

Oral History as Process : The CBC Experience

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Oral History Survives

Many of us who have discovered oral history over the years remain steadfast in our faith in oral history. We have not always been able to sustain careers as “oral historians” but we remain committed to oral history. We have had to admit that researchers have not used our interviews, or the interviews we collected, as frequently as we would have liked. But somehow that does not matter. Whenever we again have a occasion to do another oral history interview our commitment is renewed.

Perhaps we need to reflect upon our belief in oral history from a less academic and less archival perspective. The simple human fulfillment in telling one’s life story, and in listening to such telling, may, in fact, transcend the archival and scholarly values of the oral history interview. Despite our advocacy of oral history we may not necessarily have understood the true significance of oral history. In spite of our trying to win resources and support for oral history projects, we may not yet have fully grasped the potential popular appeal of oral history for the general public. We may not even come to comprehend our own fascination with oral history.

Conventional historians, at least in Canada, have continued their distrust of human memory and remain skeptical of oral history despite more and more of them using interviews when other sources are not available.¹ Archives have abandoned or disowned the few proactive oral history projects that they stimulated over the years, but most continue to accept oral history collections from interviewers. Oral history has not emerged as an academic discipline in Canada but the 1816 oral history collections

1. “Voices of the Past: Oral Research and Methodology” taught by James J. Morrison at Saint Mary’s University remains the only regular oral history course offered at a Canadian university.

documented in Canada in 1993² certainly attest to the wide variety of oral history projects across the country. The Canadian Oral History Association has never prospered but it has nonetheless survived as this journal demonstrates. Membership in COHA remains strong albeit that few members can come to annual meetings. Oral history in Canada has not certainly not gone away but rather gone underground as a popular and intuitive manifestation of the growing interest in heritage in North American society. Despite the lack of academic respectability or formal institutional endorsement, oral history has become widely accepted.

The CBC as Canada's Pioneer Oral Historian

The CBC was perhaps the first oral history institution in Canada in more ways than one. First, the CBC documented the audio representation of the country through its radio programming from 1936 on. Then in 1939 the CBC made a major investment in disc recording equipment to cover the Royal Visit and from that point a wide assortment of programs, events and interviews were recorded. In 1959 in Toronto, and in 1961 in Montreal, program archive departments were set up to formally catalogue and preserve the tens of thousands of radio transcription discs that had accumulated in CBC facilities.³

The advent of magnetic tape in the 1950's allowed CBC producers, or free-lancers preparing programs, to conduct longer interviews and then select excerpts to assemble documentary programming. The classic documentary series such as "Between Ourselves", "Identities", "Rencontres" and "Ils sont des nôtres" became wonderfully-crafted examples of oral history in progress in the 1960's and 1970's. Producers and free-lancers began accumulating interviews, and sometimes conducting interviews for their own sake, or on speculation that they might prove useful for a future CBC documentary.⁴

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2. *Guide to Oral History Collections in Canada*, by Normand Fortier for the Canadian Oral History Association (vol. 13 of the COHA Journal, 1993).
 3. See articles by Robin Woods (vol II, # 2/3, 1970) and Ernest J. Dick (vol. 22, # 1, 1991) in the Journal of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections.
 4. *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion* by Victor Hoar, and published by Copp Clark in 1969, was based on the interviews conducted by Mac Reynolds for CBC Radio Archives and is perhaps one of the first Canadian examples of such oral history interviews being used for a published history. These same interviews have been used and referred to many times since and most recently for a book by Mark Zuehlke in *The Gallant Case: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39* being published by

Also, by the mid-60's there was the sense within the CBC that conventional archival sources would not do justice to the larger-than-life characters who had populated broadcasting. The medium did not lend itself to generating or preserving written records and the personalities of broadcasting were likewise neither inclined to create, or keep, archives. Therefore, from within the CBC, Raymond Laplante and Gérard Arthur in Montreal; Bill McNeil, Sharon Marcus and Sandy Stewart in Toronto; Peter Stursberg, Jean Bruce, and Elspeth Chisholm from Ottawa; Lyal Brown and Imbert Orchard in British Columbia, and Ross Ingram in New Brunswick, amongst others, began in the 1970's interviewing the pioneers of Canadian broadcasting. Similarly, Eric Koch for his book on "This Hour Has Seven Days"⁵ and Fred Rainsberry for his research on children's broadcasting⁶ conducted extensive interviews that found their way into archives. Most recently Knowlton Nash has been doing interviews for his popular history of the CBC and a new book on backstage stories.⁷ All realized that the written archival record could never do justice to the imagination, energy and personalities of the CBC, and all were seeking to remedy this lack by doing oral history interviews.

