

Notes on Dr. Groth,

She did not want to include a photo. (She stated that she didn't have one that she liked.)

Her Works include:

Susan Charles Tuft Groth, "Scouts' own: Creativity, tradition, and empowerment in Girl Scout ceremonies" (January 1, 1999). *Dissertations available from ProQuest*. Paper AAI9937729.

This can be found at: <http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI9937729/>

"Northwest Jersey Folklife Project" which is no longer an organization but the work has been donated. This work however is not online.

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Scouts' own: Creativity, tradition, and empowerment in Girl Scout ceremonies

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**Susan Charles Tuft Groth, *University of Pennsylvania*** ([http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/query.cgi?field\\_1=lname&value\\_1=Groth&field\\_2=fname&value\\_2=Susan%20Charles%20Tuft&advanced=1](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/query.cgi?field_1=lname&value_1=Groth&field_2=fname&value_2=Susan%20Charles%20Tuft&advanced=1))

## Abstract

This work draws a fine between a specific instance of expressive culture, Girl Scout ceremony, and gradual, widespread cultural change with respect to empowering American girls and women. Roger Abrahams' "language of festivals" (1982) helps break down Girl Scout ceremony into components representing genres such as symbolic action, decorative art, music, costume, and foodways, which are then recombined. The collection of these elements appears as a syncretization of inheritances from youth movements and women's organizations, along with other elements (e.g. American Folk Revival materials; traditions developed within American Girl Scouting). Unlike the non-literate cultural groups which have traditionally occupied folklorists' attention, Girl Scouts syncretize oral and written inheritances in their expressive culture. The Girl Scout ceremony tradition is for specific groups of individuals to consciously recombine or syncretize traditional elements and innovations, and thus learn and communicate through an event's design. I trace the empowerment of girls and women through Girl Scout ceremony form, production, and discourse. Form syncretizes expressive elements from programs intended to empower boys (Boy Scouting) and women (e.g. women's social, service, and study clubs). The method of production--planning and carrying out expressive events--empowers through cultural agency and through training the planners in management skills. Empowering discourses in Girl Scout ceremony appear in words like "self-esteem," "self-expression," and "decision-making," and also through more complex themes: building strength in the individual (honor, dreams, achievement), building strength in the group (sisterhood, patriotism, citizenship), and the combination of the two (service, leadership). Applying coding theory, I argue that throughout Girl Scouting, including ceremony, one finds cultural expressions which operate on at least two levels, one challenging male dominant culture and another which does not threaten male dominance. Many of these techniques resemble the coding historically used by women's voluntary associations (e.g. framing power and leadership in the community as patriotism or good mothering). Others come about through the syncretization of a youth movement and the women's voluntary association heritage (e.g. appropriating male outdoor and technical training offset by continuing training in traditional domestic arts; training in both male and female emotional discourses). Accounting for the conservative image of Girl Scouting, I develop the ideas of failed codes and internal coding. Often Girl Scouts will code for themselves, avoiding controversial terms like "feminism" in order to accommodate the largest possible chunk of the political spectrum (to which members and members' guardians belong) and thus become a large and inclusive organization. The complex combination of internal and external coding, a variegated heritage, local autonomy, and continuous change can also result in failed codes when, for instance, individual adult volunteers emphasize traditional disempowerment of females (often turning off girl interest) or feminist outsiders do not recognize the empowering processes and withdraw support. Over this phenomenon of complexity, subtlety, mixed and coded messages, and syncretization, exists a gradual multi-generational movement, a gentle revolution. The slowness, subtlety, variety, and folklife focus in turn present a methodological puzzle: how can one study change through time when (1) the expressive and political behaviors are generally considered too trivial to record and memory fails and (2) the process is so subtle that participants commonly do not identify the empowering effect until years of cumulative impressions or (in the case of child members) in retrospect in adulthood? I use three main types of research to address this problem. (Abstract shortened by UMI.)

## Subject Area

Folklore,American studies,Womens studies

## Recommended Citation

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# Interview Questions for Dr. Charlie Groth

## Life Events – Childhood

1. What activities did you enjoy doing as a child?

Climbing trees, making things (with fabric, cardboard, wood, tree houses with furniture, dollhouse furniture, doll clothes, stuff in the kitchen, needle work, beading), hanging out with my grandma, playing dolls, doing art, playing in the brook and the tree nursery behind our house, doing stuff with neighborhood kids and siblings—especially creating clubs or pretend towns in the scrub woods or the sandbox where we used to play with Matchbox cars, Girl Scouts—especially the badges.

