Walking in Truth and Honor: A Narrative Interview with Chauncey Alexander, Part II

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The following is the continuation of an interview, the first part of which appeared in the Fall issue (Volume 9, issue 4) of Reflections.

Introduction

I interviewed Chauncey Alexander on three successive days in September of 2002 at his home in Southern California. The first of those interviews was published in the Fall, 2003 issue of *Reflections* (9:4). Chauncey was weak from a series of medical ailments yet able to focus and respond to my questions. His wife Sally participated in the interviews and would sometimes cue him or add to his responses. Towards the end of the interviews, Chauncey was feeling tired and I found myself filling in more of the spaces than I usually do as an interviewer, often paraphrasing or summarizing what I thought he was trying to get at and having him react.

The first interview covered what led up to Chauncey's career as a social worker while the second and third interviews, combined here, focused on Chauncey's professional career, particularly his tenure as Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), his reflections about his career, and the state of the profession and nation. What emerges are some of his key strengths: the ability to listen carefully, learn thoroughly, and act decisively. His personal integrity is always present, whether he is working on behalf of those who are oppressed or socially disadvantaged, standing up to the charges of being a communist that hounded him throughout his career, or being willing to resign from a job if he felt he was being undermined or that the organization was not acting responsibly. This took courage, as anti-communism fever was sweeping the United States in the 1950's and 60's and it also meant risking economic vulnerability. As you will see, Chauncey's willingness to fight for what he believed earned him respect and credibility.

Chauncey was also gentle and hospitable. He worked very effectively with volunteers and understood that colleagues have social as well as professional needs, as he and Sally hosted dinners as well as chairing meetings. He also understood the power of personal contact and relationships and did a tremendous amount of outreach to NASW chapters. All of this did not come easily to a man who was initially shy and reticent about public speaking, and yet who became the most visible, if not powerful, social worker in the nation. Willpower and the willingness to prepare, do his homework and practice difficult tasks were behind-the-scenes strategies employed by Chauncey in order to become an effective leader.

As well as offering Chauncey a chance to tell his personal story, these interviews offer a fascinating window into the politics of NASW during his tenure as director as well as the politics and issues that confronted the United States during this period. These interviews were with a powerful leader of our profession at a time in his life when his physical strength was diminished and, as Chauncey put it, "I'm staring death in the face." Yet his reflections offer us an important historical narrative, wisdom, hope, and a glimpse of the career of one of the major figures in modern social work. I am grateful for having had the

opportunity to discuss these issues with Chauncey and Sally Alexander.

Part II

JM: Chauncey, tell me about your first social service job with the State's Department of Social Services.

CA: Well, I think it really set the course for me, from the beginning. I was assigned for about a month and a half to the Glendale-Pasadena area, where I met people of my own economic status who were in trouble and getting welfare. Then I got transferred to the single men's district in the center of Los Angeles, interviewing guys for eligibility. It was fast, it was tough, and there were lots of things happening. They had NASW and the union, and the two cooperated to some degree, but [they were wary of one another].

Dr. Ed Bock, a professor from UCLA who had lost his job was a union organizer. I took Ed to lunch and said, "I'm interested in this and I'd like to help in any way I can, but if I join something, I don't expect to be just a member. I've got to really help out." I was so damned naïve (laughs). Ed took me as his assistant everywhere and got me into everything he could think of. I was active in both organizations. I was exposed to all kinds of union activity, all kinds of NASW activity, and also all kinds of thought.

JM: Such as?

CA: Primarily Marxist and social democratic ideas. I had just gotten married at the time, and so I tried to include my wife in these activities and she worked downtown too, so almost every night was a fast dinner downtown and then we'd go to meetings. The whole thing was a tremendous learning experience. A fight developed with the governor, [who] had gotten in as a Progressive.

JM: Which governor was this?

CA: Governor Olson and instead of the progressive ideas that he had [articulated], he attempted to develop a political machine out of the department. So we were fighting that, both the union and NASW, and principally standing for the principal of professional social workers doing the job. [Olson] started moving political people into the operation. One example was they hired a manager above the professional social worker and she had been head of the prostitutes on the Bunker Hill and was very strong politically because she controlled that whole area.

Sally: You mean, she was a prostitute?

CA: No, she was the prostitute's manager. One of the things that I have had to overcome is being afraid to talk, afraid to do anything. I'll illustrate it this way - when we were conducting the battle for social welfare, in [this] job, we put on a fundraising event called, "What a relief." Writer's for the Art Linkletter Show got me into the show because I was active in the leadership and they wanted to make me a star. So they had me up there trying to sing, (laughs) and I was so embarrassed that I couldn't get a note out of my voice.

JM: So you just froze up?

CA: Yes. And that was something that I had to overcome. I remember the first time that I was on the staff and had been given a job to determine the problem of single men in the downtown district and had done a study, I was to give the report to the staff. And I sweated and I got up and I braced myself and just went through it. I was wringing wet.

JM: And how did you overcome that?

CA: Just by doing it. I made up my mind that I was going to take every opportunity to

do something like that...publicly talk. And I would steel myself to get up and I would always sit in the back of the audience and finally get the nerve to raise my hand and deliver something.

JM: So you just pushed yourself to do so and it sounds like you desensitized yourself.

CA: Yes.

JM: Was your sense of yourself changing? Were you seeing yourself as a social worker?

CA: Oh, yes, decidedly. And the two social workers that were supervisors of mine convinced me to go to school. And so I started at the only school that was available, USC, in 1939.

JM: While you were still working at the state relief administration?

CA: Right. And I went nights and late afternoons or something like that.

JM: So this sounds like it was a life changing experience working there.

CA: Tremendous.

JM: You learned things, but you also saw yourself differently, and it really started you on your career as a social worker.

CA: Yes.

At this point, Chauncey went on to describe some of his early social work and union jobs and then his experience in the military during World War II, which was covered in our first interview (Miller, 2003).

CA: O.k., I came out of the service and had a wife and two children and no job and no money. One of my friends, Max Silverstein, got me a job as the research and information director for the Veteran Service Center in Los Angeles. I worked for a fellow who had been a crossing guard at the WPA, who was now head of the Veterans Service Center. He was a veteran and he worked the veteran's organizations all he could, back and forth. He had done that for years. And so I worked for him. I developed a number of things there that gave attention to the veterans and their problems and what they needed: working with individuals, program development with veteran's organizations and community relations.