This realization was not limited to the CBC and in the 1970's academics interested in the Canadian broadcasting record began to do interviews to supplement their research. John Twomey, from Ryerson's School of Radio and Television Arts, documented how precarious Canadian broadcasting resources were, and stimulated many a research project.⁸ Howard Fink and his colleagues began documenting radio drama at Concordia University's Centre for Broadcasting Studies and interviewed radio drama pioneers as well as collecting scripts across the country. René Legris and Pierre Pagé at the University of Quebec began working on radio and television programming and conducted many interviews in Quebec. Kenneth Bambrick at the University of Western Ontario's School of Journalism interviewed private broadcasters across Canada. At Brock University, Mary Jane Miller began her work on CBC television drama and

Whitecap Books.

5. Eric Koch, *Inside Seven Days*, Prentice Hall, 1986.
6. Fred Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television in English Canada, 1952-1986*, Scarecrow Press, 1988.
7. Knowlton Nash, *The Microphone Wars: A History of Triumph and Betrayal at the CBC*, McClelland and Stewart, 1994 and *Cue the Elephant: Backstage Tales at the CBC*, McClelland and Stewart, 1996.
8. John Twomey, "Canadian Broadcasting History Resources in English: Critical Mass or Mess?", 1978.

interviewed producers, writers, actors and administrators across the country.⁹ These are only some of the more prominent examples with virtually all of the historians of broadcasting doing interviews at one point or another.

Indeed, because proposals to interview CBC pioneers were so frequently requested at the Public Archives of Canada in the late 1970's the Carleton University School of Canadian Studies was approached to undertake an inventory of extant CBC oral history interviews. This led to the development of the CBC Oral History Project at Carleton University under the direction of Professor Ross Eaman and a further 275 interviews were completed between 1974 and 1989.

The French-language networks of the CBC have long recognized the value of oral history and often found ways to have interviews done with their pioneers over the years. In the late 1970's an ambitious cross-Canada interviewing project led to a 21-hr audio history of French radio in Canada, *Si la radio m'étais contée*, broadcast in 1980. The 50th anniversary of radio in 1986 and the 40th anniversary of television in 1992 prompted further interviews. Also in 1992 a commemorative book, *Regardes, c'est votre histoire*, based on oral history interviews was published.¹⁰

Yet all of this oral history documentation on the CBC by no means satisfied the appetite for CBC retirees wanting to be interviewed or diminished suggestions that more interviews should be done. When investigating the state of CBC's archival holdings in 1989, many suggested that we should be doing oral history interviews, as so many CBC pioneers were retiring or leaving the corporation. Given the precarious and fragmented state of CBC's program archives, and the neglected and forgotten condition of records management, my preference was to focus on these more tangible and conventional archival challenges.¹¹ We made some progress in these areas, most notably in program archives because of the growing reuse demand for past programming, but we never forgot about this persistent interest in oral history.

9. Mary Jane Miller, *Rewind and Search: Conversations with the Makers and Decision-Makers of CBC Television Drama*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.

10. Jean-Pierre Gagné and Carmen Strano, *Regardez, c'est votre histoire*, Éditions Saint-Martin, 1992.

11. Ernest J. Dick, "The Future of the CBC's Past", a review of archives, background paper and presentation to CBC Senior Management, (internal CBC Report 1990)

CBC Oral History Project: Revival

I kept suggesting to anyone who would listen that the Corporate Archivist should undertake an oral history project. In 1994 a sympathetic senior CBC administrator found modest funding for a revival of the CBC Oral History Project. We hired a coordinator (Rob O'Reilly - a recent graduate in communications from Concordia University) and our first priority was to update the inventory of CBC Oral History interviews begun by Carleton University's School of Canadian Studies. This inventory was incorporated into a database that we were developing on CBC positions and personalities over the years. Thereby we could easily connect the scope and extent of interviews to someone's CBC career.

