

1960 to 1976 (The First Sixteen Years of My Career in Social Work): The Settlement Years

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Abstract: This section of reflections on my 50 year career in social work focuses on my formative years from social work school through my work in the settlement movement in New York City. It encompasses a vibrant and vital period in the struggle for social and economic justice that continues through this day. I was fortunate to have lived and worked during this tumultuous time.

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Introduction

This section of reflections on my 50 year career in social work focuses on my formative years from social work school through my work in the settlement movement in New York City. It encompasses a vibrant and vital period in the struggle for social and economic justice that continues through this day. I was fortunate to have lived and worked during this tumultuous time.

At each stage described below, I will provide some narrative including accounts of some of the meaningful interactions I had which influenced my development as a social worker as well as reflections on the historical events which helped shape these two decades as they impacted my practice.

(1960 – 1964) Graduate Student, Group Worker, and Supervisor

As I was finishing up at DePauw University with a BA in Psychology and entering my twenties, I decided on social work as a career and enrolled at Columbia University to get my MSW. Certainly the radical backgrounds of my mother and father (both were Communists in the 30s) were key influencers of this choice of career path though neither one was particularly pleased with my decision. They had both long since left the fray for social justice and were comfortably ensconced in a middle class lifestyle though both were quite liberal politically, particularly my father. I'm sure they would have preferred my becoming a doctor since I had started as a pre-med in college, but since I had figured out that my attraction to becoming a doctor was essentially to "do good," social work, which was the route my mother had taken, and was simpatico with my father's commitment to social justice, seemed a

logical choice. I reflected on my participation in sports (football at the high school and college level and baseball in high school), and having been enamored with the play *West Side Story*, the notion of working with gangs seemed a good way to carry out my budding social philosophy.

Fortunately, one of the steps leading to my choice of social work was a summer job experience sponsored by The Social Work Recruiting Committee, at The Wel Met Camps, where I met my wife to be. Kay O'Connor had also chosen that same route, and we had a wonderful summer of 1958, as counselors in a social group work oriented setting. Although Kay was a practicing Catholic and I was an agnostic, we shared a common social philosophy. Her inspiration for social justice had come from Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker movement. We were married in September of 1960 as I was entering my second and final year at Columbia. We are still going strong as a couple more than 55 years later, with two wonderful fully-grown offspring.

My second year placement at Columbia was at Hamilton Madison House on New York's Lower East Side. As a group worker, my primary work experience was with an African American social club/gang called The Conservative Gents. I hung out with them on the streets, met with them at HMH where we played basketball, shot pool, and sponsored dances. I also worked with them to get jobs, and went to court with them when they were in trouble. We went on overnight camping trips together and I used whatever contacts or insights I had to support their activities and interests. For example, going through the process of making bongo drums with help from our woodworking shop and arranging for a well known Bongo drummer and recording artist Babatunde Olatunji to meet with the group at his home in

Brooklyn. The group members were in their early to middle teens and were in and out of court for truancy, petty theft and drug use. They were not a hard core fighting gang, and one or two did quite well in school though this was certainly not the norm. They were mostly from single parent homes and lived in the Lower Income Project where HMH was located. One of the boys died of an overdose while another was the older brother of Luther Vandross who was to become a big pop star. I got a glimpse of what life was like growing up as a young black male from a welfare family background. For example, one night while walking with my group down a street outside our neighborhood, several white pedestrians deliberately crossed the street as they approached us. On another occasion I was in charge of a bus trip to a country park with my group and their friends and upon stopping at a rest stop along the way, the proprietor of the convenience store locked his door as he saw us departing from the bus. Experiences like this, which unfortunately were not infrequent, certainly had an adverse effect on the self-esteem of these adolescents, to say the least.

My Masters thesis was a group project that focused on the study of the different delinquent gang subculture types and was under the supervision of Professor Richard Cloward, who greatly influenced my thinking about delinquency. His theory of delinquency as espoused in his book "Delinquency and Opportunity," co-authored by another Columbia Professor, Lloyd Olin, was based on Emil Durkheim's classic description of "anomie," which asserts that in a state of "normlessness," individuals particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds with few clear role models for paths to success in the conventional world, gravitate toward criminal or delinquent subcultures with their own norms for behavior. In the case of adolescents there are three major adaptations of delinquent behavior, or acting out: the fighting gang, the retreatist, or drug sub culture, and the criminal gang.

After receiving my MSW in Group Work from Columbia in 1961, I stayed at Hamilton Madison House (HMH) as a group worker in the Teen Program. In addition to continuing my work with the Conservative Gents, I worked with the local neighborhood council to organize softball and basketball leagues that served the multicultural Two

Bridges Community. Located between the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, the area included Alfred E. Smith Houses, which was largely Black and Hispanic, Knickerbocker Village, which was primarily Italian, and tenements on the edge of Chinatown. Written communications were in three languages.

