A Personal Essay:

Reflecting on My Drift into Rural Criminology[1]

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[1]The title of this essay is taken partly from a set of three articles by Charles Josiah Galpin, who wrote his own "my drift into Rural Sociology" that were published in the second volume of *Rural Sociology* back in 1937. He is considered the father of the American version of Rural Sociology.

Abstract

This "Journey" article is a reflection of my long years of rural crime and criminal justice scholarship, and of witnessing the growth and progression of rural criminology as a field of study within criminology. It highlights the many scholars who both helped me and helped advance rural criminology networks to what they are today – cohesive, collaborative, and creative. Although this journey essay is highly personalized, there are a series of ***lessons learned*** that are relevant to the growth of others' scholarly development and the advance of all criminological subdisciplines, including rural criminology, in the 21st century. These are re-stated in a revised form in the Appendix.

Keywords: conferences; criminological theory; networks; positive shmoozing; rural criminology

Introduction

Where I grew up in northern Kentucky, I could look out the west-facing bedroom windows of my childhood home and spy part of the skyline of Cincinnati. My buddies and I would sometimes ride our bicycles across the bridges over the Ohio River to downtown Cincinnati, just for fun and a sense of adventure. My high school in Newport, Kentucky was perched on a high bluff, overlooking a vast area of urban development on both sides of the Ohio River. Why mention these things? Simple! I have absolutely no rural background.

The Drift Begins

My drift into Rural Criminology begins with my undergraduate years at tiny Thomas More College (enrollment less than 1,000 students) situated near the Greater Cincinnati Airport, which happens to be located on the Kentucky side of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. My major was sociology and within sociology, there was a heavy emphasis on theory. My professors (there were only two), emphasized sociological theory in every course, with required readings by Talcott Parson, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Robert Merton, Pitirim Sorokin, and many others. As well, I earned minors in Philosophy and Theology, both of which included courses focused on existentialism, epistemology, and phenomenology. I could not guess at the time the extent to which theory would later shape how much I approach all rural criminology issues. ***I continuously feel sorry for colleagues who graduated from narrow-minded criminology and criminal justice graduate degree programs that neglect theory and emphasize, often in a very unbalanced manner, research methods.***[2]

As an undergraduate sociology major, I was enrolled in only a single criminology course, titled "Juvenile Delinquency". The textbook was authored by Martin H. Neumeyer, with the title *Juvenile Delinquency in Modern Society* (1961). I remember nothing from the course! However, it does serve to remind me that I have neither a rural nor a criminology background, yet somehow, I drifted into rural criminology.

A significant step in my journey to rural criminology began with a visit to the 15th floor of the Patterson Office Tower (POT) at the University of Kentucky in the northern Spring of 1970. I had a good chance to be offered a graduate teaching assistantship in the Department of Sociology (the department is still perched high on POT). Lexington is only about 80 miles from my home in northern Kentucky. Why not drive down there and shmooze a little, but with positive intentions!

When I asked about possible Summer employment on any kind of research project in order to gain the experience, I was directed down the hall to the office of Dr. Rabel Burdge. Dr. Burdge was one of the pioneers in development of the field of social impact assessment, a field that mostly focuses on how energy development, mineral extraction and other capitalist initiatives impact rural regions and the peoples who live there. At the time, he had a grant to

[2] Lessons that I believe I learned during my drift are ***in italics and bold***, and are summarized at the end of this essay. I hope that some of them benefit each reader of this journey essay.

assess the social impacts upon people who were involuntarily relocated by eminent domain for the construction of the Carr Fork Reservoir in Knott County. Knott County is in far eastern Kentucky, and very rural. Back then, the population size of the largest town and county seat (Hindman) was less than 900. It remains below 1,000 even today.

Knott County felt like a foreign country to this city boy. The Appalachian accent was completely different and there was nary a fast-food restaurant to be found anywhere in the county. A trip to a McDonalds-type establishment would require at least a 25-mile one-way trip. Not worth it for the amount of salt on their fries, in my opinion.

Before my interviews down there began, I was advised to refer to myself as growing up in Campbell County because that is how many folks in Appalachia Kentucky would identify themselves – by a county, not a town or village. After interviewing about 75 individuals, ***I learned the value of qualitative research and the surprises (i.e., serendipitous findings) that are earned through real-life field work.*** It became clear that these people, who were forced to move by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, were happy with their new location if they were able to reacquire land for a garden. It was not the actual amount of reimbursement for their property or some other financial amenity.[3] Formerly, they lived along Carr Fork Creek, that is, they lived where there was bottomland with fertile soil. For them, a garden was far more than a source of food because it functioned as a central focal point for discussions with others when they chatted after church on Sunday or other gathering spots about the progress and condition of their tomatoes, snow peas, zucchinis and other edibles. So too, roses, pansies, marigolds, and sunflowers, plus many other flowering varieties, were sources of pride/social status. This became the surprise finding – the sociological significance of the garden to people living in a very rural region of America that was economically depressed.