We then put out a notice of the project to CBC Management and to CBC retirees in the CBC Pensioner's Newsletter. Soon, over 300 names were suggested for people who should be interviewed, of people who wanted to be interviewed, and by people who wanted to do the interviewing. We were gratified, if also overwhelmed by this response, and quickly had to devise criteria of how, where, and when interviewing could begin.

We determined that people who nominated themselves to be interviewed would be interviewed, particularly if they had not been interviewed before. This became somewhat difficult to follow strictly because often notable CBC retirees wanted to be interviewed despite earlier interviews. Sometimes they had forgotten about the earlier interview; they may have been interviewed about a limited focus previously; or they simply felt they had not yet been truly able to tell "their" story. Therefore, people such as Henri Bergeron, the legendary French network radio and television host, Hugh Gauntlet, the English television impresario, and Philip Keatley, the west-coast god-father of dramatic television programming in BC, among others, were re-interviewed. When we considered that perfectly good interviews had already been done we resisted doing further interviewing but we felt badly at putting potential interviewees off. We began to understand that it was the act of doing the oral history interviewing that was important for its own sake, rather than simply the information that was being collected.

Advanced age was another obvious criteria for who should be interviewed first, and anyone over the age of 70 became a priority for interviewing as soon as possible. We did not interview people such as Pierre DesRoches, Trina McQueen or Peter Herndorf, despite their being frequently nominated, and of obvious importance to the development of the CBC. They are still active in the world of broadcasting and might naturally be expected to recall their CBC careers from their current perspectives. We preferred to wait until people were fully retired and found that some

distance from their CBC careers gave them a perspective on their complete careers, rather than commenting from their latest CBC projects.

Finding the appropriate interviewer for each interviewee was another factor in determining when someone would be interviewed. We decided to make use of as many as possible of the CBC pensioners who wanted to do the interviews and this decision quickly began to shape and drive the project. We tried to involve a great variety of interviewers, although this certainly made more work for ourselves. The only potential interviewers we did not follow up were those with such a strong reputation and well-known agenda that we feared that they might never allow the interviewee to tell their story.

Successful oral history interviewing depends on the dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee; and the respect that CBC retirees often had for each other opened doors for the project and garnered support that we would never have accomplished on our own. At the same time we had to be aware of the personal or hierarchical relationship that CBCers may have had when they worked together. This relationship, in either a constructive or inhibitive fashion could reassert itself, and we had to be alert to this. Either unwarranted deference or aggressiveness, on the part of the interviewer or interviewee, will not yield a good oral history interview and had to be avoided.

A very effective strategy was to have potential interviewers interview each other and then have a group evaluation. Interviewers thereby soon understood how much time and energy was required to be an effective interviewer and some naturally opted out of the process. We did provide biographical details on interviewees from past employee files but we did not supply a standard set of questions. We wanted each interviewee to be telling "their" CBC story and urged the interviewers to listen for clues about where that story might go.

We suggested questions such as your first memory of broadcasting, your first impressions of the CBC, your first impressions of working at the CBC, notable CBC colleagues that you worked with, how the CBC has evolved, and your sense of the future of the CBC. We encouraged interviewers to ask delicate and unwelcome questions but not pursue the matter if the interviewee chose not to. Our project was not an exercise in investigative journalism and we gave all interviewers and interviewees the option of restricting the interview for research for the duration of their lifetime (although few asked for any restriction whatsoever).

We tried to provide feed-back to interviewers as quickly as possible and found this to be essential. Interviewers needed to know that they were

asking the right questions and they needed to be thanked for their initiative and effort. Since all interviewers and interviewees obviously had a sense of broadcasting from their CBC experience, they adopted a professional attitude that was a delight to work with. The only critique that we ever needed to provide was to point out obvious questions that were sometimes not asked. Indeed, the only flaw in having CBC retirees interview each other was that sometimes the interviewers knew their interviewees somewhat too well and did not always search out nuances and questions that needed to be asked.

Matching appropriate interviewees and interviewers proved to be a intriguing process. From the CBC Human Resources data-base on CBC Pensioners we organized lists of pensioners in particular areas, in chronological order with the oldest appearing first, and then matched these names against interviews that we already knew of. We organized meetings in particular regions of the country with potential interviewers as well as whoever might be available from the regional CBC Pensioner's Association. These meetings prompted an avalanche of reminiscences and this remembering perhaps, in retrospect, we should have recorded. The process reminded everyone of colleagues that might rarely have been nominated for such interviews. It was fascinating to hear candid opinions of who might make a good interview and why, and such observations led easily to matching interviewers and interviewees. Also, this process sometimes led interviewers to disqualify themselves for a variety of reasons that we obviously respected.

