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# From the Editor

On October 28, 2002, nursing and higher education suffered an internationally broadcast tragedy. Three nursing faculty members at the University of Arizona were killed by a student who subsequently committed suicide. The event sent shock waves throughout the nursing world. It is an event that raises important issues, and that calls for many levels of ongoing searching, reflection, and investigation in our quest for meaning and understanding. I have invited Richard Cowling, who worked with one of the murdered women, to write a guest editorial commemorating the lives of the three faculty members. His words follow, and I invite others to share letters in response to this tragic, and important, event that has touched all of our lives.

## IN DESPAIR I FOUND A WINDOW

My friend was murdered today along with two of her friends and colleagues at the University of Arizona School of Nursing. The next day I cry because I remember Cheryl McGaffic and all that she meant to me and to the people who call themselves "Rogerians." She had just written to me an e-mail about wanting to leave academic nursing at the end of the school year and find a new path. Last spring she had written a beautiful essay, *My Heart is Naked*,\* about her relationship with students and patients. I learn that she was a volunteer hospital chaplain and frequently sat with dying patients in the oncology unit. She wanted death and dying to be understood and appreciated in a way that was sensitive to the individual person going through this transition. She was dead. She was shot to death. She was murdered by a student. Tears run down my face. Last week

\*The essay by Cheryl McGaffic, *My Heart is Naked*, is available at the following sites devoted to the work of Martha E. Rogers: <http://medweb.uwcm.ac.uk/martha/> and [www.azstarnet.com](http://www.azstarnet.com).

Cheryl told me she wanted to use healing work with my sister who was just diagnosed with cancer. I e-mailed my sister about Cheryl. My sister says she feels Cheryl near. I read *My Heart is Naked* to my students. I wish Cheryl was here reading this essay. Tears stream down my face. I tell my friends and colleagues and family about Cheryl and they all want to know more. In despair I found a window.

I hear the news about the killings on CNN. They talk about the killer and his life and his trials and tribulations. The woman at the desk in Atlanta asks the woman reporter in the field in Tucson about the victims and she says simply that they were nursing faculty. I am angry that the media is so fascinated with knowing what motivated the killer and less about the lives of these lost women. In despair I found a window.

I learn about Robin E. Rogers who loved her job. I learn that she cherished singing at contemporary praise services at her church on Saturday evenings. I learn that she was pediatric nurse practitioner and had served in the Air Force for 16 years. I read testimonies of colleagues and students about how much she cared for students and all people. I read friend's accounts of her active participation in the community visiting the sick. Students, friends, and colleagues wear purple, Robin's favorite color. I read the accounts of the service where her love of her husband and two children is acknowledged. I think about her being killed first, alone her office. In despair I found a window.

I learn about Barbara S. Monroe and her dedication to her students and her specialty of critical care. I learn that she taught and practiced as a role model for other clinical faculty. I read about the memorial service and Barbara being remembered for her use of props to teach and her love of music. I learn that she loved telling stories about her native Minnesota, her cat, Fluffy, and her husband. Barbara grew up reading Cherry Ames

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student nurse books and was fascinated with the history of nursing. I think about her being in the classroom with Cheryl that day. I think about her being the last to die. I think about the students and the fear and the tragedy of all this. In despair I found a window.

I have devoted a good portion of the last several years of my professional life to appreciating despair. Women came forward to participate in this work. I remember that these women have taught me so much about despair. I think of this tragedy. I think about my own despair. I remember despair as windows. I want to pay homage to the women who were murdered. I want to acknowledge the sacredness of their lives and relationships. I want them to live on in many ways. I wonder why men have not

come to talk about despair. I remember that the killer has a name, Robert S. Flores Jr. I think about his despair. I wonder why he could not find a window. I must acknowledge that I feel a deep sense of grace in the presence of those women who have shared their life stories. I feel this grace in the presence of my daughter and granddaughters. I remember my mother dying and the sense of deep connection as she was slipping away. I think of Cheryl and her colleagues and their appreciation of the moments of living and dying. In despair they lead me to a window.

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