Through the course of my graduate work, I become more and more interested in rural studies, especially studies focused on the Appalachian region. Sociological studies of Appalachia at the time were often left-leaning, referring to Appalachia as like a colony, exploited by coal companies and other capitalist enterprises whose headquarters were located in distant cities, such as Lexington, Louisville, and Pittsburgh. Massive migration from the Appalachian region to manufacturing centers in Ohio and other Midwestern states could be seen on Fridays when Interstate 75 was jammed with cars returning south from jobs in the factories of Detroit, Dayton, Cleveland and Cincinnati for visits to extended families back in rural Appalachia. Since my wife, Diane, and I drove north to Northern Kentucky in the opposite direction for the same kind of family events, we saw first-hand the sociology of traffic congestion without the inconvenience of slowing down. And yes, on Sundays, I-75 was crowded with cars returning north for the beginning of the work week, while we drove south in a more leisurely fashion.

[3] In addition to the garden, it was how these relocated people felt they were treated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Some felt mistreated, including one older gentleman who described the Corps as “meaner than a barrel of fishhooks”.

Eventually, I began to apply for various social science positions in Colleges of Agriculture. Dr. Burdge advised me to write to department chairs of places where I applied that I would be attending various conferences and if someone from the department might be there to chat with me. A bit more positive shmoozing! One of those conferences was the Midwest Sociological Society annual meeting, which in 1976 was held in St. Louis. It was there that I met at breakfast with a sociology professor from Purdue University who also held an adjunct appointment in the Department of Agricultural Economics. Later that day, he also met a second candidate for lunch, but recommended I should be brought in and interviewed first. At the end of the interview, I was offered the job. The other candidate never received an invite.

My wife Diane and I bought a house in May 1977 on the same street where this professor lived. The date is significant only because of this person's name – Harry Potter. ***The lesson here is that networking (that is, shmoozing in the positive sense of that word) is very important for success in an academic career, so long as one is also productive.*** Without that letter sent to the chair of the Department of Agricultural Economics, I never would I have met my Harry Potter for a breakfast chat. In retrospect, it does seem like magic.

Soon after my arrival, I met with the chair to plan what I would do. It was a research/extension appointment, that is, no requirement for in-class teaching but a significant amount of my time would be spent on developing and delivering continuing education programs beyond the confines of the Purdue University campus. The Department of Agricultural Economics was quite a large department, with well over 40 faculty that included a small cadre of social scientists who were not economists. Naively assuming that as a sociologist I must have enrolled in a number of criminology courses, he asked me about my interest in developing both a research program on rural crime issues and a set extension education program on crime prevention for rural populations. I agreed, but never revealed my complete lack of an academic background in criminology. As well, as I traveled about the state of Indiana, delivering various education programs, usually put on in the evening at a town hall or church annex, I soon learned to tell the difference between a corn field and a field of soybeans, and in the process acquiring a rudimentary grasp of various agricultural terms and rural people's views of big city life (mostly negative).

Over at The Ohio State University (OSU), with the support of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Rural Crime Prevention Center (NRCPC) was founded in the late-1970s. Located in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology (College of Agriculture), it was likely one of the first, if not the first, Center devoted exclusively to the study of rural crime. Its founder was G. Howard Phillips, a professor of rural sociology who came to the promotion of rural crime studies and prevention programs through his own participation in Ohio Farm Bureau Study groups. In other words, he was not informed by the discipline of criminology, but instead by his knowledge came from his own and the real-life experiences of rural people.

Fortunately for me, the financial support opened up a new tenure-track position, and I was one of the few university-based scholars focused on rural crime, even though my time at

Purdue was less than three years. Nonetheless, I was offered the position, said adieu to Harry Potter, and moved to OSU in late 1979. For the next three years, before Dr. Philips' retirement, we worked together on a number of projects. One significant development during this time was the publication of an edited book titled *Rural Crime: Integrating Prevention and Research* (Carter et al., 1982). This was one of the first books devoted exclusively to rural crime studies.

Dr. Phillips' leadership was ground-breaking ***and the lesson to be learned is that someone has to launch a new initiative, and often that is someone from the outside, devoid of the academic dogmas that act like "mind-forged manacles" [4] to constrain innovative thinking and new initiatives.*** Even though there were already various scattered publications about rural crime in both criminology and rural sociology journals, arguably, Howard Phillips is the father of rural criminology.

Through the 1980s, the rural crime literature itself remained quite scattered.[5] There were occasional papers presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society (other than mine) and the sporadic publication of journal articles. Sources of funding which kept me connected to rural crime studies through the 1980s, included: (1) a grant from the National Institute of Justice to conduct a farm victimization study; (2) a couple of grants from the Andrus Foundation of the American Association of Retired Persons to examine fear of crime and perceptions of security among the rural elderly; (3) funding from the North Central Center for Regional Development, then at Iowa State University, to develop a set of prevention education brochures titled the "Home and Farm Security Series"; and (4) a series of grants from the Division of Criminal Justice Services, State of Ohio to examine various crime and criminal justice issues, several of which carried over into the 1990s.