2. Describe your parents. What were they like? What did they do?

My dad was an analytical chemist working in research and development for agriculture. My mom was usually a student in an English department: undergrad until I was 8, and then a grad student. They were also civil rights activists through our church (Unitarian Universalist)—concerned more with kids' lives than with rights, per se (e.g. they were part of a program that kept kids in Trenton out of trouble by being active—either at the “House of Soul” where Mom taught sewing and Dad taught woodwork or in our backyard where they came to swim and play—like on the roller coaster my father built—and garden). They were always making stuff! We grew a lot of our food from our garden and preserved vegetables and fruits. Mom or Grandma made a lot of our clothes and Dad could make or fix anything, and did so. Grandma (Dad's mother) was very much a third parent in the household. She lived in an apartment that my dad built off the back of our house, and I spent a lot of time with her every day. She was a retired elementary school teacher and taught me to read before kindergarten (that didn't happen much back then).

3. Did you have any siblings? What memories do you have of them?

I have 3 brothers (13, 8, and 6.5 years older than I) and 1 sister (11.5 years older than I). I thought they were the most hilarious people ever. My eldest brother was always working on his Jeep and my sister was always doing something crazy and creative and earnest. Once when I was 4 she made me crawl out on the icy roof to feed the birds because she was too sick. Once she read in the Time Life books how the cavemen made paint (from animal fat) and started saving bacon drippings so that we could make some. Unfortunately it somehow went rancid and Mom made us throw it out. Another time, she (my sister) decided to make a Japanese tea house after reading Rumer Godden's books. It was made from tissue paper and balsa wood and it was the most beautiful thing ever. Our house was the proverbial 3-ring circus

with lots of activity and noise (my sister and her best friend would practice bag pipes and drums in the house, for example).

4. What kind of school did you go to? What was your favorite subject? Least favorite?

Presbyterian nursery school (my teacher was our mayor) and then public schools: k/1, 2-4, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12. It was the school for my town (pop. 2000) up until 7<sup>th</sup> grade; then 2 boroughs and 1 township (3 feeder schools) were regionalized for junior high and high school. I liked history and English best. I hated recess and gym.

5. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A writer, an explorer (I think I was really thinking of archeologists), a mom (I thought "adopter" was a job in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and wanted to be that).

### Life Events - Adult

1. What are some of the changes in our society that you have seen over your lifetime?

I turn 46 in a couple of days, and by some yardsticks I am the last year of the Baby Boom—or the year after that. I have seen the youthful population shrink—right after my grade went through, schools would condense and even close. The spreading effect of Title IX is a big deal. When I was a little girl, my dad got turned away when he tried to sign me up for Y Basketball because I was a girl and there was no team for girls. The transition into the Informational Age has been huge. It's not just that people can talk to people further away (when I went to Scotland for my Junior Year Abroad, I didn't speak to my parents from September under Christmas Day; now when my husband travels to the UK, he calls almost every day). It's also that the seat of communication (both oral and written) used to be attached to the home and the family unit, and now it's with the individual, even with children. Much like the shift from the agrarian to industrial eras which created the role of housewife and made the female's contribution to production near invisible, this new shift is highly disruptive to the family unit.

2. What are some of the goals you are still working toward?

I'm working on writing and publishing an ethnography on the shad fishery I started studying in grad school in 1996. It took me many years to be able to see and articulate what is so important about this site. I also want to write more poetry, get more published, and assemble and get published a volume of poetry. The challenge with both of these projects is that I scholar-tracked my poetry, then mommy-tracked my scholarship while I worked in a particularly demanding academic position to secure health insurance and otherwise support the family. I'm also trying to fix up our old house build in 1885.

3. Do you prefer to go by the name Charlie and if so, why?

Yes, because I've always disliked the nickname "Sue," and with the first name of Susan (which I'm not all that fond of either), you can't really get away from being called "Sue."

