

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



Special Issue on Families of Origin:
Implications for Practice

Lloyd L. Lyter and Sharon C. Lyter
Guest Editors

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NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Families of Origin: Implications for Practice

Lloyd L. Lyter and Sharon C. Lyter, Guest Editors

Abstract: Our own family histories, including relationships with our grandparents, parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren, have impacted, and continue to impact, our own evolving narratives. Because of all of this, we knew we would get a rich and broad range of narrative submissions. We have decided to allow each story to stand alone, making no attempt at grouping them, simply presenting them in the order we received the manuscripts. The breadth of the stories is great, the depth as well. The authors' stories tell tales that respect their own families of origin and have value to those of us who are being honored to read them.

Keywords: Family of origin, social work practice, adoption, alcoholism, deaf, war, Christian faith, secular Judaism, Holocaust, coming out, queer, child sexual abuse, genocide, Rwanda, death, single parenting

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to edit this special edition of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*. Our combined careers in academia span a number of decades of teaching courses in research, human behavior, policy, and practice, as well as monitoring field experiences, advisement, and interviewing students for admission. It was through those varied experiences that we have had the honor to hear hundreds of students' narratives of their lived experiences, most of which showed a specific focus on their families of origin.

Our own family histories, including relationships with our grandparents, parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren, have impacted, and continue to impact, our own evolving narratives. Because of all of this, we expected a rich and broad range of narrative submissions. We have decided to allow each story to stand alone, making no attempt to group them, simply presenting them in the order we received the manuscripts. The breadth and depth of the stories are great. The authors' stories tell tales that respect their own families of origin and have value to those of us who are being honored to read them.

Manako Yabe's "The Journey of a Real Social Worker" details her evolution in life as a Deaf child in Japan who attended Deaf Schools in Tokyo, Atlanta and London, and later earned an undergraduate degree in Deaf Studies, then an MSW. She credits the support of her parents and the role of faith in her life as being instrumental in her and her brother's (also Deaf) lives. Her story outlines the many stages of her life and the impacts

of being a Deaf person in a hearing world. Readers will see that sometimes the word deaf is capitalized, and sometimes it is not. This reflects the author's recognition that use of the capital D refers to a specific person who identifies as culturally Deaf, while small d refers more generally to deafness or to deaf people who may or may not be associated with the Deaf community. In addition, where referring formally to things like Deaf Studies and the Deaf community, capital D is used.

Katherine Mary Kranz's "Box 62: A Mother-Daughter Search" is the story of growing up in a household heavily impacted by alcohol and the decision to search for her family's history. She primarily focuses on her mother's adoption and ultimately uncovers the adoption records. She identifies "themes of secrecy, shame, and the suppression of emotions" that impacted her lived experience. Her discoveries led her to communicate with her deceased mother via writings she had left behind.

Boniface Odong's "The Trumpet of Hope and Change" is the story of growing up in war-torn Uganda as one of ten children. Their father died when he was still a child and his mother subsequently adopted eight more children, as well as cared for the children of family members. He credits his mother's Christian faith and solid role modeling as being important in his development until she died, also during his childhood. His life changed drastically after his mother's death and the subsequent "miserable existence" that resulted from relatives taking his mother's belongings. The impact of these early life experiences led to his goal of becoming a social worker and bringing hope to the lives of children and

families in similar circumstances.

Steven Granich's "Resolving Family of Origin Issues in Clinical Perspective" addresses the influence of his own family's story in his evolution to clinical practice in social work. He describes it as a relatively healthy, in part formed by secular Judaism, but emotionally distant childhood that centered on stress among his father, mother, and sister. He speaks to the impact of his family dynamics on his early social work career. In part, he attributes international travel, discovering a new spirituality, and becoming a step-father as being instructive in his own personal and professional evolutions.

Kielty Turner's "'Borrowed Light': Reflecting on Learning to be a Social Worker" uses the writings of her deceased mother, a novelist, poet and English professor, to reflect on her own path to social work. This brief, but cogent narrative touches on very personal remembrances and influences her mother had on her life and her road to social work. Turner deals with very personal reflections, including how she "...needed to try to understand and learn to deal with our family," in response to her mother's question, late in her life of why she chose social work.

Kim Lorber's "The Holocaust Among Holocausts: A Child's Lessons Became the Teacher's" details her life as the child of a survivor of the Holocaust. She never knew the stories of her family members, who were victims of the Holocaust, and she discusses how the lived experience of her mother significantly impacted Lorber's own development. She explains that, "It is impossible for me to separate the 'who' of my self from the lessons taught, intentionally or not, at the feet of my mother, and hers, amidst the aching void of relatives who existed in name only." She has taken these lessons into the classroom, sharing them with her students, while paying honor to their stories as well, focusing strongly on the importance of social justice in social work practice.

George Turner's "A Coming Out Narrative: Discovering My Queer Voice, My Social Worker Superpower" is aptly titled. It is both a personal account of coming out and an explication of the "disrupted biography" that informs his story and its impact on his professional practice. He celebrates his

"queer voice" while acknowledging that the doubts and voices, his own and others, from his past lingered for some time. But today he is an "authentic self - a queer male, social worker." He honors the voices of his clients in his own evolution.

Judy D. Berglund's "Pain and Joy in School: Reflections on Becoming a Social Worker" confronts her own childhood sexual victimization, both in school and at home. She attributes the start of her healing to "Leo," the person she worked with through much of her adolescence. Her subsequent position as a school social worker would sometimes bring back those memories. Berglund has been able to take her own lived experience and use it to the advantage of the children she worked with and the BSW students she has taught.

Hadidja Nyirankuye's "Family of Origin: Lessons from Exile" tells us about how families are torn apart in exile. Her story is of fleeing the genocide in Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of an extended family of twenty, including her own four children. As the only person in her family with a college education, she felt compelled to support the family, but her degree and language skills did not allow her any opportunities, which were primarily in medical practice and social work. Upon being granted asylum in the United States, she entered an MSW program with the intention of returning to Rwanda. As that was not achievable, she turned to work with refugees and asylum-seekers in America. She subsequently moved into academia, where her family of origin experiences and passion for refugees led her to develop a course called "Social Work with Immigrants and Refugees," which, will hopefully expand the number of social workers called to do this kind of work.

Nancy Meyer-Adams' "Holding the Hope: A Path to Becoming a Social Work Educator" traces the impact of family losses on her life, through both death and estrangement. She talks about becoming a wife and mother of two as a teenager, and ultimately a single parent, who, because she was a high school dropout, saw limited opportunities for herself. With the support of her children, she earned a GED and subsequently BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. degrees. She now uses the lessons from her own life in teaching social work students.

Pamela A. Viggiani's states in "The Effects of Adoption Throughout the Life Course: A Personal Reflection on Adoption, Work, and Family" that "...familial experiences with adoption profoundly affect both choice of profession and theoretical perspective." Her familial experience began with her family of origin, but because both her father and mother had grown up in homes where there were many people, they carried that importance of family into Viggiani's home life. Her home had a number of temporary members over the years, including a cousin who, because of difficulties in the cousin's family of origin, was ultimately adopted and became the family's fourth child. Using her own lived experiences and the impact adoption had on her throughout her journey, including the adoption of two children into her own nuclear family, her profession has been social work, and her practice has been informed by the importance of human

relationships and the lifespan perspective; she writes, "...adoption so clearly illustrates the complexity of our interwoven lives across a life trajectory."

As the co-editors of this special edition, we want to thank the authors and reviewers of the manuscripts, and the staff of Reflections for the support they have provided. We also thank the many students whose narratives about their families of origin we have had the honor to learn from over our careers in academia.

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The Journey of a Real Social Worker

Manako Yabe

Abstract: A personal narrative explores the author's life from infancy to the present time in which she is a social worker. The author was born deaf, and her hearing parents' strong passion and desire for better Deaf education for her she and her deaf brother led the family to move from a rural district in Japan to the international cities of Tokyo, Atlanta, and London. The author's unforgettable inspiration from the years that she spent in Atlanta and London became her motivation to enter the path of social work and choose her post-secondary education in America. The author earned her Bachelor's degree in Deaf Studies and her Master's degree of Social Work as the first Deaf female member in her family.

Keywords: deafness, identity, advocacy, family, education, role model

What is a Real Social Worker?

In May 2013, I earned my Master of Social Work degree from the University of Southern California, where I succeeded with many achievements. My professor, Dr. Murali Nair, first asked me to write my personal story around the time that I became a social worker. Until he mentioned it, I had never thought of myself as being a real social worker. Still, obtaining my Master's degree in Social Work was just the beginning; the first step of my new life.

