



To a child stepping in from outside, the corner store is like an enchanted world filled with every delight imaginable. "Oh, I love that store!" said one of the Weisfelds' young customers, "I go there everyday for everything!"

Photo by Marjorie Hunt for the Smithsonian.

Suggested Readings

Bauman, Richard. "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," *Journal of American Folklore*, 85, 338 (1972), 330-343.

Byington, Robert H., ed. *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*. Smithsonian *Folklife Studies*, Number 3. Los Angeles: California Folklore Society, 1978.

Welty, Eudora. "The Little Store," in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews by Eudora Welty*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979, pp. 326-335.

The CB Community: Folklore in the Modern World

Susan Kalčík

Viewed broadly, the CB community includes anyone who has and uses a CB (Citizen's Band) radio. But for many Cbers in the D. C. area, two way radio is more than an occasional convenience to help drivers. It is the basis of an on-going and richly-interactive community. CB people meet and socialize over the radio and at CB events; they create informal networks and organize special clubs, such as the Legal CB Operators of America who helped prepare this year's CB presentation for the Folklife Festival. The members of this club are mainly from northern Virginia, and their regularly-monitored or "home" channels are 19 and 27.

CB social events are called "breaks," and they include once-a-month gatherings for such activities as bowling, biking, hiking, feasting on crabs, or working on jigsaw puzzles. Some Cbers who work near each other also meet regularly for lunch: a lunch "break." In summer "jamborees" are held, during which Cbers meet at camping facilities to socialize and compete for trophies awarded for attendance or for winning contests such as tug-of-war.

Another important activity in the CB community is service: reporting traffic tie-ups, visiting sick friends, helping with a household move. A frequent CB event is the antenna-raising party; a large base-station antenna requires several people to install, and with refreshments provided by the owner and with community spirit, the task becomes a party. Cbers' social service also benefits the

larger community, and includes fundraising for charities, donating CB radio equipment to homes for senior citizens and schools, and singing carols at hospitals during the Christmas season.

Although members of a CB community may have diverse backgrounds, their shared knowledge, experience, values, esthetics, and sense of community result in close ties. Many Cbers speak of their CB friends as their second, or CB, "family." The ideal of the CB community is reminiscent of rural or frontier America: getting along with and helping your neighbors. Antenna-raising provides today's CB equivalent to barn raisings and quilting bees.

Cbers share a unique folklore. Language, names, rituals, stories, and jokes that they use, discuss, and pass on orally help create a sense of group identity.

The use of a CB name or "handle" is one way Cbers set themselves apart and identify themselves to each other. Usually a handle is chosen because it reflects a person's identity in some way. Thus "Rusty Piton" does rock climbing, "Ball Joint" works on cars, "Maine Yankee" was born in New England, and "Red Pony" drives a red Pinto. Sometimes handles are picked because they suggest a desired quality or are the name of a favored hero or heroine—or are just plain fun. "Dream Maker," "Lone Ranger," "Samurai," and "Wonder Girl" are a few examples. The history behind the handles and their appropriateness or lack of it are favored topics of conversation among Cbers.

Cbers also share a rich language, which has been influenced by ham radio communications, truckers' jargon, the local vernacular, and popular culture. In the "10 Code"—an official shorthand for

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CBers pull for their club in a tug-of-war, a typical contest featured at CB jamborees or camp outs. Photos by Nicholas Bocher for the Smithsonian.

use on the air — “10-4” is the official form of the message “I understand you.” “4-10” and “4” carry the same meaning, as does “10 Roger” and its variants “10 M Rogie,” “10 Rogo,” “Roger,” “Rogie,” “Rogt,” and “Roger D.” These variations are the result of creative adaptation on the part of many CBers.

Patterns of voice inflection serve as identifiers as well, and many CBers have developed a distinctive style that is immediately recognizable over the air. Inflection also carries meaning: “10-4” asked with a rising inflection can turn the usual affirmative message — “I understand you” — into a question.