Sally: Didn't you do newspaper and radio?

CA: All media. We developed a 13-week radio show for veterans and got several movie stars to participate and help. We got a lot of newspaper publicity all the time. We had various problems that arose: they were building houses for veterans and the damn things were falling apart faster than they (laughs) could build them. So we went after the contractors and got them to fix the things that were necessary. Everything you could think of was a veteran's problem. We put together all the laws related to veterans in the United States, state by state.

JM: Wow that must have been quite a project.

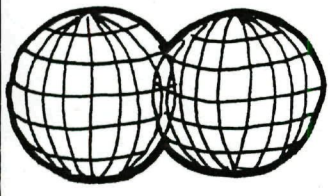
CA: Yes, and we put it in a little book that we had. We gave them away, and the first day we had veterans lined up two or three blocks around the building to get those things. It was amazing.

JM: It sounds to me like this was, again, another shift for you, that this was doing...

CA: Public relations.

JM: Public relations, organizing, program development, I mean, it took some of your earlier skills, but it expanded them to a new level.

CA: Exactly. Yes, it was a whole new area for me. It was a new profession, like, social work. I had to learn everything about what to do in public relations. We made the Veteran's Service Center the national example for the country. We had Katherine Graham, the woman who owned the Washington Post, out to dedicate the opening of the something-or-other (laughs), we had things like that and did a lot of public relations, and it was there that I ran into a friend of mine, Ed Flynn, who was a professional public relations person. Things were kind of folding up at the, at the Veteran's Service Center - the war had been over for a while and so I started looking for another job and went into business with Ed Flynn.



JM: As a public relations consultant?

CA: Yes public relations. And we handled various accounts. I developed accounts with the social service agencies around, and he handled commercial accounts. That was Ed's business. He was a very sharp guy and I kept learning more about the PR business.

JM: Were you still going to social work school?

CA: Yes, after I got out of the service, I started going back to school and 1950 was when I got the social work degree. Ed and I kept getting more business. And we started the use of pepper mills in this country.

JM: Really?

CA: Yes, with the pepper mill account that we had. Ed and I found this guy that made these wonderful, beautiful pepper mills, and got an account. So I took one end of it and he took the other. He took the national magazines and I took the press and the annual social work meeting that they used to have: I decided to work pepper mills in with it. The meeting was, I think, in Cleveland. So I went the library, and got a bunch of recipes— any recipe that had pepper in it— and I rewrote it for whole ground pepper (laughs).

JM: (laughs)

CA: I must have had 15 or 20 of these things. I started across the country with Max Boughner, who was another friend of mine, who had jewelry to sell. Mostly I would go to the PR office of a newspaper office, get the person who handled the health and family accounts, introduce myself and put 2 or 3 of these pepper mills down on the desk. I'd say, "How do you like that?" Then I would sell these pepper mills to them. In the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* I got a 2-page double trunk presentation of pepper and pepper mills. I went across the country doing that. I gave a demonstration to social workers on how to sell whole ground pepper at the Cleveland conference (laughs).

JM: It sounds like with all of these early jobs, you kept taking something new and putting them together.

CA: I think that was what was happening. Meanwhile, I was keeping in touch with the social work profession. I was going to the meetings, I was helping out, you know, running a committee or something.

JM: Tell me about becoming director of the Southern California Society for Mental Hygiene.

CA: I took over this job at our agency that had been run by social workers. We did an expose of the state mental health system. I was up and down the state all the time, appearing before the state legislature.

JM: This sounds like a change for you in that you had moved even further away from doing direct service and you were really very much in an advocacy role here.

CA: Yes.

JM: Sounds like you were drawing on some of your union experience and your public relations experience.

CA: Yes

JM: And your understanding of how social services work.

CA: Right. I would say that was a good analysis of it (laughs).

Sally: I think there's also a place here where a relationship between the executive director with the board members became very important. I'm remembering you telling me about something where you put your job on the line. He did the same thing in NASW because of the steely nature of his character, which was admirable.

CA: We had recruited a woman [a board member] who was very ambitious and wanted a lot of attention and was very controlling. So we got into a tangle, and I resigned. I said, I can't do this job this way.

JM: Because you found her too controlling?

CA: Yes, and she wanting to do things, that I felt were, that were, actually, illegal. (laughs) and unprofessional. And so it got to the point where I just had to make a show of it and so I resigned and I quit. The board had a meeting and they wanted me to come back. I said, no, once I make up my mind about this I'm not coming back. And so that was the story on the Mental Hygiene Society.

JM: When you first became an executive director did you know how to do the job right away or were there challenges for you? Again, it just seems like it was a major transition professionally. It was your first job as a director. Did you know how to be a director?

CA: I think so.

JM: Did it feel like it was a really good fit?

CA: Very much. And I found a lot of the satisfaction in it, there was a lot of praise and so forth.

JM: When you took the stand and resigned, did that feel good to you or were you ambivalent about it?

CA: I knew I was right (laughs).

JM: You had no doubts.

CA: That's all I could say. But I was anxious about finding another job, and about making a living.

JM: So, ethically you knew you had done the right thing, but economically it was a bit of a scary place to end up.

CA: Yes, absolutely.

JM: So what happened after that?

CA: [After I resigned] I got a job as a part-time administrator for the work classifi-

cation unit, which was a project of the Heart Association's demonstration project. What we did was go out and get industry to cooperate in an evaluation of their employees who had any cardiac problems. We would then provide stress testing. We had the equipment; we had the treadmill and the pulmonary function test. What we did was to establish a program where we went through about 1200 patients, testing them for heart problems. I did the social work stuff, recruitment and dealt with the industries.

JM: When you said you dealt with heart patients were you directly dealing with people?

CA: I was dealing with the people. I had to get certain information from them, so I developed a way of approaching them that that determined their life mode in virtually 15 minutes. We would put patients on the technical equipment - stress testing, pulmonary function tests, and things of that sort. We had two doctors and a technician working with me. I was dealing with the top industrial doctors in southern California, getting them to agree to work out plans for the patients. I made a lot of friends that way, Mobile Oil, all the major corporations I went to.

JM: Well, that must have been good for your career and for your work.

CA: Yes, I think it was.

JM: It sounds like you were really good at networking and developing relationships with people in organizations.

