

Jane, Edith and I: Twenty Years in the Helping Professions, One Hundred Years Apart

Margaret Bausman

Abstract: Writing as both a social worker and a librarian, I reflect upon my twenty years as a helping professional. This narration is interspersed with reflections on the history of the social welfare reform and public library movements during the Progressive Era. Highlighting the contributions of two seminal Progressive Era predecessors in conjunction with my own experience, I illuminate the interconnectedness of the core values between these helping professions, past and present.

Keywords: helping, human needs, social work history, library history

Jane Addams (1860-1935) published *Twenty Years at Hull House* in her fiftieth year. In her preface she concedes it is an impressive milestone, but not one which necessarily affords her objectivity in retrospect as those people and events of which she writes are "so intimate a part of my lot that they cannot be written of either in praise or shame" (Addams, 1910, vii). Addams frames the memoir by describing influential people and experiences from her youth that provided the impetus to dedicate her life to social welfare work; chief among them was her father, John H. Addams.

A Quaker and owner of a granary, John Addams raised his daughter as a single parent for eight years following her mother's death during Jane's infancy. Of this foundational relationship, Addams wrote: "...it was this cord which not only held fast my supreme affection, but also first drew me into the moral concerns of life" (Addams, 1910, 1). In her concluding remarks, some 400 pages later, she links with clarity her life's work to the central mores that shaped the settlement house movement.

It is my fiftieth year and I have also twenty years of service in two helping professions, social work and librarianship, upon which to reflect. And while I have no delusion that my career resembles in any way the breadth and gravitas of Addams', I do find the juncture evocative. In approaching it, I feel a small kindredship with Addams. It is an impressive milestone, deserving of reflection even if the hindsight may yet be fuzzy: How did I come to this work? How did I get from there to here? Does it help? Have I helped?

While a personal reflection, this narrative draws upon historical material concerning the dual evolution of the social work and librarianship professions during the Progressive Era. By doing so, I will elucidate examples of the historic and continuing nature of these helping professions as vehicles for social justice, egalitarianism and self-determination on micro and macro levels.

The Family Business

When I entered social work school in 1993, the mother of my oldest childhood friend

proclaimed: "Oh, you went and joined the family business!" She was right.

My father is an American Baptist minister, a protestant denomination founded in 1638 by Roger Williams (1603-1683). Banished from both the United Kingdom and the Massachusetts colony, Williams was a staunch proponent of religious liberty as well as an advocate for the separation of church and state (Handy, 2005). A central Baptist principle is that of "soul freedom," the conviction that the individual has the right to derive personal meaning from the Bible and negotiate one's own unique pathway to God and faith (Spitzer, 2006). Moreover, in seminary my father found inspiration from the Social Gospel Movement, a Progressive Era protestant movement that emphasized service over rhetoric, action over prayer, unity over patriarchy (Lowe, 2010). These ideologies formed the basis for the five decades of my father's ministry.

My parents met in seminary, although my mother initially went on to become a teacher. During my middle childhood, she studied for and settled into her true life's calling as a psychotherapist specializing in the treatment of survivors of severe childhood sexual abuse and dissociative disorders. She is a feminist, a supporter of worker's rights, an environmentalist, and a strident pacifist. Together, my parents protested the Vietnam War, marched for Civil Rights, stood up early for gay rights as my father denounced Anita Bryant from his pulpit in 1977, served hundreds of Celebrate Life AIDS dinners, made campaign calls for Barack Obama in 2008, and so on. They truly walked the walk, personally and professionally. It makes me proud.

Sometimes I smile and wonder if I really ever had a chance other than to hit the road to the helping professions, not once but twice.

The Road

Early in my social work career, I became acquainted with the necessity to tolerate the limitations of my role and the often unknowable, ineffable sequela of my interventions. It was the mid-1990's and I worked on a Title 1 Ryan White program providing mental health services to adults and families impacted by HIV/AIDS. While protease inhibitors were just on the horizon, an HIV diagnosis at that time often could, and did, quickly progress to full-blown AIDS replete with multiple health crises punctuated by social stigma, isolation, and a truncated life.

There were days when it was equally an honor and a horror to bear witness to the families grappling with—hope upon hope, grief upon grief—the inevitable outcome. I learned quickly, as one does in end-of-life work, that the goal was not health. The outcome of my intervention would not be physical healing, and even if such was possible, it was not my role. The helping was perplexing, counter-intuitively tragic: helping a young man seek meaning while enduring a complete assault to his sense of self and physical integrity; helping a widow disclose to her 8-year-old son that they both had "the same sickness Daddy died of"; helping an older parent plan the funeral for his 35-year-old child. I was never really sure what helped, or if anything realistically could. Nevertheless, I persisted, sure in my conviction that the preservation of as much self-determination and dignity as possible was of help to those traversing such cataclysmic personal terrain.

