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Poetry: Sinner

Fran Quinn

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insistence. The main reason given by parents is that the youngsters are needed to help at home, either by going to work themselves or by caring for younger siblings so that both parents can work.

In addition to economic reasons, parents want their children to leave school because they see little value in formal education. Coming from communities where cultural advantages are minimal, where libraries are nonexistent and where the only reading material is an occasional newspaper, they do not see education as a value. Most parents feel that children need only enough schooling to keep them from being cheated in a business transaction. Formal education is viewed as a deterrent to family advancement because it deprives the family unit of the help children can give their parents.

My most recent research shows a slight improvement in the school-leaving picture but nonetheless parental pressure remains a strong factor.

In the 1985 study 55% of respondents agreed to the statement: "In general, students who leave school at the age of 14 (16) do so at the request of parents." In 1976 with a somewhat different population but the same statement 90% of the respondents agreed. The decrease is indeed notable but 55% remains a disturbing figure.

The response to the multiple choice statement #12 about reasons for leaving school occasioned considerable concern on the part of educators. An alarmingly high 95% of emigrants and almost 92% of Azoreans agreed that most students leave school because parents want them to help pay bills at home.

Parental attitudes are indeed the crux of the school-leaving problem and must be taken into account in any strategy designed to solve it. Like most parents, Azorean mothers and fathers want the best for their children; educators must labor to convince them that the best includes not only short-range material goals but also the intangible, incomparable prize of a well-furnished mind.

1969 (originally published 1923), p. 347.

² Leo Pap, *Portuguese American Speech*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1949, p.16.

³ Ira Sharkansky, *The Portuguese of Fall River: A Study of Ethnic Acculturation*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University, 1960, p.43.

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SINNER

Somedays I love people so much
I do almost anything to stay with them.
They can say what they want
and I agree
and even add to their arguments
in ways I don't believe at all.

To sit there and just look at them --
their noses, their hands, their eyes
expressing what they will
and I, a devotee, a penitent
who has sinned by disagreeing with them
on other days, by dismissing what they stood for
when I knew less than they
but better.

Home again and alone, I've confessed
my lust, my inattention
to truth, my greed
for company, my adoration
of their god. Forgiven
I have sinned again.

Fran Quinn

NOTES

¹ Donald R. Taft, *Two Portuguese Communities in New England*. New York, The Arno Press and The New York Times, c.