CA: I think so. I think [from] my earlier work I could feel what it was they needed, were wanting, and what they were willing and not willing to do. I was able to get things and to give them things that they would want and make it happen.

JM: Being able to see things clearly and to come up with a quick plan sounds like a skill that you had developed.

CA: Yes, we had to do that.

JM: You went [back to school] to get your doctorate. What motivated you to do that?

CA: Well, I was raised to be a physician and I always wanted that but it became impossible, so I wanted to get a doctorate. I did everything, passed all of the tests, except I didn't take the final written test because I was hired for the NASW job. That preempted getting my degree.

JM: You had to make a decision to take the NASW job and not complete this; when you look back on that now, how do you feel about that decision?

CA: I think it was right and I think it was wrong (laughs).

Sally: You were going through a personal trauma at that point. It's when you were getting a divorce and...

CA: Yes, that was also true at that time.

Sally: That kept him from focusing on writing the dissertation.

JM: So you were saying that you felt okay about it and you also didn't feel okay about it. What are the parts you felt fine about, and which are the parts that you have regrets about?

CA: Well, I felt I did a lot of work and study that I was not getting credit for (laughs), basically. I was right up to the point where you step over and you get recognized for some

knowledge level and I felt that I really cheated myself out of that. On the other hand, when you have the equivalent of running the profession, that was the other alternative.

JM: It sounds like you had a choice where you couldn't do both.

CA: That's right. You couldn't do both if you were going to do it right, because the NASW was so demanding. During the Heart Association, I was in the middle of getting them out of trouble, and they had had an executive who was an alcoholic, and they were millions of dollars in debt when I took over.

Sally: And you were being accused at this time...

CA: I was being accused of being a communist [by a] Dr. Bullock. He [also] managed to push the board to the point where he was saying that research is the major thing we have to do, and so we're entitled to at least fifty percent of the money that is raised. That was what got them into trouble. He was appropriating all the money and they didn't have enough money to handle the other services and functions that they had. So when I went in there, I was a target for him because I had dealt with him before when we were on committees in the welfare council.

JM: Why were you seen as being a communist?

CA: Well, I was accused because of two things, I think. One was the hangover from the SRA, when they let me go with, what do you call it, with something...

Sally: Prejudice.

CA: Prejudice, yes. And that was so perfunctory that I didn't even pay attention to it.

Sally: And you were also interviewed by the state committee, similar to McCarthy, only it preceded him.

CA: I would go up to the Tenney committee and I would refuse to say anything to them.

JM: And he was like the McCarthy equivalent in California?

CA: He was the McCarthy of California.

Sally: So you faced him down. Tell him about the board meeting. It was important—about how Bullock accused you of being a communist and...

CA: Bullock accused me of being a communist and [said that the Heart Association] couldn't hire me. I went to the chairman of the board who was a lawyer and a very straight guy, and I said, "Look, Dave, I can't deal with this unless I get a chance to, on specifics, what's the problem?" and he says, "Is that right? Well, you've been accused of being a communist by Bullock and by the woman who was the head of the mental health organization."

JM: The one that you resigned under?

CA: Yes. So he told me their names and so I went out and got a lawyer, a state senator.

Sally: Richard Richards.

CA: Richard Richards was a friend of ours. And so Dick said the only way you can deal with this is to get these guys on the spot, so he told me to get a court recorder. So I hired a court recorder and I went to these three people and I said, "I'm up for this job and you've indicated that I'm not fit for this

job, and if I'm not, then people should know about it."

JM: You had a court recorder with you?

CA: I had him with me. So I said to them very pleasantly, "If what you say is true and I am a danger to the community, I'm giving you a chance to put it on the record." (laughs)

JM: That was a good ploy (laughs).

CA: And so that meanwhile this guy was going like this...

JM: Writing everything, typing everything down.

CA: Typing everything we said. And so they said, "No, no, no," I was a great guy, terrific and sorry that there was any trouble.

JM: They totally backed out?

CA: They totally backed out. I went to three others.

JM: And the others all backed down?

CA: Yes, the others all backed down. So then I had a meeting with the executive committee, and I told them the only way I could do this is go to people and give them a chance to make their charges. And then I laid out the stuff I had [from] the recorder (laughs) and they hired me right away.

Sally: This happened throughout his career, every time he'd change a job. Bullock, until he died, would harass him. He would leave a page open in the Tenney report where Mr. Alexander was mentioned in the board of the medical association, leave it there in the library for people to see. And then they'd call reporters and, I'm remembering, in the columns two or three times, just cast aspersions on him for being a possible communist.

JM: That sounds like it was a terrifying time in this country, and you were very much a prominent target in this state.

Chauncey goes on to describe how his major task at the Heart Association was to right the balance between research, which was demanding a disproportionate share of funding and the actual service component. Within a couple of years he moved to become the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers.

CA: I was on the NASW national board. When I came to the consideration of the job for NASW Executive Director, Joe Anderson was leaving. Joe had been there a long time, he was an old friend, but the last five years he was there he didn't do much. He was an alcoholic.

Sally: And the organization was in debt.

CA: The organization was trying to help on that, but the guy that was running the organization really was Burt Beck.

JM: How did he fit in with you, Chauncey?

CA: He fit in because I was helpful with the operations he was doing and so he kind of picked me out - we just matched up together and became good friends. And we understood the same things.

JM: Tell me the story about the revolution.

CA: At the 1969 National Conference the doors weren't open (laughs). So everybody was waiting around and they couldn't get the doors open. When they finally did,

there on the platform was a whole lineup of social workers, mostly young ones.

Sally: From California. California led the revolution.

CA: Well, I'm not sure about that. But anyway, what happened was that they were attacking the organization - they wanted more money and programs for ethnic groups-money for action programs of one sort or another.

JM: So they wanted more social action, more relevancy?

CA: Yes. And so they held up things and they started attacking Joe Anderson. They went after him with a very strongly organized petition. I refused to do it because I wasn't going to knock Joe out of the box. He was a long time friend; I understood his problem. I thought he should leave, but I didn't...

JM: You didn't want to see him roasted?

CA: Yes. So that whole thing was a kind of a revolution. Joe, my friend Gip Lorenzo Traylor and I put together a program for the association right there in about three hours, and took it to the assembly and cooled this whole operation out. We presented this program to the body and they accepted it, and it started the organization in a different direction. But it also brought about Joe Anderson's resignation, and so he was leaving. There was a period of about four or five months in between when they started recruiting for people and, finally, I was asked about being a candidate.

