

JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT

Footsteps

Fall 2005



FOOTSTEPS
JOT Writers on Generations

The Journal of Ordinary Thought
Fall 2005

JOT writers from Bezazian, Hall, King, Mabel Manning, and West Englewood Branch Libraries; The Blue Gargoyle; Deborah's Place; Project Hope, Pausa; and Young Chicago Authors on the theme of Generations.

Cover Image by Jason Reblando

Photography by Jason Reblando, and the Englewood Photo History Project.

Introduction by Luis J. Rodriguez.

INTRODUCTION

"We owned the street corners...you own the malls." In this statement, Mary Gray Kaye differentiates one generation from another; although only a short span between them, they appear as two distinct realities, different worlds confronting different news. As far as people can remember, generations have been

separated by time, memories, technology, soundtracks, and hopes. Yet only recently (at least since the beginnings of the industrial age) did the concept of "generation gap" have astonishing resonance.

Prior to this, strong threads of tradition, values, families, and work tied the generations closer together. People were expected to do as their parents did. They were expected to marry into their class, their race, their division of labor. They were expected to keep family close, generations often living under one roof.

Today this is almost unheard of.

Today, separation is our lot. Gaps between the generations are only one of the many gaps between each other. Our modern job market has changed so drastically that working in the same plant or profession as one's parents is an anomaly. People in one family may not even belong to the same religion. New idioms keep further distance between our elders and the young. We practically don't have the same language to adequately cross the divides.

The speed of life today – of TV, movies, books, jobs, living situations, marriages, and relationships – seems to be full tilt, with less depth, less time to stop and listen, to observe and learn, to build from. Hanging on to something for a while, to truly savor, to understand thoroughly, to enjoy, seems fleeting. We were fast in my generation; I didn't think it could go any faster. But now I feel left behind in the dust.

Generations.

Yet somehow, the song remains the same. Many changes have occurred between us all, and still we confront the perennial issues, battles, fears, triumphs and ideas.

The writers in this issue of the *Journal of Ordinary Thought* bring out both aspects –how things have changed, and how they've stayed the same. We still have ongoing needs to link with our ancestors, to be cared for and

guided, yet we also confront a tremendous shift in our economic and political foundations, one that has never occurred before, as we move from industrial-based technologies to those based on electronics.

Sometimes the earlier generation doesn't have enough experience, knowledge, and wisdom to guide the generation coming up. Quite a problem for society.

In such times, the young carry a significant portion of a community's wisdom. This may be hard to fathom, but it's something we need to take into account if we want to cross the barriers between elders and youth, mentors and mentees, teachers and pupils, journeymen and apprentices, parents and their children.

In the end this is about our inheritances. I don't mean just monetary or property ones (although, nowadays, this is a big aspect of many family relations), but also some not so welcomed ones like diseases, metabolisms, and personality traits. And then there are the inheritances of imaginations, gifts, capacities, poetics, and dreams. In these writings those legacies, among others, are explored, told, relived, and wonderfully rendered.

Despite the gulfs, many of us still love our grandparents; many of us have our best friends in our grandchildren. But as Charlie Clements says, "I am dreaming of life, or living a dream, unable to move...I lay back and listen for a voice, but it has vanished."

Luis J. Rodriguez

Luis J. Rodriguez has written ten books in poetry, children's literature, fiction, and nonfiction, including the best seller Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in LA. Living in Chicago for 15 years, he was active with mentoring troubled youth. Now in Los Angeles, he is cofounder of a bookstore/café/cultural center in the San Fernando Valley called Tia Chucha's Café and Centro Cultural. Although he never knew three of his grandparents, Luis is a father of four, three boys and a girl; and a grandfather of four.

SHADOWS

Charlie Clements

I am dreaming of life, or living a dream, unable to move...
I lay back and listen for a voice, but it has vanished.
With this voice has come a memory of my past, of my
Parents reading stories and poems to me when I was
Little, thus sparking my literary devotion.
Sometimes I awaken feeling an emptiness of having
Lost this old connection...
Then I feel an almost spiritual pull of my
Hand...a welcoming presence of shadows...in
Vaguely-remembered storybooks, watching
Over me...in kind milk of
Distance.

My heart was broken
when she left us,
but I could never imagine your pain.
You were her baby boy
grown into a man.

I wrote a poem for you
to say how much
I love you.
To tell you that I share
in your grief.
But,
before I could give it to you
you died.
And no one writes poems
for me.

I WAS TOO LATE

Khadijah

I wrote a poem for you
to help you remember the
joy of your mother.
I told you to look into the mirror
whenever
you were missing her face.
That smile was a wonder.

A DREAM

Sandra Gaspar

I dreamed that I had wrinkles and
long, gray hair, but I was full of
happiness and the satisfaction of having achieved
everything.