Those years are long past and I am thankful. I am thankful that medicine offers far more now by the way of prognosis and treatment. I am thankful that the cultural zeitgeist is increasingly holistic and compassionate. I am thankful that work in HIV/AIDS is no longer de facto end-of-life work. I am profoundly thankful to have encountered several souls with resilience so remarkable that it remains immediately resonant for me until this day, as I hope it always will. I am thankful for a cognitive and visceral awareness that, at least on some occasions, I helped.

My professional role grew to include supervision, program and clinic management, and administrative social work. More recently, my professional acumen expanded into a second helping profession as a librarian. One might assume this was a point of professional divergence. Yet it is in this sphere that the richly intertwined history of social work and librarianship as helping professions came alive for me, strengthening my professional identity in unanticipated and entirely gratifying ways.

Merger

It was a blustery fall afternoon in 2008 as I made my way through mid-town Manhattan. I had just completed an interview with a senior librarian at a large public library for my first assignment in my first class toward a Master of Library and Information Science degree. As I mulled over the discourse, one aspect of our conversation prodded at me: the donation of \$100 million made the previous March by New York Public Library (NYPL) Trustee and Wall Street financier Steven A. Schwarzman to kick-start a billion dollar expansion project of NYPL's hallmark edifice at 42nd Street and 5th Avenue (Pogrebin, 2008). I ruminated: What is the impact on a public institution of such a donation made by a private individual who also serves on its Board of Trustees? Might this sway the balance of power? Who then are the primary stakeholders: the public that the institution serves or the private individuals who fill the coffers?

These words, public and private, swirled around in my head. Just several weeks away from the 2008 Presidential election, I had been hearing these words regularly in the news, uttered by candidates frequently in the context of social welfare and public health policies. I observed that the application and meaning of these words changed depending on which candidate spoke them and in what context. And I knew this was not a new conundrum but one dating back to the early social welfare history of the United States during the Gilded Age (1880-1900) and the Progressive Era (1900-1920).

During the Gilded Age, Charity Organization Societies (COS) dominated the social welfare landscape. These private organizations functioned as a kind of clearinghouse for other private organizations that sought to provide charitable assistance to those in need. Assistance was understood as a reactive service of last resort, available to the "deserving poor," and was overseen by the "friendly visitor": a volunteer whose primary duty was to serve as an example that, if emulated, would remediate need (Trattner, 2007).

A young woman during this time, Jane Addams drew from Tolstoy to describe the "snare of preparedness" that ultimately led her to London's Toynbee Hall. A well-educated young woman of the upper middle class, Addams' early adulthood was stymied by a dearth of opportunities

into which her considerable intelligence and energy could be channeled. Her exposure to the English Settlement House movement definitively released her from the "snare" (Addams, 1910). Addams founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889, and the American Settlement House movement was born, a pivotal event setting the stage for the massive social reform of the Progressive Era (Barbuto, 1999).

The settlement movement tenets were diametrically opposed to those of the COS, summed up by "The Three Rs": residence, research and reform. The settlement movement purported that social welfare need was the result of oppression and thus was remediated by reform. Moreover, the settlement movement asserted that effective remediation and reform was dependent upon a realistic understanding of and an authentic connection with those in need. Therefore, settlement houses were created in the communities they served and occupied by the settlement workers themselves (Trattner, 2007).

The Road

Such grassroots efforts are not unfamiliar today. Indeed, American history is replete with such examples in which social issues are propelled by concerned, organized citizenry into the public scope of responsibility.

In my early to mid-20s, my process of coming-out as a lesbian and my arrival into the gay community coincided with the early AIDS pandemic. It was an appalling time as many rebuked my "gay brothers" as a scourge. There were personal losses: a beloved mentor, a dear friend's brother. There were few, if any, meaningful public policy or service responses. The public hospital unit in my community with a designated unit serving AIDS patients was located on the grounds of the prison system, a powerful indictment concerning the public sphere that people with HIV/AIDS occupied at that time. To me, this was far more than fear-driven denial. It was an egregious attack in which gay men, intravenous drug users, and people of color became not only the face of the crisis but also the cause of it, not victims in need of succor but perpetrators in need of containment. They were pariahs, disposable, not real people at all.

