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Soul Stirrings: How Looking Back Gives Each of Us the Freedom to Move Forward

Joyce Mollie Jean Coleman
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“Looking back became a learning experience,” reflects Coleman, “I finally found my voice… [and] am beginning to use it.”

The author is referencing that special voice within people which, if tended to, is capable of summoning such virtues as wisdom and courage, as well as the mental and spiritual fortitude needed to face life’s darkest moments.

The success of Coleman as an experienced corporate executive and entertaining public speaker is no surprise, for here in her first book, she conveys with humor the richness inherent in a simple life. Lessons about hard work and integrity, universal to every childhood, are absorbed without the reader even realizing it. The result is a work with across-the-board appeal, whose heartwarming effect cannot be disputed.

This autobiographical account of the author’s upbringing takes the reader back to the everyday activities of rural Mississippi in the 1950s. Delightful storytelling conjurs images of a farming community and its people, whose lives are deeply rooted in church, school, and family. Each story about Coleman is playfully spun, quickly endearing readers to her and the characters surrounding her as she matures.

Her mother, Miss Lula, who started a one-room schoolhouse, championing the area’s education, and her older sister, Elsie, served as strong role models. Her grandfather, the son of a plantation owner and his slave, was key as the even-handed patriarch who presided over important community matters from his country kitchen table, complete with fried chicken, butter cake, and lemonade. In the retelling of these tales of her youth, the author unveils exercises in honor, conviction, and spirituality in a culturally historical context.

Each of the book’s three sections end with the author’s personal reflections, and slowly the astute reader understands a larger lesson about change. Concerns of the soul, when addressed by meshing the past with the present, enable a person to move forward in life.

Most importantly, Coleman continues to challenge her readers, along with herself, to realize the influence individuals have over their own efforts.

JILL WANDAS (May / June 2001)

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