

Letter from the Editors

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Abstract: This letter from the editors introduces Volume 20, Number Two. It contains summaries of the narratives in this issue. It also contains some discussion from the editors as to one way of thinking about the nature of the narratives published in this unique journal.

Keywords: Narrative, exposition, storytelling.

Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping is a journal that focuses on the narrative style. We recognize that there are many forms that the narrative style can take. We eagerly look forward to each unique story that makes its way to us. We want to make sure that each story is told in the best way possible.

We are often asked what we are looking for in a submission. To that end, what we are looking for in a submission is writing that leans heavily towards the narrative, story-telling style and keeps away from an expository style that lacks the details, emotions, and scene setting that the narrative style beautifully portrays.

Speaking just for the present editor, and not necessarily for the journal of the future or for other members of our growing editorial team of associate editors and section editors, our definition of a narrative is very broad. It encompasses any form of story, regardless of how long or short the piece. Because of this, expositions and narratives will often overlap. Narratives require some amount of exposition in order to tell the story, after all. However, a narrative requires much more description. In order to tell her/his story, a narrator has to “show” the reader what happened, as opposed to simply “telling” the reader what happened. “Showing” is the hearing of the narrative style in *Reflections*. “Telling,” on the other hand, tends to be exposition.

Exposition sets the scene of a story in order to provide the background information that the reader needs to understand in order to follow the story that comes after the exposition. Unfortunately, in many submissions, the narrator never seems to leave the expository writing style and never seems to develop the piece into more of a narrative. The exposition simply “tells” the reader what happens, without showing the reader. Although exposition is important, it should be used primarily to set the

stage for the narrative interspersed within it.

For example, the following is exposition:

I realized the families at our agency needed a support group. However, there were no support groups in the area to which I could refer them. So, I needed to start my own. I went to my supervisor, and after some discussion, he approved it.

When *Reflections* asks for a narrative, we are asking for more than what the above example provides. There is so much more that needs to be told here. How did you realize the families needed a support group? Who had said something that made you realize that and what did they say? Who, what, when, where, and how was it said? If you want to add reflection to that narrative, why do you think it was said?

Thinking back, what was the actual moment when you had that epiphany? How did you feel when you realized you had to start your own support group? Write a vignette of this and you have narrative to add to the exposition. Next, what was the discussion with your supervisor? How did you convince your supervisor to approve it? Don't just “tell” us what happened, “show” us what happened. Here is an example:

It was Friday, and the clock's hands slowly moved to 4:30 p.m. It would be dark in a couple of hours. I was feeling the call of Shabbat. I should have been disengaging from work. But the pain of a week of roadblocks pounded in my head. I knew my supervisor was probably also tired and ready to go home. But I thought she probably would go along with the suggestion. Perhaps it was selfish of me, but I wanted to be able to have a green light to think about how to make this happen. So I stopped by and shared the idea.

“I suppose you want to spearhead this,” she observed.

"I would be glad to, but I'd be happy with anyone doing it, as long as it could be available to our families," I replied, knowing full well that this project was not going anywhere unless I took the initiative.

"Do you think you have time for this?" she asked, turning away from her computer monitor to address this question to me.

"I'm sure I can find the time, and if not, I'll make time," I replied, "It's for the families." She sighed. But, most importantly, she approved it.

There is a clear difference between the previous expository style and the above narrative style. It doesn't have to be long or extensive, and you don't have to go into more detail than you're comfortable with. However, you need to draw the readers in and put them right there in that room with you. Most importantly, give yourself a voice, and give those you are with a voice.

When you write your narrative, make it clear that only you and nobody else could tell it the way you tell it. Let us hear you, understand you, and get to know you. This is your story. Make it come alive!

So, now, get over to that pad of paper, typewriter, or computer. Tap into that narrative deep in your memory that the world needs to hear.

Reflections is always accepting submissions, but don't use that as an excuse to put off perfecting that manuscript of yours. Get at it the moment you feel inspired. If you feel blocked, think back to those moments, and write your vignettes around them. Once you're finished, we will be happy to work with you to make sure the manuscript is the best that it could be.

This issue is the second issue published in November 2015, and the second in Volume 20, originally scheduled for 2014. Yes, we are behind, but not for long! Due to the over 100 articles in various stages of peer review and copy editing, including dozens of articles for several upcoming special issues, we will be publishing one issue after another in the months to come. We will be up to date in our publishing schedule by the end of next year.

Volume 21, 2015, will be complete during the current academic year. However, this remains a good time to write for *Reflections*. Now that we are an online journal, we don't face barriers related to printing costs. We are committed to publishing any and all quality narratives. The last issue was over 100 pages in length and contained eleven articles. The present issue is just under 50 pages and contains just six articles. We foresee much variation in issue length. Out mottos are no issue before its time and no article until it is ready.