Letters were then sent out from the office of the Corporate Archivist formally asking the person to be interviewed and explaining the project. We named the designated interviewer but always gave the interviewee the option of asking for a different one. The designated interviewers then followed up with phone calls to arrange for an interview. Waiting for interviewees to contact either us or the interviewer produced very few results, whereas taking the initiative to contact interviewees invariably generated a very positive reaction. Often the interviewees needed a little bit of coaxing and reassurance that "their" story was worth telling and recording. A formal letter from CBC Head Office was nice but the invitation and encouragement from a former colleague was often essential.

CBC Oral History Project: Results

We easily had more interviewers than we could effectively manage. Twenty-five different people carried out interviews for us over the two

years with another half-dozen willing to do interviews if we had found the time to organize them. The principal interviewers that worked with us included Peter Meggs, a former Vice-President at the CBC, Dave Watson, an agricultural reporter with CBC Regina, Gabi Drouin, a former French network radio and television reporter and host, Don Tremaine, the perennial CBC Nova Scotia radio and television host, Sandy Stewart, the broadcast historian and producer for "Reach for the Top" and John Twomey, formerly with CBC children's television and from Ryerson's Radio and Television Arts Department. A wider appeal would have generated another twenty-five interviewers with minimal effort.

After the first year, interviewers were not paid for their time although we did supply recording equipment, cover out-of-pocket expenses and provide a token honorarium. No retirees abandoned the project as interviewers because we were not able to provide payment. All reiterated time and time again that the satisfaction that were deriving from the project was more than sufficient reward for their effort. They were stimulated and energized by making the contacts with former colleagues, preparing themselves for the interviews, and by the interview process itself. But equally important they were gratified that the CBC as a corporate entity was funding and organizing this project. It was important to do the interviews but it was almost more important to be asked formally by the CBC to undertake this work. It validated their careers, their expertise, and their ongoing contribution to the CBC. Peter Meggs said it nicely: "For me it was a good two years. I found myself reunited with old colleagues for the first time in years and that was a real joy to me. But, more important, I found in the 30 interviews I carried out that (a) CBC was a community...indeed a family...for those of us who were privileged to work together in public broadcasting; (b) that there was more than a willingness to recall the good years of the Corporation and (c) that the Corporation was served by some remarkable talents through its history."¹²

As much as possible we worked through local CBC offices. Any meetings that we had with prospective interviewers to determine who would be interviewed were in CBC facilities in their own city. Although we were coordinating the project from Head Office in Ottawa we developed a network of local CBC contacts where recording equipment and tapes could

12. Peter Meggs letter to Ernest J. Dick, 20 March, 1996.

be picked up and tapes deposited.¹³ This was essential for an institution as widespread and diffuse across Canada as is the CBC. Head Office is no one's favorite CBC venue and the corporate-local collaboration that we accomplished was the envy of most corporate-wide CBC projects. Partially, this was due to the care we took to respect local CBC dynamics but primarily this was due to the genuine and heart-felt enthusiasm that oral history generated for everyone. Everyone wanted this project to succeed, and therefore, were willing to suspend their usual suspicions and resentments.¹⁴

At all stages of the project we relied upon the CBC Pensioners' Association to offer advice and to validate the process. The national association included descriptions and progress reports on our projects in their newsletters and this stimulated many names to consider for both interviewers and interviewees. In Saskatchewan, Montreal, Ottawa, and Nova Scotia the local CBC Pensioners' Associations became actively involved in helping us go through lists of their retirees and recommending who should be interviewed by whom. In Winnipeg and Quebec City the local pensioners' organization literally took over the project and organized interviews themselves within the small budgets that we were able to allocate to them. In these two locales they certainly accomplished a good many more interviews that we would have ever on our own, although the interviews were somewhat shorter and less expansive than our average.

The coordinator for the CBC Oral History Project was a recent university graduate with an inexhaustible enthusiasm and appetite for the stories and personalities of the CBC. His energy and eagerness to hear these stories were fundamental to the success of the project. He was hired full-time for this project and that meant that his response to queries from interviewers and interviewees was his first priority. Also, it meant that he provided almost immediate feed-back to the interviewers.

