

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez

While story telling is a fundamental part of life from childhood through senescence, written narratives come from a privileged space, where the luxury of creating a reflective persona necessarily resides. A good narrative tells a story that has been refracted through time and thoughtful meditation on its meaning for ourselves and others. While published narratives, such as those in *Reflections*, are crafted with literary intention, informal stories we tell others about our life also share in the selective reordering of events and emotions that characterize all presentations of self and articulated memories of the past. Narratives are linear and intentional; their worth is often judged by their grace and meaning for others. Thus *Reflections* asks its authors to move from the immediacy of their lived experiences to find in themselves a narrator with the perspective to make a larger sense of things.

Yet these literary narratives are only one aspect of storytelling. Others, who do not have the privilege of crafting their stories, but tell them in an unmediated fashion, are often excluded from professional narratives. I think of the ex-slave narratives collected by the WPA in the 1930's; personal recollections I have borrowed to tell a larger story of the history of the grandmother in the African American community. These and other stories found in primary historical documents are powerful evocations of lived lives distinct from the ones I have known. These stories are startling and moving precisely because their meaning was not evident. They were mysterious and called to the occasional reader who came upon them to reflect on their meaning. The individual stories I found in historical docu-

ments allowed me to tell a larger one, for which I crafted a narrative voice with a larger sweep that offered the reader a set of guideposts to interpret the experiences of the women who lived lives so different from my own.*

Having now been the editor of *Reflections* for three years, I am struck increasingly by how important it is for this journal to include voices like the ones I found in doing historical research on African American grandmothers. Primary historical documents are one method of finding narrative voices unconstrained by the distance implicit in rendering stories into literary pieces. Our clients are other avenues for these voices, along with all those who are disempowered, struggling without the privileges that professional lives offer. While stories that offer beginnings, middles and ends and carry meanings mediated through the authors' narrative voices are the foundation of *Reflections'* mission as a professional journal, I hope that narratives published here will increasingly include the voices of persons who do not have the privileged space in their lives to craft a formal coda to their stories. I hope that the voices of African American grandmothers from the rural South during the Great Depression will be echoed by the voices of women in danger of being cut off TANF in the next year, voices of homeless persons and others who face increasingly diminished resources in a country with a shrinking domestic policy agenda, voices of adolescents leaving foster care with uncertain plans for their futures, voices of prisoners suffering from unjust sentences and prison conditions, voices of persons encountering discrimination and oppression—of those the helping professions are committed

to empower. Giving a voice to the voiceless is a first step in the struggle for social justice. As editor of *Reflections* I welcome this challenge and opportunity, and invite our readers and authors to do the same.

* "The History of Grandmothers in the African American Community," forthcoming, *Social Service Review*

Reflections welcomes letters to the editor.
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