Nonetheless, considerable thought was given by me to dropping a focus on rural crime and pursuing other rural sociological interests. Despite this scholarly wavering, rural criminology remained my primary focus to the extent that I once described rural crime studies to a non-criminology colleague as like a "dog that is continuously tugging on my pants legs – it simply won't go away". Perhaps that dog was the foundation of my sociological theory and philosophy/theology courses from Thomas More College and my graduate studies focus on the sociology of community that kept me involved. ***The lesson to be learned is that there is a great diversity of rural crime and criminal justice topics, all of which are important for advancing scholarship. With a proper theoretical background, a scholar can "jump" or "slide" more effectively from one issue to another already equipped with a set of effective conceptual tools.***

[4] "Mind forged manacles" is a phrase from a poem by William Blake titled *London*.
[5] A short history of rural criminology can be found in volume 5, issue 1 of the *International Journal of Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer, 2019). Also, please refer to a more recent accounting of rural criminology's development by Ceccato (2025).

The 1990s

For two primary reasons, the decade of the 1990s was significant for my journeys as a rural criminologist. Both drew me away from the Rural Sociological Society as my primary professional organization and into the American Society of Criminology. The first was that in 1992, the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) annual meeting was in Columbus, Ohio. I suppose that the RSS council thought it appropriate, given the 500th anniversary since the first voyage of Christopher Columbus. From today's perspective, it seems more like an insult to First Nations people.

I was asked to present a paper at RSS that reviewed published research on rural drug use. I was part of a session that included Eugene Oetting and Ruth Edwards, both from the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University. The Tri-Ethnic Center had a significant focus on rural populations, specifically, Hispanic, First Nations, and white, reflecting the demographics of rural peoples living in various western states. The Center had been successful in acquiring funding from several centers within the National Institutes of Health. I was invited to join them as a visiting academic during the Summer of 1993, and subsequently returned to work collaboratively with their faculty and staff on several other occasions.

From my partnership with them, two significant scholarly products were developed. The first was a theory called "Primary Socialization Theory" which considered rural adolescent substance use from the perspective of their social bonds to family, school, and other peers (both peers who were not and peers who were involved in substance use), and how these networks, vital to social learning about values and practices related to the adoption of drug-using behaviors, were in turn influenced by the larger economic and social dimensions of rural communities in America. Hence, for example, how do rates of unemployment and poverty, population mobility and other broader social forces affect the development and sustainability of drug-using networks (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998)?

The second scholarly product was the creation of a way to assess the readiness of a community to support prevention education programs (Donnermeyer et al, 1997). This idea emerged from discussions which observed that directors of substance abuse prevention and education programs in rural communities varied greatly in the success of their efforts. The reasoning was that since these directors varied less in their relative qualifications when compared to variations in program effectiveness, there must be something about the communities themselves they serve, that is, community context, that is affecting their relative level of success. To measure this variation, a scale was developed with nine stages of readiness and an open-ended survey with key stakeholders to determine how ready (or not) was a community for action to reduce substance misuse. The stages themselves ranged from "community tolerance" (stage 1), indicating that there was little or no realization among community leaders that drug use was a threat to the physical and mental health of the people who lived there, to "professionalization" (stage 9), indicating that prevention programs were supported across many groups within the community, with strong collaboration amongst these same groups, plus, there were efforts to continuously review their community-level

actions to meeting changing needs. With each stage was made a list of actions that might advance readiness within the community to the next stage (Donnermeyer et al., 1997).

The lesson I learned (that is, re-learned from my earliest OSU days with NRCPC) was the dividends of collaboration for adding value to ideas, from theory development to empirical research. Collaboration involves trust, and sometimes what starts out as an attractive partnership with others does not work out. Plagiarism, making up false stories about colleagues, petty jealousies and a host of other not-so-nice interpersonal dynamics amongst academics can create real and long-lasting PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). ***It is inevitable that anyone who pursues scholarship with dedication and energy will encounter some situations where what looked at first like a productive collaboration should be deposited into a chamber pot, carried to a john, and flushed away.***

About the same time as my collaborative work in the mid-1990s with scholars from the Tri-Ethnic Center, I met Ralph Weisheit, a professor at Illinois State University (ISU) in the criminal justice program. It could be argued that Ralph is the father of rural criminology as much as Howard Phillips because his book, co-authored with two other ISU colleagues, was the first real synthesis of the rural crime and criminal justice literature. It seems that from the year of publication of the first edition of *Crime and Policing in Rural and Small Town America* by Waveland Press (Weisheit et al., 1996), rural criminology began its real growth. The book itself went through two other editions, in 1999 and 2006, and even though focused only on the United States, it can be credited with helping to launch rural crime studies in many other countries.

