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SOCIOLOGY ON THE ROCK

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“There comes a moment when being spat upon, you turn the spit into roses; you turn the verbal attacks into a garland of flowers, into rays of light. There is, in short, a moment when shame turns into pride.”


The six photographs in the Photo Gallery of the 14th issue of Sociology on the Rock are the work of Kathy Fitzpatrick. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University. Kathy is an avid outdoors person who enjoys taking pictures of landscapes. Originally from British Columbia, she completed her BA and MA degrees in geography at Simon Fraser University. Her PhD thesis compares the employment-related commuting of home-care workers in St. John’s and Southwest Newfoundland and explores how their different forms of commuting influence their experiences of work and work-related health and safety. The thesis reflects the influence of mobility theory, feminist political economy, and rhythm analysis. Kathy is also a trainee with a national program (On The Move Partnership), which has international links that investigate commuting and its consequences for workers, families, employers, communities, and various levels of government. This semester Kathy is teaching introductory sociology.
Tribute to Larry Felt

By Barbara Neis and Karen Stanbridge

“You have to make it right to do it right.” This is what our colleague and friend Larry Felt said as he accepted the inaugural Marilyn Harvey Award to Recognize the Importance of Research Ethics in 2015. So direct and clear – and so typical of Larry in both style and substance. Excellent research is principled research, the kind of scholarship that Larry practiced and defended his entire professional life.

Professor Larry Felt had a long and distinguished career in Sociology, specializing in the political economy and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador and the health and wellbeing of its inhabitants. These days, interdisciplinary research and public engagement are touted as innovative ends for university scholarship; Professor Felt did this for decades. As a result, he produced a body of work that added in very significant ways to our knowledge and understanding of the social conditions characterizing the province and country.

Larry Felt built an international reputation as a scholar of the politics and economy of resource-dependent communities, particularly in the North Atlantic region. As remarkable, however, was his faithful support of the array of committees and boards tasked with ensuring that academic research at Memorial – and indeed across Canada – was undertaken in an exacting and principled manner. Through his numerous contributions – as faculty mentor advising students and junior colleagues on matters of ethics; as member and Chair of internal and national peer review committees for SSHRC and CIHR grant competitions; and as a member of Memorial’s Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) from 2000-2003, ICEHR Chair from 2007-2011, and Chair of the provincial Health Research Ethics Authority after 2011. He also served as a member of the Government of Canada’s Panel on Research Ethics. In these capacities, Larry played a key role in sustaining the dialogue around how to conduct research ethically without compromising scientific rigor or intellectual curiosity.

Larry Felt embodied the kind of scholar he cultivated through his research and service: a skilled and experienced academic, well versed in the theory and methods of his discipline of Sociology, who engaged with his research participants in a respectful and ethical manner. Over his career, he carried out research with aboriginal, rural and marginal urban populations. Research topics ranged from those related to health through ecological knowledge to rural development. He also conducted research based on “a comparative investigation of aboriginal, particularly Inuit, and university research ethics review boards to better understand each group’s construction of reality and knowledge and through this understanding ensure that objectives, expectations and cultural values of each are acknowledged and respected” http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/panel-group/about-apropos/members-membres/lawrence/

His research also included an extended collaboration with people in Nunatsiavut and their land claims government.

In addition to his contributions to knowledge and to research ethics at Memorial and in Newfoundland and Labrador, Larry Felt was also a dedicated and loving father and spouse and was extensively engaged in sports and other community groups. A role model both inside and outside academe. We miss you, friend.

From a Law Firm to a Lecture Hall

By Sean Waite

I always wanted to be a lawyer. The legal profession seemed so exciting and glamorous in television and movies and I was drawn to images of hot-blooded lawyers advocating for their injured clients in the name of justice. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to work in a personal injury/medical malpractice law firm during my sociology undergraduate degree at King’s University College in the University of Western Ontario. I soon realized that the legal profession was nothing like it’s portrayed in the media.

In fact, most lawyers spend their days locked in offices drafting tedious motions about procedural matters and reading hundreds of pages of legal briefs. Don’t get me wrong, I really enjoyed my four years working at the law firm but I realized that a legal career was not for me. At the same time, I really enjoyed working on my undergraduate honours thesis. This project
used public census data from 1981 to 2001 to explore visible minority immigrant wage disadvantage. I had a taste of sociological research and I loved it. As a sociologist I could focus my energy on answering interesting questions about the social world and I could share these insights with students and the larger community. Yes, this was far more exciting than preparing an Affidavit of Documents or Motion Record.