With no conscious recognition of it in the moment, I joined the AIDS movement. I went to protests and vigils. I raised money in walk-a-thons and dance-a-thons. I joined the local AIDS project. I volunteered for the local NAMES Project display. I became an AIDS Buddy. And ultimately, I went to social work school and earned an MSW.

Merger

In 2008, this rumination about public versus private; about social work's history and my own, about an imminent election, the outcome of which could reshape the application of these words and thereby influence decades of social policy to come, begged the question: Where did the public library movement fit into the paradigm and intersect with Progressive Era reform?

Just as the "friendly visitor" was the hallmark of the COS movement, the library ethos during the Gilded Age promoted the "library hostess" as both the vehicle for access to information as well

as a model of moral and appropriate personage for the lower, marginalized and immigrant classes to emulate. Gilded Era library leadership, which has been described as "genteel," tended to be men, quite a few of whom were also clergy. They conceptualized the library mission as an educative one that not only advanced individual morality but thereby also had the capacity to heal social disorder. Library collections reflected this objective by providing access to material that primarily reinforced Victorian values and standards for Americanization (Garrison, 2003).

As the settlement house movement took root, so too libraries began to shift in mission and service. Progressive Era librarians reached out to their constituents in ways not previously considered library functions. Through embedded branch locations and delivery stations, books were brought directly into communities lacking physical access to libraries. Physical library spaces hosted non-library gatherings such as community meetings and cultural events as well as public bathrooms and kitchens. Programming and resources were increasingly patron-driven focusing on enrichment, recreation, foreign language materials, and children's services (Garrison, 2003).

The Serendipitous Find

Thinking that this conjunction of the settlement house and public library movements might form an interesting basis for my final paper, I began searching for relevant examples. One afternoon, while hunting through databases, I stumbled across Edith Guerrier (1870-1958)—it truly was a serendipitous find. Guerrier proved to be an excellent subject for my final paper, and I have continued to study her, the Progressive Era and its social reform movements ever since. I have scoured databases, catalogs, and finding aids. I have visited special libraries and archival collections. Guerrier captured not only my scholarly interest, but also my heart and imagination.

Her childhood biography is an evocative one. Losing her mother to tuberculosis at the age of three, Guerrier's father rotated her childhood care through several households of extended family. Despite the disruptions in custodial care, Guerrier's primary nurturing relationship throughout her life was with her maternal aunt, Anna Ricketson. A member of the intellectual elite of New England, Ricketson was known for her great compassion and caring. Guerrier ascribed to her aunt: "You don't have to go out looking for things to do for people (t)hey come to your door if it is the right sort of door" (New Bedford Whaling Museum, autobiographical sketch, ca. 1950). In eulogizing Ricketson, Guerrier wrote:

My memories of my dear Aunt are sweet and fragrant. After my mother's death ... she became a mother to me. There was nothing I enjoyed more than running into her room and climbing into her bed in the morning. Her wallpaper was sprinkled over with little stars, and to me her kind eyes always reflected the stars... (Guerrier, 1927)

In her memoir, Guerrier describes these early influences as formative, fundamentally responsible for shaping her sense of self, both personally and professionally.

Guerrier served as the library attendant for the public library delivery station at the North Bennett Street Industrial School in Boston's North End during the 1890s. Just prior to the turn of

the century, she established a series of girls reading groups, arranged by age and named for the day of the week on which they met (Guerrier, 1992). The oldest group of girls, The Saturday Evening Girls (S.E.G.), represents a unique slice of Progressive Era history (Larson, 2001).

Comprised of the daughters of Italian, Jewish and Russian immigrants, Guerrier provided the S.E.G. with a program of study consistent with a liberal arts curriculum offered by women's institutions of higher education, a course of study not typically available to those of the North End. Going a step further, Guerrier and her life partner, artist Edith Brown, established the Paul Revere Pottery (P.R.P.) that employed many of the S.E.G. members in the creation of high quality, hand-made ceramic tableware. With the support of a wealthy benefactor, Helen Osbourne Storrow, Guerrier and Brown purchased property in the North End where they not only created a working pottery studio and retail outlet but also where they themselves resided and presided over the S.E.G. (Larson, 2001; Matson, 1992).