Of great personal significance to me is that soon after meeting Ralph, he encouraged me to attend the American Society of Criminology (ASC) annual meeting. I was easily convinced and so I boarded a flight from Columbus to San Diego for the 1997 edition of ASC. I knew very few criminology scholars at that time, but Ralph was instrumental in introducing me to a number of them. Further, I experienced for the first time the joys of making my way from one departmental party to another on reception night. Free food and sometimes free booze! Like earlier times, I was shmoozing positively with individuals, some of whom would become life-long colleagues. ***The lesson here is simple: don't be shy, find a mentor.*** Ralph was mine.

One easily taken-for-grant technology today, but one considered quite revolutionary at one time, was email. It became quite popular during the 1990s and with its adoption induced, for better or worse, social and cultural change. By the beginning of 21st century, this and other social media technologies would greatly aid the development of rural criminology. Scholars who may have been the only ones interested in rural crime and criminal justice issues at their own institutions, and felt professionally isolated because of it, began to communicate more frequently across to scholars with similar interests at other universities. Lone wolves no more, rural criminology scholars were beginning to organize into packs. Hence, a new kind of synergy was developing with the aid of this information infrastructure. Later on, Zoom, Teams and a host of other ways to exchange information and ideas bolstered the cohesion of scholarly networks for rural criminology.

The lesson here is that as an outsider, I never acquired any of the disciplinary dogma and network parochialism that seems so prevalent in so many academic circles. So far, dogma and parochialism seem not to be primary traits of contemporary rural criminological networks, and I hope it stays that way. I am proud to declare that I am not part of any insular and elitist "good ole boys and girls" networks to be found in the American Society of Criminology, either today or yesterday. ***Another lesson is that social cohesion operates within academic communities in the same way it operates within communities of the real world – to include some and exclude others.***

A New Century is About to Begin

One cold, wintry day in 1998, I received an email from Pat Jobes asking me to join him on a rural crime research project in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, where he had successfully secured a research grant. Pat had moved from Montana State University (Bozeman) to the University of New England (UNE) Armidale, NSW several years prior. We previously knew each other through the Rural Sociological Society and an earlier attempt to examine rural crime and population change, but the grant proposal was not approved.

Even though I first had to search hard on a map to find Armidale's location, I was quite excited to travel there in 1999, and ever since, my relationship with UNE has never stopped. I am not keeping count, but I estimate close to a dozen visits to Armidale, and today I am able to give directions to some of the better pubs in town. It is one of the few small towns where this city boy would be happy to live.

Pat was a big fan of social disorganization theory and the sociological concept of *gemeinschaft*, and both informed the approach to our research, using police data and census information to examine variations in crime rates for the rural LGAs (local governmental units) of NSW.[6] LGAs are like counties in the United States, with the more rural LGAs containing a market town or two and a surrounding hinterland of farms and open-country regions.

A few days after arriving in Armidale during my first trip, I met Pat's colleague, Elaine Barclay, who assisted with the statistical analysis of the data and writing up the results. We were a remarkably productive trio (I count eight peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on my CV with those two). By the time Pat retired, Elaine had earned her PhD and occupied a lecturer position at UNE. Elaine and I continued to research and write together for many years on a variety of rural crime topics. Like the good folks at Colorado State University, I knew that with these two, I could share ideas with full trust that they would not be expropriated, and that any questions and criticisms by each of us directed toward our collective ideas was intended to improve them. Pecking order was irrelevant. ***Almost without exception, productive scholars are unselfish collaborators. A great deal of the long list of publications on the CV of highly productive scholars is due in part to the intellectual***

[6] See, for example, Jobes et al., 2004 and Jobes et al., 2005.

efforts of their partners. Partners are important, even though they may be a mere "al." on the et al. of a publication

Elaine Barclay was the leader in organizing two rural crime conferences, both held at UNE. The first took place in 1999 and the second in 2007. Although both were mostly focused on rural crime in an Australian context, also in attendance were several rural crime scholars from other countries. In 2018, near the time when Elaine retired, she was the primary organizer for a third conference, this time in collaboration with the Faculty of Law at UNE. And again, scholars from several other countries were there. ***Conferences where scholars can meet and chat face-to-face remain necessary, despite various alternatives vis-a-vie social media options.*** In fact, email and other forms of electronic communication not only makes it easier to organize conferences, but most meetings have become hybrid so that scholars have choices relative to their own schedules and budgets.

The account of my drift into rural criminology would not be complete without briefly telling readers about my epiphany while conducting a couple of interviews with Elaine Barclay near Lighting Ridge, which is an opal-producing area and five or so hours drive to the west of Armidale by car. One was with a farmer and the other with a police officer. The farmer told us about a couple incidents of sheep theft, which he suspects was a neighbor who also raised sheep. He was reluctant to call the police because he was concerned about being labeled as a snitch by others in the community. It makes it tougher to enjoy a beer at the nearest pub if one is not well-liked by one's neighbors. The police officer described how he weighed the time he should spend on investigating a report of crime committed against a local agricultural operation by the status of the owner-as-victim relative to the status of the possible suspect. In one case, because the suspected thief's wife was on shire council, the officer was even more reluctant to take seriously the reported crime. In rural criminology today, many scholars deal with the issue of "access to justice", and this was an early example of lack of access based on the discretionary decision-making of the officer.