Sally: What I'm thinking of was that the President at that point was Whitney Young.

CA: And I'd worked with him. Well, I didn't apply for it and then somebody approached me about it and asked if they could put my resume in. And so we decided yes (laughs) and the whole communist thing came up again.

JM: Again? Wow.

CA: And Whitney called me and asked me about it and what I'd been doing and why this is happening. Whitney, then, supported me for the Executive Director and, but that was after they had called me in to have an interview with the whole gang, not the gang of four, the gang of forty (laughs). So I went before the group and they asked me questions and I answered them.

JM: Because you really had nothing to hide.

CA: That's right. And so, Whitney then called me and he asked me about the communist business because he had been called and talked to by somebody and I told him, "Whitney, you can't be bothered with that, it's nothing that I'm going to be able to deal with in this way." And so he asked me some questions about programming and said, "You were the only one that answered questions clearly."

JM: You had a clear idea of what to do about things?

CA: Yes, I knew what to do. And I'd been through it for years, watched people. And so I was made the executive director. Sally and I moved to New York.

JM: Was that where the headquarters were, in New York?

CA: Yes, the headquarters were in New York. And we were there for three years and then I moved the headquarters to Washington D.C.

JM: You realized politically that that would make much more sense?

CA: Yes.

JM: That you could be where the government was.

CA: I thought it was necessary for us to be in the center of action.

JM: What were some of the highlights for you [in your work with NASW]?

CA: One thing was putting the organization on a modern management operation.

When I went into the National Association the only function that worked well was the book production. Bea Saunders had carved an island around herself. She wasn't going to listen to all that crap out there. She did her job and she did it well and she was very possessive of it. And she was the one department you didn't have to fool with; she already had put it together.

JM: At least you had one thing working when you got there.

CA: Yes (laughs). But with everything else, there was confusion. The first thing I did was I had a meeting of all the staff and I told them exactly what I was going to do for the next six months and answered questions. After I finished answering people came up to me and they had tears in their eyes. It was a damn mess. There was the department that had to do with the handling of the names of our members and they had twenty elderly women in there, shuffling cards back and forth. It was a sight to see.

JM: Sounds like it was from another era and it had not entered the modern world.

CA: Yes, and we had to change that. We had to figure out a way to either get rid of or find a place for twenty elderly women, but we were able to do that and that's when we started getting the organization some modern technology.

Sally: You finally brought in Black [employees].

JM: So it was a predominantly White organization?

CA: Yes.

JM: And this is a big part of what people had been upset about when you had that revolt?

CA: Yes. So we had start hiring more [diverse] workers.

JM: Was there resistance to your hiring racial and ethnic minorities when you started that program?

CA: There was…

JM: From the people who were there?

CA: There was fear. Expressions of fear from people who were afraid that if they hired [more ethnically diverse] people they would have to go or something.

JM: Fear that people would lose their jobs…

CA: Yes. But many of the staff were just relieved that things were happening. I told them, for example, that there wasn't going to be any radical change in this organization for the next six months, but we were going to make changes and people would be asked to comply and work with these changes. Then

I wanted to talk with each person; I was going to talk with all of them.

Sally: Can I maybe bring up something that is a little apart from running the 8 to 5 job, (laughs), which was not that at all. It was all day, all night. When he would have national meetings...

CA: Every time we had a national committee coming in, which was all the time, we would have them at our home.

JM: That sounds like an [effective] strategy, but how did you learn that that was important to do?

CA: I had had the experience from many years of going to Washington. After the meeting was over, I'd turn around and everybody's gone and there you are. In the city, it's nice, but [not if] you don't have any friends. So I was going to correct that. So Sally did a great wonderful job of...

Sally: Being the "hostess with the mostest."

JM: That must have done so many things because it must have helped create a better sense of trust and a kind of group bonding but also gave you a chance to meet everybody in an informal way.

CA: Very much. It was great...

JM: Which must have solidified your position as a leader.

CA: It was a great thing to do, a great technique to do and we would discuss things around some social kind of life and everybody would have drinks.

Sally: Food. I was always amazed at how hungry the younger people were (laughs).

JM: (laughs) Food goes a long way.

Sally: [And we would] visit all the chapters. At that point there were a lot of chapters.

CA: There were eighty-five chapters and I got through a thing that got them down to fifty-five, some manageable size. We got them merged and we had to offer them things, and we were able to get them operating more as a unit but it meant I made a point of being out in the chapters three to five times a month.

JM: It sounds like you really came into your own with this job, that you really knew what you had to do, you could see it clearly and you knew how to make it happen. So it was a combination of being able to see it but also knowing how to make it work.

CA: Yes, that's true. I had been in lots of chapters; I'd been on every damn committee that was in the organization. I had worked with most of the people, so I felt comfortable about it and felt easy in it. I felt it was a huge task, but I felt confident about doing it.

JM: That's what comes across, that you felt confident and you were therefore able to exude that you knew what you were doing to an organization that needed somebody to do that.

CA: We were in debt. The bank notified me that it couldn't make the payroll, those kind of things. And so I had to deal with a lot of problems immediately. It was exciting, it was a lot of fun.

JM: You also were not only working with the chapters and with the community, but didn't you also forge pretty close working relationships with politicians?

CA: Yes. That was necessary. I had a number of ideas about what was necessary [for NASW] but the first thing we had to do was get the chapters functioning. They were in chaos. We created a whole continuing education program that way. We would get prominent social workers to come out and be on our organization. e developed a faculty liaison system.

I developed the ELAN system - Educational Legislative Action Network. And each chapter would have two people who would be in control of that. And that would then form the basis for our legislative action program.

And we developed a program planning budgeting system for the chapters. I had a fellow I hired when I was in New York who was like a business manager. He'd go out to the chapters and reorganize their accounting operations.

JM: Right. So it sounds like you reorganized the national organization, and then, chapter by chapter, provided the resources for them to reorganize.

CA: That's what we had to do.

JM: Chauncey, you had said yesterday that this was also stressful, that your blood pressure dropped twenty points after you stopped doing it, and so it sounds like it was exciting. What were the stressful parts of this?

CA: Well, one stressful part is getting some of the staff to do what you want them to do (laughs).