For me, my definition of a real social worker is a role model who provides dreams and hope. Based on my personal experience, my definition has changed over the years. It is not necessary to be any more particular about defining a real social worker, as I believe that the unique character and individual personality of each person leaves a historical contribution on people and society in various ways. Each individual has a different interpretation of what a real social worker is, which is originally shaped by individual experience and passion.

Looking back on my life, I began to realize how much my parents had influenced and shaped me into becoming a social worker. Without their existence, I would never have been called a "real social worker." Here I write about my life's journey from infancy to the present to provide you a reference of how that desire developed.

Born in a Hearing World

I was born deaf. My brother, who is one year older than me, is also deaf, but my parents are hearing. At the time that I was born in Japan in the 1980s, Deaf education prohibited using the method of Japanese

sign language (Nemoto & Ishihara, 1996). Instead of this, it was popular to train deaf children using the oral method, meaning an education accomplished through oral language (Nemoto & Ishihara, 1996). The method used included lip reading, speech, and mimicking the mouth shapes and breathing patterns of speech (Nemoto & Ishihara, 1996). Over time, Japanese sign language became slowly recognized but it was not accepted until the 1990s (Nemoto & Ishihara, 1996). It was believed that if Deaf children depended on sign language only, they would be unable to participate in a hearing society that had very few sign language interpreters (Nakamura, 2006). Because of this, my brother and I were educated the oral way.

However, the oral way was insufficient for me to communicate fully. I was also trained using a Japanese cued speech in order to supply greater communication access. The cued speech is a phonemic-based system of communication, which is a different style from American cued speech (Quenin, n.d.; Roffe, 2013). It makes a spoken language accessible by using the hands in different locations near the mouth as a supplement to lip-reading (Japan Deaf Children and Parents Association, 2001). In my early life, I mainly used the oral method in deaf and mainstream schools, while I used cued speech to communicate with my family at home.

Attending a Deaf School

My parents were very surprised when they learned that my brother and I are deaf. Although generations of my family had never had deaf family members before, my parents raised us as "children with special personalities that God presented," and never as "children with disabilities." I was born in Japan in the Iwate prefecture, where my parents lived for my father's

work. My parents lived in the northeast rural district, and there were very little Deaf educational resources available. To seek better Deaf education, my parents decided to move to Tokyo, the largest city, where it was more advanced.

Until I turned six years old and transferred to a mainstream school in the second grade, I was educated in the oral method at a Deaf school. Those years were very tough for my parents. They worked so hard every day to raise my brother and me.

Outside of the Deaf school, society provided little support for Deaf people. There were no captioned televisions. There were no social services from City Hall unless my parents visited to ask for help (Yabe, 2000). Many curious, prejudiced and unsympathetic people asked my parents why both my brother and I were born deaf. Such questions hurt my parents sharply, but at the same time, motivated their parents' passion. My parents wanted to ensure that my brother and I received better Deaf education with the awareness of our right to a bright future.

Our lives settled into a first-grade pattern. Every two years in turn, both grandmothers visited from their distant rural areas and assisted my mother in raising my brother and me. Without fail or absences, my mother and my grandmother took my brother and me to Deaf school. We went to the Deaf school at 7:30 a.m. and either my mother or my grandmother stayed with my brother or me during the speech instruction classes in the afternoon. The classes often continued until 3 p.m. When another class had snack time, my class was at lunchtime, but I ate from my mother's handmade lunchbox during speech instruction. During the summer time, my mother made lunchboxes with ice packs to keep the food fresh in order to avoid food poisoning.

Finally, we returned home at 8 p.m. My brother and I went to sleep, but my mother and grandmother stayed up until 1 a.m. They were assigned to write daily picture books that described their kids' whole day, with all our conversations – all our spoken words reported in detail, including expressions like “ahhh” and “wooo.” Then, the reports were turned in to the teachers the next morning.

Those four years – three years of preschool and one year of first grade – were my early childhood. I

thought that experiences of my early childhood were a normal daily schedule. I thought that hearing children went to another preschool and took the same lessons as deaf children. I was so innocent.

My Mother, in the Hospital

During those six years of raising my brother and me, my mother slept only five hours each night. My mother never rested from her writing of our childcare books from the time of our births. She never complained. My father always provided mental support for my mother. But after all of this, her health broke down. She was constantly in and out of the hospital from then on.

One day, I was playing on the ground at my preschool. Suddenly, my father came into the playground. I ran to him and hugged him.

“Papa! Are we going to home?”

“Your mom is urgently ill. We are going to the hospital.”

“The hospital? Where are my brother and grandma?”

“They are on their way to the hospital.”

“Is Mom all right?”

My father looked pale. I did not know what had happened.

When I entered a room in the hospital, I saw my brother, my grandmothers, nurses, and doctor surrounding the young woman who was on the bed. In the scene before me lay a woman with a very pained and tear-stained face. Her mouth was covered with an oxygen mask. Her thin, left wrist had an intravenous drip. Her eyes were tearful. That woman was my mother.

My mother was in critical condition. She had seen a bright light and was free from pain. She was ready for heaven. But at this moment, when her eyes caught my brother and me, ages six and five years old, she did not want to die and leave us. The light was gone, and pains came back. She screamed and burst into tears.

It was the first time that I saw my mother so close to

dying.

Since that time, I began to be aware of and pay attention to everything around me. I began to recognize that I am deaf and I am different from hearing people. At the Deaf school where I had learned the oral method, I could communicate fully with my deaf classmates with peace of mind. But my parents were aware that the Deaf school spent so much time emphasizing the oral method that my progress in coursework was slow and my level of study was low, when compared to other mainstream schools (Yabe, 2000). I sensed my parents' concern. I wanted to study at a mainstream school because I did not want to be behind in my studies when compared with hearing students who were my same age.

My First Mainstream Classes

During my first semester as a second grader, I transferred to my local school that had a very different environment. My teacher and classmates had different lip movements, so I could not understand fully when they spoke unless they remained facing me when they spoke to me. I had to memorize all of the textbook and blackboard information. I also went to a special class at another primary school twice a week after regular school. I prepared and reviewed my lessons with my mother every day, and my mother regularly exchanged school report books with my teacher, and the number of her written books increased.

The communication level during early childhood was less complex than what occurred during puberty and adulthood (Ministry of Education, 2009). For example, I was a child who actively played outside. If I had a misunderstanding with my classmates, I did not care about it at all. It just did not bother me, and I did not talk about it. If I could not understand a whole lesson, I studied from the textbooks and notebooks, so I simply passed the tests. My classmates assumed that I could lip-read and hear everything with my hearing aids. Although this was not true, I believed that was normal.

I never thought how serious it was that I had missed so much in my early years – until I gasped after receiving an interpreter at a university for the first time.

Living in Atlanta, Georgia

During my second semester as a second grader, my parents decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia. The reason was not just for my father's work, but also to seek what would be best for our Deaf education. We lived in Atlanta for two years, from 1995 to 1997.

My brother and I went to a Japanese mainstream school in Atlanta that had many American students. It was like an international school. We had many first-time experiences – our first pet dog, our first Halloween, a large-sized tree at Christmas and a Christmas performance, a conversation with a celebrity who looked like President Abraham Lincoln, a meeting with the first Deaf winner of the Miss America pageant 1995, a trip to the Olympic Games in Atlanta, a visit to the church where Martin Luther King, Jr. had been pastor, and our first family trip around America. Everything was so energizing and impressive.

The most impressive thing was our friends' positive thinking that was rooted in their daily lives. Our friends always told us, "Your Deafness is a 'challenge' gift from God. You have a special talent because you are Deaf. You are made to live to use your talent. So take courage and do your best confidently."

In art class, my teacher saw my portrait and praised me, saying, "Your portrait is excellent. You must enter Harvard University in the future." I was so glad and so motivated. I told myself, "I will do my best to become a famous artist!"

We learned one lasting thing from our teachers: to find children's small strengths and praise those strengths. In this way, the children's weaknesses are overcome by the steady growth of their strengths, which become their fantastic personalities. The positive messages from our friends and teachers pushed us forward, ever forward. My eyes were opened to new worldviews and the joys of learning. I was full of hopes and dreams, like King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

The two-year experience in Atlanta left an unforgettable mark of influence on my family's life. We would have never imagined all of this if we had never left Japan. The experience became the source of my family's original power, and resonates in our lives even now. That power has pushed us forward ever

since we left Atlanta nearly two decades ago.