Needless to say, there was a lot of racial tension and organizing sports leagues was seen as a major way to foster some common activity, though the teams organized themselves pretty much by race. On one occasion, a group of Italian men from Knickerbocker Village crossed the Catherine Street border into Smith Houses and attacked an African-American adolescent who was rumored to have beat up an Italian youth. Although there were not organized Italian fighting gangs in the area, the fathers of teen boys, sometimes took matters into their own hands. Since the fathers of the black delinquent youth were often absent from the home, it was left to the adolescent gangs, which included my Conservative Gents, to respond. There was talk of a counter attack into Knickerbocker Village, which was tamped down by the social workers and priests in the neighborhood, including myself. In many ways, we were an instrument of social control, along with gang or "street club workers," paid by The New York City Youth Board, which also sponsored outdoor dances and provided funds for special events and bus trips out of the city for gang members.

In '62 I was promoted to Director of the teen program at HMH. This meant more supervisory and administrative experience in addition to group work. I continued my connection with Columbia as a field work supervisor, a role I maintained throughout my career. My big influence was Bill Schwartz, a professor at Columbia whose work focused on open and direct "contract setting" with both clients, groups and supervisees – no hidden agendas, and lots of self awareness. Bill was a leading scholar and author in the field of social group work in the 60s, and I was lucky to have him as a hands-on mentor. One case he helped me with was the eventual termination of a supervisee who worked with a Puerto Rican Drug group through a contract we had with Mobilization for Youth (the first big anti-poverty program in the nation focusing on juvenile delinquency). Harold K had become so identified with the group and its problems he ended up smoking pot with them. Bill saw it coming in my records long before I did and helped me work through

issues related to authority and setting limits, lessons which became very crucial to my work in the years ahead. Probably the skill he emphasized most was listening, the ability to hear where the client or for that matter anyone you were working with, was “coming from.” His notion of mutual aid as a guiding principle in understanding and promoting group process, helped me to see how, through the group, individuals basically meet each others’ needs. This became crucial to me in my “administrative” work with boards and staffs, and particularly important in my future work as National CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America for fourteen years.

Working with a mix of wealthy individuals, celebrities, people possessing special skills or knowledge, and those who benefitted directly from the service allowed for the potential for strong boards built on trust and commitment to a common mission. The skills I learned as a group worker were critical in helping me to succeed in these later years. I found that engaging and thus empowering board members in shaping the direction of the organization was a more effective strategy than simply “managing” the board through a low level contract characterized by a less involved board which pretty much left things up to the staff. An engaged board meant one that not only raised more private funds but also used their connections and expertise to advance the work of the organization. The last ten years of my career were spent at Penn where I focused my teaching on nonprofit leadership, which included great emphasis on building strong boards. I’ll comment more on this in my conclusion, but now lets get back to the sixties.

1963 was a year when many threads came together resulting in my full engagement in the civil rights movement. Ed Pitt, a young black social worker joined our staff as a worker in the teen program. He had been an active participant in college at North Carolina AT&T in the Woolworth lunch-counter sit-ins, one of the seminal events in the evolution of the movement. He brought his zeal and commitment to HMH and especially to another young social worker who joined our staff that year, Mickey Schwerner, who later became a martyr to the cause. It’s hard to imagine, but Mickey had been asked by Columbia to Intermit from school after his first year in order to get more experience before returning to complete his MSW.

Three events sparked the engagement of Ed, Mickey and me. A July 4th sit-in at The Gwynn Oaks Amusement Park in Maryland, demonstrations at the construction site of Rutgers Houses on the lower east side and The March on Washington for Freedom and Justice. All three are viewed as landmarks in the history of the civil rights movement with the most famous being The March on Washington, the highlight of which was Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

The successful demonstration to desegregate The Gwynn Oaks Amusement Park (1) was led by black ministers and consisted of a couple of hundred activists, mostly from New York and Philadelphia, who met at a church in west Baltimore and rode in buses to the privately owned amusement park, where 283 of us were arrested for trespassing and spent the night in jail. This was the first experience of this type for both Mickey and me. I’ll never forget Mickey staying up all night trying to convert one southern white youth who was in our cell and had been arrested for drunkenness. My other vivid memory is of us getting ready to leave the bus and being reminded of our training in non-violent resistance (putting our arms over our heads) if we were attacked by a mob. Fortunately this didn’t happen as the police were out in force and arrested us rather quickly. We were released the next day and returned to New York full of enthusiasm for the next encounter.

