

WRITING THE STORIES

In each word, each thought, each painful expression in the writings there is a part of me. At first I was frightened, frightened over the new discovery each word brought as I dug into the inner self. It was like an expedition. I was digging for and uncovering something that had been lost while I was in law school--my inner self.

At times the writing made my personal life more difficult. It is hard to uncover bitterness, the bitterness that comes from one's childhood, from the way you live now, from legal education. The bitterness frightened and shamed me. At times I wondered whether it was really me that was writing some of the things I wrote. And I was afraid of letting someone else see the bitterness.

As I wrote, I began to understand that my feelings were normal and were shared by other women. I was not alone. The self-exploration was hard but it got me through a difficult time.

My writing expresses my beliefs, my fears, my accomplishments and my failures. Most of all, it expresses the confusion I have felt trying to deal with becoming a female lawyer. My insecurities and desire for power seem to be reflected throughout my writings.

However, I see myself growing and taking shape within the writings. I see acceptance and understanding. The story I am telling is one of growth.

By being honest in my work I was able to rediscover myself, my goals, and what I truly sought by coming to law school. Whether I'll ever reach those goals is another question. Now I have more strength and understanding.

CATHY MORGAN

My writing took me further and deeper than I thought understanding could go. My writing was part of an artistic process, not unlike the artist working with canvas or a poet creating a poem.

The writings tell my story in three acts. In act one, I explore the reasons for coming to law school and tried to remember my background from the perspective of being a

law student. In act two, I vent my frustration with law school and society in general, noting that law school is just a product of culture and society. In act three, I discover the connection between my creative side and the legal work that I am about to do.

I have become a more complete and united person. I have a greater understanding and appreciation of and for myself as a person with both "masculine" and "feminine" values.

As I explored my life before law school, I began to notice how my life seemed to be made up of separate strands of experience, of numerous stories. The different stories were not always harmonious. It was difficult to reconcile the story of my old life and the life I now live. Working with these differences and conflict provided insights that illuminated what I wanted to be and who it is that I am.

In my early writing there are a lot of labels: housewife, law student, lawyer, and artist. These labels reflect my fragmented vision of life. The distinctiveness of the labels made it hard to see myself or others as a cohesive, "human" being. It is now clear that I cannot be what I thought a lawyer should be without ridding myself of some qualities that I esteem and admire. I know I can't not be a lawyer. I have invested too much time and energy in acquiring lawyering skills. I feel like I am away from home and will find it hard to go back.

The frustration from feeling set adrift by the men in law school and in society has been debilitating. It is like reading Marilyn French's The Women's Room while living with a psychologically abusing husband. The two can't be reconciled. And yet, the frustration is a necessary stage of development for a woman law student. It prepares her for what she is up against now and will face in the future. It reveals the possibilities for change and for conformity.

There is a recurring theme in my writing--that all things highly esteemed by our culture are "masculine," which means that the "feminine" is negative and destructive and thus must forever be so in my work and thoughts. I want power because I want to succeed, but "success" is described now only in masculine terms. I don't want to succeed unless "success" incorporates feminine values as well as masculine. It is hard to figure out what a woman like me (looking for feminine values) is doing in an all-male

institution like law school.

In writing, I became more creative, more like what I was before I came to law school. I wrote a fairy tale and a poem. I began to like myself and to realize that I had intelligence and technical skills as well as imagination and artistic skills. Things began to come together.

FRAN HUGHES

In my writing, I hear the voice of a woman distancing herself from her own experience. At times I am objective and detached, reciting unrelated bits and pieces of my life to an audience. I sound as if I am proud of the trauma and turmoil that I have experienced.

There is something missing. There is much that I did not tell. I don't seem to have given any psychological significance to the story that I've been telling. There doesn't seem to be the kind of introspection that leads to a meaningful understanding of myself.

People suspend their values and beliefs in law school. They assume that it will be possible to magically recover those values upon graduation. I find myself doing the same thing. I suspended thinking about the crippling effect that doubt has upon my decisions. The idea is that it will be better once I start working.

SUSAN SPENCER

When I read my work, I feel like I am outside myself, like someone looking in the window of the home of an old friend. As I wrote each week, it was as if I were writing a letter, or entries in a journal, writing often for the sake of writing, never thinking of the possible pattern my writings might be taking.

I thought I would be embarrassed to read the work again, as if forced to face an image I disliked in the mirror. But I'm not embarrassed. The pieces tell a story. They reflect what is happening in my life, what happened in law school, what is happening to me now.

I began by trying to work through my feelings of powerlessness, in law school and in the male world of work. As I wrote, I saw how coming to law school was a way to

realize the power to change my life. I was on the outside, looking in. And then I found myself in law school, doing the same work as everyone else, but feeling as though I did not belong. I wasn't aggressive enough. I was too sensitive, too hesitant in my decision-making. I began to question myself. I wasn't sure I would ever be on equal footing with my law school peers.

My first writings were an exploration of how I was different from others. The difference grew out of conflicting messages that I got from my parents. My father expected excellence, yet gave little praise. My mother was content with her own life and activities, and seemed to have no yearning for power. I came to both yearn for and fear power. I have tried to tie these feelings of alienation and questions about power to my experience in law school.

Even as I did the writing and prepared to leave law school, there was a part of me that was hesitant. I believed that I had failed to measure up. I was too soft, too easy, and had tried to ignore those feelings. Then I began to face my own feelings of failure. I tried to discover what power meant to me. There was confusion. I recognized more than one type of power, the power of inner strength and the outer power that dominates. I knew what I had some strengths, yet I wasn't sure they would be useful. They did not seem to be strengths tied to the power I saw that others had.

In all my writing, I tried to explore ways in which I could be stronger. At times there was an obsession with finding a place in the professional world, with belonging. The only cure that I could find for my feelings of alienation was self-improvement.

Then as I began to read fairy tales and the stories of women in Greek mythology, my focus began to change. I started to think about women and how I stood in relation to my own sense of womanhood. Instead of looking at myself as a law student and future lawyer, I began to look at myself as a woman. At first, the change in perspective was subtle. I was seeing myself as a woman on the margin of the male world. Seeing myself this way, I realized the fears I had at the prospect of being both woman and lawyer. I wasn't sure I could handle it.

Even as I experienced the fear, I explored the idea of being a woman. I admitted my attraction to the hearth, but also the simultaneous distrust of the Cinderella dream. At

times, I ran to the hearth, to the warm spot by the fire. It seemed like I was running away from the world. I was actually re-discovering my own femininity. My focus shifted from the world to me--as woman, child, person. I no longer tried to analyze how I stood in relation to others, my relation to success as a lawyer. I was coming home. I was beginning to realize that I am happy as a woman. I began to reject self-degradation. My happiness no longer meant weakness and evasion of responsibility.

And then I wavered. I could feel the warmth of my acceptance of femininity, but had to face the world. I was implicitly measuring my readiness to accept power and the responsibility that goes with being a lawyer. My more rational side reminded me that I would have to enter the world to make a living. The challenge was to keep what I had learned about myself as a person as I entered the world. I feel now that the most difficult task is to hold on to what I have learned.