Meeting Ms. Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1995

My parents heard the news that Ms. Heather Whitestone, the first Deaf winner of the 1995 Miss America contest, came to a Deaf school in Atlanta, where my hearing aids were checked. My mother wanted to meet her, so she sent a personal letter, an Easter card and a Christmas card to her. My mother kept writing and checking the mailbox often. My mother never gave up. A few months later, my father received a call from Ms. Whitestone's Miss America office. "We are going to meet her!" said my parents, who were very excited. On May 1, 1997, we got the opportunity to meet her and her husband at a small ice cream shop near our home which was within a 15-minute drive.

When I first met her, Ms. Whitestone's gentle eyes melted my heart like ice cream. Her message of "You can do it," was deeply rooted in my heart and became my new dream. I wanted to become like her and succeed in the hearing world. I wanted to study at a university in America! I never imagined that my dream would come true ten years later.

Ms. Whitestone's message gave new hope to my parents. After that day, my mother became strong and healthy. Her face became bright and pink like a rose, and her smile was cheery like a girl's smile. I hardly believed that my mother had been in the hospital a few years before.

Returning to Japan, Seeking My Identity

During my second semester as a fourth grader, my family returned to Japan. Once I transferred to a mainstream private school in Tokyo, the hopes and dreams I had found in Atlanta shriveled like a deflated balloon. Every morning during the commute to school by train, my heart was overburdened. My classmates were very kind, but I knew that there was a vast disconnect between them and me. I felt no sense of acceptance. I felt that they looked at just my deafness, rather than my entire personality. My hearing classmates' sympathetic eyes made me feel like an exception because of my deafness, as if they were saying, "She is Deaf, so she cannot do anything. I feel sorry for her."

When I returned to the country where I was born, I faced a cultural shock. I still enjoyed outdoor activities and I loved playing soccer. But when I ran onto the playground during my first gym class, no girls approached me, only boys. The girls looked shy and chatted quietly in the corner of the playground. I could not understand such girlish behaviors.

One day, a classmate told me that some classmates had left her out in the cold. The girl said, "I have been made of fun of by my classmates, as I am a cripple." The other classmates frequently questioned me about the girl, asking, "Well, do you like her or dislike her?" It was uncomfortable and I asked myself why they asked me such questions. I could not understand why my classmates were bullying or why they were being left out.

As a seventh grader, I transferred to a junior high school for girls. I was an honor student and never missed any of my classes. However, since I was near puberty at that time, my communication level had become more complicated (Ministry of Education, 2009). I often pretended to smile without interrupting, even if I could not understand a conversation. I was beyond my limit. I made desperate efforts to assimilate into my hearing classmates' environment, but I finally admitted my limitations, thinking, "I am Deaf, so I cannot do anything."

I was hurt and I was isolated. I could not express myself. I wanted to do something, but I did not know what to do. I began to question myself, "Why can't the oral method provide me with perfect communication? Why can't I be hearing like them?"

British Sign Language, My Freedom from the Communication Barrier

During my first semester as an eighth grader, my parents decided to move to London in the United Kingdom. This reason was not only for my father's work, but also for my parents' desire to continue seeking for our Deaf education. My parents began to recognize what was missing from the oral method and started to look into the possibility of the sign language method.

At that time, my father lived in London from 2000 to 2001, my mother and my brother lived there from 2000 to 2003, and I lived there from 2000 to 2005. I

lived with my family until I was a tenth grader and then I lived in a dormitory until I graduated from a Japanese mainstream high school in London.

While I lived with my family, I commuted to the Japanese mainstream school in the daytime. Then, my family commuted together to a college to study British Sign Language (BSL) in the evenings. The BSL evening class was full of hearing students, except for my brother and me who were deaf. While many of my hearing classmates were fluent in BSL, my family struggled to learn BSL for the first time. We battled to learn both BSL and English, which were foreign languages to us. We had to use both a Japanese-English dictionary and an English-BSL dictionary every time. My mother made copies of BSL vocabulary words, created posters and put them on walls in our bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen. We practiced every day.

One day, my hearing classmates invited us to join a Deaf youth club. My mother drove my brother and me to the Deaf club. At first, I stayed in the car because I was not confident enough to sign or even speak to a Deaf person. However, my brother walked into the club alone.

Then, my brother ran back and shouted to me, "There are many deaf girls!"

"No way!" I shook my head and sat tight – it was too late.

A group of deaf girls approached the car. They peeked at me through the car window, asking,

"Are you free? Why not join us?"

My brother grinned. "Yes, she is free."

My face turned red. I could not stay in the car anymore.

Thanks to my brother, I met one girl in the group. Together we found a kindred spirit and laughed. For the first time, I understood what she was signing. I was able to sign what I wanted to say. I felt like a small bird that finally had flown away into the blue sky from a forbidden gate after a long time. I thought, "That's the one!" That moment was when I first acquired BSL as my language.

Since I first realized that BSL was a real language, the distress that I had carried in my heart was gone at once. I was full of peace, joy and freedom of mind. My eyes shone. Every time that I saw people signing in BSL, I was excited to talk with them. After approximately half a year, I became fluent. After one year, I passed the advanced level exam in BSL. I was full of life, like a fish at home in the water.

My studying in English changed dramatically. Since I had never been trained in the oral method in English, I always suffered when my English teacher asked me to speak it. I was not up to par in English as a subject. However, once I became fluent in BSL, I acquired English rapidly, and it became one of my favorite subjects. I finally got myself back, and BSL became a part of my Deaf identity. The positive messages I gained from my stay in Atlanta called back to me again.

My Role Models, British Deaf Families

Meeting British Deaf families brought my family a new future. There were many Deaf families in our community. One family was the leader of the Deaf youth club and worked at city hall as a social worker. A member of another family was the director of interpreter services at a college and also worked as an actor. These families attended the same local church with an interpreter every Sunday. My family socialized with the Deaf families and our friends at church, and they occasionally visited us at home. The British Deaf families were our family's role models. They changed my perspective toward my deafness. I stopped thinking of my deafness as a limitation. I began to think, "My deafness is my personality, so I can take pride in life."

In spring of my junior year, I moved to a dormitory and I stopped attending BSL classes, Deaf youth club and my local church, as I did not have a car. Still, I wanted to share all that I had learned from the British Deaf families. I decided to present a speech in BSL for an English speech contest, and I won. I also established a BSL club, contributed a BSL performance, and taught BSL at a special school as my community service. I wrote about my personal experiences in an essay for the Japan Airplane Overseas Essay Contest, and I was selected for an award of excellence and an overseas student scholarship. My article about BSL was published in

local newspapers in Japan and London.

Meeting the Late Ms. Mariko Takamura

As I was approaching my senior year, my family read a biography written by Ms. Mariko Takamura (1993). She had studied as an equal among hearing students with the use of interpreters and note takers at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Suddenly, I knew it. This university was the place that I had dreamed of.

On Christmas Eve in 2005, my father and I met Ms. Takamura personally. We were surprised that we had several commonalities in our lives: we had both studied at the same junior high school in Japan, met Ms. Whitestone, and loved Atlanta. Ms. Takamura invited me to join a group tour to visit CSUN in spring of 2006. I never imagined that the tour would be the last time that I would see her. She passed away a few days after the tour.

After returning from the tour, I showed a picture from the tour to my parents. My mother looked surprised.

“Is that the woman, Ms. Takamura, whom you met? I saw a woman who looked like her.”

“Where did you see her?”

“It was in a train. She was sitting in front of me, and then she took off after a few stops.”

“When did you see her?”

“Let me check...It was on May 7th.”

“Are you sure? She passed away on May 4th.”

Shortly after that, with mixed joy and sadness, I received an acceptance letter from CSUN.

My First Participation in the Deaf Community, Gallaudet University

Prior to my admission at CSUN, I entered the English Language Institute (ELI), located at Gallaudet University, to study ASL and English. Gallaudet University is the only university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the United States,

and it has a variety of international deaf students from many other countries (Gallaudet University, 2015). ASL is a very different sign language from BSL (Sternberg, 1998; Thompson, 2002). The BSL Alphabet is produced using both hands, but ASL Alphabet is produced using one hand only. For example, when signing “Okay” in BSL, I put my thumb up. But in ASL, I spell “O-K.” During my study at ELI, I had to concentrate on the language with my eyes to become fluent in ASL within three months.

Even though I am deaf, when I first participated in the American Deaf community, I felt like I was on an alien planet. Everything was new. I had never felt labeled as disabled, and I learned that the American Deaf community has their own point of view with cultural values that differ from the hearing community (Padden & Humphries, 1990). When I talked about becoming a social worker to help deaf people, the Deaf woman from a Deaf family told me,

“It does not make sense to say ‘I want to help deaf people.’ Our Deaf community is a linguistic minority group. It is more appropriate to say ‘I want to empower Deaf people.’”