That summer, the civil rights movement came full force to our Two Bridges community. The focus was on integrating The Building Trades Unions, which were well known for their policies of grandfathering family members for construction jobs. Since the unions were all white, this in fact amounted to blatant discrimination. Just a couple of blocks down the street from HMH was the construction site for Rutgers Houses which became the target along with Rochdale Village in Queens for large scale sit-ins to block construction workers from entering the sites. Unlike Gwynn Oaks, this was largely a community based demonstration, and as such, many of the teens and adults who frequented HMH became a part of the rallies and subsequent sit-ins where Ed, Mickey, and I were subsequently arrested. We were taken to The Tombs, a Manhattan based detention center where we were adjudicated later that day. Our lawyer was Mark Lane, a well-known civil rights lawyer who counseled us to plead guilty to trespassing and

resisting arrest.

We were given our choice of thirty dollars or thirty days. Mickey and I chose the former. Ed Pitt wanted to make a stronger statement, so he took thirty days, and was sent to the Brooklyn House of Detention, where he ironically met up with one of the kids he was working with, who had been sent there for petty theft. Imagine the surprise of the kid when he saw his worker, who was trying to keep him out of trouble, and ended up in the same place.

As the summer rolled around to a close, all of us at HMM were involved in planning for the massive March on Washington, scheduled to take place on August 28. Through the help of Mickey's parents we were able to pay for two buses to transport our group of teens, adults and staff to the demonstration. It was a moving experience to be part of such a monumental event.

Later that fall Mickey and his wife Rita who lived nearby in our Brooklyn neighborhood where our son Mark had been born earlier that year, made the fateful decision to go south to work with The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) in Mississippi, and the rest is history. Mickey along with his two colleagues, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney, were murdered that following June 21st by The Klu Klux Klan. Mickey and Rita had organized a Community Center, and were actively encouraging voter registration among other civil rights activities. The brutal killings sparked the signing of The 1964 Civil Rights Act and The Voting Rights Act of 1965. Kay and I received numerous handwritten letters from Mickey and Rita during their time in Mississippi which we unfortunately lost, or threw out by mistake, in the process of our several moves. Movies and TV dramas depict their story. Probably the best are "Murder in Mississippi" with Tom Hulce playing Mickey, and Jennifer Grey playing Rita, and "Mississippi Burning" starring Gene Hackman as an FBI Agent.

(1964-1967) Assistant Executive Director of Bronx River Neighborhood Centers

The next move up the ladder for me was to become a Community Center Director. In the spring of 1964 I went to work for The Bronx River Neighborhood Centers (BRNC) as Director of their James Monroe

Community Center. Located in the Soundview Bruckner section of the southeast Bronx, JMCC was located in a low-income housing project and served a mixed community of White, Black and Hispanic people. Programs were primarily youth centered and ranged from a Child Care Center to a teen program, and included an active after-school program and summer day camp, for kids ranging from 8 through 13. I remember one single parent black family, whose two daughters were in our teen program. They had to take care of their infant brother, while their mom worked, and often brought him to the center with them. He turned out to be an all American basketball player and became a successful pro and later an assistant coach. I also remember another teen in our program, who I helped get accepted to Hotchkiss as part of the A Better Chance (ABC) program, which placed low income minority students in top prep schools. He went on to gain fame as a singer and later became a successful movie exec. He passed away earlier this year. In the 90s I contacted him and tried unsuccessfully to get him involved in a fund raising event. But he made it clear he didn't want to "look back."

I continued to supervise grad students and had a small year round staff of three full time workers which grew to over a dozen during the summer months. Kay and I moved with our year old son to a middle-income housing development a few blocks from the center. I got very involved in the larger community helping to form The Soundview Bruckner Community Development Association, and getting appointed to the local school board for the district. This was prior to members having to be elected. I also had my first opportunity to work with a board of directors which consisted of a range of adults from the community, most of whom were parents of kids in our programs. This was a relatively uneventful period of time. My strongest memory is of a terrible accident to a young boy who almost lost his leg when a ping-pong table collapsed on him. I remember literally holding the boy's severed leg together (he had a compound fracture with the bone breaking the skin of his lower leg) until the ambulance arrived. The parents of the boy were so grateful their son's leg had been saved they never even considered suing us for what was obvious negligence on our part. What a different litigious environment exists today.

A year and a half later, I was promoted to Assistant

Executive Director at BRNC, in charge of all programs in four locations including oversight of James Monroe. The experience there in managing staff and budgets for the many programs run by BRNC was very essential to my development as a manager/administrator, though I continued to have a direct hand in working with youth. The Executive Director was a solid administrator though not very creative and BRNC had a multitude of sports and recreational programs in addition to Headstart and social programs for seniors and adults. They were not as oriented to organizational work in the community and didn't get very involved in community activities. None of the more than 25 staff actually lived in the community except for me. I got a chance to work with some of the members on the board, all of who also lived outside of the community including a very wealthy elderly woman who was a big contributor in my later years at United Neighborhood Houses.