4. How did you decide what you wanted to study when you went to college?

I was deciding between being a German major, English major, or history major. The German major seemed too limited for someone planning to stay in the US. History didn't seem right, because so much of that field seemed focused on male pursuits such as Politics (with a capital P) and military activities. Before I settled on an English major, I found a major called Literary Studies, which was sort of like a cross between the humanities and comparative literature. There were only 3 of us in my class (and only 2 of us graduated together). This major had lit from all over the world since forever (the intercultural aspect) and many requirements in philosophy, history, and religion to help us interpret what we read. There was also a foreign language requirement. We had no minor requirement since our major was so broad, but I was one class short of concentrations (Middlebury's minor) in history, religion, and theater. I sometimes wonder whether my life would have been different if I hadn't been assigned to a chemistry professor as my advisor in my freshman year. If I had been assigned to someone in the humanities or social sciences, he/she might have done a better job of listening to me and would have probably sent me over to the Anthropology and Sociology department.

5. What was your favorite job you ever had? Why did you like it?

I'm in the best job I ever had! This placement allows me to combine my loves for teaching, leadership, community, and art. I'm a professor at Bucks County Community College in Newtown, Pennsylvania. Here I get to teach writing and literature in my department, and cultural anthropology as an adjunct. This place is very forward looking in the services and education it provides its students. Some of my students perform at the level my Penn students did, and others are discovering academic talents and interests they never thought possible. In addition, I get to co-direct a student research conference (185+ undergraduates presented their research this semester) and co-direct the county poet laureate program, which includes the county high school poet of the year contest. The school emphasizes arts, and it's placed in a wealthy woman's manor, surrounded by the state park she donated land for. The grounds are gorgeous, because there's a historic and landscape preservation certificate program here; our faculty center is a 19<sup>th</sup> century fieldstone farmhouse in the center of campus, which the patron (Stella Elkins Tyler) used as a sculpture studio, and there are formal gardens and gorgeous trees. Every day I feel lucky to have landed here. My colleagues are friendly, creative, and caring towards the students, and I would like to grow old with them. This is a place where people like to stay.

The next favorite job was as a preservation intern for a historic schooner in New Bedford, MA.

## Influences

1. Looking back, what person, group of persons, or organization/institution has had the greatest positive influence on your life story? Why?

My church, my family, and Girl Scouting. These three emphasized service, creativity, self sufficiency, and leadership.

2. Who are your role models or mentors? Why?

My grandmother worked very hard and very faithfully as a teacher and mother. She supported the family when her husband was disabled. My godmother was a great role model. She chose a life as a single woman, which was unusual for her time (1918-2010), and she was so generous with her time and spirit, but didn't lose sight of her own needs. Some of the key informants I met through my studies of shad fishing and Girl Scouting have influenced me greatly in terms of commitment to the task and to the community I serve. When I lead my own Girl Scout groups/troops (I have three: 2 troops and a group that grew out of the religious award that I worked on for my denomination), I think back to 4 women I interviewed and also to my own Girl Scout leader, all of whom told me I had to follow my girls. There are also a couple of women at church that I strive to be like in their courage, commitment, and service. I also try to follow the example of my daughters.

## Identity and Personal Ideology

1. What is something that you are very proud of, and why?

My daughters, aged 10 and 15. They are very smart and thoughtful and generous of spirit and with their time. They are creative and seem more tolerant of their own imperfections than I ever was of my own.

2. What are some of your favorites? (color, food, ice cream, book, movie, song, sport, etc.)

green (but not Kelly green—sage and forest and others); cheeseburgers and korma and bread and butter and...; ice cream is a favorite—I especially like Chocolate Mint Chip, Salted Caramel, strawberry, sweet cream, and cinnamon (especially the cinnamon and other flavors I make myself); Borges' *Ficciones*, the Mabinogion, Grimms' Fairy Tales, *Baby Island*, *Marta and the Nazis*, Faulkner novels, *Jane Eyre*, anything by Jane Austen; *Sound of Music*, *Reds*, *Secret of Roan Innish*, *The War of the Buttons*, *How to Make an American Quilt*, *The Secret Life of Bees*; hymns, Girl Scout songs, spirituals, 70s and 80s pop, songs my family sings (much is folk revival); basketball; working on my house; sewing; needlework; holiday celebrations.