I was often told that I was so lucky to have a deaf brother and hearing parents who spent a large amount of money and time to support my brother and me to find better Deaf education. I learned that 90% of deaf children are born in hearing families, and most of hearing parents do not sign (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). Many deaf children experienced being left out at home due to a lack of communication (Meyers & Barte, 1992). Although I experienced isolation at the mainstream schools that I attended, I still had a place where I was able to comfortably and fully communicate with my deaf brother and my hearing parents by using cued speech at home.

I was a lucky girl from a fortunate home.

My First Time Studying Alone, California State University, Northridge

In fall semester of 2006, I entered CSUN. It was my first time living and studying alone. I thought that I was ready to take courses with an interpreter and note-takers for the first time, as I had studied ASL and English at ELI in the spring of 2006. But I was wrong.

I found that CSUN has a large number of American deaf students, but only a few international deaf students, which was different from Gallaudet University's environment. Most of my American deaf classmates grew up orally in mainstream schools and signed in Pidgin Sign English (PSE). PSE is not a sign language but rather a communication method to sign English words in order (Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1980).

Many of my classmates signed and spoke in English at the same time, which was difficult for me to understand, since I had never grown up speaking orally in English. When they used PSE, I did not understand their signs. When I used ASL, they did not understand my signs.

However, studying at a university in America had been my dream since the age of nine, and my parents supported my entering CSUN. I did not want to spoil all my parents' efforts, and I did not want to miss the opportunity. I had longed for equal communication access for many years, and the opportunity finally came at CSUN. I wanted to earn my degree at CSUN as the first Deaf female member in my family generation.

During second semester as a freshman, I slowly became comfortable switching among Japanese, English, ASL, and PSE. I began to understand what my professors and classmates said and why they laughed, through the use of interpreters. Without this, it would have been impossible for me to understand lectures, pass tests, and complete my diploma. I often realized how important communication access was.

Miss Deaf CSUN Pageant 2007

When I walked into the student lounge at the National Center on Deafness (NCOD) at CSUN, my eyes first caught a poster that said, "Sign Up for the 2007 Miss Deaf CSUN Pageant!" My mind flashed to the time when I had met Ms. Whitestone in Atlanta nine years earlier. Also, just eight years later, I met Ms. Takamura who had studied at CSUN. In her book, she described how she had entered a Japanese pageant and passed all sections except for the final interview. She failed because her judges found out that she was deaf (Takamura, 1993).

The pageant was not about the contestants' appearances, but focused instead on the contestants' leadership skills. At first I hesitated to sign up, as I was a new freshman who was trying to adapt to a new environment. But at the same time, I recalled Ms. Whitestone's smile and her message, "With God's help, everything is possible," and the late Ms. Takamura's eyes that were filled with passion. I wanted to thank my parents, Ms. Whitestone, and the late Ms. Takamura in heaven for pushing me forward to grab my dream here, so I decided to join the pageant.

On February 16, 2007, my dream became true. I won the Miss Deaf CSUN 2007-2009 crown as the first international Japanese winner. I won the platform speech and evening gown sections, and received scholarships. This was my proudest moment because I was able to express my sincere thanks to my parents, Ms. Whitestone, and the late Ms. Takamura. My success in this experience took nearly 10 years from when my first dream was born on May 1, 1997.

Expanding My Deaf Identity

After I won the 2007 Miss Deaf CSUN Pageant, I became actively involved in student activities at CSUN. I was involved as the 2009 Miss Deaf CSUN Pageant Chair, I worked as an NCOD orientation leader in 2009, and I also assisted deaf students in classes as a teaching assistant. As a representative of CSUN, I was selected as a Presidential Scholar for two years, and I received 10 scholarships during my four years of study.

As a student, I majored in Deaf Studies. I studied ASL grammar structure, Deaf and hearing culture, Deaf history, Deaf literature, and Deaf law from deaf professors and leaders from the American Deaf community. These experiences helped me to come out from hiding my talents to develop my Deaf identity and increase my self-esteem.

At a Turning Point in My Life, the University of Southern California

In January 2010, my senior year, I had just come back from my community service in Jamaica, and I was preparing applications for graduate school in social work. I went to meet my Deaf mentor, Dr. Barbara Boyd, at her office, to ask her for a recommendation

letter. I planned to apply to a university which had a large deaf student population, as I was anxious about studying alone at a university that had few deaf students.

When I met her, Dr. Boyd's eyes became full of tears. She shook her head and said "You must apply to the top-ranking social work graduate program. Please do not limit your capability. Otherwise, you will waste your time!"

Dr. Boyd strongly recommended that I apply to the University of Southern California (USC). When I first called the admission office for the application questions, to my surprise, the staff member responded to my call had the middle name Mariko. It reminded me of the late Ms. Mariko Takamura who assisted me in applying to CSUN. One month later, I received an acceptance letter from the USC. Dr. Boyd was so excited at the news and said,

"I know you can do it. I graduated from the USC Rossier School of Education with my Ph.D. degree in 1983. At that time, there was no law to advocate for deaf rights, so I had to pay for both tuition and interpreters out of my own pocket. It took 20 years to pay back all of my interpreter fees. Today, you do not have to worry about it thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. I never regret that I earned my doctoral degree from USC. I met a great mentor who has changed my life."

The direction of my life was turning 180 degrees. A half year after my admission at USC, Dr. Boyd passed away on Valentine's Day, 2011.

A New Vision: Captioned Jumbotrons at Commencement

When I entered USC in the fall semester of 2010, I was the only international deaf student. USC had very few deaf and hard-of-hearing students, but had a large number of international students. It was more of a challenge being a deaf student than being an international student.

I stood and looked around campus, muttering to myself, "My parents have supported me to achieve my dream. What can I contribute to USC while I am here?"

On May 13, 2011, I attended a commencement ceremony. There were many families from other countries. The disabled seating section was full, and many wheelchairs users, English as Second Language (ESL) individuals, and senior citizens stood watching the event with their family members, looking at the Jumbotrons rather than being located in the disabled seating section. My family members are ESL individuals, my brother is deaf, and I have both deaf and hearing ESL friends.

The sight brought me a new vision: It would be a wonderful moment when all of our family and friends could enjoy watching their students' faces on captioned Jumbotrons without any limitations such as sitting separately from their family members.

After that, I started to investigate other universities' accessibility issues related to captioned televisions, online videos and Jumbotrons. I was involved in several discussions and proposals for accessibility at the USC campus regarding the use of universally captioned televisions. I conducted an independent research study to measure the American, international, deaf and hard-of-hearing students' total values toward captioned online classes at two universities. I found that not only deaf and hard-of-hearing students, but also international and American students, would be willing to pay for captioned online classes with additional fees in order to receive better learning opportunities. The total values of captioned online classes were estimated to be \$2,000,000 per year (Yabe, 2015a; 2015b).

I recalled the late Dr. Boyd's message to me, "I know you can do it." I breathed deeply and I wrote a proposal letter to the commencement committee, stating that the Jumbotrons at USC's 130th Commencement should have captions added to them. On May 17, 2013, my vision came true.

At the 130th Commencement

During the commencement celebration week, I was selected for the 2013 USC Student Recognition Award, the 2013 Dean's Award for Excellence & Innovation Award, and for the Phi Alpha Social Work Honor Society. I was also selected to present as the 2013 Social Work Grad Night Gala speaker. My family members and my friends visited me to celebrate. There were also many family members of

international students and senior citizens. I stood in line and watched the captioned Jumbotrons. I looked up into the blue sky, where Dr. Boyd was in heaven.

My eyes were full of tears. I was fraught with great emotion.

In Closing

Recently, I again read my mother's book, "We Can Hear Atlanta's Wind" (Yabe, 2000). My mother had kept her records from our births through our school life at an international school for Japanese students in Atlanta, Georgia in 1995. At the time, my brother was a fourth grader and I was a second grader in elementary school. My mother was inspired to see how our personalities had borne fruit, making our Deafness become our uniqueness. After returning to Japan in 1997, my mother wanted to share her experiences with everyone through her book – her thoughts for Japanese deaf children, her inspiration in Atlanta, and the reality of the barriers in Japan (Yabe, 2000).

With happy memories, I realized that my parents, filled with their faith, had raised my brother and me and brought out my personality and gifts. The messages of "Hope," "Dream," "Courage," "Forward," and "Challenge" are now a part of my body and blood. My parents' words and the Bible's scriptures have been unconsciously etched into my heart deeply.