Sally: It was also struggles with members of the Board of Directors, [clarifying] the relationship between the board and the members. Again, there was a cabal that was organized to do away with him.

CA: Yes.

JM: A cabal among the board of directors wanted to get rid of Chauncey?

Sally: Yes.

CA: In the beginning it was chaos and the board...each person had their own actions and they would talk and argue, back and forth, until doomsday.

Sally: They would work with separate employees, to see if they would go beyond the Director.

CA: And they were used to doing that, you see.

JM: It sounds like it was a feudal system when you came in.

CA: (laughs) It was. F-U-T-I-L-E (laughs).

JM: Feudal. Futile.

(all laugh)

CA: Yes, it was (laughs).

JM: So this group that wanted to get rid of you; was that based on the old communist charges?

CA: It was not a group. It was one man.

Sally: It was? I thought it was more than that?

CA: And it was a fellow that was head of the government's social work program. Whitney told me about it, asked me about it. I got through that and never did know who the person was. I didn't know anything about it, because Whitney didn't say anything and I didn't ask him. And one day, about two years later, I was out in one of the chapters and this

fellow was at a meeting with me and he came up to me and said, "I want you to know that I'm the person who had doubts about your taking this job. And I talked to Whitney and several other people about it and I want to apologize."

Sally: This had to do with the accusation of communism.

CA: Yes.

Sally: [There] was totally a different kind of a thing that happened to you later with the board.

CA: What happened was that they were proposing to do a special program that we were doing having to do with [ethnicity and] membership. At any rate, they would assign this program to somebody who would then be in complete control of it. And I challenged that. And it finally got to the point where a decision was made to do that and I resigned. On the spot! I said, "I can't work for an organization where as the Executive Director, I don't have responsibility and control of it." And that was kind of a shock, so I left.

JM: So you resigned and your resignation stood?

Sally: They didn't accept it.

CA: No, they didn't do anything. They argued about it. They argued about the thing [for the next few days]. Marianna Haffey was president at the time and she called me and at first she tried to get me to accept the idea of having somebody come in who was in control of this piece of program. And I said, "Nothing doing." And we talked about it and I told her exactly what were the consequences of that kind of thing happening and I wasn't going to be a part of it. And the word had gotten out; we were having our Executive Board meeting. National Conference was also here.

JM: So the word had gotten out.

CA: Gotten out among all the social workers that Chauncey had resigned. And so that was a big deal but they argued about it and argued about it and came back with some kind of thing, and I said, "My terms are not conditional. I've got to have responsibility or I don't." And so they finally decided it would be a good idea to keep me.

JM: So it sounds like your taking a stand had a desired effect.

CA: Yes, it gave me much more control and responsibility.

JM: Were there other things you found particularly stressful about this [job]?

CA: Well, the stress itself was a problem, because I was going to the doctor and they were telling me I had high blood pressure and ought to do something about it. I had known I had it for a number of years. They gave me some pills, and I didn't care whether I kept up or not with those pills. So I stopped taking those and just kept working and trying to get my blood pressure down and lower that as much as I could. I wasn't very successful about it but it was enough. I was proud of the things I'd created [at NASW].

JM: You created the modern organization, really.

CA: [That] came out of experience working within the chapters. I was President of a chapter several times. And I knew that would help. I put into motion the PACE operation, [which] would bring in money and at the same time was a useful political action

program. We had to find some way to get extra money into the organization.

JM: Were you able to shut this off? Were you able to have a social life? To be able to sleep or was this like, just 24-7, something that consumed you?

CA: Well, it was 24-7 all right.

Sally: Well, he slept, even when we'd fight.

CA: I would talk myself to sleep.

Sally: It always amazed me.

CA: It was problematic in some of the middle years and then I [did]some thinking about this and when I was traveling I would make myself take naps. I learned to go to sleep. It was very useful.

I'll tell you a story about George [Wiley and the Welfare Rights Organization]. This was in the 60s and during that time Wiley used a number of techniques, one of which was, some showdown operations. In either 1967 or 1968 he closed the doors of the national conference and wouldn't let anybody in or out. Then he talked to the social workers and told them what they ought to do. So, when I was on the job a short time, I called Wiley and asked for a meeting. I wanted to meet with him, because he was badmouthing the NASW. And I called Joe Hoffer [Joe was for many, many years the head of the National Conference of Social Welfare]. So I called Joe and we had a meeting. And in the room it was like this: it was kind of semi-circle, and there were three women over here, and then there was Wiley, and a young guy who was kind of his PR staff, and a young [Black] social worker [named Jim]. And Jim (laughs) put out the lights. What happened was that we started out with introductions and started talking more and more about what was happening. The thing turned into a complaint session and each one of the people was raising hell about what the social workers were doing and so forth. And it was terrible some of the things they were doing. And so finally, after the women talked, Jim finally spoke up. And he started telling me about what the social workers would do and wouldn't do and how terrible they were and he was swearing all the time and, you know, just showing off. So, I started swearing back, because I knew how to (laughs) swear and he was stunned. He just sat there stunned. And Wiley sat there and getting a grin on his face and then I said (first, the association had been giving them little pieces of money for their organization), "There's no more money. We haven't got the money. We are in debt. We will help you any way we can but it won't be with money. And, also, we're going to have some hard times and we need to work together. And we'll work that out if you're willing, but I can't be of fiscal help to you." They were sitting there kind of shocked about that and then Wiley spoke up and said, "This is the first time we have had any straight talk." And we went on from there. Later, not long after that, I was on a television show with Wiley, and Wiley gave a lot of compliments to social workers, and so we had a good relationship after that. He just needed straight talk, that's all. They would tell him, "Yeah, we'll give you $40,000," and they didn't have $40,000 to give. The other thing that I did, I said, "You tell me of a social worker who does anything that you think is wrong and I'll get it corrected."

JM: It sounds like clarity and directness was something that really was important to them.

CA: Yes, but it was important to turn the relationships [with other organizations] around.

JM: Because you were under attack and always on the defensive?

CA: Yes, exactly. There was the movement toward bringing the organizations together.

JM: Which organizations, Chauncey?

CA: Let's see. There were seven of them: Psychiatric Social Workers, NASW, Medical Social Workers, Group Workers, Child Welfare Workers, etc.

JM: They were all seven separate social work organizations...

CA: Exactly.

JM: ...that you took over?

