

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

**Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.**

This issue of *Reflections* demonstrates the power of the narrative form to illuminate the ways personal experiences slip the boundaries of our professional lives. Grant Larson in "A Dialogue with Students in Mexico" recounts his experience of leading a group of Canadian social work students in a two week study tour in Mexico. Moving beyond the socially constructed hierarchical boundaries of educator and student, Larson experienced his students as individuals able to enter personal and professional dialogues with faculty. Their experience together in a foreign country transformed the traditional pedantic relationship to which he was accustomed and brought him a new appreciation of the transformative aspects of the dialogic relationship with students. Confronting their own privileged position in the trans-global economy, students and teacher saw first hand the impact of structural inequality abroad and at home.

Carol Swenson and Judy Lee have allowed *Reflections* to reprint their seminal article "Theory in Action: A Community Social Service Agency," which first appeared in *Social Casework* in 1978. This classic narrative discusses how the life model and interactionist concepts of social work were proven effective when put directly into action in a community social service agency. In their contemporary reflections on this article, the authors remind us that time's passage doesn't diminish the importance of the central tenets of the social work profession.

Leon Ginsberg, in his reflection on his career as the founder of rural social work, demonstrates something that many seasoned professionals know: a backward look at the trajectory of our lives offers a sense of

inevitability to our personal and career choices. His early work in Appalachia was to be central to his unique contribution as a practitioner and social work educator. Writing an intellectual as well as personal biography, Ginsberg's rich retrospective reminds us of the synergy of personal and professional experiences in constructing our professional contributions.

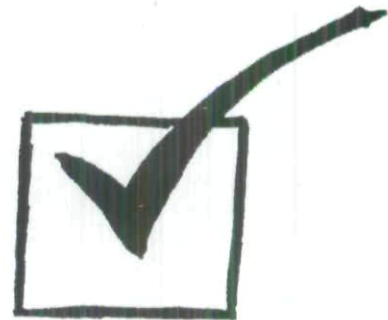
Michelle Emery-Blake in "Ariel's Legacy" describes her reawakened pain from a past miscarriage as a window into her clients' experience of loss. Honoring her loss after many years allowed her to connect with losses felt by her clients and added depth to her clinical practice. In "The Cloak of Invulnerability: Secondary Trauma and the Helping Professional," David Prichard describes the impact of secondary trauma on emergency workers. While working as a clinician at a mental health crisis center with firefighters who had responded to a horrific highway accident, he discovered that one of its victims was a close professional associate. Through his own experience of secondary trauma as a result of this experience, Prichard recognized that his vulnerability both deepened his work and made it more problematic.

Frank Kokorowski in "Conversations with Mother: Healing the Wounds of Psychological Trauma" recalls how his childhood pain mirrored that of his mother's as a Holocaust survivor. In this moving narrative the author recounts how the intergenerational suffering that began with his mother was resolved through conversations with her when he was an adult. Lora Nakamura in "Looking Up: A Short Woman's View of a Heightest Society" recounts the loneliness and discrimination she has experienced as an Asian American woman of

short stature. Living her life with the belittling stereotypes of others, the author experienced internalized oppression as she attempted to separate her identity from the stereotypes associated with her short stature. Her understanding of oppression and suffering experienced by others, as well as her commitment to speak against oppression, were forged by personal life experience.

Cheryl Resnick-Cortes in "Seventy Years of Mistrust: Elderly Survivors of Sexual Abuse" recounts her work with older women who are survivors of child sexual abuse. Through her work with these clients, Cortes was reminded of the strengths all people evince, regardless of age or physical condition. She writes of how her clients' transcendence of this early trauma offers a lesson about the ways life moves upstream from the painful experiences of our youth. Marion Bussey in her narrative "Living in Community: Lessons from the Commune" recalls her own youthful experience in the 1970s as a member of a commune near Ithaca, New York. The author reflects on this early experience and links these reflections to research on communes and intentional communities. She finds a resonance between communal life and the settlement houses founded by Jane Addams and other early social workers. It was in social work that she found a profession consonant with her early ideals and beliefs that people are basically good.

These narratives reinvigorate our central commitment to offer professional narratives to *Reflections'* readers, narratives which bring a singular reality not available in most professional writing and research.



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