I would like to share one of my favorite stories, the Parable of Talents (Matthew 25:14-30 New International Version). The story is about three servants and their master. To summarize:

Before the master went to travel, he left his profits to his three servants: five talents for a servant, two talents for another servant, and one talent for the last servant. After the master left, the servant who had received five talents went to work and gained more than five talents. The other servant who had received two talents went to work and gained more than two talents. The last servant who had received one talent did not use it, and hid it in the earth instead. When the master returned, he was pleased to hear that the two servants had used their talents and had earned more than the five and two talents that were given to them by the master. But the master was disappointed

to hear that the last servant never used even the one talent for any benefit (Matthew 25:14-30 New International Version).

There are different translations and views regarding the meaning of the Parable of Talents. From my perspective, the talents in this story stand for abilities. The master was happy to see that the two servants took the opportunity to use their abilities for benefit, but the master was upset to see that the last servant missed an opportunity to use his ability that he was offered.

Since my early childhood, my parents have encouraged me to use my talents gifted from God. When I was a child, I was not sure if I fully understood, but today, looking back on my life, when I used my gifted talents for my benefit or if I never used my gifted talents at all, my harvest was small. But when I decided to use my gifted talents to contribute to others, I received an uncountable harvest. I could not ignore the fact that there was an enormous difference in the result between when I used my gifted talents for myself and when I used them for the benefit of others.

Here, from my deep heart, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to my parents who spent so much time and effort to seek and obtain better Deaf education for my brother and me. I am indebted to my family who has raised my tiny seed of a desire to be a real social worker into blossoming colorful gardens in my life.

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Box 62: A Mother-Daughter Search

Katherine Mary Kranz

Abstract: My experiences growing up in an alcohol troubled home and the search for my family history provided a rich opportunity to appreciate and more deeply understand my mother, my father, and my choice to be a social work practitioner and teacher. This story is the outcome of a journey to search for my mother's adoptive birth history records. This led me to Box 62, where her adoptions records were stored in the Minnesota Historical Society for nearly ninety years. What I did not anticipate was what Box 62 would reveal to me regarding lessons about the influence of secrets and the value and power of recovery. The themes of secrecy shame, and the suppression of emotions surround this story of adoption and addiction. These lessons emerge from my dialogue with writings my mother left after her death which embody her struggles and how she moved beyond them.

Keywords: adoption, alcoholism, mother-daughter relationship, adoption records, recovery, addiction

Boxes: A Mother-Daughter Search

Being the daughter of two alcohol-troubled parents involved pivotal events and experiences that shaped the trajectory of my life's work and perspectives. One piece of this story is about my mother's search for her birth parents and the secrecy surrounding her adoption. It was shameful to be adopted and to adopt in the 1920s. My mother learned early on in her life not to ask about her past. She sealed off a part of herself. Her alcohol addiction helped to repress her emotions around the pain of not knowing. In her later years of life as part of her recovery from alcohol addiction, she was able to let go and accept who she was.

Experiences with my family of origin notably influenced my choices as a practitioner and teacher in the profession of social work. My story is different from those of my siblings as we all reacted and coped in varying ways to the disruption of addiction. I matured early and would learn to be a secret-keeper. I also learned to seal off my emotions to protect secrets about my family. These qualities ultimately influenced my early development and the replication of these experiences is notable. Both of my parents sought help and began their recovery process while I was in my early twenties. To have been the child of alcohol-troubled parents was challenging, but also taught me to be determined, resilient, and empathetic. I share this story specifically as the daughter of a complicated woman, my mother, who has left me questions to explore about her and myself and about how addiction and its secrets brought me into the field of helping others and the process of healing.

Her adoption papers rested in Box 62 since 1925. Searching for information about my mother's first two years of life and why she was given up for adoption proved an emotional journey into secrecy and loss. Life is not neatly organized within papers and institutions. Box 62 is the starting point and a piece of the story of my mother and me.

My Mother's Adoption

It was a Friday morning in the early spring of 2014 when the phone call and a message came in. There are pockets in my house where the phone will not ring so I miss those calls. It was from Minnesota Dakota County courthouse. The caller, in a Midwest accent said, "I have information for you on the adoption request." My heart pounded, mixed with excitement and anxiety, as I waited to hear the judge's decision about whether to open the adoption records on my mother's birth history. I quickly punched in the numbers on my cell and the familiar voice answered. She remembered me and said the judge had signed the order for the 1925 adoption records of my mother. They were located in Box 62 at the Minnesota Historical Society. Within a month, I was off to St. Paul to continue the search my mother could not undertake.

The Historical society staff was generous and respectful of the envelope inside Box 62, an envelope that held papers of extraordinary quality and clarity. I could not take pictures of this bundle of papers but could have chosen documents to be copied. Although I had prior knowledge of my mother's given birth name, I had little else. The consent for adoption revealed her full name, which sounded more typical of the south than the small Midwestern town where she was raised.

It was the first two years of her life of which I have no knowledge. The following excerpt was written by my mother in her early 60s as she began the recovery process:

I learned quickly not to question my birthright. I am an only child, adopted, raised in a middle-class German/Irish family. It was the 1920s and Minnesota law enacted in 1917 protected the rights of the unwed mother to guarantee secrecy. I lived in a Sinclair Lewis town and suppressed the impulse to know the secret, adoption. I felt strange. My parents were never honest with me. As a child, I turned to three imaginary playmates, little boys with strange sounding German names (Psychiatry would say my price of suppression was replaced by fantasy and imagination). My self-fulfilling prophecy was to succeed. But I wanted to know, not so much about the biological father, but who was this mother whom I could never ask about? What was she like; her face, her hair, her smile? This subject was not to be discussed within our home. And in the cold halls of the State Capital, the files were sealed by a state law legislated years prior to my adoption.

But as the years went by, I searched and found a name, a place of birth. I cried but it closed a piece of my life. The price is the suppression of one's life story, and it begins with the falsification of this birth certificate to the adoptee's life process. All the time that I was wondering about the dark side, the dirty little secret, the specter of illegitimacy, mine was a beautiful life. All I wanted to know was to know who I was.

I found a small piece and for now, it satisfies me. I want to live life in the now and the future, not forgetting the past, but getting on with it. There will be time for more pieces, for I was chasing, running, and now it can be a calm, methodical search, less emotional and more disciplined.

I learned as my mother and I have grown together that her adoption in the 1920s, as an only child, set the stage for family secrets. Her drinking maintained that secret until her recovery set her free. These papers afforded a new direction to search in order to know more about her birth parents and the institution(s) that cared for her prior to her formal

adoption. These revelations suggested a new search in the juvenile court opening records of her birthparents and those first two years of her life – the next box.

Our [Drinking] Family History

The late 1950s was a time of economic stability and for some, prosperity. I was the fifth of six children and the first girl after four boys. Notably I was born on Mother's Day, into an Irish-German, Catholic military family. My father was a naval officer who endured deployments that lasted for six to nine month stretches, while my mother cared for five children in a bucolic coastal city in California. I suspect my mother was tired, given the military's deploying my father every two to three years, leaving her to raise us during critical developmental periods. She had the boys to watch over one another and two daughters soon followed. She was a college-educated woman at a time of economic change. Women's roles in the workplace were just beginning to shift, and I wonder if there was discontent on her part, wanting to explore these new roles. With the tension of being a navy wife, shifting gender roles, and a nagging question about herself, alcohol slowly became her companion to cope with the busy routine and constant changes internally and externally.

Her drinking would ebb and flow as fresh naval assignments brought us to new communities and experiences. Alcohol was an integrative part of Navy life – a means to connect, to support, and to forget. In those days, a Manhattan was a common fix, along with a cigarette, and both parents grew to like those Manhattans. It afforded time to relax, to enjoy a moment of quiet disconnect. It was acceptable in the Navy culture and in an extended family where the norms of drinking were emblematic, along with a fierce dedication to the Catholic faith. At face value, we were a perfect bunch, looking and appearing just "right," yet simmering underneath was the pain of addiction and its companion, shame. The secrets endure, as on the outside all appeared fine, but the inside was filled with despair of unknowing.

My mother's steady drinking escalated into binges as I entered my early teen years. It was from those years that I recall my anxiety and search for a foundation in the face of inconsistency. By the time I was five, I had known something was not quite right. I would peek around the corner to my parents' bedroom in the

middle of night (or so I thought) to see if they were home. I would worry and wonder about where they were. I shared a room with my sister, who was only a year or so younger and slept through everything. I was not so blessed. Those early days of my mother's drinking were filled with dread of the unknown. My wakeful nights were moments of trying to control something I did not understand and over which I now know I had no control. My father drank too but he was a different type of drinker; more functional, while she was a binge drinker. This style of drinking resulted in unpredictability. When she was sober, she was delightful, but hard to access emotionally. She was never cognitively or emotionally clear, even in brief periods of abstinence, and maintaining a relationship of trust was difficult. So athletics was an outlet to cope and a relief for me, providing a foundation to feel connected where I was introduced to the skills of team building, leadership and listening. Teachers, coaches, friends and extended family established a network of support and a valuable sense of hope and purpose. These offsetting factors strengthened my resolve to do well and to eventually extend these lessons with others who have endured similar experiences.