At its height of activity for nearly 20 years (1899-1917), the anecdotal legacy of the S.E.G. is remarkable. The S.E.G. retained its organization existence throughout the lifetimes of its core membership who did not vote to disband until 1969. As a group, the S.E.G. membership attained a rise in socio-economic status and entered professional careers at a rate in excess of their North End peers or middle class counterparts, as did their children after them (Larson, 2001). The P.R.P. outgrew its North End quarters, opened several retail ventures in Boston and Washington DC, and continued to produce original work until 1942 (Guerrier, 1992). Paul Revere Pottery continues to be marketable and collectible, much of it crafted by S.E.G. members whose talents as artisans in their own right would likely have been squandered otherwise (Chalmers and Young, 2005; Gadsden, 2006).

Guerrier fits the construct of the "new woman," unique to the Progressive Era (Kaufman, 1992). Jane Addams is a well-acknowledged example of such: well-educated and ambitious, discontent to sublimate her talents into the role of a Victorian wife and mother, and willing to occupy a social space somewhat aside of mainstream in order to give expression to her intellect and apply her skills in service to the community. "New women" thus formed the core of the settlement house (Trattner, 2007) and library workforce (Garrison, 2003). Many, Jane Addams among them, were active in the women's movements of the day that form the historical base of early feminism, such as suffrage and promotion of labor unions (Evans, 1986).

And yet, Guerrier is somewhat of an enigma. For example, it is difficult to know just where Guerrier stood in terms of early feminism. Neither her memoir, discovered in archival holdings and partially published in the early 1990s, nor her family's personal papers are particularly forthcoming. What is amply and abundantly in evidence, however, is Guerrier's commitment to the young women of the S.E.G., her deep respect for them as individuals with much to offer, and an innate sense of the affectual reciprocity inherent to the helping professions. She wrote:

"I could fill a book with reminiscences of my friends (in the North End) ... I have watched them emerge with pride and satisfaction. They serve on city committees and on education boards, and are all for progress. They tell me the (S.E.G. and P.R.P.) meant much to them; I tell them it meant more to me." (Guerrier, 2003, 90)

A fascinating hybrid of the public library, settlement house, and arts and crafts movements, there is much here worthy of scholarly attention, which I imagine will occupy me well for years to come. Moreover, Guerrier herself has nestled into a small part of my psyche as a holding place for the interwoven, undefinable, affectual complexities that encompass the helping professions, allowing their mutual tenets regarding social justice, egalitarianism, and self-determination to traverse varied skill sets, functions and responsibilities.

But Does it Help?

I now serve as the head librarian at a branch library serving the academic and research needs of a large public, urban school of social work, a stunningly provident juncture of my professional experiences and interests. This is a faculty position and as a tenure-track junior faculty member, I have an opportunity not only to continue to pursue historical research on the evolution of the helping professions but also pursue study on the relational aspects of library engagement and on the information literacy needs of social work students and professionals. I tend to the library's administrative and supervisory needs, and I serve as an instruction and reference librarian, which is a tremendously satisfying aspect of my job. But do I help?

This might be easier to answer if I had settled into public librarianship, where I could connect my daily role to promotion of egalitarian access to information, or into archival work, where I could connect my role to the social justice aspects of the preservation of irreplaceable records, personal papers, and ephemera. However, in the shift from clinical social work to academic librarianship in a graduate level professional program, the impact of helping is less apparent on the surface.

As a field instructor of social work interns in a community mental health setting, I often found myself supporting students in the management of their affectual state in their practice. This would include not only the parsing of countertransference issues but also the appropriate use of one's "gut" response in assessment, of one's "third eye" for the underlying, unspoken story. Even for the most seasoned practitioner, the management of the visceral and the intuitive can be a challenge. Helping students to recognize, tolerate, modulate and integrate their internal experience as a normative part of the work was therefore an essential part of helping the individual take on the professional stance of the helping professional.

I still work with social work interns. In fact, I have broader contact with social work students now than ever before, although my role has changed. I am concerned now with another aspect of their professional knowing, that of information literacy. As an instructional librarian, my overarching responsibility is to teach and promote information literacy competencies appropriate for social work education and practice. How does this help? There are several illustrations I would draw upon that align information literacy instruction to the values of social justice, egalitarianism and self-determination.

As a social work practitioner, it is my experience that social work as a discipline has been behind the curve with regard to information literacy. I have encountered colleagues who eschew its importance to social work practice, sometimes displaying with pride a luddite status as proof that

they are a genuine social worker—interested in the relational, not the technological or automated. Such a stance, however, demonstrates a clear misunderstanding as to what information literacy is, the ways in which it supports professional practice and thus contributes to successful intervention.