I applied to McGill University for graduate school because of its international reputation and because it was located in downtown Montreal. I grew up in London, Ontario, and was really excited about going to graduate school in a big city. I was accepted directly into the sociology PhD program after my undergraduate degree, which was exciting but also overwhelming. Initially, I wanted to study the labour market integration of visible minority immigrants and their children. This would have been a continuation of the work I did during my undergraduate thesis but I was soon drawn to other dimensions of labour market stratification, such as gender. Of course, there is a large body of literature interested in the size and sources of the gender wage gap in Canada but most of this research explores wage inequality at the aggregate level and gives little attention to how gender wage gaps may vary by age, education, field of study or across different occupations. Similarly, few studies explore how the sources of wage inequality vary along these dimensions and over time. This became an important aspect of my dissertation research.

As a gay man, I was also interested in how labour markets may be stratified by sexual orientation. I believed that some of the processes that disadvantage women could also disadvantage gay men but operate in unique ways for lesbians. After many conversations with fellow doctorate student, Nicole Denier, we decided to work together to explore these issues. In particular, we were interested in whether or not sexual orientation was an important dimension of labour market stratification in Canada (spoiler alert, it is!).

Much to our surprise, there was a growing international literature interested in the economic lives of the sexual minorities but almost no research in Canada. We felt that Canada was a particularly interesting case for studying sexual orientation and labour market inequality because Canada has a relatively long history of providing employment protections for sexual minorities. In July 2005, Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Ten years earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada held that sexual orientation was subject to coverage under federal anti-discrimination laws outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In the 1970s and 1980s provincial human rights charters and laws began prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in private housing and labour markets. In 1996, the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to include sexual orientation as a protected class in employment. Attitudinal research also shows that Canadians tend to be more tolerant and accepting toward the gay and lesbian community than other countries, such as the United States. For these reasons, Canada provided a particularly interesting case for studying labour market stratification by sexual orientation.

Our first paper, Gay pay for straight work, established that the Canadian labour market was indeed stratified by both gender and sexual orientation. We found a hierarchy of earnings where heterosexual men earned the most, followed by gay men, lesbians and, lastly, heterosexual women. In other words, all men do better than all women but gay men are disadvantaged and lesbians are advantaged relative to their heterosexual counterparts. This paper received considerable media interest, not only in Canada but also in the United States and the United Kingdom. We gave many interviews and our research appeared on CTV News, Global News, Le Journal de Montreal, Global News Montreal, Global News Toronto, Yahoo News Finance, the Atlantic, CBC Radio, The Loop, The Kingston Whig, The Ottawa Sun, GayStarNews, Out.com, and Instinct Online. All of this media interest confirmed that these were important issues, not only from an academic perspective but also within the larger community. We also realized that far more research was needed to more fully understand the economic lives of Canada’s LGBTQ population.

Nicole and I have now developed a multifaceted research agenda employing a plurality of research methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and experimental research to comprehensively explore the labour market experiences of Canada’s LGBTQ population (see www.gaypaycanada.com). We recently published a paper in the Canadian Review of Sociology exploring whether coupled gay men and lesbians differ from their heterosexual counterparts in their propensity for self-employment. I published a paper titled Does it Get Better? A Quasi-cohort Analysis of Sexual Minority Wage Gaps in Canada, which explored whether sexual minority wage gaps
narrowed in the last decade. Nicole and I started interviewing sexual minorities to better understand how sexual orientation influences human capital acquisition and labour market choices/constraints. We will also be starting an exciting experimental research project to determine whether Canadian employers discriminate against sexual minorities in the hiring process.

Although my published research to date has been strictly quantitative, I do not adhere to a single methodological approach. Instead, I believe in answering interesting research questions. Some questions can be answered with quantitative methods and others are better suited for qualitative research. My quantitative research on sexual orientation and labour market outcomes has raised a number of new questions that cannot be adequately answered with quantitative methods. For example, why does sexual orientation influence human capital acquisition or occupational choices? Do members of the LGBTQ community experience discrimination in the hiring process? These are important questions that cannot be adequately answered by adhering to a single methodological approach. I believe that a plurality of research methodologies is the best solution for answering these types of complex questions.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I had gone to law school. I may have loved it but I think my choice to pursue research and teaching was the right call. I love the rush of discovering something new and sharing these findings with my students, colleagues, and larger community! I think MUN will be a great place for me and my research.