The drinking escalated when we moved to the East Coast, during the final tour in my father's thirty-year naval career. Living in an active and busy Navy base was actually quite wonderful. You could go anywhere, see a movie for a quarter, bowl for a mere dime, and fish off of the navy piers for endless hours as the mackerel swam by. This community was a blessing. We could count on families around us, play until dark, and always feel safe. However, this is where my mother's drinking intensified. She was in her late forties and her health was poor. She easily choked on food, smoked, and continued drinking those Manhattans. Often there would be gatherings in our home with other Navy folks or at the "Officer's" club where we could be unsupervised. These years left my mother disconnected from herself and from us. She later recalls feeling terribly depressed and lost. She questioned herself and her life.

This "who am I?" question quietly stayed beneath the surface and I suspect was buried during those drinking years. It was in her recovery from alcohol addiction that she began to explore her "self" and attempt to understand those early years – to find

peace. My mother wrote about an experience in the first grade when an older boy said:

"They found you. You are not really theirs because they did not have you biologically. Your name is not really your name."

All I could do was run and bury my face in the coats at the back of the classroom and wait to go home for lunch. I asked my parents. My father was quiet and my mother was crying. My father said we needed to never talk of this again. It was settled; no one would hurt me again with such talk. That day something was soiled, spoiled. I felt a change inside. Did the whole town know something I did not? It was the beginning of doubt, confusion and later denial, anger and obsession.

Here is where she learned to suppress her emotions, protect herself, and be a secret keeper as well. It was in her recovery she had the opportunity to address the secret and slowly accept who she was.

Our Journeys to Recovery

My mother started a recovery journey and never turned back. She endured at least two dozen detoxes and a handful of inpatient rehabs. She felt understood by a psychologist friend and found sensible meaning with the organization "Women for Sobriety," where she befriended Jean Kirkpatrick, its founder. Her recovery began to take hold. My mother was not a stereotypical female troubled-drinker. She was a beauty, dressed elegantly, and spoke with precise articulation and grace. That is exactly why folks did not know of her trouble or found it too difficult to address. In those days, addiction in women was invisible. Mom carried the burden of both being a woman without easy access to help and the socially-sanctioned silence of a female drinker. She fooled some by her elegance and charm, but it was a ruse.

Her recovery brought her to readdress the question of who she was. I, too, was questioning my role as I was chartering a course in life. My learning ground of secret-keeping taught me to repress my sexuality and the struggle to reveal the pain of being different. We intersected in our recoveries at different stages of our lives. As I began to work from the inside-out emotionally, I was able to embrace my sexuality and use this experience, (although it's an on-going process), to understand the pain of others. I learned the

challenges and pain of disconnection, which has brought many disguised gifts. These gifts were individuals and institutions that believed in me in times and moments when I did not. Relationships were invaluable in my healing, including painful ones that taught me to establish and maintain my own individuality. I understand being strong in broken places and the immense value of positive and safe relationships. I understand the origins of my anxiety, partly a familial, genetic history, but partially a legacy of living in a chaotic, inconsistent environment, resulting in an inner tension of self-doubt and uncertainty.

This self-doubt initiated my motivation to excel and learn to regulate my inner anxiety. My father often referred to my work in the addiction and mental health field as a direct result of the impact of familial addiction. He was partly right as it laid the foundation for my life's journey. It became the lens of understanding family, self, and community. My temperament of patience, curiosity, and determination along with family values of faith and loyalty created a natural underpinning to be a helper. It was a Navy doctor working with my mother after another detox when I was in my twenties who gently told me to move on with my life. I stood ready to let go of my role of caretaking and to live my life. This was a turning point for my mother and me. We crossed career paths as my life developed and hers began anew. She acquired a master's degree in counseling and worked in a clinic helping other women with addiction troubles. She blossomed as a woman in recovery moderating "Women for Sobriety" meetings. This was her new community. She had an identity beyond that of a mother, Navy wife and adoptee, but also as a proud, recovering woman. She found meaning and a home for herself. Letting go was growth for me to develop my passions and take charge of my life. The familial traditions of secret-keeping were beginning to be broken.

Inspiration of Author's Social Work Practice

The use of stories, my mother's journey and mine, has provided fertile ground for my focus and motivation to be a practicing social worker. To guide, assist, and collaborate with clients in their telling of stories and narratives of their lives that deepen their understanding of themselves. Stories

and narratives are fundamental to the work we do in the social work profession. Storytelling provides a way to construct meaning from our past and make sense of our current lives and the challenges we are facing (as well as our strengths). Stories are a powerful, compelling, way to organize and help others make sense of their world.

It was in my own storytelling to friends, therapists and my mother that taught me to trust, let go of shame, and to appreciate the value of listening without judgment. Part of the process as a social work practitioner is to reduce the strength of the secrets to reveal those hidden parts of the self. Embracing the new parts take time, patience and support. Secrets can be much like boxes, with little room to move, grow and develop.

Being a social work practitioner has evolved from opportunities to work with individuals and families in varying degrees of pain from addictions, relationship problems, and mental health challenges. I take seriously the stories of each client and pay attention to the narratives of their family. This often reveals experiences and feelings about who they were and how those roles may play a part in their current life's functioning. Family of origin work has been the centerpiece of my personal growth and development. The social, emotional and cultural aspects of life begin in our original families. My vulnerabilities and wounds remind me of those early relationships as well as the positive connections. Collaborating with my clients to appreciate their histories, acknowledging the pain and the joys, and weaving their stories to construct the truth and meaning of their lives are my framework in helping others. These joint interactions with client systems to encourage the telling of their stories are intrinsic to the work I enjoy as a social work practitioner.

Teaching as Knowing

Teaching was not an occupation I would have considered early in my career as a social worker, but my experience and training with addictions provided an opportunity to teach at the college level. I have had the privilege of teaching undergraduate college students for 24 years, often in a course about addictions. As a social worker, I am a teacher and a guide with others, and this very much parallels my teaching style. Educating undergraduates about the power of addiction and recovery in a story form etched

from my early family experiences and my clients, helps students to appreciate the process of pain, despair, hope and recovery. My message is that despite the impact of addiction, we can come through it and can live a quality life with the stories of our personal history teaching us daily.

Storytelling can be a tool to lessen the influence and intensity of secret keeping in addictions work. It is practiced in 12-step meetings daily. I ask my students to attend an open meeting sometime during the semester course. Their initial reaction is fear. What they learn is invaluable – the honesty, the nonjudgmental space– and the stereotypes begin to fall away. They get a glimpse of the power of sharing and its inherent value in a safe space. Secrets and shame find little room to grow where there is honesty and connection.

That Next Box

There were no records of the first two years of my mother's life, but their absence led my mother and myself to mine the records of our own lived experiences, where more fundamental, transformational truth lies. Drinking destroys stories or reduces them to repetitive, one-note interactions. Secrets, by their nature, forbid useful stories. My mother's early shame inevitably set the stage to question of who she was. She passed away not knowing her biological parents and those first two years of her life. Adoption in those early years and addiction in later years brought shame. Living with secrets is psychologically numbing. Sharing secrets with those who will listen and understand without judgment is freeing. This is part of my work personally, as a social worker, and as an educator. This is what my mother was able to do in her recovery. In the last 25 years of her life, she was free to be, to stop the exhaustive search for self, as it was right there with her.

As my mother and I reconstructed our lives within her recovery and mine, it was hard work to forgive and let go. I have learned to appreciate the power of stories which have created internal change, albeit slowly. Being vulnerable with family and a community of friends and colleagues helps to heal the wounds. Families are complicated, but shape our life's stories if we are willing to talk about those

relationships that build our character and values. I am blessed to have had a mix of difficulty and joy in my family of origin, with addiction as the background, but hope and faith front and center. This has established the basis and foundation of my career as a social worker and teacher.

What I found in Box 62 was not just partial explanations of my mother's life and mine, but also a symbol of our respective journeys. This box revealed pieces of her story, a story of secrets immersed in shame, doubt and loss. It taught me to appreciate that there is always more to come in life if we trust its process. My mother, in her recovery, found that as well. She went beyond the box once her recovery was firmly established. My clients, when they leave their re-constructed stories, and finish their work with me, continue their journey of discovery. We all do. It has taught me to grieve, let go, and to know that our stories continue. There are new boxes to open if we are willing and have the support and courage to be vulnerable. To open a new box may raise more questions than answers, but it can strengthen the resolve and desire to ask, pursue and to know.