(1967-1971) Executive Director of Hamilton Madison House

In the spring of 1967 I was recruited to come back to Hamilton Madison House as Executive Director, another step up the ladder. My mentor at HMH, Geoff Wiener, left HMH as Executive Director to get his doctorate at Columbia and was now the volunteer Chair of the Board. Coming back as head of HMH was a great opportunity to play a larger role in serving the Two Bridges Community. At 29 I was the youngest Executive Director within our network of 36 settlement houses affiliated with United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). My predecessor was an experienced social worker who was known for his professionalism but didn't really understand or care for the community organization aspects of the job, nor was he at all hands on in his approach to working with staff. He delegated all staff supervision to the assistant ED. The agency was languishing and in financial difficulty. The board stepped in and fired the ED. My first decision as executive director was to not continue with the Assistant Director, much to his chagrin. By now I had experience "letting people go" and I felt comfortable with the decision.

Another decision was to once again move into the community where I worked. Kay and I moved to the lower eastside a few blocks from HMH with our son Mark, and soon to be born daughter, Lisa. We lived

in a Mitchell Llama Co-op with a great view of The East River. It was situated amid low-income housing projects and tenements and proved to be a great place to be, with lots of good friends with young families, most of whom were social workers like us. Our son Mark enjoyed the programs at Henry Street Settlement, and Kay helped organize a cooperative nursery school at the nearby Educational Alliance Settlement House.

For the next four years I was the Executive Director of HMH. These were turbulent years, highlighted by The War on Poverty with its "maximum feasible participation of the poor" in government funded programs which included Head Start, VISTA, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Community Development, Jobs Training and many other federally funded programs. The funding for many of these programs was through neighborhood-based boards of community residents called Community Corporations which reported up to a citywide Council Against Poverty. For the first time, low income, Black and Hispanic community residents had a real voice in decision making, and this largely political experience became a route for many to become state and federally elected officials. Examples include Congressmen Adolphus Towns and Major Owens from Brooklyn, and John Conyers from Detroit.

In order for Settlement Houses to remain relevant and receive government funding, we needed to bring local residents on to our governing bodies. Since I had been active in the civil rights struggle and believed very strongly in community engagement/participation, this fit right into my approach to leading HMH. I was very involved on The Lower Eastside Community Corporation while at HMH and in later years was a member of the Citi-wide Council Against Poverty. The major role of the community corporations and its citywide parent was the allocation of antipoverty funds to community based and citywide nonprofits. Many long nights were spent in the bargaining and horse-trading .

With the influx of government funding, the size of the staff of HMH grew to well over a hundred. Our programs included day care, Head Start, a mental health unit with a psychologist and a psychiatrist, a community organization with a focus on housing and community development, a teen program with a focus on at-risk youth, an example being Alternatives to

Detention, an after-school program heavy into tutoring, and a senior citizens program, which consisted mainly of several hundred older men who had left their families in China many years ago. Through these programs and services we reached thousands of community members who represented the three major racial groups with distinctive ethnic identification among them such as Italian, Puerto Rican, and various Asian peoples. In fact as an outgrowth of our mental health unit, our program director, Harold Lui was instrumental in our establishing the city's first Chinese mental health program, the Chinatown Family Consultation Center, which later grew into the largest Asian mental health program in the city serving Chinese, Japanese, Philippine, and other Asian groups. As an example of the diversity in the programs, I was able to choose from three types of lunches each day: soul food by the Headstart program cook, Chinese at the senior citizens program, or Greek/ Italian by our day care center cook.

Like 1963, 1968 was punctuated with major social action initiatives where HMH was involved. The Poor Peoples Campaign (2) was an outgrowth of the riots in Newark and Detroit the year before. Martin Luther King was the driving force. His idea was to bring non-violent protest to Washington in the form of turning the area around the Lincoln Memorial, the site of his great civil rights speech, into a tent city of low income and unemployed protesters for economic justice in the form of federal legislation that would be introduced to Congress as an Economic Bill of Rights. Unfortunately Dr. King was assassinated in April, a month before "Resurrection City" was created. Although the six week long encampment attracted around 10,000 full time tent city residents, it did not lead to any major legislation as the 1963 March on Washington had. Our Two Bridges Neighborhood was represented by a group of dedicated activists. I remember being part of the construction of our tent in the middle of a very muddy area within sight of The Lincoln Memorial. Two positive outcomes were increased awareness of the plight of the poor, and the embracing of economic issues by the civil rights movement. In the middle of the life of "Resurrection City" Robert Kennedy was assassinated on June 8th. He had been an early supporter of Dr. King's original plan.

