

MEMORIAL STATEMENT—JIM BAILEY

Margaret Beissinger, Princeton University

There was always something so genuine about Jim Bailey. He genuinely loved Russian folklore, teaching, and, of course, his family. Jim was instrumental to the establishment and furthering of the study of Slavic and East European folklore in North America. He was one of the founding members of the Slavic and East European Folklore Association (SEEFa, affiliated with ASEES), guiding it at the outset as its first president. Moreover, he served as the editor of the “SEEFa Newsletter,” a publication that developed eventually into *Folklorica*, long a recognized journal for the study of Slavic and East European folklore. Jim was also one of the co-founders of the Folklore Program at UW--a field of study that continues to thrive and that offers dozens of courses. Jim's scholarship, especially on epic and oral traditional song meter, contributed substantially to the field. He published widely on Russian oral poetry. Most lasting, perhaps, has been his 1998 *Anthology of Russian Folk Epics*, an informative and beautifully translated volume co-edited with Tatyana Ivanova. It is by far the best annotated English-language anthology of *byliny* and is used everywhere by students and specialists alike. Jim was well-known and deeply respected in the Soviet Union and Russia. He was familiar with many Russian scholars, and much of his work on oral epic, lyric, and ritual poetry has been translated into Russian and published there. Moreover, Jim was extremely generous and supportive as he helped Russian folklorists who came to America (and Madison) find a niche here.

Jim, who taught for decades, delighted in sharing his knowledge and passion for oral traditions and poetry to his students. Among a variety of other courses, he regularly taught a class on Russian folklore. It was such a joy for Jim to introduce students to the world of oral traditional

Russian culture—a topic not often in university course offerings. He never took his many years of teaching for granted, however. He knew that to teach well was an ongoing challenge—he wasn't afraid to admit this truth. He also told me many times what great (but humble) teachers know: there is so much to learn from students. As Jim told me time and again, students open our eyes in such untold ways, sometimes leaving us astounded as they come up with the most amazing questions and subtle readings of “texts” of all sorts.

Jim also adored his family. I was guest in the home where he and his beloved wife Hanna lived. Not surprisingly, “evenings” at the Baileys’ were “folklore events”—he would gather “folk” for memorable evenings to meet and talk at length about oral poetry and traditional culture. Jim always spoke so warmly of his sons and grandchildren, and when I “attended” (virtually) Jim’s funeral two weeks ago, I was moved by the memories and affection expressed by them in their remarks. They appreciated Jim, of course, in a more personal way—as father and grandfather. But everything they said measured up to the Jim I knew: always there for the people and things that he cherished, always ready with a joke, and always so “genuine”—there was absolutely nothing fake or affected in him.

Before I moved to Madison from Boston in the late 1980s, Jim (knowing that I too was a folklorist) wrote me such a nice, friendly letter, hoping that we would meet soon after my arrival. And we did. I remember so well our first (of many) shop-talk lunches. He introduced me to the Sunroom Café on State Street, which we continued to frequent over the years. Jim warmly welcomed me a year later into the UW Slavic Department (and Folklore Program), thrilled to have a kindred spirit and fellow enthusiast of oral traditions on the faculty. When I first met Jim, I was so impressed by his utter fascination for Russian oral poetry: epic, lyric, and ritual (he was besotted!). Jim loved oral epic in particular, and he loved to talk to me about it. Whenever I saw

him—anywhere in the Slavic Department (or Folklore Program), or when we met for lunch at the Liz Waters cafeteria (which we often did once I was teaching in the department), he would eagerly tell me of some new observation about epic, with such a happy glint in his eye and a broad, heartfelt smile (usually punctuated by laughter), representing his pure delight in the nuances and meanings of oral poetry. Jim was a wonderful colleague at UW and a champion of Slavic folklore in such a candid and natural way—it was truly touching and inspirational. He contributed so richly to the field as well as to my own understanding and recognition of the depth and beauty of oral traditional literature.