Many CB phrases are rhyming or repetitious, and, because of this,

easily heard over the air. Hence a policeman may be a “county mountie,” and a strong radio signal described as “wall to wall and tree top tall.” Imagery and metaphor are important, too. A Volkswagen is a “pregnant roller skate,” and the first car or truck in line is the “front door.” If you just want to sit back and listen to your CB radio, you can “copy the mail.” If you talk too much, you are a “bucket mouth.”

One term may generate a string of related terms. A “bear in the bushes” (policeman) may be waiting to spring a “bear trap.” The unwary driver may have to “feed the bears” by paying a ticket. Police may have CBs too (“bears with ears”) and thus become part of the community. In some cases, they adopt CB terms for their own handles, becoming “Midnight Bear” or “Honey Bear.”



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1 The antenna raising party is the modern CB community's version of the frontier barn raising.

2 From her base station Wacky Witch monitors rush hour traffic for mobile units and talks and jokes with her CB friends.

Stories are also a form of CB folklore. Subjects include on-the-air happenings, such as helping to rescue a person in need, or giving an “18 wheeler” the wrong directions and later finding the truck stuck under an underpass. Also told are jokes about fellow CBers and stories of pranks played on them.

This shared language and lore,



An important part of CB lore is the CB name or handle, worn here on a vest with the owner's club patch.

like the shared knowledge of radio technology, gives members of the CB community a sense of group identity. Badges with handles or names of jamborees on them, as well as distinctive T-shirts and club uniforms, are outward signs of CBers' inner sense of community.

Many people think that technology destroys folklore. But the CBers' folklore thrives precisely because of two-way radio technology. Folklore is apparently more durable and enduring than we might think and exists as surely in the CBers' world as in the more traditional rural community or ethnic neighborhood.

Suggested Readings

Houston, Albert, et al. *The Big Dummy's Guide to C.B. Summertown, Tenn.: The Book Publishing Co., 1976.*

Street Cry!

Steven Zeitlin

The fish stare glassy-eyed from trays. The crabs, pulled from a swarming basket, lock pincers and entwine with one another. Lincoln Rorie, street crier, lifts the gills of a bluefish to show you how good it is. "If it's slimy, it's fresh," he says.

Like all the vendors at the fish wharf in Washington, D. C., he gives 14 crabs to the dozen. His rapid fire fish chants seem to pack almost as many rhymes in every line: "A Big Mac attack/ain't nothing but a snack/compared to the jumbos on sale right here/right here in the back."

Huckster Walter Kelly, with a different approach to the art, can stretch a single word to fill the melody of a whole blues line. On a brightly painted horse-drawn wagon crammed full of cardboard boxes and overflowing with produce, he hollers the name of a fruit, savoring each isolated sound so that an improvised blues languorously pours from a single term.



WAT-ER-MEL' WA-TER-MEL-HO!

The places where cultures meet to do business with one another produce some of our most vital folk expression. At markets where Italians sell to Jews, where blacks sell to Chinese; in streets where itinerant peddlers make their neighborhood stops, vendors combine talent, tradition, and business sense to sell their goods.

In many marketplaces from New York to the Carolinas street vendors share a "hollering" tradition. Certain calls or hollers have been collected many years apart and in different places. When the 1930s Harlem fish peddler Clyde "Kingfish" Smith was a child in North Carolina, his father talked of a peddler who called, "Bring out the dish pan/here's the fish man." The younger Smith brought the line with him to New York, and it was heard until recently in Baltimore. Stanzas like the following illustrate continuity in this huckster tradition:

Baltimore, 1925, caller unknown:

*Ah, I have 'em hot.
Ah, I have 'em brown.
Ah, I have 'em long.
Ah, I have 'em round.
Dey's nice 'en fat.
Dey weighs a pound!*

Washington, D. C., 1977, Lincoln Rorie:

*I got 'em red.
I got 'em dead.
I got 'em green.
I got 'em mean.
It got the fightenest, bitenest crabs
This year has seen!*

Harlem, 1939, Clyde Smith, from a WPA recording by Herbert Halpert in the Library of Congress:

*I've got 'em large.
I've got 'em small.
I got 'em long.
And I got 'em tall.
I've got 'em fried.
I got 'em boiled.
And I can't go home
Till I sell 'em all.*

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