Around this time another social action initiative was

taking hold in our community and around NYC: the welfare rights movement. Welfare clients organized to push for changes in the welfare system through demonstration at the offices and home of the Welfare Commissioner, Jack Goldberg, whom I knew well from his days as the Director of Camp Wel Met, where I had worked for two summers. The demonstrations led to the institution of a flat grant payment system, as opposed to welfare recipients having to itemize their needs, for example, money for clothes in the fall, for the school year. The tactic used by protesters was to flood the welfare offices with requests for checks for specific items leading to a bureaucratic nightmare for the department. Although the amount of the flat grant was too low, it did represent a reform in the way welfare recipients were treated, no longer needing to justify each expense, no matter how small. One of our community organizers on staff at HMH, Jeanne Latting Jones, was in the forefront of the demonstrations that included many of the families in our program, some of whom were involved in the Poor Peoples Campaign. (3)

The third well-documented historical event which rocked our neighborhood that year was the public school strike, called in the fall by The United Federation of Teachers led by Al Shanker. The citywide walkout was called in response to the experiment in community control then underway in three areas: Oceanhill Brownsville in Brooklyn, IS 201 in Harlem, and our own Two Bridges neighborhood. Our three areas were designated "Model School Districts" and were funded by the City and The Ford Foundation to put in place elements of what is now called school reform. These included what were then new concepts in education such as "schools without walls." The controversial part, however, was the authority given to community school boards in those areas to select their own superintendent who in turn had authority over hiring principals. Teachers were also to be held accountable for their performance. It was working fine in our area, but in the other two where there were clear racial overtones given the nature of the two black ghetto communities, things did not go smoothly, to say the least as several teachers and administrators were fired. In Two Bridges, HMH played an active role in helping to keep our schools open. We were the only district of the three where most of the teachers did not go out on strike. This was because they had been heavily involved in the experiment through true community participation,

made possible by a foundation grant to establish PDP, The Parent Development Program, one of whose leaders was Paul Kurzman, a longtime board member of HMH. Our after-school tutoring programs took place in the schools and our staff and parent groups were very present in keeping the schools running. In fact, after the strike ended and the UFT had essentially emerged victorious in forcing The Citywide School Board to end the experiment in reform, the principal in one of the schools actually terminated our tutoring program in his school. We had the community on our side though and the program was reinstated. The UFT actually picketed HMH one day in protest of our role in the strike. Our parents were quick to counter demonstrate and the UFT sponsored picketing did not continue the next day.

One of the most dramatic examples of the multifaceted role of HMH took place the following year. It demonstrated how much HMH was a part of the Two Bridges Community. Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), otherwise known as The Domestic Peace Corps, was an important federal source for staff in several of our programs. We had over a dozen workers, one of whom was assigned to work with The Two Bridges Neighborhood Council. Ken was an English major who like to write and the director of TBNC, Dick Duhan, who we worked with very closely, needed someone to develop his Council Newsletter, an important source of information in our tri lingual community.

Around mid-night one evening, Ken was working at the TBNC office, which was located in a storefront down the street from our main headquarters. Apparently he was doing some last minute editing of the newsletter when a truck pulled up to the storefront next door and began to unload hundreds of cartons of cigarettes. Since the storefront in question was rumored to be a Mafia hangout (there were always older men out front playing cards), Ken was suspicious and called the local police precinct to report what he thought might be an illegal activity: importing cigarettes from a southern state to avoid paying taxes on them and then selling them for a larger profit. It took a while for the police to respond and by the time they finally arrived the truck was long gone. Ken described what he had observed but there was no further action taken.

The following morning Dick was paid a visit by one of the older guys from next door who told him what a mistake the “young kid” had made the night before by calling the police and that something was going to happen to teach him a lesson. Dick then came over to my office, explained the situation, and asked for my help. I had an idea.

Our Headstart pre-school program was the most integrated of any of our services. The focus was not only on the kids but also on their families through what was referred to as “parent participation.” Parents of kids in classes were hired as teacher’s assistants and one of them was an Italian woman whose mother, Eleanor J., often hung around the program which served her daughter, a single parent mom and parent aide in the program, and grandson who was a participant. I had gotten to know Eleanor who was a very gregarious woman and whose brother was a well-known racketeer. Her husband was the leader of the Democratic Party in the neighborhood and they lived in Knickerbocker Village, the aforementioned middle-income co-op across the street.

Eleanor and I had once had a conversation about the new book everyone was reading called “The Godfather” and she made no bones (pardon the pun) of her knowledge of the sub-culture depicted in the book later to become one of the most popular movies ever made. My idea was to ask for Eleanor’s help in dealing with the danger to Ken, our VISTA worker. I was pleased when Eleanor said she would look into the situation after I had described it to her. She was very calm and noncommittal in her response.

A few days later Eleanor reported to me that everything was going to be all right with Ken. I was very relieved, to say the least, but couldn’t resist asking her what she had heard was going to happen to Ken. She calmly replied “they were going to throw acid in his face.” Later Eleanor asked me if we could assign a youth worker to set up an outreach program for “their” teens in the basement area of Knickerbocker Village. Needless to say, my response was a positive one.

Our programs and budget continued to grow at HMH and I began to conceptualize a purpose for our overall approach: “to enable our community to better deal with the major institutions/systems that impinged on their lives.” There were five: world of work, juvenile

justice, welfare, education, and health/mental health. All of our programs seemed to fit within this context. I also continued my interest in drug addiction though involvement with The Lower Eastside Addiction Services Agency.