Newfie as Ethnophaulism: The Views of White Youth Attending Memorial University

By James Baker

Ethnophaulisms are derogatory expressions used to describe a racial or ethnic group. They have been categorized by Parrillo (2012: 93) into three types: disparaging nicknames (for example, Polack for people from Poland or of Polish descent); alleged physical characteristics or foods (frog for French Canadians); or alleged behaviours (to gyp someone, which is based on the supposed criminality of the Roma or Gypsies). All ethnic and racial groups use ethnophaulisms to refer to other peoples. Thus ethnophaulisms are apparently cultural universals (Palmore 1962: 442).

Over the past few years the number of people who find the term “Newfie” offensive appears to have increased. Bob Hallett, a former band member of the Great Big Sea, criticized Walmart for selling a tee shirt emblazoned with the term and the band itself took umbrage with its usage in a Macleans article about their album Play. An unidentified former St. John’s resident complained to the Halifax Regional Municipality about the Middle Sackville street sign “Newfie Lane” (Sweet 2013). In 1997 the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council received a complaint regarding the use of the phrase “those Newfies are so stupid” in an episode of the American comedy Ellen. Indeed, historian Raymond Blake (2004: 28) noted that during the Confederation negotiations Canadian civil servants “were warned against calling any resident of the island a ‘Newfie.’”

Despite its acrimonious history some people still do not find the term offensive. In response to the article on Newfie Lane The Telegram hosted an on-line poll. Approximately 41 percent of the respondents indicated that they were either indifferent to the term or loved it. The remaining 35 percent, however, stated that they hated it (Robinson 2013). While the poll lacks scientific rigor, the fact that over one-third of the respondents found Newfie to be offensive is interesting.

The purpose of this article is to examine the responses of 30 post-secondary, white youth regarding their perspective on the term Newfie and Newfie jokes. The three main questions were: Do you think Newfoundlanders are an ethnic group? Do you believe the term Newfie is an ethnic slur? Do you find Newfie jokes offensive?

In the lone article dealing with Newfie as an ethnic label King and Clarke (2002: 537) explained that while the term itself served as a “vehicle of social marginalization,” its meaning among in-group members remained complex. In fact, research suggested that Newfoundlanders were viewed negatively by mainland Canadians (McKinnie and Dailey-O’Cain 2002; Edwards and Jacobsen 1987).
Memorial University folklorist Peter Narváez (1986: 58) noted that Newfie was first employed as an ethnic slur in 1938 during an American radio narrative. While Pringle (1985) equates Newfie with the ethnic slur Polack, the Editor of the first two editions of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* described Newfie as “informal” while Polack was listed as offensive (Barber 2004, 1998). King and Clarke (2002: 545) mentioned that within Quebec the term had a negative connotation because it roughly equated with imbecile or fool. While it may seem odd for some people to consider Newfoundlanders an ethnic group and Newfie as an ethnophaulism, I am not alone in making this argument (Baker 2014; King and Clarke 2002). But in most contemporary books on ethnicity in Canada, there are no references to Newfoundlanders as a distinct ethnic group.

There appears to be little qualitative sociological research on ethnophaulisms because the studies that have been conducted have been quantitative and within the realm of psychology. These works suggest that ethnophaulisms directed towards immigrants vary in negativity and complexity (Mullen and Leader 2005; Mullen et al. 2000). Other authorities further contend that one of the limitations of such research is that these ratings are based on white American perceptions rather than the in-groups’ own perceptions (Rice et al. 2010: 118). This why I am interested in understanding how white youth attending Memorial University perceive the term Newfie and Newfie jokes.

Two general themes emerged from my interviews. First, most respondents did not see Newfie as an ethnic slur (including youth who were born outside Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Canada) or they felt that its meaning was context dependent. For example, one female suggested that the term was “not offensive if used in a light-hearted way” while two others (a male from Nova Scotia and a female from Newfoundland and Labrador) described the term as “cute.” This perspective is somewhat ironic. Asked what comes to mind when they thought of the word Newfie, almost all of the respondents indicated stupid or some other synonym.