CA: Yes. The rank and file was pushing to get these organizations working together. And they were all going in different direction, all pushing their own programs and trying to get on top of the heap. And so, when I was the president of the Los Angeles group we had a temporary inter-association council. The demand [for this] started developing all over the country, and not just from us, but from the conditions - social workers had to deal with too many organizations. So, here in Los Angeles, we said, "Let's show them how to do this." So we combined all the organizations into one. It operated as one organization, and had everybody participate in it and it was a demonstration to the national [organization] that this could happen.

JM: What was the driving force? Why were people in favor of this?

CA: One was the fragmentation of the profession, which made it difficult to get anywhere. There were so many organizations to get people together that they couldn't get programs going in communities. I think the other demand was for strength of the profession.

One thing I wanted to tell you about that is significant, [took place] after the war, in the 50s. I was on the board of NASW, at that time, AASW. And we had Phil Gentile, a dynamic guy, terrific, [and] his job was to try to make a place for ethnic groups in NASW. There wasn't any activity or much work in that direction and he had a big committee and they got together and they worked out a program of having every chapter start bringing ethnic social workers in and providing services in a certain way. He had a big plan for it, and he brought it in to the board of directors and the board of directors was considering it, and we spent at least two days struggling over the damn thing because people were raising questions about would this work and that would work. It finally came to a shape where there was going to be a vote on it. And I was expecting that it would go through because it was natural and it was perfect, but many of the conservative social workers were afraid...they'd see themselves trying to implement [this] in the community and they didn't have the nerve to do it.

JM: The program was to try and have more attention paid to ethnic minorities?

CA: Yes, to develop minority programs and bring in ethnic minority social workers into the Association.

JM: And the people who were resisting, were they predominantly white?

CA: Oh yes. The whole board was originally white.

JM: The whole board was white?

CA: Yes, I can't remember a minority who was on the board. And it came up for a vote. Three people I knew were considered

progressive, voted against doing anything about it: "Let's study it more," and all that crap. People who had written in the field about these things. I was terribly disappointed with them.

JM: I assume you were eventually able to prevail.

CA: Yes, but that was ten years later. [Another story] is about Nixon. When Nixon came into, the presidency, he acted like a human being for a while.

JM: He did, I remember. He fooled us for a while.

CA: And he started working on the Family Assistance Program. And we were having meetings all the time on getting this program – at one time, the program would be progressive, two weeks later, it would be reactionary. That was the way it was going. And Nixon was going with it, and he agreed finally to put into the program into effect.

JM: And it was the progressive people who shot it down.

CA: Yes (laughs). And they shot it down, and, and we had bad times after that.

JM: After NASW, what particularly stood out for you in your career?

CA: Well, I think that the principle thing was my activity after we [moved to] Orange County. At the request of the United Way, I formed the Health Council of Orange County. It was a coalition. We brought in everybody we could find that was interested in health care, problems, and concerns. It is now a standing organization in Orange County. It has about 100 organizational members and is influential to some degree. They're still fighting the fight to get decent health care. I spent five years as a volunteer, organizing that and being the Executive Director of it, and for no pay (laughs). I was able to get some foundation grants and we were able to hire an Executive Director.

The important thing here is that it got to the whole community. Orange County was the bastion of developers. And originally, as I remember it when I was a kid, was a farming community. And then the developers found it after Los Angeles was filled up and they started coming here. So they were building a lot of housing [but] they ignored the needs of the poor people. The poor people who lived [or worked there] were having to get their healthcare in other counties. I did several research [and] annual reports in which we did an analysis of the situation. We were in front of the board of supervisors all the time, trying to get things through. We were able to get some allocations that helped to develop the coalition of community clinics. I can't say that we were too successful (laughs), although we did get all the organizations working together.

JM: What about your career as a teacher?

CA: I was asked to go to work at Cal State Long Beach and enjoyed it. I developed two classes. One on public policy and the other one was on…

Sally: Management.

CA: (laughs) Management. So I developed a management course and a public policy course and I taught those.

JM: I'm sure you had a lot to teach in both of them.

CA: Well, the students liked it. We had a lot of students who were green and didn't know where to go and how to do it.

JM: I want to ask you what teaching was like for you, professionally?

CA: It was a chance to talk about the kinds of problems that you run into in social work, and how and why the conditions are what they are. I think I did pretty well at it.

JM: Was it satisfying to be able to share your accumulated wisdom and in a sense try to pass the baton to younger people?

CA: Oh, yes, most of the time it was. But at times there [were] the students that you couldn't reach, that didn't care.

JM: Chauncey, this is shifting gears a little bit. You know, you've had many jobs where you've been the executive director, and I guess I'm interested in how you would describe your style of leadership and your philosophy of management. I'm sure you've done a lot thinking about that. I know you've written about it, but what are some of the key parts of that for you?

CA: Hmm. You'd have to ask Sally that (laughs).

JM: If I asked Sally, what would she say?

CA: (laughs) Well, I think my style is cooperative. And I have a strong set of principles that lay underneath. I think I'm gentle in my dealing with people.

Sally: Too gentle, sometimes.

CA: (laughs) I'm gentle and then, but there is a line where they don't pass.

JM: When you say "a line that they don't pass"... like when you had to fire your friend. Would that be an example of that?

CA: Right.

JM: What are those principles, this strong set of principles that...

CA: I was afraid you were going to ask that (laughs).

JM: Or at least, what are some of them that stand out? I know you've written about some of them and I've found them very interesting.

CA: (laughs) I think most of what I've operated on is simple honesty, and you work toward [a particular] goal and if you don't, then you're in trouble.

JM: So to set the goal and then to work towards it.

CA: Yes. And to have a goal which is challenging the inequities of society. I think any social work manager has to see the inequities that they're dealing with and then work towards changing them.

JM: One of the things any manager faces is how much do you set that goal or that vision on your own and then try to communicate it to your staff, or how much do you develop it with the staff.

CA: Well, I think my way or style is to develop a goal, a plan, and then put it in the mix with the appropriate staff and get it straightened out.

JM: So develop the plan, give it to the staff, they play with it and modify it and they give it back to you and then together you work on it.

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay, that's interesting because it's not like you just say, "Well, what do you

think?" You have to first figure out as a leader...

CA: Yes, people will be all over the box if they, if you ask them what they think.

JM: And it sounds like with NASW you had to come in a see the problems and develop at least certain bottom line plans, like there had to be fiscal discipline.