During '69 and '70 I also became very involved with our parent federation, United Neighborhood Houses of New York. Here I was able to interact with the other executive directors of the then 35 settlements in New York City. A year later I became the president of The Executive Directors Council, a peer group which met monthly to share best practices and advocate with UNH on key social issues. I developed a strong relationship with Bert Beck, the leader of the largest and most well known settlement house, Henry Street Settlement. Bert was an older man with a strong reputation in the field. I considered him as much of a mentor as Geoff Wiener and Bill Schwartz had been earlier in my career. In fact it was Bert who in late 1970 was my key supporter for the job of ED of UNH after the long time head, Helen Harris, had announced her retirement. Helen's retirement was precipitated by a strong protest from the Executive Directors Group over her refusal to continue UNH as a citywide sponsor of The Neighborhood Youth Corps, an important youth employment program which was of great benefit to all the settlements. The program was involved with a great deal of red tape, and at this late stage in her illustrious career, Helen Harris just didn't want to bother with it. She had been the head of UNH for over 25 years.

In early 1970 I was recruited by a headhunter to become the head of a large group of settlement houses in Chicago. It seemed a natural progression for my career, and I went through several interviews and a trip to Chicago before I was offered the job. Kay and I were ready to move our young family to Chicago when I was informed that the board had given in to pressure from black leaders to not hire a white guy for the job and had rescinded their offer. I viewed it as fortunate that I hadn't uprooted my family only to be driven out of the job upon arrival in Chicago. Clearly, the board wasn't in touch with the community. Although I had already announced to my board at HMH that I would be leaving they were happy to take me back. Word was out about my willingness to change jobs and I was asked by Bert and several other EDs if I would be interested

in applying for the top job at UNH.

When I threw my hat in the ring for Executive Director of UNH, I had the support of the local executive directors, but not the key members of the board of directors nor Helen Harris and her top staff, all of whom were older and more experienced than I was. UNH had become somewhat removed from its affiliates, and my approach, as it was in my later job at BBBSA, was to bring the "locals" into closer alignment with the parent group so that they were truly "united." My biggest supporter for the job on the board was Helen Hall, a retired executive director who was the best-known person in the settlement movement over the past 50 years. The board deadlocked on several older and more-well known candidates, and then finally settled on me. Helen Hall placed a phone call to me, after the crucial board meeting, telling me: "you're in." This was now in the fall of 1970, and the decision was to be kept confidential until after a great celebration was to be held later that fall honoring Helen. It was held at The Waldorf Astoria and included most of the political luminaries of the city, including the Mayor and several Congressmen.

(1971-1976) Executive Director of UNH

In 1971, at the age of 33, I became the Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses, The Federation of New York City's Settlement Houses. The next five and a half years proved to be very productive. UNH became more united, and an even stronger force for change in NYC. Through our Settlement Housing Fund (SHF), led by Clara Fox, and our Settlement Houses Employment Development Program (SHED), led by Juliet Brudney, we sponsored the development of a variety of housing projects, employment training, and development programs. Both Clara and Juliet were my seniors and had stood with Helen in opposing my candidacy for the job. However they both came around to buy into my approach and leadership, and eventually accepted me as their boss. My approach was essentially one of consensus building among our major stakeholders: the local affiliated settlement houses, focused on the development of government funded joint projects. Several major new programs were initiated, including a multimillion dollar adult consumer education program, funded by Title XX of the Social Security Act, the employment of several hundred workers

placed in Settlement Houses funded by The Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), a citywide Alternatives to Detention Project which I hired my former assistant director at HMM, Harold Lui to direct. This program focused on serving adjudicated youth and was built on the model we had worked on at HMM. Our Senior Companion Program also worked through our affiliates to bring outreach workers and meals on wheels to low income senior citizens.

Beyond program development and subcontracting with settlements to carry out government funded projects, UNH provided technical assistance to agencies in all of its program areas and assisted in fund raising with foundations and individuals through the Joint Supplemental Fund, moneys of which were distributed on a formula basis. We fostered collaboration and mergers where needed through our Cluster Program in areas we served, such as the South Bronx, Lower East Side, West Side, and South Brooklyn, and were heavily engaged in social action on a citywide level, related to our work in all areas. We were in the forefront of the move to decentralize public services in the city and to separate them from flat grant payments to welfare recipients. We also helped establish a Statewide Federation of Settlement Houses, for the purpose of social advocacy on the statewide level.

The demographics of the settlement movement in New York changed radically during my time, pushed mainly by the advent of The Poverty Program in the 60s. I embraced this change and pushed it whenever and wherever I could. By 1975 more than half of the 50 key executives in settlements were black or Hispanic and the majority of overall staff which now numbered 3,313, more than doubled, were residents in the neighborhoods served by their settlement. More than forty percent of the local board members lived or worked in their settlements neighborhoods. Self-help was not just a fancy phrase but had become a daily reality of settlement life.