On the long drive back to Armidale along a highway in an area with open range so that cattle, sheep, kangaroos and wallabies were free to cross the road or to graze on the grass near the shoulder of the road (or were carcasses, trampled by large "road trains" and other motor vehicles with cattle guards on the front), I half-jokingly suggested to Elaine that we need to write an article with Pat Jobes on the role of *gemeinschaft* in facilitating crime, not constraining crime, as a way to "take the mickey out of Pat". As both of us kept a steady eye on the animals we did not want to hit in a relatively small motor vehicle with no cattle guard, especially as day turned to dusk, the suggestion evolved into a more serious idea, and sometime during our return to Armidale, I exclaimed, "there really is no such thing as social disorganization". That was the beginning of my intellectual travels toward not only critiquing the theory itself, but realizing that ***rural crime studies have great value for advancing new conceptual perspectives about crime and criminal justice.*** And, along with Pat Jobes, we did publish an article with the main title as "The Dark Side of Gemeinschaft" (Barclay et al., 2004).

My journey towards considering the theoretical implications of rural crime research advanced greatly upon a momentous event in my professional career. It was mid-year, 2004. For one of the very rare times in the history of OSU's Criminal Justice Research Center, a seminar focused on rural crime was presented, and I was invited to have dinner with the presenter. At the time, he was a professor at Ohio University (OU), located in the Appalachian region (southeast) of Ohio. His name is well-known to both rural criminologists and critical criminologists. It is Walter DeKeseredy. As readers who know his work have likely already guessed, his presentation was on violence against rural women by their husbands and boyfriends. We three (including Ruth Peterson, the director of the Center at that time and a former president of ASC) had a marvelous conversation. A few weeks later, I drove down to Athens, where OU is located, to meet him (i.e., shmooze) and suggested writing a book together. I assumed we would meet in his office, but as anyone who knows Walt quickly realizes, ***ideas almost always flow better when located at a nearby pub or at a conference bar.*** The pub chat eventually led to the idea of co-writing a number of articles, book chapters, and eventually a Routledge Monograph titled *Rural Criminology* (2014).

I continue to publish with Walt and the colleagues I met through him. For example, in late 2025, *Drilling Down on Patriarchy: Resource Extraction and Violence against Women in Rural Places* will be published in the series titled "Routledge Studies in Rural Crime." This book is co-authored with Jayne Mooney (currently co-editor of *Critical Criminology*) and her son, Fintan Mooney, who is working on his PhD. In between the books *Rural Criminology* (2014) and *Drilling Down* (2025), I count over two dozen journal articles and book chapters co-authored with Walt and others on my CV. As well, Walt introduced me to a great many criminologists who take a critical approach to their scholarship, ***an approach that I embraced in part because it is quite compatible with my background in sociological theory, philosophy and theology.*** And, it can be argued that there are more critical criminologists at the ASC conference bar, discussing criminological theory and research, than any other group of criminologists. Critical shmoozing!

Walt has in the past and continues to extend my scholarly life. For you see, I retired from OSU in 2014, yet, I am as busy now with my rural criminology scholarship as at any time since that first conversation with the department chair at Purdue University back in the mid-1970s. Walt and I have frequent chats on the phone about every conceivable topic, from the idiocy of bad presidents (the White House variety) and less than ethical faculty and graduate students whom we mutually know and from whom we wish to keep our distance, to ideas for the next round of writing and publishing.

In between meeting Walt and the next important person in my career, I would be negligent if I did not mention how much I have enjoyed working with and exchanging ideas with several wonderful Europeans – Vania Ceccato, Kreseda Smith (and her colleague, Richard Byrne), Robert Smith and Matt Bowden. Vania was the organizational leader of a rural crime conference held at her university (KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm) in 2014, and subsequently, most of the papers were published in the *Journal of Rural Studies* as a special issue (Ceccato, 2015), including one by me that discussed the

logical fallacies of social disorganization theory. Since then, she has published two books on rural crime, both of which like Weisheit et al.'s (2006) scholarship are excellent syntheses of the literature. The first one (Ceccato, 2016) was titled *Rural Crime and Community Safety.* The second and more recent one was co-written with Jonatan Abraham (also at KTH) and is a free access book available through Springer. It is titled *Crime and Safety in the Rural: Lessons from Research* (2022). More recently, like "icing on the cake", Ceccato (2025) published an assessment of rural criminology in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, arguing both for its importance to criminology in general, and the directions it might take in the future.

Kreseda Smith is from Harper Adams University in Shropshire, England. Along with her colleague, Richard Byrne, they have examined transnational crimes, including assessing the prevalence of modern slavery in agricultural operations. More recently, Smith and Byrne (2024) have written about the "darker side of rural masculinity", which speaks to the psychological impacts of crime on farmers as a source of stress, along with the weather, commodity prices and other challenges to maintaining a family-owned agricultural operation (Smith, 2022). It was part of a special issue on trauma and victimization, co-edited with Ziwei Qi, who is a professor at Fort Hays University in western Kansas. Along with Associate Professor April Terry and Assistant Professor Morgan Steele, it is one of the few institutions of higher learning with more than one scholar focused on rural crime and criminal justice issues. A critical mass!