Interestingly, two respondents believed that there was a desire to reclaim the term, which suggests that they believed Newfie was at one time offensive although both indicated they did not view it as such. Five of the respondents could be categorized as believing the term was offensive, with one Newfoundland female noting that she did not like the term Newfie because it seemed to have a negative connotation. One male described Newfie as a “cultural slur” rather than an ethnic slur based on his belief that Newfoundlanders were not an ethnic group. This perspective was not unexpected given that almost all of the respondents conflated ethnicity with race. It may also help explain why many of the respondents did not view Newfoundlanders as an ethnic group despite my belief that we fit the criteria as defined by Anthony Smith (1986), one of the prominent authorities in the field of race and ethnicity.

The response to whether Newfie jokes were offensive mirrored interviewees’ opinions on Newfie as an ethnic slur. Again, a significant majority believed that these jokes were not offensive or that context was important. In making a contextual argument, some respondents suggested that the jokes were “fine when it’s a Newfoundland telling it” (Newfoundland male) or “not if they are well made” (Newfoundland female). These perspectives may reflect Picca and Feagin’s (2007: 74) assessment that such jokes “may sometimes operate to sustain or illustrate social bonds between friends.” Indeed, many of the respondents noted Newfoundlanders’ penchant for being able to take a joke or to laugh at themselves.

There is uncertainty in arguing that the word Newfie is an example of an ethnophaulism. From the perspective of these 30 white youth, the general consensus is that Newfie is not, I believe, primarily because they do not see Newfoundlanders as an ethnic group. There are, however, those who would find either Newfie or Newfie jokes offensive depending on the context. There were also two respondents who pointed out that Newfie is used pejoratively in Quebec supporting the work of King and Clarke (2002). Parrillo (2012: 93) contends that the use of ethnophaulisms has the “effect of a less than human abstraction” by reinforcing particular negative stereotypes about a group. Indeed, this is reflected in the respondent’s view that the word Newfie equates with stupidity despite his assertion that it is, at the same time, not offensive.

Parrillo (2012: 93-94) further asserted that ethnophaulisms could be used by a member of an in-group to reprimand another in-group member who appeared to be acting out a stereotype although it could then function as a “humorous expression of friendship and endearment.” This perspective, too, was reflected in the responses, with many of them describing Newfie as a term of endearment among
Newfoundlanders. With regard to ethnic joke-telling, Laveen (1996) contends that if a member of an ethnic minority tells a joke to someone in the ethnic in-group, the phenomenon of laughing together has the effect of developing a sense of “we-ness” among the in-group. On the other hand, if an ethnic minority person tells the joke to an outsider, it has the effect of undermining the stereotype by ridiculing it. This is certainly reflective of the perspectives of the respondents who believe that telling Newfie jokes helps to promote solidarity while combating stereotypes associated with being labelled a Newfoundland.

Works Cited


Not Bad at All

By Lisa-Jo K. Van den Scott

I admit that my mischievous side enjoys dropping these words into conversations: “Not bad for a high-school kickout.” But it is true. When you consider that I achieved a post in the well-established Department of Sociology at Memorial University despite being kicked out of high school, it’s not bad at all, is it? Great, in fact.

My intellectual life has been enhanced, I think, by the ups and downs which resulted from developing a critical eye at a young age, no doubt under the influence of my parents – both of whom are sociologists. This critical eye led to a series of protests that ran off and on until I was kicked out of high school. One of these included purposefully scoring only 51% on tests, which would never have allowed me entrance to university. So, you see? My success is not even in spite of my expulsion, but rather it is because of the opportunity it gave me to spread my wings outside of the traditional educational system (and thereby increasing my grades) that I was able to continue my education. Not bad at all.

I had been longing for the chance to immerse myself in knowledge since the age of two. A little later when my uncle asked me what I wanted him to build for me with Lego, what was my answer? A university, of course. When I finally began my studies, there were 51 first-year course offerings which interested me. I decided on a joint course of classics and mathematics, figuring that classics would give me the foundations to go forward in the humanities or social sciences and math could launch me into the hard sciences. I frolicked in books and kept as many doors open as long as I could, eventually graduating from Mount Allison University with a BA in classics and a minor in math.