We thanked the interviewees for their participation in the project with a formal letter from the Corporate Archivist and by giving them the CBC

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13. Gail Donald of CBC Radio Archives in Toronto and Normand Lapierre of SRC's Service de references in Montreal were essential in advising and shepherding the project. They now hold tape copies of the interviews as well as the tape recorders for ongoing interviews.
 14. Jean-Claude Asselin, with SRC in Montreal, was one of the most important friends and supporters of the project. His knowledge of past SRC employees gave our project a point of entry and credibility with them that we could never have earned on our own.

Heritage Pin which we had designed and made for this project.¹⁵ We decided to sell the pin as a fund-raiser for the project and priced it at \$10, well above the usual price for such pins. People were willing to pay a premium for such a pin because it was of handsome design, because they were proud to wear it, and because the revenues supported a project that they wanted to be identified with.

Interviewees were invariably most gratified with the interview process. Few requested any restrictions whatsoever and many wrote thanking us for the CBC Heritage Pin and for the opportunity of being interviewed. Some of our most moving letters were from spouses of people who had been interviewed, thanking us for providing this sense of valorization¹⁶ of the time and effort that their partner had devoted to the CBC. Gabi Drouin, one of our interviewers based in Montreal, wrote eloquently about the sense of pride that the project afforded:

*Dans le monde matérialiste d'aujourd'hui, hélas trop souvent rempli d'ingratitude, ces hommes, ces femmes, tant de la radio que de la télévision, ont su manifester dignement leur sentiment d'appréciation pour le geste que l'on posait à leur égard. Ils sortaient de l'ombre, on se souvenait d'eux!*¹⁷

We did accomplish 160 interviews from Victoria to St. John's in the two years that the project was active. This was almost twice as many as we had projected and budgetted for and with the momentum we had established, it would have been easy to have done even more in subsequent years. We interviewed George Davidson, past president of the CBC, just months before he died but inevitably also saw people such as Doug Chevrier (beginning with the CBC in 1937), Brick Brickendon (first director of television with CBC in Halifax), Warren Davis, (CBC radio announcer) and others pass away before they could be interviewed.

Our intention was, and remains, to deposit these interviews with the National Archives of Canada but we quickly sensed that the appropriate archival fate for these interviews was somewhat a let-down for the interviewees, the interviewees, as well as for ourselves. A more active and

15. This pin made use of the first CBC logo designed in 1941 and still easily recognized by many. We also included the current CBC logo, the words heritage/patrimoine and attached the pin to a card explaining why the pin was created.

16. We are using the verb "to valorize" to mean "to add value to".

17. Letter to Ernest J. Dick, 25 April, 1996.

tangible result would have been preferred for all of us and we spent some time developing proposals around CBC's impending 60th anniversary in 1996. A CD-ROM "publication" of extracts from interviews, together with career/biographical details and photographs would have made an appropriate 60th anniversary project but the drastic budget cuts at the CBC have precluded even considering such concepts. Extracts from the interviews could also have been used for programming but no CBC programming budget these days has the capacity to take on such a project. We did circulate the inventory of all CBC oral history interviews that we documented and commissioned to the scholars studying the CBC and will make copies, if they have budget to cover such copying. When the interviews are deposited with the National Archives we will recommend that they find an appropriate way to acknowledge the interviewers and interviewees.

We did receive many requests from interviewees for copies so that they could leave these to their families as aural memoirs. We were happy to provide such copies and consider that this is not an insignificant tangible product from the project. In a few cases we expect that the interviews may lead to written memoirs. We did not have the resources to transcribe the interviews, though we know that there are CBC retirees willing to do so as volunteers.

The interviews themselves are more engrossing than one would ever imagine, although that does not mean that will translate effectively into print. The stories celebrate the ingenuity of their colleagues, the accidents of meeting programming deadlines, and the fun of broadcasting. One cannot help but envy and admire the sense of purpose and dedication that these people had in their CBC careers. Most often these interviews illuminate the personality, wit, and intelligence of the interviewees themselves, although they are talking as much about others as of their own career. Antonin Boisvert's passion for public broadcasting, Jack Craine's nine very full CBC lives, Bill Armstrong's graciousness and generosity, Gabi Drouin's sense of humour and practical jokes, and Vincent Tovell's artistry that he brought to radio and television public affairs programming are just a few of the inspiring stories deserving to be heard by many.