One of the most daunting moments in social work practice, for both the seasoned professional and especially the student intern, may well be that of: "What do I do?" When faced with that moment, an information, literate social worker will include the information universe as one of the professional resources through which she may increase her understanding of the problem and construct an effective intervention. An information literate social worker is one who has the ability to identify what information is needed; to effectively search for the information through professional literature, systematic review resources, research institutes and professional organization; to evaluate the material; and then to integrate it into their practice.

Further, on a broader level, to under-recognize the importance of information literacy to agency management may contribute secondarily to the trend in which non-social work professionals increasingly fill senior leadership positions in social service agencies. This would primarily include those with administrative and business training, who are typically well versed in adroit and productive navigation through the information universe (Hoefler, 2013; Bausman, 2015). I would posit that those social work students taking an administrative track through their programs especially benefit from information literacy instruction with an acute eye toward resources concerning policy, program development, grant writing, resource allocation and professional development needs of a social services workforce.

On a global level, the 2014 Lyon Declaration was crafted by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as an advocacy document that,

...calls upon United Nations Member States to make an international commitment ... to ensure that everyone has access to, and is able to understand, use and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development and democratic societies. (Lyon Declaration, n.d.)

The promotion of information literacy as a global social justice issue on this level is one that directly intersects with the mission of global social work and community organization. Practitioners in these arenas will need a commensurate knowledge base in order to effectively advocate and plan for the information access and literacy needs of the developing nations and communities they serve.

Last year a colleague and I published a paper entitled "Library Awareness and Use among Graduate Social Work Students: An Assessment and Action Research Project" (Bausman & Ward, 2015). One of our findings indicates an increase in the use of library resources by the social work students who participated in the study with potential correlates to curricular endeavors to enhance the information literacy instruction. I will confess that it is a gratifying result. One might conclude that this is evidence that my efforts help our students engage with the library, which is a gateway to becoming an information-literate social worker.

But I am also aware of the visceral. Just as I knew in my heart that I helped some of those who I served in the Ryan White program, just as I encouraged my social work interns to acknowledge affect as a way of knowing, I believe that I help some of the master's students I instruct because my gut tells me so. And this also is gratifying: the student whose anxious fidgeting melts away as she begins to connect to the skills that lead her to the research literature she needs; the student sent to the library by an instructor concerned by his poor command of academic information sources who subsequently earns honors on his final paper; the alumnus who arrives at the reference desk because her practice needs demand new intervention strategies.

Jane, Edith and I

We are at first glance an unlikely trio: Jane, Edith and I. Yet, despite vast differences in time and place, it would seem that we share some essential personal commonalities and communal professional experiences. I am sure that many helping professionals would find the same when investigating the lives, motivations and experiences of our seminal predecessors. While the world has changed, the core values of the helping professions have remained stalwartly consistent, providing our disciplines with fluidity and continuity.

Of the movement to which she dedicated her life, Addams closed her autobiography by stating:

The Settlement casts aside none of those things which cultivated men have come to consider reasonable and goodly, but it insists that those belong as well to that great body of people who, because of toilsome and underpaid labor, are unable to procure for themselves. Added to this is a profound conviction that the common stock of intellectual enjoyment should not be difficult to access because of the economic position of him who would approach it, that those "best results of civilization" upon which depend the finer and freer aspects of living must be incorporated into our common life and have free mobility through all elements of society if we would have our democracy endure.
(Addams, 1910, 452)

To me, the power of this statement lies in its flexible application to any movement or profession that values social justice, egalitarianism and self-determination. One can replace "the settlement" with "the progressive library" or "public education" and the statement still rings true. In that sense, Addams' words constitute a rather formidable declaration that endows all gestures made by helping professionals with the capacity to promote equity and fairness, to succor and elevate others, and to transform our communities.

Addams and Guerrier moved gracefully into their 21st year of helping and beyond, both continuing to make significant contributions to their communities on local and national levels. In 1930, Addams published *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House* and two decades thereafter, Guerrier celebrated her 80th birthday, feted by the then-middle aged Saturday Evening Girls. As for me, my story too will continue to unfold. I intend to use the next decades to be of service, and I embrace all the helping possibilities that may entail. I am looking forward, hoping to step into my 21st year with the grace of my predecessors, trusting that I will get from here to there, and knowing it will help.

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About the Author: Margaret Bausman, LCSW-R, MSLIS, is Assistant Professor and Head, Social Work & Public Health Library, Hunter College / City University of New York (212-396-7659, mbausman@hunter.cuny.edu).