An important dimension of my work at UNH was working with my own board as well as the leadership of local boards, and I was very fortunate to have two highly committed and effective Board Presidents at UNH in Dr. Arthur C. Logan and former NYC Mayor, Robert F. Wagner.

Arthur Logan was a distinguished African American surgeon in his mid sixties, who was among other things, the doctor and best friend of Duke Ellington. His second wife was a former jazz singer, twenty years his junior, who was very bombastic. For example, Arthur called me back from a consultancy I was doing in Florida on my vacation, to deal with his wife who was over spending our funds to develop a fund raising auction with the public television station in NYC that eventually fell through. His highly publicized death on Nov. 25, 1973 was from a fall from the elevated Henry Hudson Parkway at 134th street, onto the site of what was to become The Arthur C. Logan Memorial Hospital. I served as a pallbearer at his magnificent funeral in Riverside Church, attended by Mayor Lindsey, Whitney Young, and Ramsey Clark, to name a few.

Arthur had been a big help to me in my first years at UNH. His support was critical to my being accepted by the Helen Harris admirers. There is a photo on my "ego wall" of Arthur, Helen and I cutting a cake at our 70th birthday after I had just become Executive Director. He was the most skilled chair of a meeting that I have ever seen, and was extremely helpful to me in gaining support for my ideas from the board. He was a true mentor and close friend. After his death there was a great deal of discussion about who should succeed him. The two leading candidates were Cyrus Vance who had been president of Union Settlement, and former mayor Robert F. Wagner, who had worked closely with the settlements during his tenure at city hall and was a big admirer of Helen Harris. By this time Helen and I got along quite well, as she too had gained confidence in how I was leading UNH. She and her long time admirer Julius C. C. Edelstein convinced Wagner to take the post.

It was fun having Mayor Wagner as my board president. He opened lots of doors and was very much in demand as a speaker at various settlement functions. His speeches were always written by Julius, who was a real character, and had been the deputy mayor under Wagner. He was now the Vice Chancellor of The City University System. A visit to his office at CUNY would entail walking over literally dozens of copies of The New York Times laid out on his floor. Mayor Wagner was deaf in his left ear and always had me on his right side at meetings so he could hear me. He also explained to me once how he faked eating by moving around the food in his mouth and skillfully dropping it

into his napkin when he got a chance. Needless to say, he was required to attend far too many dinners on the rubber circuit as mayor. He was very laid back and made famous the expression “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” but this belied a highly astute politician who was a true liberal in the tradition of his father Senator Robert F. Wagner.

One of the culminating events in my tenure at UNH was our 75th Anniversary Dinner, the biggest fundraiser in our history which honored two of the major givers to settlement houses through our history: Lawrence Rockefeller and Brooke Astor. The event was held at the Hotel Pierre on 5th Avenue, probably the city’s fanciest banquet venue, at the insistence of Mrs Astor who also gave us her list of vendors to solicit as did Lawrence Rockefeller. The Chair of Shell Oil, Gus Taveloraos, served as a vice chair as did several settlement alumni among them Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, and Harry Golden. Politicos like Louie Lefkowitz and new Mayor, Abe Beame, also settlement kids, were also present. A highlight of the evening came when Brook Astor made a speech extolling the value of settlements. What was important was not what Mrs Astor said, but what resulted from her remarks. Within the next week more than a dozen of our locals had written elaborate fund raising letters to her, and as a result her key staff aide, Linda Gillies, called me to set up a meeting to discuss how Mrs. Astor should respond to all these requests. She took my advice and recommended to Mrs. Astor that she make a gift to our joint fund which would be distributed through UNH to the settlements. Mrs. Astor came through with a commitment of a million dollars, which at that time, was the largest single gift ever made to UNH.

In my final couple of years at UNH, I recruited my old high school friend, Sid Lapidus, to become involved as a volunteer committee member. He soon became treasurer and then several years after my departure, the long standing Chairman of the Board, and its most active contributor and fund-raiser for over 25 years. He remains active today as Honorary Chair.

By 1976 things were really rolling at UNH despite the fiscal crisis facing New York City, that led to the State creating the Municipal Assistance Corporation, to meet the borrowing needs of the city and prevent

its default. The Settlement’s total budget had grown from 14 million to 35 million in the past five years and UNH had brought in close to 5 million in service grants and contracts from foundations and government in the past year. However, cuts in services were on the horizon in order for the city to regain its fiscal stability.

At the citywide level in addition to serving on The Council Against Poverty and the advisory board to The NYC Department of Social Services, I was active as a part of Community Council of Greater New York. At The Community Council I chaired their committee on the reorganization of the department of social services which developed a model for services decentralization to neighborhood locations throughout the city. Unfortunately, like school decentralization, it never came to be. Another Council committee I was active on was their Task Force on The New York City Financial Crisis, and it was there that I met the executive director of SCAA, Gordon Brown.

