

# Professor STORIES

by Burton Blatt, EdD

## APPEARANCES

Everyone at the university had great respect for Mary Catherine Clemence. But this is not to suggest that anyone called her "friend." Professor Clemence had the Word, and some thought it was conveyed directly from its original source. She neither bent to the pleas of students nor the wiles of her ostensible superiors—"ostensible" because both they and she knew that they were neither morally, intellectually, nor spiritually superior to this formidable woman. But who on earth was?

Nothing remains the same. A nasty situation developed between Professor Clemence and the American Educational Research Association, (AERA), the society that professors of education and other educational researchers look to for policing scholarship in education. It all started when Professor Robert Gregory, a Harvard PhD no less, gave a paper at the association's annual meeting on the psycholinguistic development of young children. Who would suspect that such a paper—one that claimed little, found less, and in every sense was entirely forgettable—would precipitate scandal in the ranks of objective and reasonable scientists? No one could have predicted the scene.

In essence, Professor Mary Catherine Clemence filed a protest to the president of AERA charging Professor Robert Gregory with plagiarism. How could that be? Why would a man of Robert Gregory's character, reputation, accomplishments, and intelligence do such a thing? What did he have to gain? Here he was, a full professor with tenure at a major university, neither a drinker nor a fool. No, it was hardly believable that Gregory was a plagiarizer. So when the accused professor came forward to testify that she did the library work for Gregory while he was writing the paper, the case seemed to be settled. No, he asserted, he's not a plagiarizer. Rather, Clemence is a lunatic.

That didn't end the matter. Professor Mary Catherine Clemence persisted with AERA, insisting that the drafts

Gregory submitted were hers, either lost or stolen during her annual move from her summer home in Maine to campus in the fall. How Gregory got his hands on her work, why he published the paper under his name, and what drove him to the lie are questions she couldn't answer, but the work was hers. The AERA had been fooled, and the world should know that Gregory was a scoundrel. She had nothing further to say on the matter. She would not drag in *her student* to testify against Gregory's student. She would not dignify Gregory's charges against *her* with any defense. She, not Gregory, tells the truth, and if the committee is too stupid or too cowardly to recognize the truth when they see it, then they deserve the plagiarizer and the misbegotten "creation."

Professor Robert Gregory was vindicated, and while Professor Mary Catherine Clemence was not further embarrassed nor made to certify her sanity, most of her colleagues who followed the case concluded that she, not Gregory, was the culprit.

Mary Catherine Clemence, an honest and courageous professor, lived by the book. However, there was one thing she either didn't know or had forgotten in the book—the one thing that caused her to lose out, not only in the Gregory case but in life. Mary Catherine Clemence didn't know that being honest isn't enough, especially for one who would guide the lives of others—that is, especially for one who would be a leader, a teacher. Those who would teach others, those whose lives are meant to be models to guide and inspire the behavior of others, must not "merely" be honest but must also give the *appearance* of being honest. Professor Clemence did not understand well enough that, as honest as she was, she appeared in one sense to be mean and narrow-minded and in another sense to be crazy or, at best, a mischievous troublemaker. Gregory was the real thief, but Clemence gave the appearance of one. Either way, we have less than the perfect teacher.