

## Music To My Ears

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I awoke slowly to the sound of church bells. As I struggled up to reality through layers of dreams, I became thankfully aware that it was Saturday morning. Relieved that my dream had been just that, I went over the details of it.

I was late and hurrying to get across the river for the first meeting of the writing workshop I had made such effort to arrange. In my rush to get there on time, I did not notice that the street had been dug up and was now a ditch five feet deep. Before I could slam on the brakes, I was in the ditch. Cursing my luck, I took a deep breath and signed with relief; I seemed to be unharmed. I would survive this, but the group would not be able to get into the building, I had the only key. I fought back feelings of guilt and frustration. I had worked too hard to make this happen and nothing was going to prevent me from being where I most wanted to be. Suddenly I heard sirens approaching. As sounds often do in dreams, the sirens became church bells.

I opened my eyes, but quickly closed them again and gave myself a moment to listen to the sounds around me. Bubbling water from my table fountain, contented purring from my cat, and the beautiful bells of St. George's Church, proclaiming that it was 7:00. I had plenty of time to get there by 9:30.

This workshop was the result of a meeting I had attended for the Mental Health Association of New Orleans, where I met Floyd Perry and his writing teacher, Jim Randels. Jim had been voted Orleans Parish Teacher of the Year in 1998, and he subsequently wrote an article in *Gambit Weekly* about his Students at the Center Program, which he implemented at McDonogh 35 and Frederick Douglass High Schools. As a clinical social worker providing (individual and family) therapy for adolescents (on probation), I was very impressed by what Jim had to say about education. Through work on various committees, I had developed a strong interest in the connection between education and mental health, but I had also become very aware of the gap between the two. Jim's article convinced me that I was not alone. Months later when I received the invitation to the annual meeting, announcing that Jim was the speaker, I knew it was an opportunity I could not ignore.

Jim spoke articulately about his program and about public education then introduced his student. Floyd read an essay so eloquent in its simplicity the room became silent. I had to wait through what seemed an eternity of speeches to talk with Floyd and Jim, but the time passed eventually, as it always does. I introduced myself to Floyd and commended him for his courage in speaking so candidly to such an audience. A few minutes later, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with Jim. I told him about my work and expressed how much I had enjoyed his article in *GAMBIT*. We were both in a hurry, but agreed to talk again soon. I gave him my card and left, feeling vaguely unsatisfied. On the way back to my car, I saw them again, and suddenly an idea struck me. I asked Floyd if he would be interested in doing a creative writing workshop with some of my "kids." He agreed and it became my job to attend to the details of making the workshop a reality. Luckily, Jim also

agreed to give his time to the project and with a little planning and a lot of luck it is happening.

Only one of my kids showed up that first day, but another of Jim's students, Bruce Coleman, had decided to participate in the workshop. The kids talked for a while about their experiences and out of their discussion two themes emerged: music and running away. We all agreed that everyone would write something on one or both of those topics before the next workshop.

What became clear to me while listening to those bright, creative teenagers was that I am privileged to have the opportunity to hear the voices of our future. Their thoughts, hopes and dreams are truly music to my ears.