CA: It is [also] very important, I think, to have people who are going to execute things, to carry them out.

JM: So you need the right people and everybody has to be on the same page.

And if there are problems you have to work with those people to get them working towards the same goal.

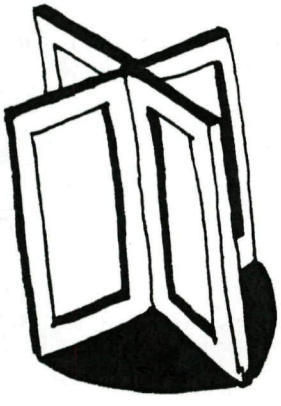
CA: Yes.

JM: And another thing: it sounds like what you were saying earlier is that you have to have certain principles that you're not willing to compromise on.

CA: That's right.

JM: And actually have resigned [from positions] because there were certain fundamental principles that you were just not going to compromise on.

CA: That's right. Sally, what do you think?



Sally: Well, I'm bursting here because I wanted you to tell about your work with volunteer organizations. Most of the time, except for Lockheed, you worked with volunteers. Not only having to know what you wanted but always participating with them and recognizing [their importance]. I think many executives come in, personally, from business and they think they can decide what things should be and forget about the fact that it is a volunteer organization. I know when I worked for him [he would] always stress that the volunteers were the ones that made the decisions and we carry out their policies.

JM: So, a lot of respect for the volunteers who serve on boards.

Sally: Absolutely.

CA: Well, it's more than that. You have to feel that each one of them has as much responsibility, as well as opportunity, to commit themselves to the job as the other one.

JM: So, I'm hearing respect and also responsibility, and everybody's a player.

CA: Exactly.

JM: Do you have any thoughts about, for somebody who's taking over an organization, like you did, how quickly they should put together their vision and their goals?

CA: As soon as possible (laughs). They've got to be clear about it, that's the other thing. You just can't fool around with where you're going. You've got to get a plan as fast as possible. And then, of course you get to test it out. But, you cannot drop a plan or proposal or ideas in people's laps and then expect them to always have the right answers or to be able to handle it. You've got to give them a chance to work on it.

JM: Let's just say, hypothetically, if I was about to take over as the dean at a school that I didn't really know a lot about, you know, I'd done the interviews, I'd done a little bit of homework, but I really didn't know the system. Or I was going to become the director of an agency that I had the same kind of familiarity with and I consulted with you and I said, "how fast should I move? When do I

need to have my vision in place?" What would you tell me?

CA: Well, I'd ask you some questions about the organization and what it's doing and why, and then I would suggest that you put out what is feasible for the next few months and share it with people.

JM: Okay. So get that initial vision out there pretty quickly.

CA: Yes.

JM: Kind of like you did at NASW where you said, "We're not going to radically change the organization but [some things] are probably going to happen."

CA: Right. And I knew the organization well because I'd been with it for so long.

But if you have a new operation then you give yourself a chance to learn it, to find out what it's all about, and then go with it.

JM: What it sounds like is the balance. You have to give yourself enough time to understand it. You don't want to put out a goal or vision without really knowing what you're talking about but if you wait too long you're missing an opportunity.

CA: Yes, people will entrench themselves. It's fast, so you have to go after it, and you have to unseat people in their prejudices and their commitments by various techniques and getting them in the group.

JM: You have to have techniques, and skills and strategies of persuasion. But at some point it sounds like you decide a person's not workable, right? Was it your philosophy that you tried to work with somebody as a start, and then only after a certain point you would realize this person is just not going to carry out the vision?

CA: Right. And my way of doing it is to sit down with them and tell them that I have this view of what they're doing and give them two or three things that they have to do to change.

JM: Be real clear with them what it is...

CA: And give them a timetable on changing.

JM: And did you turn some people around that way?

CA: Yes.

JM: And sometimes you didn't.

CA: (laughs) Yes. Often you didn't.

JM: Clarity and directness - those are two things I'm hearing from you quite a bit, that are part of your style.

CA: Yes, it is. Sally, is it?

Sally: Yes. There's something behind all of this that you don't speak of, which has to do with the study and the research that you do. He always amazed me at just writing a speech, just going out and making a speech before a group of people, he still researches [thoroughly]. And that's why there are so many books that fill our house because that is what he believes in.

JM: So it sounds like having a knowledge base, a broad knowledge base, but also assessing and studying the situation that you're entering.

Sally: And keeping up. That is the thing I think is so wonderful - that he is keeping up as much as his health will allow.

JM: And that is something that Chauncey has done during all of his career. And that is part of what made him a strong leader.

Sally: That's right, he had to know wherever he spoke (laughs).

JM: You were saying [that] you had a lot of good professors at USC. One of your attributes was that you, particularly when you were younger, would take things that people could teach you—whether it was Harry Bridges or people you were working with at your first job, your supervisor or even when you were doing the longshoreman work—you had your eyes open and your ears open and that you let people be your teachers, and were able to take away a lot of things that people offered you.

CA: Well, I think most people do that.

JM: You don't think you were unique that way?

CA: No (laughs). I don't think so. Learning has always been kind of a passion for me.

JM: Well, that's the part, maybe, that learning has been such a passion for you. It made you more open to hearing what people had to say.

CA: Well, I guess so. I don't know how to evaluate [it]. I feel like I could have done a lot more after I retired than I've done.

JM: Do you have some regrets about that?

CA: Yes, I do.

JM: Do you feel comfortable sharing them?

CA: I have some regrets about living in Huntington Beach.

Sally: What do you mean?

CA: I think we could have lived in Los Angeles where we were closer to the center of activities, and also get more support for whatever I was doing than I did here. Because Orange County is so backwards, so reactionary and so it was a struggle—the Health Care Council, the First Amendment Foundation—were all harder and I don't think they accomplished what I would like to have seen.

JM: Were there other things that you feel you wish you had accomplished, either recently or going back that you sometimes think about?

CA: Yes, I think so. I think I could have been much more help in the battle about the First Amendment Foundation. I think I could have been much more help to social work if I had been more in the center of social worker activity, then.

Sally: How do you equate that with your desire to write your books?

CA: (laughs)

Sally: That's why you stopped really being active because he's got four books inside his head that we would like to get out.

JM: So it sounds like you've had to let go of some of your activism to give yourself more time to reflect.

