

IN DEFENSE OF THE DREAMER

Jo Ann Lawrence

Far off I remember sunny clear springs, muggy summers, blazing autumns, frigid white winters and my grandfather. Grandfather was not old or harried then; he spoke softly to me, laughed, sang old, sweet songs of laughing, sweet girls and handsome young men and comforted me with his warmth. Once he had been young and had dreamed; now my grandfather wanted that dream for me.

There were broad, fresh-plowed fields where he walked with me, my head bobbing with my effort to match his long strides, the warm moist soil clinging to my bare feet. On the crest of the swell near the woods my grandfather often would stop. Standing tall, he surveyed his flat, rich fields. I could almost sense his soul swelling with pride, for the Dream had been fulfilled. Finally he would turn to me and tell again the story of the Dream.

At a time when the soup lines twined for blocks through New York City and others peddled apples and pencils on street corners, my grandfather settled with his wife and five children on one hundred acres of thin, dry ground. In the beginning he sharecropped the farm, scrimped and saved and put his family to work on the land. One day he bought the farm outright for his Dream was to make a place for his children. For years the ground was powdery, and the wind swept great clouds of dust up against the hot, empty sky of summer. My grandfather saw the precious soil flying, saw his fields that produced meager crops, saw his wife's face and his own grow thin and haggard—yet saw always before him the vision of his fields abundantly fertile, the soil rich and black. So he bought fertilizers and spread manure from the cattle on the land. While his son and daughters grew up, the land slowly became fertile. Gradually as the fields bore crops, and the ground became thick and loamy, and his offspring came to revere the land, Grandfather's face relaxed and assumed the warm easiness that I remember. My grandfather had dreamed and had used his life to construct into reality that one most vital Dream.

So will I dream and encourage and defend others who also dream, as did my grandfather. When, for me, there is that one dream more vital, more urgently compelling than the rest, I will follow it. I shall use my life to consecrate that dream so that my visions, like Grandfather's, will one day show the substance of my labor.