Robert Smith was a professor at the University of the West of Scotland, who, along with his colleagues (especially Gerard McElwee), approached illegal actions of farmers as a form of criminal entrepreneurship from the point of view of scholarly studies of business development and related activities. Their case study approach provides an innovative way to examine a variety of rural crime topics, but especially what they call the "pluriactivities" of farmers (McElwee et al., 2011). More recently, he examined how thieves drive out from nearby towns to agricultural operations on e-bikes, with their faces fully covered by hoodies, stealing GPS systems and other attractive targets. Their nickname is "rural wraiths", with the latter word taken from Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings*, referring to the evil-looking, ghostlike figures riding silently on horses in search of the ring.

Matt Bowden currently serves as a senior lecturer at the Technical University Dublin and Academic Leader of the Culture and Society Research Hub. Along with a former student there, Artur Pytlarz, they have written extensively using the concepts of late modernity and liquid modernity as the conceptual backdrops for examining the ways that change – economic, climate, social, and cultural – impacts people's sense of insecurity.

What these four European scholars have in common for me is that they represent the growth and expansion of rural criminology in the 21st century, a development which I have witnessed with great pleasure, and with a large measure of gratitude in part because it expanded rural criminology's perspective well beyond the U.S. I consider each a valued colleague who have made my retirement, to quote Paul McCartney (the Beatles, Wings, etc.), like ***a "long and winding road" of intellectual stimulation and scholarly achievements.***

Hence, as the 21st century progressed, so too did rural criminology and the richness of my networks (and the wealth of rural criminology networks for all). Yet, it gets even better!

In 2015, at a conference in Brisbane, I was introduced to Alistair Harkness and Bridget Harris. At the time, both were lecturers at Federation University, Victoria, in southern Australia. Quickly, both Alistair and Bridget joined my personal pantheon of great colleagues with whom I have collaborated. Today, Alistair is an associate professor of criminology in the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New England and co-director, with Kyle Mulrooney, of the Centre for Rural Criminology there. Bridget, who is an expert on technology-facilitated violence, is now Director of the Monash University Centre for Gender and Family Violence Prevention.

Alistair provided aid and comfort to me at the 2016 annual meeting of the European Society of Criminology (ESC) in Münster, Germany, when my passport and laptop were stolen. I was devastated and a bit scared. He came to my hotel and walked me over to the ESC reception, and after a couple of drinks and an introduction to Kyle Mulrooney (then, a graduate student), eased the pain of my victimization and demonstrated again why colleagues are important in so many different ways to one's career.

In 2019, Alistair organized the "Understanding Crime and Rural Communities" workshop, held on the Gippsland campus of Federation University, which consisted of a small invited group of scholars interested in rural crime studies. Subsequently, a special issue in the *International Journal of Rural Criminology* (IJRC) (volume 5, issue1) was published (Harkness, 2019). Later, Alistair and Kyle (along with others) organized the "Rural Crime, Justice and Disaster" symposium, which was held on the campus of UNE in November 2023. Sponsored by the Centre for Rural Criminology, these two represent a second generation of rural criminology scholars from UNE. A special issue of IJRC from papers at the disaster symposium is scheduled for September 2026.

One very significant contribution by Alistair was that issues of IJRC was irregularly published before he joined me as a co-editor. That soon changed! Subsequently, both Kyle Mulrooney and Jessica Peterson (Southern Oregon University) doubled the talent, perhaps more, on the IJRC editorial team. Today, IJRC is published at least twice a year on a regular basis, and sometimes three or four times if there are special issues, such as the ones noted above.

I would be remiss without mentioning two other leaders in rural criminology and their conferences on rural crime. The first is Wilhelm ("Willie") Clack, a senior lecturer at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. Along with his colleague, Anthony Minnaar, they sponsored an international conference in 2017 on agricultural crime, held in the Pretorian suburb of Centurion. Along with Elaine Barclay (UNE) and at the time, the young Kenyan scholar by the name of Emmanuel Bunei, I was a keynote speaker, talking about farm crime, the topic also addressed, but from different perspectives by both Elaine and Emmanuel.

One "sunny" evening ("sunny" because sessions were over and the bar was open) at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, held that year in Atlanta, I enjoyed a long sip and chat session with a number of colleagues, including one who I only knew at that time as a former President of the European Society of Criminology. His name is Gorazd Meško, a Professor of Criminology at the University of Maribor, Slovenia. It must have been close to 2am before I stumbled out of there and back to my room. Ever since, I consider Gorazd as another good friend and colleague. Every two years, following the week after the European Society of Criminology meetings in September, Gorazd gives leadership to organizing the Biennial International Conference on Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe, held in the capital city of Ljubljana. The last conference focused on rural security issues.