State Communities Aid Association (SCAA) was a 104 year old statewide public policy and advocacy organization focusing on improved health, mental health, and social welfare which has since changed its name to the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. Because of the growing importance of the state’s role in oversight of the “bailout” of NYC, SCAA became a key player on The Community Council Task Force and I got to work with Gordon who was planning to retire in ‘76. He approached me one day in true WASP fashion telling me he liked “the cut of my jib” and asked me if I would be interested in succeeding him at SCAA.

After thinking about my response for a few days, I answered in the affirmative influenced by the fact that by then I was interested in becoming The Commissioner of Social Services for New York City one day and felt that SCAA would give me more experience with government agencies. I had been a serious candidate for Commissioner the previous year but lost out to the retired head of Metropolitan Life Insurance, J. Henry Smith. In retrospect, I mistakenly thought that SCAA would provide a better route than UNH. Probably an even better route would have been to apply for the deputy commissioner job which Deputy Mayor Cavanaugh had asked me if I would be interested in. But, it was also clear that states were playing an increasingly important role in public policy

in human services so that I felt I could do more to influence policy through SCAA.

After I stepped down, Former Mayor Wagner also decided to step down as Board President and the Board hired my Assistant Director without undergoing any kind of a search. As is sometimes the case when there isn't proper succession planning, the number two person doesn't work out in the top job. I made the mistake of staying out of the decision making process even though I had some of my own misgivings which I did not express, as I should have. My eyes were too fixed on my next job. UNH went through some troubled times before selecting a new exec several year later who was able to right the ship.

A pattern had developed in the first 15 years of my career. I was doing well in my various jobs and gaining confidence in my ability to assume greater responsibility. Clearly I was very ambitious about advancing to what I thought at the time was the job where I could have the greatest influence and impact on peoples lives – Commissioner of Social Services. Because, through the years, cutbacks in public funds and the enormous shift in government funding from publicly run services to contracting out with the voluntary sector, my focus changed. It seemed that government had become more the monitor than the provider, and was limited in its creative development of new approaches by an increasing fiscally conservative public. SCAA afforded me the opportunity to work more directly on advancing progressive public policy options without having to worry directly about fund raising. It was financed through an endowment the earnings of which funded the core programs.

I remained at SCAA for the next nine years before being recruited to head Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, a post I held for 14 years before retiring to academia for the last ten years of my career, teaching nonprofit leadership and advocacy at the University of Pennsylvania.

As I now look back on my career, certainly among the most memorable years were those spent in the settlement movement. There existed a hope and spirit that inspired our work, and led us to truly believe that we could make a real difference not only with individuals and groups, but with society as a

whole.

Unfinished Business

If I were to do an assessment of where we stand today, regarding the major themes which guided my work over 50 years, I would have to say that there is much left to be done.

Certainly strides have been made in the important quest for racial justice, but as recent events involving criminal justice has demonstrated, we still have a good way to go to eliminate institutional racism.

Sadly there has been little, if any, progress when it comes to economic justice. We appear to be headed more and more toward an oligarchy of the super wealthy elites, who dominate the political process through their unfettered campaign contributions supporting regressive policies. While it's encouraging to see grass roots support as indicated in polls for more egalitarian approaches to lessening the disparity gap between the haves and the have-nots, it's questionable how much change can take place given the dysfunction of the political process at the national level.

The field of social work has certainly changed in its orientation since my student days. We seem to have been captured by the health care industry. An indication of this is our identification in the yearly rankings of graduate schools by US News and World Reports. Social Work is listed under Health Specialties. And during my stint in academia at Penn, the School of Social Work, which was not even led by a social worker, actually removed 'social work' from its name. Although casework has always been the dominant methodology, back in the sixties we had a robust program in group work and community organization. Although we still see the term community organization used to describe a field of work, witness the experience of President Obama, it doesn't seem to be identified with social work training.

Admittedly I am out of touch with current trends in the field since my retirement six years ago, so I certainly hope there still is important advocacy and public policy work being carried out in the name of Social Work, as there was when I was active in the New York City Chapter of NASW thirty years ago.

Certainly there is much unfinished business and Social Work has an ever-important role to play. The birth of the settlement movement in the late 1800s and its evolution through the years stands as testament to significance of our being where the action is, in communities, and through neighborhood based services, and approaches, to making a positive impact on peoples' lives as well as society as a whole.

NOTES

I have indicated below links to websites with more background information from Wikipedia on three of the lesser-known demonstrations/movements I have cited.

Wikipedia (2015). National Welfare Rights

Organization. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Welfare_Rights_Organization

Wikipedia (2016a). Gwynn Oak Park. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwynn_Oak_Park

Wikipedia (2016b). Poor People's Campaign. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_People%27s_Campaign

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