3. Do you have any special sayings or expressions?

You don't neglect your own folklife just because you're studying someone else's. I didn't realize this was a "saying," but I said it to a researcher I was supervising who felt conflicted about an event she wanted to cover which was scheduled the same weekend as her family reunion. Much later our administrative assistant said she had used that idea to guide her for years after. Other favorite proverbs:

It's never done; it's only due.

No rest for the wicked.

A Girl Scout leaves a place better than when she found it.

Why not? It's something to do. (My godmother used to say this on family outings; into her 90s she was up for anything).

4. How do you approach political and social issues? Do you have a particular point of view? Are there specific issues that you feel particularly strongly about?

My father was an agnostic and he taught us that since he didn't know whether there were any gods, he and his fellow humans would have to be responsible for creating good in the world and supporting themselves. As a very religious atheist (this is not a contradiction in terms within Unitarian Universalism), I tend to follow his lead, use cultural relativism as a starting place for viewing problems in a culturally diverse society, and then I follow the Girl Scout Law. As a Scout, I have promised to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do; respect myself and others, respect authority (tempered by the other parts of the law of course—Girl Scouts don't blindly follow bullies), use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.

I am a political independent, probably because most politicians aren't liberal enough for me with their social agenda or conservative enough for me with their ethics. I am a feminist. I tend to be particularly motivated to take a stand related to feminist and LGBT issues. I have marched and demonstrated related to these two issues. The issue that actually got me flyering homes and canvassing door-to-door, though, was making sure that the funding for my local library stayed stable.

5. What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about your work?

Well, I am ever motivated to work, to give service, whether it be in my profession (teaching or scholarship), for my family, or for my community. I spend a lot of time on community service (fortunately some of that serves as participant observation). I don't think there are many studies worth tearing a community apart for, and while I will do my best to portray a conflict honestly, I will not exaggerate or exacerbate a conflict because I think it'll make me look important or will further some abstract concept. This came to me like a shot one time when I was talking to a film studies grad student who was making a film about the fishery I study. He said his first



obligation was to his audience—offering them what they'd be interested in and furthering their knowledge. For me the community that shares itself with me and has given me my trust has my first loyalty in my work. This isn't simple, of course; if a community is collectively hurting someone or some group, it's a whole new game. I haven't encountered that in the groups I study, however.

6. What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?

I work a lot and I agonize over ethics; that probably covers both my strengths and weaknesses! I am good at analysis and seeing patterns through analysis so that I can interpret culture. I have trouble saying no to volunteer and workplace obligations, which then holds back my scholarship and art.

### Life Lessons, Challenges, and Legacies

1. Tell me about a memorable moment in your life; a time you will never forget.

When each of my daughters was born, including the one who lived for less than an hour. There's nothing like seeing one's child for the first time and each birth and child is different. I also will never forget what it was like to help my godmother reach the end of her life; the work I had to do as her health proxy and Power of Attorney, resolving her business and connecting with her wide circle, will never be forgotten.

2. What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were younger?

That I'm more courageous than I realized; I wish I'd been more daring about pursuing opportunities when I was younger. Even though I was pretty much different than the other kids and did do an awful lot, I wish that sometimes I'd been a little more courageous about unstable times (e.g. I left college without a clear plan and when I left high school, I got engaged; it was really dumb).

3. How do you define a "good life" or a "successful life"?

One which is fulfilling but gets beyond yourself and isn't a drag on other people. We used to be praised for being "well-rounded" and that still seems to be important to me. I also feel like I want to leave something meaningful behind me.

### Peak Experience

A peak experience would be a high point in your life story- perhaps the high point. Today, the episode would stand out in your memory as one of the best, highest, most wonderful scenes or moments in your life story. Please describe in some detail a peak experience, or something like it, that you have experienced some time in your past. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.

I'm stumped! I'm also hoping that it might not have happened already.

Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story, can you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme of your life story? Explain.

I guess it's probably that it's important to commit yourself, your creativity, and your work to your community, whether that's your family, town, religious group, or something else, generations past, present, and future.

Other

What else should I know to understand your life story?

I can't think of anything else, except that what seems so radical about my life is that it stays within the realm of ordinary. I mend my clothes and don't allow my children to own video games in a time when that's extraordinary. I'm the kind of person who finds it very frustrating to text, because there are no semicolons available.