The lesson from all of this travel is simple: conferences are one of the best ways to re-energize one's thinking about research, theory, and what to write next.

Finally, in my personal pantheon of great colleagues are three very recent additions. The first is Emilia Jurgielewicz-Delegacz, a professor with the Faculty of Law at the University of Białystok, located in the eastern Polish city of Białystok. I lived there in the months of September and October 2024, presenting several lectures on a variety of topics, the most important of which was the intersectionality of Rural Criminology and Environmental Criminology. Białystok is a beautiful city, easily walkable, and with friendly people everywhere.

On November 8, 2024, a rural crime conference was held at the Université de Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada. It was a hybrid conference, with both presenters and attendees there in person and online. It's theme and the various papers were mostly, but not exclusively, focused on rural crime in the maritime region of Canada. Better yet, the organizers are planning a special issue for IJRC, likely to be published in March 2026. The abstracts will be in both English and French (or perhaps another non-English language as preferred by the author), which is something new for IJRC and something that should be pursued with more vigor for future issues of the journal. The impetus for both the organization of the conference and the editorial leadership for the special issue come from my two newest rural criminology friends, Seyyed Hesamoddin Seyyed Esfahani and Véronique Chadillon-Farinacci, both from the Université de Moncton.

The 21st century is historic for Rural Criminology because it includes numerous key events which have built-up a very cohesive and growing international network. The first was the founding of the Division of Rural Criminology in the American Society of Criminology in 2019. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic came along soon after, canceling ASC and other annual conferences, the Division of Rural Criminology (DRC) met the challenge of staying alive (thanks to social media) and remains an actively visible part of the ASC. It has hosted joint receptions with the Division of Critical Criminology and Social Justice and the West Virginia University Center for Violence Research, run by Walter DeKeseredy. Under the leadership of Kreseda Smith, the European Society of Criminology Working Group on Rural Criminology was started in the same year. In 2020, the International Society for the

Study of Rural Crime (ISSRC) was established. I give Jessica Peterson of Southern Oregon University a shout-out for her efforts on behalf of both DRC and ISSRC. I was not only involved in each of these developments, but rejoiced at how much leadership was provided by my many good colleagues, including Jessica. Yet, the struggle with the internationalization of rural criminology continues. There is an uneven geographic distribution, with a need for many more rural criminology scholars from various Asian countries, north Africa, and both Central and South America was well, or at least scholars who focus on these part of the world

Finally, kudos must be extended to the 2023 publication of *The Encyclopedia of Rural Crime.* It was published by Bristol University Press and includes 85 entries on topics related to rural crime and criminal justice by 82 authors from every region of the world. The Part V section on "Geographic Status of Rural Criminological Research" was the inspiration for the recently published book in the Bristol University Press series on "Research in Rural Crime" edited by Matt Bowden and Gorazd Meško titled *Rural Criminology in Global Perspective: State of the Art on the World's Continents* (2025). It summarizes the status of rural crime studies on each continent, and that includes Antarctica. I shall leave it to the readers of this essay to examine that chapter for themselves, rather than for me to answer the question: how in the heck did the authors find enough to write about? I was privileged to be the co-author of the North American chapter, written cooperatively with Walter DeKeseredy and Wendell Wallace, who is a professor in the Department of Behavioural Sciences on the St. Augustine Campus (Trinidad and Tobago), of the University of West Indies. Dr. Wallace was the editor for the recently published *Rural Policing in Global Contexts* in the Bristol University Press series. Another addition to my pantheon!

Wrap-up and the Future

Perhaps some readers noticed the shift in focus from the beginning to the end of this journey essay. It starts with a series of key individuals, from Rabel Burdge to Harry Potter to Ralph Weisheit, that drew me into rural crime studies, but the essay transitions to events (conferences etc.) and the many individuals associated with those events that have kept me involved in rural criminology long into my retirement years, and will continue to do so.[7] In this sense, the title is wrong. I did not really drift into rural criminology, but instead my own scholarship developed as the field of rural criminology itself grew. Notwithstanding, so much of my sociological theory, philosophy and theology courses from Thomas More College came to enrich what I had learned all along the way.

I would be less than straightforward if I did not admit that my journey was without some negative events and situations. Along the way there have been a couple of very inept department chairs, a sociopathic professor, and a not-so-nice scholar so full of braggadocio. I shall never solve the puzzle about how they managed to keep their university appointments and why they act in such rude and unethical ways toward others. However, I did learn from them the value of simultaneously keeping my professional distance and keeping my smile

[7] I now tell my colleagues that I am 75, plan to research and write for another 25 years, and then taper back a bit.

throughout. They are my negative role models. Everyone mentioned by name in this essay is my positive role model.

