Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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Reflective writing is not fluff or filler. I first learned this decades ago from Art Winter, who was the editor of NCR's Praying magazine, that lovely man who was publishing

my pieces. I was a young mother filled with wonder, and he taught me how to write about our sons growing up and finding baby snakes in their pockets, how I felt flying down the street on my bike Old Nellie and that overwhelming sense of well-being I experienced when I was hanging laundry on the outdoor clothesline. What I still recall to this day is Art's call to his writers and readers alike to distill and capture the sacredness of life through reflection and prayer.

I learned that reflective writing is the act of sitting still before a keyboard and expressing truths of the heart through the written word. It is about reflecting on the inner workings of the soul in creative language. It is about the need to write of the beauty one witnesses in the world and in one's life as well as the sorrow, doubt, faith, challenges and insights we experience along the way. Those who write of, about and for God are called ministers of the written word — and it is an avocation available to everyone.

Reflective writers are interested in seeing connections everywhere and seek a prayerful way of being that is threaded with richness and depth. They are in tune with colors, scents, music, feelings, emotions, nature — details! The intricate veins in a leaf catch their eye, and they write poetically about being real, present and in touch with the spirit.

The call of a reflective writer is to pay attention, which was instilled in me by the groundbreaking 1992 book *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* by Julia Cameron. She called her readers to stand "knee-deep in the flow of life," even when things are at their worst. We need to savor that which opens our minds and saves us.

There is a contemplative quality to being a reflective writer that is able to translate images to the written word. My friend and fellow writer Adolfo Quezada writes of summer breezes, the dawning of a new day in the desert where he lives, of climbing over a fence and keeping vigil at the gravesite of his beloved son, the language of a sigh. He writes of the first flight of a mourning dove, an intriguing tree he calls the Church Tree where he goes for meditation, the treasure of a hummingbird on a nest, the scattering of the ashes of his parents high on a mountain, and an encounter with a coyote while walking with his granddaughter.

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Spiritual reflective writing is an expression of soul seeing. It is a prayerful, healing, conscious appreciation of life and carries within it a vitality that stems from being interested in the good of God, especially where we least expect it, in suffering or loss. Reflective writing is being awake and aware.

It can be strong, bold and clear — yet it can also be ethereal, whimsical and poignant. There isn't a right or wrong way to do it so much as simply placing emphasis on being true to one's unfolding faith and evolution as a child of God. Anyone who keeps a diary as a spiritual practice knows this well.

In one of my many journals, I once wrote:

> Our beloved Queenie, the matriarch of the small herd of deer who visit our yard was body slammed by a car and when she appeared at the Blessing Wall in our sanctuary, we were heart-broken to see the bad shape she was in. Her foot was shattered so badly it dangled, forcing her to walk on bone. Here is the surprise: Queenie is learning to be a handicapped deer and is thriving now except for her broken foot. She raised her fawns with devotion and while I still wince when I see her poor, ruined foot, I have also seen the odds she has overcome. It reminds me of heroic human beings who are also temporarily or permanently crippled in some way through wounds of the heart — yet learn to adapt and thrive when you least expect it.

To me, learning to adapt and thrive, to stand knee-deep in faith and to pay attention to the personal, intricate details that shape our journey is what an instructive, reflective life of soul seeing is all about. Thank you, Art Winter, for awakening this call in me that is extended to all. Thank you, Michael Leach and NCR for continuing that holy quest.

[Joni Woelfel, a frequent contributor to Soul Seeing, writes from Spicer, Minnesota.]

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