The juvenile court responded to my petition. There are no records of my mother prior to her formal adoption. I felt sad as the letter sat between my fingers. Yet I found a small piece of her story, and the process of searching was emotional yet liberating. I look to her words of many years ago to let go and be satisfied with what I do have from when she was in her last few decades of life, in recovery. There will be more, new boxes to open to reveal pieces of my life. I appreciate the influence of family, friends and community who have traveled with me on this journey of discovery. I am humbled to travel with clients on their journey of family storytelling to reveal secrets, joys, pain and loss. I appreciate the power of one box that had safely rested on a shelf for ninety years. Box 62 did not answer some important questions but it raises new questions equally difficult to address. I am now alone on this journey without my mother, but am inspired to recognize and be surprised to open new boxes as a daughter, social work practitioner, and teacher.

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The Trumpet of Hope and Change

Boniface Odong

Abstract: In this narrative, I look back at how my life's circumstances impressed upon me the desire to work with and to plant seeds of hope and change in the lives of vulnerable children, youth and families. Despite being born and raised in a war-zone area that lasted over two decades, within me still lay an amplified, resilient sound of sharing and giving hope, belonging and love.

Keywords: war-zone, Uganda

Throughout my life and from my working experiences within different communities, I have come to believe that social work is my career destination. I am currently navigating my way toward becoming an accredited social worker from Radford University (RU).

I am Boniface Odong, age 27, and I was born in a family of ten children (six boys and four girls). I was fifth in that line. I was born a few days before the longest heated civil war began in the Gulu District, led by Joseph Kony's Lord Resistance Army in Northern Uganda. My father died while I was very young. Early on, my caring mother adopted eight more needy, little children and our number rose to eighteen official siblings. Additionally, she took in several others from struggling relatives. A few people thought that my mum owned a private kindergarten of sorts because of the number of children residing with us. She was a strong, loving, hard-working Christian woman, a wonderful mother and terrific role model at my young age.

For a brief period of my youth, life was rich with love and joy, even growing up in such a large family with only one parent. That joy was to be short-lived. My nurturing mum died suddenly, at which point my childhood changed forever. Some of my own greedy relatives confiscated my mum's properties – both the land and the house we were living in. The legal system failed us when we children tried to fight them. We lost everything we owned except the clothes on our backs. Life for us became brutally hard without a father or mother to support us. Our number had grown too big for my oldest brother to handle; our outlook for survival became dim.

I do not have enough words to describe our miserable existence being born just before and raised during a civil war, with all its atrocities. I will do my best, though, to describe our grim existence. We

lived in a rural area without electricity or running water. Because of the war, most schools were closed, hospitals abandoned, and the entire national infrastructure was totally collapsed. Knowing what the rebels would do to us if we were caught, we still walked miles and miles daily to fetch water, which we quickly used up. Every day that we struggled to survive mirrored Charles Darwin's "survival of the fittest."

Most nights, we slept on empty stomachs because we could not risk planting a garden due to fear of the rebels. We had no way to make money to buy local produce from the market. So many, many nights, we longed for any kind of food. Sometimes, during the right seasons, nature looked at our family with fond eyes and provided us with mangoes, jackfruits, sugarcane, and maize. Those were the cherished times of the year. There were days though that we would strip the mango trees even before the fruit was ripe. Although they tasted green, we consumed them, reminding me of the words of Solomon:

"To a hungry person what tastes bitter is sweet."

We wore the same shirts on our backs as long as we could fit into them. If they weren't reduced to rags, we handed them down to the next child with hopes that another would hand something to each of us. Sometimes we took a great risk and went to the well to wash what we wore and waited for it to dry. Usually our bare feet felt the heat of the burning sand or rocky terrain. Only if one was very lucky, could one manage to get cheap flip-flops. In our community, one commanded respect when he or she owned a pair of black shoes. It was the dream for each of us to one day own a pair of black shoes. Shoes would earn us status in the community. How strange to desire status when we were barely surviving!

Needless to say, the war greatly affected us children in

our year growing up. One morning when my twin brothers were playing with a grenade thrown by the rebels, it went off, blowing both of them up before my eyes. I lived in constant fear that I would be the next in line of death's tortuous grip. Despite the misery, I wanted to survive. A year later, my siblings began to move away from home because the conditions were so tough. Many sought refuge in alcoholism, prostitution, early marriage, and drug abuse. We barely had any basic necessities for life. We had been abandoned like a flagstaff on a mountaintop and were left to fend for ourselves. We lived at the mercy of friends and compassionate people in the village.

Though the war officially ended in August 2006, its effects still rage. Many people in this community are traumatized by starvation, homelessness, the unnatural death and murder of their family members, a narrow escape of death themselves, sexual abuse, family breakups, torture and a lack of medical care. Most do not function normally; they have been robbed of their purpose to live. This situation has given them a hopeless view on the way they see themselves, the situations they encounter and the expectations of the future. My community ranks among the worst in poverty, alcohol consumption, illiteracy, unemployment, depression, and early marriages. I did witness the masses living in camps and being helped by the various international agencies. This help brought hope to my people in Northern Uganda. However, during the economic recession, the community suffered a double castigation. Besides the effects of war, the economic recession led to more death because the relief organizations that were helping the people finally withdrew their help, when most donors stopped funding their services. This meant that the local people who were dependent on emergency services like food, water, and medical care, ultimately died of famine and disease.

During this period of war in Northern Uganda, no one ever said to me or my family about anything in the world called "counseling." It is strange, but the first time I used the word was years later in college in the United States. The closest thing to counseling that I had done was speaking to my siblings and the other children to "keep fighting, don't give up now. It's just another season that will one day come to an end; believe!" Yet I recall asking myself 'why.' I

had lived more than 20 years watching bullets fly over my head; hearing the screams of women and children as bombs exploded; existing in a community that buried its dead daily; watching the agony of people nursing freshly mutilated limbs and lips by machetes. After spending two years in America, I remained in awe by the tremendous difference between my people's existence and the rich living conditions of my adopted country – they were two worlds apart. I am still amazed by how the community in this country (US) responded to the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. For over a month, the media covered the incident and talked about how traumatized the community was. It talked of the need of counseling and other interventions to help people deal with the horror of what had happened.

Despite the financial challenge I endured in Uganda during and after the war, a need within to help the children and the youths in my community began to brew. This excruciating story drew me closer to my Christian faith and shaped in me a love for others and an awareness of human suffering. Ever since those years, I have felt a deep obligation and responsibility to reach out and transform the lives and futures of young people. Sometimes when I had any possessions (like money), I would share it with those around me or even go with the young boys and girls to the shop to buy things to eat. This often made me feel satisfied and peaceful. Though we were in the same boiling pot, I dreamed of becoming an agent of change. However, I couldn't fathom how this was possible. I had been forced to drop out of high school and certainly didn't have the financial necessities to consider further education. The question of how I could help my own flesh and blood burned inside of me for a long time. My opportunity came when my older brother and sister sacrificed their education for me because they saw potential in me. Some family friends also saw something special and chose to help me. So how could I turn my burning desire to help others into a lucrative way to help support my surviving family? I now had the opportunity to continue my studies in Uganda, which had only been a dream before.

As I was struggling to figure out what to do, I recalled that as I was growing up, my family thought I had the call to become a priest. I knew that this would help me meet their spiritual needs. I dropped that aspiration and considered studying to become a medical doctor because in addition to helping the sick, I could earn

the money to help out my siblings. But I had been inconsistent with my education because of our circumstances. I also considered going into law to earn a good salary, but there just wasn't enough money for all the education I would need.

Once in was college, I questioned which discipline I would pursue if I wanted to be an agent of change in helping my family and my new community. I perused my numerous opportunities, but my heart was ultimately drawn to social work as the best option. Though I had lived with my mother for only a short period, she had instilled in me an empathetic, helping spirit. I had later been helped by many others with my tuition to study. I wanted to give back what I had been given. The problem came when I learned that social work was a field that does not pay well. I was trying to earn good money in my chosen profession to help my family back home. That was why I had considered becoming a doctor, lawyer or engineer. I was in internal turmoil. One evening, I recall being rebuked, challenged, and at the same time inspired by a thought in my mind.

It's not about the money, but the condition of the heart, that will make the difference in this world. You can have the money, but become just another statistic.

Those words hit me to my core, a chord in my spirit. Yet it seemed like my thought was not yet complete for it continued.