Eventually, I pursued an MA in classics, which led to my first experience with Memorial University. In those days, 15 years ago, the Department of Classics was located in the very offices which the Department of Sociology now occupies. I also had not realized when I applied, but my father had completed his MA in Sociology and Anthropology at MUN several decades earlier. He argues that I had an intuitive sense for following in his footsteps. I should note that he, too, was kicked out of high school and went on to become a Professor of sociology at the University of New Brunswick.

When my spouse, Jeff, and I finished our MAs in St. John’s, we decided to take some time off before pursuing PhDs. My spouse was offered a teaching job in Nunavut, and I followed and soon found myself teaching at the Nunavut Arctic College. Our time in Nunavut went from a two-year commitment, to three years, to indefinite. We learned Inuktitut and loved our new community.

I had been there merely two weeks when a family friend who was in town working with the elders called me and invited me to some elder and youth workshops which were happening that week. I had the privilege of being introduced to the elders as a group, something which rarely happens with newcomers. With the encouragement of the elders I began to take part in community groups and activities.

I was quite nervous, at first, about my role as an outsider. I did not want to come in with any prescriptive beliefs, nor did I believe my role was there to help “fix” things, whatever that means. I was there to learn, live my life, and to be of service if asked – the same as I would lead my life anywhere. The people of Arviat, the community we were in, were warm, friendly, and generous with their time. They welcomed me and embraced me. I learned a great deal.

One of the first things which refreshed my spirit was how little my book-learning was valued. Having just spent three years locked in a room for 15 hours a day, studying ancient Greek and Latin, I was thrilled to be reminded that there was more to the world than reading and writing well. I have been an avid cross stitcher for as long as I can remember, and this talent was valued in Arviat. I soon learned to sew. I inadvertently started an after-school program for at-risk girls (i.e., they asked if they could hang out at my place and I said yes and eventually got some government funding to pay for their cross stitch supplies). We started with cross stitch. Later one of the girls asked if we could do some math. Um – yes! I love math! We also did photography, baking, poetry, and anything else they could think of. My skills with a needle were far more valuable to the community than anything else, and I learned to value myself as a whole, rather than the bits and pieces that are held in high esteem by a fairly rigid educational system.

As the years went by, I became interested in how differently Arviammiu (the people of Arviat) treated
the walls in their houses. Some were practically ignored, while others were crammed full of family photos and a myriad of collections, from spoons to empty cigarette boxes.

Let me digress for a moment to add that as this interest was growing, my relationships in the community also continued to develop. The elders were pleased with my and my husband’s participation in the community and told us that they were the last people remaining who had lived “on the land” (nomadically on the arctic tundra). They could see their culture changing and wanted to teach it to as many people as possible. They encouraged us to ask questions, come to drum dances, and learn the language.

While these connections were building, so was my interest in the sociological story behind and within their walls. Were these representative of the anomie which accompanied their relocation from the tundra to within walls? Did they experience these spaces in which they lived most of their lives as Inuit or Western? When I went into one home, where they had viscerally cut into the walls and created a mosaic of traditional life with stones from where their family had roamed nomadically, I knew that it was time to accept that I wanted to transition into the role of researcher. I was fortunate in that I could consult with my Inuit friends and mentors about making this transition. The elders were supportive and charged my spouse and me with the task of participating in the transition. They explained that we had promised. My dissertation focussed on the ways in which the introduction of permanent walls affected Inuit culture, such as changing notions of public and private and gendered implications around knowledge transmission, as well as how the Inuit agentically interacted with their walls and their spaces to bring their culture indoors.

I guess this is the part where I blow my own horn. Never comfortable, but here goes.... As part of this SSHRC-supported research I did photography and cognitive mapping with my participants. This earned me a post-doc in visual methods at Brock University, along with an invitation to give a workshop on visual methods at a conference in Bulgaria this past summer. In addition to four paper awards, I won the Karpf Prize for work which “promotes universal peace, goodwill, tolerance and understanding among the peoples of the earth.”

