

Fieldwork Discussion Group

This piece comes out of online discussions between three of Bev's students (Anna Hoefnagels, Sherry Johnson, and Judith Klassen) around the ideas and lessons that she gave us on doing ethnomusicology. In our exchanges it became very evident that each of us admired Bev as a scholar, mentor, and friend. Indeed, as with any student-mentor relationship, our individual relationships with Bev grew over the years (and continue to do so), and it is impossible for us to separate Bev the teacher from Bev the mentor, role model, and advocate, as her pedagogy and personhood are implicitly linked. Bev's impact on us extends beyond her "lessons of ethnomusicology" to include lessons, or modeling, of excellent teaching, interpersonal skills and research methodologies. What follows is our attempt to communicate some of the wisdom Bev has shared with us about doing ethnomusicology, lessons that all students and ethnomusicologists can both learn from and value.

Anna: In terms of interviewing techniques, she modeled in her classes how to create space for "dialogue" and conversation instead of merely a Q & A session. She taught me to listen closely and to let others (students, peers, "informants") steer the discussion, that meaningful materials will come forth if the person is given chance to talk about what is important for him/her. One of the best pieces of advice Bev gave about interviewing is to include the question (at the end of the interview): "is there anything I haven't addressed that you think is important?" This again shows Bev's understanding of human interaction and empowering people and acknowledging that ultimately, people in the field know more about their music, culture and important issues than I did/do/ever will.

Judith: Yes, shifting the point of reference is something that Bev definitely encourages in her students. If I recall correctly, it was for her "Canadian Music" class at York University that I conducted my first interview. I had listened intently to, and thought unceasingly about, recordings of the musician with whom I had arranged to speak. My questions reflected this eagerness, laden with intricate detail and specificities. It was at this early juncture—not yet two months into my masters degree—that Bev shared with me the wisdom that she lives: "Use few words." She did not suggest that I was 'wrong' nor discourage my enthusiasm, but rather encouraged me to consider approaching the interview from another vantage point: "Let your informant guide the conversation if they wish"; and "I find it useful to close an interview by asking if there's anything we've missed or that they'd like to add..." In other words—ethnography is not about me. Nor is it about eliciting a desired response. It is about creating a safe place for interaction.

Sherry: In terms of my own interviewing technique, I have been most influenced by Bev's reminder to listen to what isn't being said. On the one hand, that means watching body language and listening to the pauses in the conversation. On the other, it means taking note of what topics are not broached or engaged, either studiously or casually, by my consultants. I still remember the visceral jolt I received upon reading the following question in Bev's work: "In what circumstances and by what means does gender (or class, region, language, etc.) emerge as an important issue" (2000: 107). I had already bumbled ahead, alerting many of my consultants to the fact that I was interested in gender relations in the fiddle circuit. By bringing to the forefront something that had long been dormant within the culture, I raised all sorts of emotions: anger, fear, antagonism, frustration. I asked about gender, and did I ever get gender! I wonder, though, what I might have found out had I let my consultants raise gender issues, or not, FIRST. Might the responses have been more subtle, less amplified (maybe even distorted) by emotion? Since reading this sentence, and the article in which Bev demonstrates it being put into action, I have tried to listen more, to both what is being said and not being said, and talk less.

On relationships and respect

Anna: Moving beyond the "lessons" of ethnographic research, something that Bev taught implicitly, which I think is incredibly critical in all communities that we study, is the importance of respect. Respect in interviews, in participating and/or observing at activities/events, in presenting our research in oral and written form, etc. Although this is obvious to most of us, it was palpable in Bev's way of dealing with *everyone* that respect is essential for an ethnomusicologist (and for people).

Judith: Bev's passion for just relationships is not only evidenced in intellectual rigor, but in the attention that she affords reciprocity in fieldwork. Her willingness to share personal experiences with students attests to this, as does her advocacy for working out situation-specific consent and reciprocity. Here is a valuing of relationships that is born of respect.

Anna: Related to respect is research ethics. Again, Bev never had hard and fast guidelines for obtaining consent, rather she modeled and questioned ways to talk with people and ensure they were comfortable talking and being quoted using consent methods that are culturally sensitive and appropriate. She taught me that there are culturally appropriate ways to seek consent and ways to "give back".

Judith: One of the things that stands out for me is that, in addition to "giving back" appropriately, it is sometimes equally complicated to *receive*. That human relationships are integral to ethnography is perhaps self-evident. But the importance of respecting the myriad enactments of 'human-ness' in relation to other people takes on new meaning during the amplified reality of fieldwork. I recall an instance when discrepant cosmologies 'in the field' made me hesitate to engage in dialogue for fear of what I might hear, and of the implications it would hold for my work and the people around me. Of course, the only thing for me to do was to approach Bev in a panic. As always, she responded with sane wisdom, casually suggesting that being interested in all points of view does not mean that one must also share those points of view. Respect need not always entail agreement. So simple, so direct, and yet so difficult.

