

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Rebecca A. Lopez, Ph.D., Interim Editor

As our country attempts to recover from the recent student massacre at Virginia Tech, we have been forced to confront the power and consequences of disconnected individuals unable to communicate their needs and desires. Post-event analysis reveals a young man who was thought by many to be non-communicative and living only on the periphery of what should have been an exciting and creative college experience full of hope and prospects for a successful future. Many who have been following the accounts of the troubled young man have come to appreciate or perhaps acknowledge for the first time that we all, indeed, suffer without that human connection—a human connection that allows us to share our fears, our anger, our joys, and our dreams. We have clearly seen the ultimate, disastrous outcome when a person is without this connection to mitigate conditions that are compounded by a sense of isolation and, perhaps, underlying mental anguish.

With this issue's body of narratives, I am struck by a recurring theme that speaks to this need we all have to connect, to communicate, and to sustain important social relationships. Marcia Harrigan and Beverly Koerin write of the need to stay connected to elder family members despite considerable barriers posed by long distances and by demands of busy, professional careers. The communication of love by doing and providing family care is apparent. As we approach an era in our history when the demands of family care-giving will escalate, they offer valuable tools to help us keep the communication and care lines viable.

Amy Mendenhall offers her perspective on honing her communication skills and

therapeutic style in her work with adults of different ages and cultural backgrounds. She elaborates on many aspects of communication in the clinical sessions with client and family, including the use of the "miracle question" to elicit more open expressions about desires and goals. The ability of family members in one particular case to communicate more explicitly contributed to more positive outcomes, as she describes.

Susan Behrens and Rebecca Sperling offer a disclosure of the language prejudices they view to exist in our society. The power of being able to communicate in more acceptable mainstream modes and being able to use the "right" language bring with it innumerable opportunities for entrance to the riches of the "right" segments of society. They provide intriguing food for thought as the reader is encouraged to consider the many implications of these dynamics for de-valuing accents and dialects and for intolerance of language diversity in our pluralistic country. They bring to light the marginal status of those who cannot meet the expectations of "Standard American English" and compel us to consider another potential barrier as we assess the available communication resources of those attempting to advance in systems of power.

Maintaining connection despite personal loss is the focus of the contribution of Karen Gold and Laura Anderson. The authors take us through the painful stages of learning to communicate particularly difficult times through the use of narrative. Through this process, they describe the emergence of an even stronger, empowered person able to cope with the loss of a particularly dynamic and memorable client. As they revisit

counseling sessions with the client, the definitions, labels, and constraint of accepted professional language are brought into question for their potential to “disconnect” the practitioner from client. Also compelling is their awareness that listening is as important as verbal expression in maintaining open communication.

The article by Donita McNiel is an impassioned retrospective of a childhood of unexpressed fear in the home of an alcoholic mother. She is able to communicate to us her earliest disappointments, and then moves us to her self-awareness and ultimate forgiveness of her parent. The mature, professional author is now able to take a step back, accept that her childhood was less than ideal, and forgive her abuser. She is able to channel that self-knowledge and share those experiences in effectively working with troubled clients in counseling settings.

Jennifer Soule has contributed an interesting perspective that may help the reader gauge a starting point for communicating with learners. She seeks to explain the “compassion” of youth and “beginners” in an undergraduate social work program as she invites us to recall the excitement of the first day of grade school. We are asked to hold onto that sense of inquisitiveness and freshness in taking on the world, our clients, or any interactions. The author reminds us that, if we are lucky, we will always have opportunities in life to approach new experiences with a “beginner’s mind.”

Susan Saltzburg and Pamela Richmond have provided an intriguing call for revising our practices in an important area of teaching—that of mentoring qualitative researchers. Qualitative inquiry, they contend, is critical to the helping professions and education as it is a most effective means of “accurate communication” of client experiences—yet it is a methodological approach largely lacking in elaborate supports

and “precise roadmaps.” They were able to overcome the inadequacies of traditional research curricula and the reality that qualitative research follows no “linear” process by creating their own “mentoring alliance.” Their empathic relationship culminating in mutual growth and accomplishment provides a much-needed framework for communication in the scholarly research process.

Whether communicating personal trials, professional dilemmas, or innovative styles, our contributors to this issue offer a variety of learning opportunities. We are grateful for their unique perspectives.

Corrections and Apologies

In our last issue, we ran an article entitled “Social Work and Spiritual Healing: Partnering with a Curandero,” written by Alonso Cavazos, Jr., Ed.D., and Catherine Faver, Ph.D. Unfortunately, due to an egregious error by our bleary-eyed assistant editor, the name of the third author was left off of the byline. This is most embarrassing, particularly because the third author, Alberto Salinas, Jr., is the actual curandero the article is written about!

Since mere apologies will not suffice in this instance, we wanted to devote some space in this issue to let the author tell you about himself in his own words:

“Alberto Salinas, Jr., was born in Willacy County, Raymondville, Texas, on March 6, 1951. The eldest of ten children (two stillborn), Alberto grew up in “Little Mexiquito,” the barrio on the poor side of town. Brought into this world by the town midwife, Carolina Moya, and the son of migrant field workers and a low income family, Alberto was brought up in the world of curanderas. As a child, Alberto’s mother, Herlinda, was told Alberto had been born with a “Don,” a healing gift. Alberto’s paternal great-grandmother, “Dona Maria,” had been

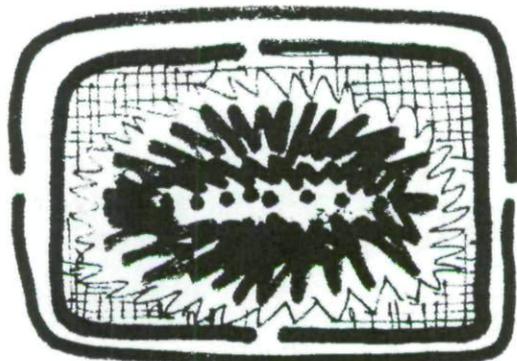
a reputable curandera in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico. In 1967, Alberto became a statistical drop-out from his sophomore class at Raymondville High School. Alberto, a common field laborer, aspired to do something with his life.

“In 1976, Alberto was hired by the Willacy County Sheriff’s Department as a radio dispatcher and jailer. This was not enough for Alberto. He wanted to do more, so he took the G.E.D. test and passed it with flying colors. Alberto was sent to the police academy at Texas State Technical Institute and graduated on June 19, 1976. Alberto served as a Texas Peace Officer for the City of La Joya, Texas, in 1977 and as a Deputy Sheriff for Hidalgo County, Texas, in 1978. Events of internal political turmoil within the department in addition to county politics landed Alberto in the unemployment line. Alberto’s culture and tradition kicked in. Without a job, no money, no luck, Alberto looked for help with a curandero. It was there that Alberto met with destiny and the call from

the spirit of Nino Fidencio who advised him through a young spirit medium that Alberto needed to say much prayer. Alberto recalled his childhood past, when he had been told by a curandera that he had a “Don,” a healing gift. Towards the end of 1978, Alberto journeyed to his calling: Nino Fidencio’s tomb, in Espinazo, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. At the age of 27, Alberto began practicing curanderismo on a daily basis, consulting, guiding, consoling, and comforting people who came to him seeking help, advice and prayer.”

As mentioned before, the other two authors are colleagues at the University of Texas Pan American Department of Social Work. Alonzo Cavazos, Ed.D., is the Director of the MSSW Program as well as an Associate Professor, and Catherine Faver, Ph.D., is a Professor.

Reflections would like to thank all three authors, but especially Mr. Salinas, Jr., for their understanding regarding this matter.



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