I approach my work as a symbolic interactionist and currently serve as Treasurer for the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction. I have published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Symbolic Interaction, and the American Behavioral Scientist, among other journals, on topics which range from the North to ethics and methods to reality television. I also have several book chapters, one of which is forthcoming in the new Science and Technology Studies Handbook on the importance of ethnography. I have had the privilege of guest-editing a special issue of the Qualitative Sociology Review and am currently editing another special issue for the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography. I am co-editing a methods book, The Craft of Qualitative Research, which comes out of the Qualitative Analysis Conference which I have co-organized for several years. I have also had the pleasure of teaching a variety of interesting courses, such as the sociology of dystopia novels, the social psychology of walls, and am teaching the sociology of time this semester. I love my students and consider teaching one of the greatest joys of my life. So ... not bad for a high-school kickout, eh?
Remembering Bill Kirwin and Jean Briggs

By Roberta Buchanan

Recently two long-time members of the faculty died within a week of each other: Bill Kirwin and Jean Briggs. Both were distinguished and respected academics – Briggs for her research in the Arctic, and Bill for starting the English Language Research Centre which produced the famous Dictionary of Newfoundland English.

I won’t write about their academic accomplishments, but rather about some personal encounters which would never appear in the official obituaries. When I arrived in St John’s in 1964, Bill Kirwin and his friend Alastair Macdonald were regarded as the two confirmed bachelors in the English Department. Bill was an American, and when he heard that I had never been to a Thanksgiving Dinner and knew nothing about American Thanksgiving, he was shocked. He invited me to his house on Wicklow Street to have the full experience: roast turkey with all the trimmings and apple pie for dessert. He was an excellent cook. Exclaiming at the elegance of his table setting, Bill told me that he had grown up in Newport, Rhode Island, where his father was employed as a carpenter in the stately mansions of the wealthy elite. Bill’s idea of entertainment seemed to be to have the radio tuned to the taxi-drivers’ wavelength and we heard blaring out the dispatcher’s instructions to go here or there, pick up or deliver this or that passenger or parcel, and the taxi-drivers’ conversations among themselves or reporting that they were booking off for dinner. Bill was a keen musician and played double bass and trombone in the Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, and after dinner he played us some LPs of classical music.

On another occasion, Bill and Alastair invited me to join them in escaping the constant ringing of one’s doorbell on Halloween by having dinner at the Woodstock Colonial Inn out of town. Alastair hated noise with an almost pathological hatred. Bill drove us in his large American car (as it seemed to me accustomed to the “mini” cars in the UK), and we had a large slap-up meal which they insisted on paying for.

Bill occasionally went on benders, and one evening turned up at my house on Monkstown Road very, very drunk. He asked if I had any beer. I had, and I gave him one. After another beer, as I was wondering how to get rid of him, he asked me to marry him. I politely declined. “I’ve been married. Didn’t like it. No privacy.”

The proposal was not altogether a complete surprise. He had already proposed marriage to another woman in the English Department. Joyce was delighted, and told us about it the next day. She was a widow, whose husband had tragically died young of cancer, and she would have been happy to marry again. However, Bill seemed to have forgotten the proposal once he sobered up, and never mentioned it again. So I didn’t really take him seriously and assumed it was the kind of thing he did when drunk.

Bill had a wonderful garden and used to bring armfuls of beautiful gladioli to the English Department secretaries. He was a self-effacing man, and was content to let George Story take the praise for the wonderful accomplishment of the Dictionary of Newfoundland English.

Time passed and we both retired. I would see Bill walking to the university every day to carry on his work on revising and expanding the dictionary in the Dictionary Room of the Arts and Administration Building. He was an inspiring model of the dedicated researcher who works for the love of it. If I was looking for some information on a word I came across in the process of my research on Labrador, he was always generous in spending his own time helping me. Bill was also generous with his time in providing information for Stephen Riggins’ history of the MUN Department of Sociology and for Jeff Webb’s book Observing the Outports: Describing Newfoundland Culture, 1950-1980.

Every afternoon when I went to get my afternoon coffee and calorie boost at the University Centre, I would see him heading for the Dairy Queen to get his ice cream treat. Too much cholesterol, I thought. Sadly, Bill had a stroke and was hospitalized. He was never able to return home, and spent the rest of his days in St. Patrick’s Mercy Home, where he died. I’m ashamed to say that I never visited him. I did go to Carnell’s Funeral Home to pay my final respects. A few people from the English Department were there, and there was one man I didn’t recognize who I thought might be a family member, so I went up and asked him if he was. He wasn’t. He said he had worked for Bill in his garden. He asked me my name. When I told him, he said “Bill often talked of you.”