Sherry: Respect is also evident in the care Bev takes in representing the voices of her research collaborators and consultants. She is not content to use the same means of representation all the time, but tries to find the most appropriate means for each specific case. She encourages her students also to experiment with new ways of dealing with issues of representation. Respect is the basis for this ongoing commitment to those with whom she works.

Anna: Yes, Bev's teachings about relationships and respect in the field extend beyond the interview and the relationship between the researcher and informant(s). I learned to try to be more aware of how people interact with one another, what people's agendas might be, and the fact that people have hidden "issues" or "challenges" that we are not necessarily privy to but that might influence their interaction with us. For me being an ethnomusicologist in many ways is about ongoing learning about ourselves, each other and our relations, and the music and cultural expressions that articulate those relations and identities.

On mentoring and "sharing" and connecting

Judith: Bev's integral manner/self makes it difficult to compartmentalize her influence on the thinking and work of her students. Thoughtful intellect, tireless generosity, and defiant gentleness bear witness to the wisdom (and I do not use this term lightly) that she lives -- not as a careful enactment of principle, but an honest enactment of being human.

Anna: What I found when I was studying with Bev, is that she never told me how to do things (or how not to do things), rather she always guided me with questions, answering my questions with questions, forcing me to think about issues and ideas on my own. It was difficult at the time, but a great way to teach by modeling. She respected the learning that I had to do and the various ways that learning can happen. Bev was also very willing to share materials from her own extensive field work to let me see how she approached writing about similar events as I was attending. We had discussions about what to include, where and how to focus, and the kinds of questions to consider both in and out of the "field." She modeled ways of doing and knowing that are not easily taught.

Sherry: Bev's ability to guide without explicit instructions extends to how she respects and accommodates the differences in expertise, learning modes, confidence, and working strategies of her students. I am impressed with how Bev allows her students to work at their own pace and in their own way. While some students may need a weekly check-in by phone or email, others prefer long periods of solo work followed by lengthier meetings for discussion. In my personal experience, when my preferred working method seemed to be unproductive, Bev suggested a number of other strategies for making progress; however, she didn't insist that I adopt them. She allowed me to continue finding my own way, always with her support and little pressure. Modeled on Bev's teaching, I *try* to accommodate my own students in the same way, encouraging them to follow their own interests, build on their own

strengths, find their own way.

Judith: Bev's refusal to hoard wisdom (i.e. she exudes brilliance but uses it to encourage others to speak!) is inspiring.

Sherry: That is evident in her enthusiasm for connecting people, both those with like interests, and those with divergent interests that might be woven together to create a larger whole. Some people do this insisting that they, themselves, remain a part of the working relationship. They seem reluctant to initiate a successful project from which they gain nothing for themselves. I see this as part of, as Judith put it, Bev's "refusal to hoard wisdom." She seems happy to set the wheels in motion and then step back, letting the project/collaboration take on its own life or peter away to nothing, depending on the will and energies of those involved.

Judith: Bev's ability to enable spaces of creative safety, and her extension of this gift to (pedagogical) contexts beyond ethnography make her work genuine and inspiring.

Anna: For me, I have often thought about some of the teachings I have received from people in the Native Canadian community and how they relate to the teachings shared by Bev. I am sure she had received similar teachings about respect and the interconnectedness of all things during her research, and I suspect she has been influenced by those teachings. For me, the sense of connectedness that I get from Bev (connections with Bev, her research, other students and colleagues, etc.), illustrates the impact that one person can have on creating a community, both at the local and national level. The fact that students of Bev's remain connected to Bev and each other, working together, supporting one another and sharing ideas for teaching and research attests to her awareness of the importance of human relations and "safety" in relationships. The interrelatedness of all things and the relations that exist between people links us together with understanding, respect, curiosity, etc. Be encouraged and showed an awareness of the complicated nature of people – what you see, what you don't see – and supporting and caring about everyone regardless of the seen and unseen.

While these reflections derive from our personal experiences with Bev, this discussion amongst the three of us highlighted many of the common lessons that Bev has shared with her students over the years – lessons that remain meaningful and important in ethnomusicological research. Bev's unwavering support and advocacy for her students, coupled with her ability to "let us go" allow us to test new ideas, knowing that we are safe, having received wisdom from, and have the support of, a very intelligent, thoughtful, reflective and caring individual.