CA: Yes. Well, I had to let go of a lot of things in order to get time to write.

JM: It sounds like, from what you have been saying [to me], that you have some concerns about the profession.

CA: Oh, decidedly.

JM: Do you want to share with me what some of them are?

CA: Yes. One has to do with leadership. I don't know where the National [organization] is going. I have confidence in Mizrahi, the president. She's competent. But I haven't seen anything developing that will provide a place for social work in the whole field of responsibility and change.

JM: The need for social change and where social work is positioned in that? Kind of like it was during the 60s and 70s?

CA: Yes, it had to rise against pretty clear enemies, pretty clear forces. Now, it's very confusing for the profession to know where they're going. You know how we've got all these folks that have got one foot in private practice and you have social workers in every function of society now, which is good, but they don't know how to give leadership in the particular area that they're in and do it in collaboration with the whole social work movement.

JM: That sounds like a really important point. Let me make sure I understand it. Social workers are in many areas and that's good. But they're not exerting leadership in those areas and they're not bringing in the national body to support social change efforts that are necessary in those areas. What is your analysis of why we are not exerting the kind of leadership we should be in these areas? What is getting in the way of that?

CA: I think it arises as a result of the bigger struggle over control of resources.

JM: A bigger societal struggle?

CA: Yes, a national and international struggle.

JM: It's like so huge that people feel overwhelmed and unable to figure out what to do?

CA: Well, I think that's happening, but here we have the United States as the major economic force, but it's not devoting that economic force to good benefits. It's deceiving the world. It's going against the basic interest of the American people in my view. And social work is just part of that, just a little part of it.

JM: I assume that you're also including trends like the tax cuts, the cutback in services, the loss of the safety net, and the loss of civil liberties.

CA: Having a guy like Ashcroft - it's dangerous. It's really dangerous.

JM: It is dangerous. So, Chauncey, what would you advise somebody who's just entering the profession, given what you're saying about what's going on in the world and how we haven't been able, as a profession, to respond?

CA: Well, if they're just entering I would try to advise them to get as much knowledge as they could but recognize that some of the knowledge, some portion of the knowledge that they have is not applicable, isn't going to work and so they have to test out what it is they're doing and why.

JM: Would you tell them (I'm thinking of your own career), would you tell them that things change, and that it might look bleak at

a certain point but it's important to continue to work towards what you believe?

CA: Yes, people have to do that. Unfortunately, I don't think that people are being educated on all of the principles; there is a lot of confusion that people face. They hear Bush talk about all these good things that he's going to do and they don't recognize what it is. It's just a bunch of crap.

JM: So it sounds like this is a fairly pessimistic assessment of where we are now and what the profession can do.

CA: Not of what the profession can do. I think that [if] the profession is organized in a unitary body and was directed toward a central mission that they could have a lot of power. But they're working in child welfare, and individual and personal services, they're being pulled in, they're needed to kind of repair. A bigger role for social work is necessary and desirable.

JM: So, social work is not seeing the bigger role, the bigger picture?

CA: That would be taking responsibility for making changes in society, in societal functions.

JM: Not just to work with individuals but to work to change policies?

CA: Yes.

Sally: He has always had a struggle with social workers, that there was a big division—from clinical as opposed to community service and group work—there was always that kind of a schism in the social work field.

CA: I feel that social workers need to be trained generically, to train to do social work as a function and then that gets applied to all the various aspects of society and that way they don't get caught in the trap of working only in a specialty. And, I think that is possible to do. I don't know. I haven't been close enough to the other schools in the last ten or fifteen years, but I think that there must be some schools that are holding on to the idea that they teach a generic program and a social worker can do anything that is social work in any aspect of society.

JM: It seems to me what you're saying is, it's not necessarily bad for a person to learn how to be a clinical social worker as long as they learn the other parts of the job and don't see their clinical social work in some kind of isolation.

CA: Exactly.

JM: And in some ways you did that when you worked for the state mental hospital, where you were seeing people individually but you were also developing resources in the community, looking to change policies...

CA: Exactly, sure.

JM: When you think back on your growing up, your encountering poverty, your break with religion, your having to survive during the Depression, and then you think about your career and all you accomplished and all the different things you did, and you reflect back on that, what does this all mean for you now?

CA: Well, I guess I'm trying to find out what it's all about (laughs) because I'm staring death in the face. I think that I did the best you can. And, so, I'd like to pass on some of the knowledge that I've gained – that is why this interview is so important, but that is kind of an arrogant thing to think about. It's just that I wish I had to opportunity to continue doing it.

Sally: You are still writing honey.

JM: But it sounds like what you are saying also is, at some point you have to, in a sense, let go of what you can do directly. You know, what you were saying about facing death and I'm sure having a lot less energy and just the capacity to do all that you used to be able to do, that is part of why I feel like interviews like this are so important. I think it is really important for people to hear your story and to hear how did you get to be able to do what you were able to do during your prime and also, to have hope. Because, you know, it does feel so overwhelming. I have so many students who say, "Well, what can we do? Racism is everywhere. Greed is everywhere. Tax cuts are making this an unequal society." And I think they're absolutely right. I wake up in the morning and I can't listen to the news without getting aggravated. But in the end, they need to have stories like yours that have hope because things were pretty bad when you were a younger man. There was McCarthyism. There was World War II. There was Nazism. There was the Depression. It wasn't a great time to be coming of age.

CA: No.

JM: And yet you took those experiences and they might have broken you at times but you also came back stronger and ultimately became a leader who really did something. You took NASW when it was a non-functioning organization and it was in debt and it became a very powerful, important professional organization. So, I just think that these interviews are important because we all need to pass the baton and I think that's an important thing to leave people and to give people.

CA: Yes. It can give you a [sense of] courage. It has been very enjoyable to unleash some of these things.

JM: I had one last question, Chauncey. You kind of lost your faith when you were a teenager and yet you have done all of this work on behalf of people At this stage of your life, where does that leave you?

CA: Well, I feel like I've spent my life trying to help other people without the usual rewards. I know I've helped thousands of people. I know I helped people in the hospital - I took them out and I got them in places that were beneficial for them and they liked it. And so I think that is worthwhile, but I [also] see the strong, greater powers of society that have continued to abuse the very thing that you are working [to protect]. I'm optimistic about it, too, because I think that the [negative] things that are being done have forces within them that create their own opposition. And therefore they make way for future change.

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