Poetry: Tale from Culleoka, Tennessee

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a student's entire undergraduate program. There is also a definite move toward tightening academic standards and regulations. Values and skills are receiving greater emphasis; some programs call for "writing across the curriculum." Some institutions are working for greater integration of the undergraduate curriculum by requiring such things as an interdisciplinary baccalaureate essay.

Gaff makes the point that curriculum reforms and revised general education programs are only as good as the quality of instruction they provide. He chides the "strong acceptance of amateurism in college teaching." To combat amateurism, Gaff suggests that the findings of educational research be examined and the best of what we know about the teaching and learning process be applied to post-secondary education. In light of the research Gaff holds that general education courses should deal not only with the content of the discipline but with the method of the discipline -- not just the conclusions but how those conclusions are reached. Restructuring the course content in order to reveal the method of the discipline is necessary in order to engage the student in active, meaningful learning. To the lecture format, Gaff presents many alternatives which are designed to engage the student actively in the learning process.

The new general education programs incorporating revised philosophies, redesigned course distributions and updated methodological strategies require good administration, solid financial support, and thorough evaluation. Gaff makes a strong case for a representative general education committee and/or a special director to coordinate this part of the undergraduate curriculum since an academic dean and standing curriculum committee are principally engaged in monitoring existing programs. Successful new programs entail new expenses. Reimbursement for planning sessions, limitation of class sizes and the employment of evaluation systems designed to assess the effectiveness of the new program all cost money. Therefore, an institution committed to successful change will need to shift financial priorities and devote more of its budget to general education.

Gaff closes on a cautiously optimistic note. Although reform is far from universal, more and more colleges are returning to the goal of a broad education for all students. However, each institution with its own unique setting and circumstances should develop its own program, bearing in mind that a "curriculum is a social contract and

Tale from Culleoka, Tennessee
for my father

Once, when I was a boy, old man Paul Jordan took me and his pet coon fishing. The sun was just past being overhead; a dusty hot day since before sunrise. That's why we decided to stop at the spring for a cold gourd full of water before we hit the river beyond the woods.

In the cool shade I took turns with Mr. Paul rinsing our mouths and drinking from the chained gourd while Zip grappled for crawfish.

His hands went way back under that hill and his face didn't change as he dragged something squirming from the spring.

But he must have suspicioned something because instead of popping it straight in his mouth he turned to look as he held up high a wriggling black snake! Well, it was like you could see the skin beneath the fur turning bone white, as though he had pulled from under that rock all the nightmare in the world. And his eyes! Poor fellow, like those I saw in the face of a young boy who fell on a broken bottle and cut his throat. He flung that snake in the water and tore out toward the house, not knowing it wasn't a moccasin, not knowing piddling differences.

Just knowing snake. We found him in his box under Mr. Paul's bed after he'd climbed the front porch columns to the second floor and gone through an open window. We lifted the fancy quilt and there he was, two bright eyes among the dust boogies and dull shadows, staring at us, staring like he just caught sight of the drop edge of never.

by Jacquelyn Crews

Born in Diana, Tennessee, Jackie Crews is a technical writer for McCormack and Dodge, a software company based in Natick. She has published in Tendril, Plowsshares and was recently feature poet in Salem State College's literary magazine, Soundings East. Her Master's Degree in Fine Arts is from the Warren Wilson program in North Carolina. She has recently completed a manuscript entitled "The Spring at Diana, Tennessee."