Before moving on to discussion of the articles in this issue, we want to revisit the powerful and disturbing article in Volume 20#1, "Cold: A Meditation on Loss." More than most, this article illustrates the degree of emotional labor that it takes to serve as an author, reviewer or editor of this journal. The reader may have noted that the g in the three letters, God, which are used in present standard English to refer to Yahweh, Allah, or God, was not capitalized in all cases! In some cases, where the author was providing a narrative account of conversation and where the word was used casually, it wasn't capitalized. Neither in the case of God, nor in the case of Jesus, were the words always capitalized. Since they were being used conversationally, rather than as a proper and formal name, they weren't capitalized. We thought about this, and concluded that this was truly the respectful thing to do. If the words are used casually or even profanely, should they be capitalized? We thought not.

But the decision to leave the narrative alone in that regard was more complicated than that. There were other issues, such as the use of swear words in the manuscript. And we left them alone as well. We think that deserves comment. The fact is *Reflections* is not the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It is a journal that believes in telling it like it is and showing things as they are. We give broad leeway to our authors to write in the style they feel is best for their narrative. And we believe in giving voice to the people portrayed in the narratives. If there is an occasional reader offended, this is something we must live with, along with other egregious errors, such as allowing a sentence to end with the word with!

That said, next we discuss the wonderful articles in this issue.

The Miracle within Michael: A Barn, a Boy, and a Horse

Using her experience working with children who have been victims of abuse, Marian Swindell writes about the healing power of animal assisted therapy. She draws on the transformation of one specific child from withdrawn and shy, to light hearted and relaxed. Marian describes how the experience of bonding with and riding a horse enables a young boy to develop greater trust and confidence. This narrative is an inspiring story that highlights the healing power of animal therapy.

Service Dog Training by Service Members & Veterans: Reflections on the Need for Empirical Evidence

Five interdisciplinary researchers collaborate on developing a formal evaluation to measure the impact of animal therapy on reducing PTSD symptoms on service members/veterans with PTSD and mild Traumatic Brain Injury. In working with the director of the Warrior Canine Connection and reviewing earlier research on the human-dog connection, they learn about prior research on animal therapy, and work to create a pre and post test for veterans who undergo the animal assisted therapy program. The article gives details on the ways in which animal therapy with dogs can be beneficial to veterans. The authors cite the difficulties veterans have with reestablishing emotional intimacy with their partners and connection with their children. By training and bonding with a dog, they relearn how to regulate their emotions and strengthen their relationships. The evaluation is still in a stage of development at the time of this article, however the researchers share their experience of looking for hard data to measure “warm and fuzzy” outcomes.

Helping Those Who Learn to Help: Addressing Stress during a Community Disaster

This article, written by two social work educators, Roni Berger and Orly Calderon, is about their experience teaching social work students during and after the Hurricane Sandy disaster in New York. They describe their attempts to remain in contact with students during and after the disaster, and the steps they took to help the students process their

reactions. The authors draw on research that details the effects of trauma on people in the helping role, and discuss how this shaped their efforts in helping the students cope with the disaster. They also examine how trauma affects many domains of one’s life, and discuss their findings of using a myriad of methods for remaining in contact and supporting their students during and after Hurricane Sandy.

My Journey Toward Anti-Oppressive Work in Child Welfare

The authors, Kimberly A. Brisebois and A. Antonio González-Prendes, highlight the internal struggle social workers may face while building trusting relationships with families and still carrying out their agency’s mission of protecting child welfare. One author shares a personal narrative from her first position as a child welfare worker, and the power hierarchy that develops client and social worker. Social workers may feel pressured by their agency to watch out for child abuse, but in the meantime, may fail to become true allies to families, especially those of different cultures and class backgrounds. The author details her process of first starting working in child welfare, and her developing awareness of the power hierarchy that can be perpetuate between workers and families. This article raises an important issue for all social workers, especially those that work in child welfare.

From Healer to Transformed Healer: Relearning Lessons in Grief

Social workers may find that if they have gone through a similar experience as their client, they are better able to understand their client’s grief. Erica Danya Goldblatt Hyatt describes her own transformation as a therapist, after experiencing such a traumatic loss. She writes how her own personal challenges inspired her to pursue a career as a social worker for children with terminal illness, and how this directed the course of her career. She shares her own painful experience with loss and how it helped her gain a better understanding of the feelings of her clients and families that face with grief and loss. In addition, she outlines major themes in her experience and the elements that helped her. This article is a deeply personal and descriptive story of one social worker’s loss and how it ultimately brought her closer to understanding her own client’s grief.

Learning From and With Humility

Mari Alschuler reminds us that, as social workers, we will make mistakes. Her narrative discloses her own tale of choosing the wrong therapeutic intervention for a client in a poetry therapy group. She highlights that while social workers can carefully plan and choose the “right” therapeutic tool for clients, we cannot foresee everything and will make mistakes at times. Although the interaction with her client brings on her own inner critic and deep feelings of doubt, she moves through this by sharing the experience with her supervisor. By being transparent and vulnerable with her supervisor, she receives her supervisor’s support and

guidance instead of internalizing her error. Social workers may struggle with openly admitting faults or “failures” to supervisors. However, in Mari’s narrative, she writes how being honest about mistakes can be an effective way of building competency, self knowledge, and remaining open to learning.

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