All readers of this essay will encounter similar difficult situations and selfish, hoggish, unethical people, and my advice is to find alternative ways to pursue your own scholarly interests. Avoid obsessions with battling these bastards, for they waste your time, although I must admit I took great pleasure on a couple of occasions in taking effective actions against them, either within my own academic unit or various professional circles, such as ASC. Amazingly, a good theoretical foundation helps with locating new pathways for one's scholarship that allows one to get past pesky and pernicious pricks.[8]

So, here I (and we) are – already one-fourth of the way through the 21st century. I published in IJRC a review essay titled "A Baker's Dozen Significant Books about Rural Crime in the Twenty-First Century" (Donnermeyer, 2023a). At first, I thought I might have a difficult time finding 13 monographs and edited books, but to my very pleasant surprise, 38 were found. The difficult part became the task of identifying what in my opinion were the top 13, and of how to apologize to the authors/editors of the other 25 quality, scholarly products.

There are more books coming out in 2025 and beyond, including three in the Routledge Rural Crime Series: (1) *Crime, Peoples and Places: Perspectives on Rural Safety and Justice*; (2) *Farm Crime: An International Perspective;* and (3) *Drilling Down on Patriarchy: Resource Extraction and Violence Against Women*.[9] In the Bristol University Press series, upcoming books include two different volumes on rural policing, one on farm crime, another on rural heritage crime, and one on crime in rural China. Finally, Willie Clack from the University of South Africa and Emmanuel Bunei (formerly of Moi University in Kenya and now with Flinders University, with campuses in both South Australia and the Northern Territory) are developing an edited book on *Rural Criminology in Africa.* This book will be groundbreaking because it will be the first of its kind.

Below the references, in an appendix, is the list of "lessons", slightly edited without the narrative of my own scholarly journey in rural criminology. I hope readers learn from them. I know I have.

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[8] I have written one article for the ISSRC newsletter and one for IJRC and one about professional behavior and another paper about defective reviewers. See Donnermeyer, 2023a and Donnermeyer, 2023b.

[9] The list of already published books in the Bristol University Press series includes: *Dark Tourism and Rural Crime* by Jenny Wise; *Gender-based Violence and Rurality in the 21st Century*, edited by Ziwei Qi, April N. Terry and Tamara J. Lynne; *Rural Policing in Global Contexts*, edited by Wendell C. Wallace; *Rural Transformations and Rural Crime*, edited by Matt Bowden and Alistair Harkness; and *Rural Criminology in Global Perspective*, edited by Matt Bowden and Gorazd Meško. The Routledge series in Rural Criminology includes: *Rural Crime Prevention: Theory, Tactics and Techniques*, edited by Alistair Harkness, *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* by Walter S. DeKeseredy, *Rural Victims of Crime: Representations, Realities and Response*, edited by Rachel Hale and Alistair Harkness; and *Research Methods for Rural Criminologists*, edited by Ralph A. Weisheit, Jessica Peterson, and Artur Pytlarz.

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Appendix

16 Lessons Learned During a Very Long Career

1. *Colleagues who graduate from criminology and criminal justice degree programs that neglect theory and emphasized, often in an unbalanced manner, research methods, are short-changed on their education.*

2. *There is great value in the significance of findings from qualitative research and the surprises (i.e., serendipitous findings) that are earned through real-life field work.*

3. *Networking (shmoozing in the positive sense of that word) is very important for success in an academic career, so long as one is also productive.*

4. *Someone has to launch a new initiative, and often that is someone from the outside, devoid of the academic dogma that acts like, in the words of William Blake (from the poem "London", published in 1794) "mind-forged manacles", constraining innovative thinking and new initiatives.*

5. *There is a great diversity of rural crime and criminal justice topics, all of which are important for advancing scholarship. With a proper theoretical background, a scholar can "jump" or "slide" more effectively from one issue to another already equipped with the proper conceptual tools.*

6. *There are untold dividends earned from collaboration for adding value to ideas, both for theory development and empirical research.*

7. *It is inevitable that anyone who pursues scholarship with dedication and energy will encounter some situations where what looked like a productive collaboration should be deposited into a chamber pot, carried to a john, and flushed away.*

8. *Don't be shy, find a mentor.*

9. *To the best of one's ability, never acquire any of the disciplinary dogma and network parochialism that seems so prevalent in so many academic circles. So far, dogma and parochialism seem not to be primary traits of current rural criminological networks, and I hope it stays that way.*

10. *Social cohesion operates within academic communities in the same way it operates within communities of the real world – to include some and exclude others.*

11. *Almost without exception, productive scholars are unselfish collaborators. A great deal of the long list of publications on the CVs of highly productive scholars is due in*

part to the intellectual efforts of their partners. Partners are important, even though they may be a mere "al." on the et al. of a publication.

12. *Conferences where scholars can meet and chat face-to-face remain necessary, despite various alternatives through social media options.*

13. *Rural crime studies have great value for advancing new conceptual perspectives about crime and criminal justice*

14. *Ideas almost always flow better when the discussion is located at a pub or at the conference bar.*

15. *In the words of Paul McCartney (the Beatles) "long and winding road" of intellectual stimulation and scholarly achievements is what makes for a memorable career.*

16. *Conferences are one of the best ways to re-energize one's thinking about research, theory, and what to write next.*