

# PREFACE

This special issue of the ALSA FORUM represents a substantial departure from previous issues. The work represented here was produced by a group of women and their teacher in a law school course at West Virginia University. The course was called Women and the Legal Profession. Neither students nor teacher set out to produce an issue of the FORUM. The idea for publishing our work came as we were completing the second semester of the year-long course. We began to see that our work was unique and creative, and collectively expressed sentiments that none of us had fully explored individually.

We began this work as students and teacher, teachers and student. Our subject was women and the legal profession, and we soon found ourselves engaged in something more than a course. We began to talk and listen, to give voice to the personal concerns that lie behind or beneath our decisions to be in the course and in law school. We found that we had much to say and much to discover. As we read about women and listened to our own stories, we discovered the power of our own voices and the excitement in trying to get some sense of what it means to be women in law school. We experienced the power that comes from sharing our feelings and experience of the world in a community with others.

The work which we share with you here is the writing we did in conjunction with the course. The writing was integral to the course and became, slowly and with struggle, sometimes with confusion and pain, a part of our lives. We began the writing without a clear sense of ourselves as writers, as speakers of experience. We have learned that there is life in our stories. There is a special satisfaction derived from telling a story, and listening to one, to writing one and reading one. A good story always bears retelling.

An audience as diverse as the one which comprises the readership of this journal will see our work, our stories, from radically different perspectives. To some, what we say may sound so subjective and self-indulgent that it qualifies as an exercise in narcissism. Others, we assume, will see the value in writing openly and honestly about our

concerns, fears, conflicts, hopes, dreams, and ideals. We have tried to face ourselves and write about what we see and feel as we become lawyers.

For women to be at home in the world, as well as to have a world at home, we have found it necessary to work with our own felt experiences. In other courses and at other times in our academic lives, we have concerned ourselves with formal scholarship, articles with footnotes and references to authoritative sources. Here we engage in an equally difficult task--the work of recording our own voices and honoring a sense of self that is broader than the professional self imagined by the men who teach law and the women and men who passively take on a traditional legal persona.

We are not a randomly selected sample of women in legal education. In the pluralist universe of legal education, there are many stories being told. (At times it sounds like a meeting around the Tower of Babel.) Some women want to fight the good fight, on men's terms, playing the law game, but with a set of rules that admits women as full-fledged players. Still others have difficulty with the idea that women have a "different voice," that there is a story of women to be told. These views and the stories in which they are embodied are not fully represented here.

Our work has no secure home in the law school and will, perhaps be equally alien to sociologist, anthropologist, political scientist, or philosopher. Stories are a human creation, an expression of human feeling and sentiment which should, however, be of interest to humanistic law and legal studies scholars. The stories told here were shaped by a particular society and culture, and consequently ought to be of interest to humanistic sociologists/anthropologists. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our stories are a statement of who we are in the world and what it means to struggle with and attain a sense of identity, personal and professional, a struggle which is, in the truest sense, philosophical.

The questions which guided our inquiry were: What does it mean to be a lawyer? What does it mean to be a woman, a man? How does being a lawyer affect who I am as a woman? How does being a woman affect who I am as a lawyer? In our view these are questions worth asking and talking about, the kinds of questions we are generally too busy to ask. They are questions buried under the on-going

demands of a curriculum and pedagogy which prepare one for professional practice while ignoring the person who becomes a lawyer.