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## Listening For A Life

Patricia Sawin

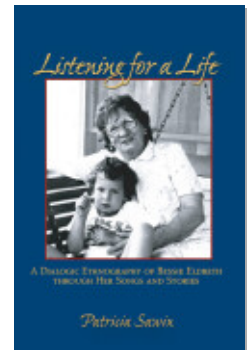
Published by Utah State University Press

Sawin, Patricia.

Listening For A Life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth through Her Songs and Stories.

Utah State University Press, 2004.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/9291](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9291).



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A DIALOGIC ETHNOGRAPHY OF  
*Bessie Eldreth*

THROUGH HER SONGS AND STORIES



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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LOGAN, UTAH

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Utah State University Press  
Logan, Utah 84322-7800

Publication of this book was supported by a grant from the University Research Council at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Manufactured in the United States of America  
Printed on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sawin, Patricia.

Listening for a life : a dialogic ethnography of Bessie Eldreth through her songs and stories / Patricia Sawin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-87421-582-X (pbk. : alk. paper)

**ISBN 0-87421-500-5 (e-book)**

1. Eldreth, Bessie Mae, 1913- 2. Eldreth, Bessie Mae, 1913—Interviews. 3. Women folklorists—Appalachian Region—Biography. 4. Women storytellers—Appalachian Region—Biography. 5. Folk singers—Appalachian Region—Biography. 6. Folklore—Appalachian Region. 7. Folk music—Appalachian Region. 8. Appalachian Region—Social life and customs. I. Title.

GR55.E53S397 2004

398'.092—dc22

2004004974

For my parents, Marilyn and Lewis Sawin,  
whose lives and stories I cherish and whose loving listening I  
strive to emulate

Better go down upon your marrow-bones  
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones  
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;  
For to articulate sweet sounds together  
Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
The martyrs call the world.

—William Butler Yeats, “Adam’s Curse”

*But is it impossible to reveal, through a character’s acts and through these acts alone, his ideological position and the ideological world at its heart, without representing his discourse?*

*It cannot be done, because it is impossible to represent an alien ideological world adequately without first permitting it to sound, without having first revealed the special discourse peculiar to it. After all, a really adequate discourse for portraying a world’s unique ideology can only be that world’s own discourse, although not that discourse in itself, but only in conjunction with the discourse of an author.*

—M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*