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Jean Briggs I thought was a rather fierce woman, who wouldn’t suffer fools gladly. By some odd twist of fate, we lived in the same house on Elizabeth Avenue opposite the university. (An old farmhouse, it was later torn down and is now an ugly housing development.) She had the upstairs apartment which was reached by a separate staircase, while I and a flatmate shared the downstairs one. Later I heard that Jean had complained to her colleagues that we had too many noisy parties. It is true that we did have parties, but only about one a semester. And we did invite her but she never came.

I was in the apartment alone one afternoon, when I heard heart-rending sobbing upstairs. It sounded as if she was in a terrible state of grief. I did what any English person would do under the circumstances. I phoned her and asked if she would like a cup of tea. She declined. Later I heard her distress had been caused by an unhappy love affair.

In the summer Jean went off to the Arctic to do research. When she came back she gave up the apartment and moved to Maddox Cove, but left an unfortunate trace behind. She was succeeded by a young couple, a man in the Sociology Department and his wife who worked at the School Board. She complained of being covered with small red itchy bites in the morning, and discovered bed bugs. (For some reason, they never bit him.) Jean had become infested with the bugs in the Arctic, not an uncommon occurrence apparently. The whole apartment had to be fumigated.

Soon I too felt itchy at night. Was it my imagination? I used to leap out of bed and search my sheets, and I did find a dead bug. At that time I had a most unpleasant room-mate, who had the habit of bringing strange men home from the bars, who I would encounter the next morning when I went to the bathroom. She also locked me out of the house when I came back from my research semester in England. I too was moving out, as I had just bought my first house, the one on Monkstown Road. I proposed to my room-mate that I would leave my bed behind, as I no longer needed it. She accepted with alacrity, as she had found a dead bug. At that time I was working on the diary of George Elson, one of Mina Hubbard’s guides on her expedition to Labrador in 1905. The expedition crossed the Labrador Peninsula from south to north, ending up in Ungava Bay at the George River Post. There the local people were Inuit, and George Elson listed some
words in Inuktitut at the back of his diary. I had to check to see that the Inuktitut words and their English translations were correct. In some trepidation, I asked Jean if she could look them over and see if they were okay, or suggest someone who could help me. I was really out of my depth. She was busy working on her dictionary of an Inuktitut dialect, but she couldn’t have been kinder or more helpful. She told me to come to her office, and showed me how to sound out the words and look up the possible variants in the various dictionaries she showed me. She must have been a great teacher. She didn’t do the work for me, but showed me how to do it.

Like Bill, Jean became disabled, though she still lived in her own house. She had to have a caregiver, and to depend on her friends. It must have been galling for someone so adventurous and independent to depend on others, particularly as she lived out in the country.

When Jean died, I made another visit to Carnell’s Funeral Home to pay my last respects. Displayed was the beautiful colourful parka that her Inuit “mother” had made for her, and a photograph of her wearing it. An Inuit sculpture and her books were also displayed, including volume one of the recently published dictionary she had worked on for so long.

**The Clipboard**

**By Stephen Harold Riggins**

Dr. James Baker has been awarded the prestigious Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship. The Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships program provides funding to the very best postdoctoral applicants, both nationally and internationally, who will contribute to the country’s economic, social, and research-based growth. Dr. Baker completed his PhD in our department under the supervision of Stephen Harold Riggins. He has also taught courses in the department for the past four years. Under the supervision of eminent race and ethnicity scholar Victor Satzewich, McMaster University, Dr. Baker will investigate the experiences of racism among refugee youth in St. John’s and Hamilton, Ontario. In addition to his Banting Award, he has received a SSHRC grant to examine the opinions of white, post-secondary youth of Canada’s response to the Syrian Crisis as well as their observations of racism in St. John’s and Hamilton.

Iranian PhD student Elahe Nezhadhossein was featured in *The Gazette* in the article “Humanities and Social Sciences Wiki Created by Students for Students.” Elahe’s topic for her PhD thesis is women’s representation in social media and movements. [https://gazette.mun.ca/campus-and-community/helping-hands/](https://gazette.mun.ca/campus-and-community/helping-hands/)

MA candidate Enoka Bainomugisha defended in July his research paper “Quiet Storm: Established Donors, China, and the World System.”


Czarnuch, Stephen, Rose Ricciardelli, and Alex Mihailidis, “Predicting the Role of Assistive Technologies in the Lives of People with Dementia using Objective Care Recipient Factors,” *BMC Geriatrics*, 2016.


Photo Gallery