Often the interviews do suggest disappointment at the CBC of today but this is usually expressed with care and with sadness, rather than with indignation. Most often former CBCers are all too aware of the conflicting demands on the CBC and how difficult life at the CBC is these days. We expected more anger and resentment and indeed, encouraged interviewers to ask the questions would allow such sentiments to be expressed. Partially,

interviewers may have restrained themselves because they were clearly speaking for the “historical” record; but equally, a detachment of some years from their CBC careers invariably mellowed strong resentments. Invariably most interviewees saw their CBC careers as fulfilling and enriching, and considered themselves ever so lucky as to have been able to have worked for the CBC.

CBC Oral History Project: Lessons

Indeed, the only consistent disappointment in the interviews comes from how CBCers were “retired”. Many were “retired” involuntarily and told that their function was no longer needed. This is never a gratifying response to a career and if someone is then re-assigned or hired to take on these functions, it becomes particularly grating. Those who volunteered for retirement certainly tend to be happier with their leaving of the CBC but even here they speak of being quickly considered *persona non grata* once they are out the door. Many would like to continue to be connected to the CBC, and make ongoing contributions to the CBC, but have little opportunity to do so. Earlier and earlier retirements are only going to exacerbate this frustration. Indeed, the eagerness of CBC retirees to become involved with the CBC Oral History project undoubtedly reflects their need to continue to be involved with the CBC.

The funding from CBC Head Office for the CBC Oral History Project was not continued despite the glowing responses from all involved with it. Ironically, the proportionally high level of visibility and success of the CBC Oral History project are its downfall. The consensus within the CBC is clearly that the CBC cannot be seen to be doing something so apparently “frivolous” and non-discretionary when programming budgets are being chopped. This is a powerful argument that will carry the day as long as CBC budgets are threatened. No one disputes the worthiness of the project but no one dares find money for it in this environment.

Our strategy at the CBC will be to approach potential corporate sponsors eager to have a strong presence with CBC’s 5,000 pensioners. This is a group that travels considerably, and sometimes has a fair bit of disposable income. We believe that oral history affords these corporations an opportunity to make a strong and very positive impression on CBC pensioners. We shall see if potential sponsors agree.

At the same time, we will approach corporations and similar institutions, offering the lessons we have learned from the CBC Oral History project. We believe that we now have the expertise to develop oral

history projects for other institutions and will be seeking to establish partnerships so that we can sustain the CBC Oral History project as well as help facilitate others.

Finally, we may have unleashed something at the CBC that we really cannot stop, even if we wanted to. So many are determined to continue with oral history that it will persist whether it receives corporate support or not. Oral history interviews with CBC retirees pre-dated this project and will survive beyond it. Such oral history projects will be gratifying and worthwhile but without the institutional coordination and endorsement they will not become a corporate resource.

Conclusions

Oral history may represent a human resources opportunity and responsibility for organizations like the CBC. To this point, we have considered the inevitable down-sizing that virtually all institutions have endured, or will be enduring, as a distasteful and unpleasant business to be dispatched with as quickly and mercifully as possible. Perhaps retirement and ongoing corporate involvement should rather be prolonged and encouraged. Oral history could be part of the strategy for accomplishing this in a very economical and practical way. Oral history valorizes one's career and may also afford ways to facilitate a corporate memory and a corporate pride for the future. The rapid turn-over of staff, and constant re-invention of professions, functions and individuals, that is becoming the norm will tend to erode corporate traditions and loyalty. Institutions will have to find new ways to *develop corporate history and identity*.

Understanding oral history as a process rather than a tangible product will change much of how we do oral history. It will require us to pay more attention to all stages of that process and take seriously what interviewers and interviewees are saying to us. It allows us to be more open to whatever stories "they" want to tell rather than the stories we want to hear. It certainly means we accept whatever restrictions both interviewer and interviewee want, even if that limits opportunities to make use of the interviews. By so doing, we will valorize and dignify our interviewees for their own sake, rather than for academic and archival purposes.

In comprehending oral history as a process and a human resources opportunity we may, in fact, begin to fathom its true potential. We may well have been demeaning oral history, quite unintentionally, by limiting it to a tool and instrument of the discipline of history. Oral history may, in fact, allow us to show the respect for our elders that they warrant. Our society will be the better for having asked for these stories and having listened to them.