future in the industrialized Newfoundland that would unfold. When this did not materialize, it lead to bitterness and resentment against Joey Smallwood which continues to this day. As Anita put it, "Joey will never make it to heaven for what
All: Mr. Power could read, but he didn't read very much. He could easily read, but he'd rather do something else. He'd rather talk. We'd rather knit. I think knitting belongs to storytellers.

EB: It makes you talk?

AB: Yes, because they're telling the story, you have a pattern going, different colours all woven together. If you drop a stitch, you have to go back and fix it before you go on to the next.

One of [Mr. Power's] stories, Jack meets the Cat, got taken and changed completely by Shirley's Brat [a St. John's folklorist].

EB: I've heard of Jack meets the Cat, but I've never heard it told, or seen it performed as theatre.

AB: That was one of Mr. Power's stories but it got changed so it was really quite different. Mr. Power was a really classic marchen teller. [His stories] are not full of estrange drama at all; they're straightforward fairy tales, just like the Grimm's.

AB: This was the real article, the microphone where you're really much like the Grimm's had we encountered when they were doing their collecting, told to adults with children listening eagerly at the edge as they always did.

AB: I don't know if you've really any of Bengt Holbeck but he became sort of my unofficial mentor. I never met him; he died while I was studying. He wrote a book called Interpretation of fairy Tales. If there was ever an academic who liked the way I did things, it was actually; one was a Swiss guy, Max Lutti ...

EB: Yes, I familiar with Max Lutti's work, but not Bengt Holbeck.

AB: As far as I'm concerned, those people had more to say about fairy tales (than other academics.) They spoke about the marchen; that was what they were interested in; that's what they meant by fairy tales, and that's what I'm interested in. They understood all the roles - the whole folklore thing. Mr. Power had about 14 different ones that I have heard during the time that I knew him.

EB: Are these all Jack tales or a mixture of things?

AB: A mixture. There was one called Pretty Raven, another one called Johnson and the Fellow Traveller. I hoping to have those under my belt before long.

EB: I am hoping so too because I want to hear them.

The two I have really have now are Jack Meets the Cat and Peg Bearskin. Peg Bearskin's fabulous.

EB: Would you mind telling me Peg Bearskin?

AB: Peg Bearskin. I'll tell you the summary. Peg Bearskin is the ugly daughter that's born after the beautiful daughters. She's big and ugly and hairy. The girls go off to seek their fortunes in the world. They're beautiful; they don't want her to come and she wants to come. They chase them and they throw rocks at her and she speaks after them. They get into the woods and they're really frightened. She rescues them from their fear and begins going up to a witch's house and escaping somehow with three magical gifts. Because of these three magical gifts, she gets the jinn who will agree to marry her two sister. One of the things is a horse that gallops so swiftly that he outstrips the wind, and there's a decorum that never runs dry and a lantern that sheds a hundred square miles of light. Great gifts! That's a new one too ...

EB: Of course!

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EB: And you wouldn't want to know it, would you? Even you knew it, you wouldn't want to know it officially until the end.

Asta also described the way of life in Placentia Bay at the time she was listening to, and collecting, Mr. Power's stories.

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EB: Anita for me the Little Ball of Yarn, she captured something of the mood of a kitchen party or a time on the radio. How would you describe it?

AB: It was a Newfoundland folklore hour. I didn't use the world folklore, but that's what I wanted to get across. I started out thematically. There was one that was pirate songs and stories and so on. Another was ghosts. I tried to suit them to the time of the year; that the ghost songs were around. All Souls and Hallowe'en, and I always tried to have calendar customs that related to whatever time the show was going to be on the air. We had nine Christmas shows [and] the July Drive Remembrance Day. The soldiers' remembrances were always great stories. There were a lot of letters.

One interesting thing about that were shows that I had that few really young people in their early 20s. How many letters did I receive? How many people that I knew that knew this part of their culture? They didn't get it in school. It makes me angry.

EB: I think storytellers might like to hear a few stories about how you went about collecting the stories that you used on Little Ball of Yarns - the stories of the stories.

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he did, he wasn’t bad enough to go to Hell, because
he really believed in what he was doing.”
2. Amber Music has a home page (http://www.ambermusic.nfnet.com) where you can
meet Anita Best and Pamela Morgan and the
other people who have contributed so much to the
preservation and advancement of Newfoundland
traditional music and traditions. Or you can
contact them at:
Amber Music, P.O. Box 156, Topsail, NF A0A
3Y0
Phone: 709-834-1705; FAX: 709-834-5741
3. The home page of the Memorial
University’s Folklore Archive where Anita was
first inspired to take up further studies in archives
is at: http://www.mun.ca/cgi-bin/mfs/03/folklore/munfla.html
Another collection rich in Newfoundland
culture is MUN’s Centre for Newfoundland
Studies:
http://www.mun.ca/library/cns/archl.htm
4. "Come and I will sing you; a
Newfoundland Songbook edited by Genevieve
Lehr. Songs collected by Genevieve Lehr and
0-8020-2567-6 cloth; 0-8020-6586-4 pbk.
5. Interpretation of fairy tales; Danish
folklore in a European perspective
by Bengt
Holbek. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia,
6. Shyaan Am! Tuvan folktales,
selected
and edited by Kira Van Deusen. [Bellingham, Wa:
Udagan Books, 1986] 0-9647716-0-8 Address is:
Udagan Books, P.O. Box 29374, Bellingham, Wa
98228] $9.95.