

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE THE MAKING OF A GERONTOLOGIST: THE ROLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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This special issue focuses on the role that intergenerational relationships play in choosing a career in the field of gerontology. The idea for this issue came about as a result of my work as a GeroRich project director at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). The main goal of the GeroRich Grant, funded for three years (2001-2004) by the John A. Hartford Foundation, was to expose social work students to more gerontology content and increase interest in choosing career paths in gerontological social work. A total of 67 schools were funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation.

At CSULB, four faculty members from the Department of Social Work worked collaboratively as a project team to coordinate the grant. During the planning phase of the grant, our team spent a lot of time discussing how to increase student interest in working with older adults. Naturally, some of the first meetings included discussions about how our own interests in the field of aging emerged. As a result of these conversations, I began to suspect that a positive experience with an intergenerational relationship was often part of what led professional helpers to choose gerontology as a career. In an effort to further explore this career path, the idea for this issue of *Reflections* was born.

This special issue contains narratives by authors from across the United States. The authors are leaders in the field of gerontology. The interview of Fernando Torres-Gil offers insight as to how his relationship with his grandmother impacted his career path. Others stories share experiences with grand-

parents who offered their guiding wisdom; life-changing encounters with older adults; with members of the Saginaw Chippewa tribal nation; caring for a mother at the end of her life; friendships with older adult women; with a blues player; and with a supervisor.

Reading the stories about what a profound impact intergenerational relationships have had on the authors in this issue, professionally and personally, is inspiring. These stories remind us of the powerful role older adults can and do play in our society. They also remind us of what a privilege it is to be a gerontologist.