Consider men and women like Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and what about your own mother? How much did they have in their bank accounts? But they each left a footprint among the people with whom they lived...

I recall being speechless for a while. As I reflected and meditated upon those words, I became inspired to pursue social work while at college. This made me more curious to learn more about the profession. So I began taking courses in the field. I discovered that social work is a helping profession where social change is promoted, problem solving in human relationships is enhanced, and people are liberated and empowered to function to their best of their ability (self-actualization). My college professors influenced me with their obsession with the field.

Their zeal was contagious. I studied the profession not with the mentality of I-shall-save or I-know-all the answers, but to become a part of the process of change among the youth and children.

During our semester breaks, I decided to volunteer with a couple of organizations in my community. I volunteered with several organizations in order to make a difference such as The AIDS Support Organization (TASO), Health Integrated Development Organization (HIDO), Gulu Women Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G), and later in the US with Urban Promise Ministries (a non-profit in Camden, New Jersey working with inner city children). I was involved with the following activities: community dialogues, debates, sensitization, drama, school outreaches, and focus group discussions with the different stakeholders in the community. I was filled with the desire to challenge some of the social injustices on behalf of the vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. I discovered that many people were devalued or denigrated, thereby deprived of a voice on matters affecting their lives. This enabled many people to regenerate and revive their innate potential and resilience to control their lives. I do believe in the intrinsic worth of an individual in their environment.

Despite all the financial challenges I faced, I pushed for my higher goal of academic excellence and this I achieved when I was pronounced the best male student during my college graduation. I had been involved in several research projects within Uganda Christian University. As a Teaching Assistant (TA) at my undergraduate school, I held several dialogues and discussions with students and those in my community about the rewards of education. I shared with them my testimonies, and this encouraged many who were on the verge of dropping out, to persevere until they graduated. I was able to talk some of my siblings into returning to school, and by God's grace, two of them are now in college.

A friend who once visited my university through an exchange program encouraged me to apply for an internship with a non-profit organization in Camden, NJ. Luckily enough, I was granted the opportunity to work with the inner-city kids of Camden. While working with these disadvantaged youth, I discovered that one should possess a heart of love, empathy, resilience and a belief that they can succeed and above

all, be compassionate. I realized that to further tailor my career to the specialty of working with children, youth and families, a master's degree in social work would be the next pursuit. Fortunately, an opportunity opened up at Radford University in Virginia. I currently work and intern with the Substance Abuse and Violence Education Support (SAVES) under the RU Aware department, whose focus is on counseling and an education intervention program, for students who violate the university's alcohol and other drug policies.

Social work is challenging, yet rewarding, and fully packed with priceless moments. I recall while volunteering at TASO, I talked to a couple that had twins—one was HIV (Human Immune Virus) positive and the other was negative. This helped to challenge me that there are people outside who are still in need of help. I am honestly enthused by the skills and values used by social workers in approaching clients such as acceptance, a non-judgmental attitude and the positive belief in them. This would not be possible in a society that is characterized by stigmatization and discrimination, but social workers say, "I am here for you." While working, I developed the ability to work within a team and the relevancy of working in partnership with other agencies.

Through applying these values, principles and skills

in my voluntary roles, I have not only gained a great sense of job satisfaction, but have learned that they are vital to gaining respect and trust from clients. My ability to demonstrate patience, empathy and humility in such situations has further encouraged me that I am in the right profession. I am excited to be a social worker and to continue to grow and mature in my ever-expanding dream. I believe in embracing diversity; applying reasoning and logic to unfamiliar ideas, opinions and situations; effective communication; skill and competency in administration; acting with integrity and the involvement of multi-disciplinary approaches to achieve results.

Pursuing social work will bring me closer to my career goal of becoming an agent of change and hope, that through being part of the process of liberation and empowerment, especially to vulnerable children, youth and families. I believe there are successful places in this world that need to be occupied by the children and youth that have experienced indescribable difficulties as they find meaning, belonging, love, peace and the resilience to survive and thrive despite horrific odds.

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Resolving Family of Origin Issues in Clinical Practice

Steven Granich

Abstract: If one is to be an effective social worker in clinical practice, family of origin issues are very critical to resolve. Being in the clinical practice since 1976 has meant facing a strenuous effort to come to terms with my own family and family of origin to help clients. Traveling extensively in Latin America for the last eight years has greatly enhanced this process.

Keywords: family of origin, Guatemala, transference, self-care

Practicing social work since 1976 has been an amazing journey. By understanding my family of origin and transference issues, effective relationships with various clients have been established. Also, self-care and secondary trauma are important issues for me as a social worker. Learning to cope with negative and positive experiences in my life has helped me to grow as a social worker and to be effective with clients.

When I was growing up with my family of origin, there was significant conflict between my mother, father and sister. My father was the dominant individual in the family, which resulted in constant conflict between members of the family. He was the powerful authority figure and he would not yield to negotiate any differences. My sister was triangulated into the conflict between my mother and father; my position in the family resulted in an emotional cutoff.

Growing up with strains in my family of origin, I was fortunate to have a healthy environment; I received adequate nutrition, good schooling, and a safe environment. Work did not start for me until I was 18 years old, and then there was excellent recreation, vacations and health care. Life overall was positive, without experiencing violence growing up, and Judaism from a secular perspective formed the basis of my spirituality as a child.

My first job as a social worker in 1976 was far away from home. I had successfully left my family of origin and could be on my own. I had the responsibility to travel to five counties, serving five health departments. My supervisor reminded me of my father and was very authoritarian, resulting in a very strong, negative countertransference. This supervisor stirred very negative feelings within me, and I left after a year. I had erected elaborate defenses in order to defuse painful experiences with

my father and needed to work out these issues. Gedo (2013) states, "One powerful manner in which the therapist can come to know these effects is by experiencing them personally as counter transference" (p. 162). In my first job as a social worker, I did not effectively resolve issues with my father, and I could not be an effective therapist.

For years, I staying away from clinical practice because I was searching for my own identity away from my family of origin. I was involved in an enmeshed relationship with my family of origin, especially with my mother. Traveling away from the United States began in 1984 with a trip to Costa Rica for three months, followed by living for a year in Spain from 1985 to 1986.

I returned to clinical practice in 1987 and began to train as a family therapist. I was able to examine issues within my family of origin. Through an exploration of my family genogram, I recognized various relationships, cutoffs, triangles and multigenerational processes. For me, understanding the enmeshment with my mother helped me to work on my differentiation of self, so that I would not be so emotionally reactive with clients. Understanding triangles assisted me with understanding any countertransference based on my family. Recognizing an emotional cutoff from my family of origin helped me to understand that this method of resolving anxiety was unhealthy.

I was married in 1989 and became the stepfather of four children. As a stepfather, I learned more about family systems and issues of loyalty, boundaries hierarchies, accommodation, and subsystems. Launching a career in working with adolescent substance abuse gave me a new perspective on family systems. For ten years, I directed an adolescent day treatment program where I encountered a diverse group of youth with varying substance abuse and

mental health issues. During this time honing my skills as a family therapist, I received a license in marriage and family therapy in 1997. Through my training as a family therapist I began the process of acknowledging many of the issues surrounding my family of origin. I can vividly recall presenting my family genogram to other therapists and being very nervous to reveal the issues that bothered me. The response of the group was very supportive and universalizing; they found my family issues to be similar to their family of origin issues which was very comforting.

Felberbaum (2009) explained the importance of memory of grief in working with clients and sees Tibetan mandalas made by monks as reflecting the transitory nature of life. My father passed away in a nursing home in 1992, and I did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to him, although I attended his funeral. From 1995 to 2005, I had the opportunity to spend more time with my mother because she came to live near me at an assisted living residence. She was very independent until a year before her death in 2005. After my mother's death, I needed to engage in short-term counseling to resolve the loss of a very significant person in my life. I was a member of a critical incident stress debriefing team, and it was very hard right after my mother's death to effectively work with clients who were experiencing losses. Going to counseling resolved these feelings of loss.

The deaths of my uncle, father and mother were traumatic for me, resulting in feelings of depression and grief after my mother died. Cox and Steiner (2013) find it important that social workers manage stress when trying to help clients who have experienced trauma. Kanter (2007) discusses compassion fatigue as a secondary traumatic stress occurring over time. Social workers have more difficulty with self-care when they are experiencing trauma themselves. Response to secondary trauma is determined by one's countertransference reactions.

The next stage of my life was to work on family and family of origin issues and occurred in 2008 when I traveled with other university faculty to Zacatecas, Mexico. This trip made me realize that traveling would enhance my abilities as a social worker and help me to resolve many issues based on my family of origin.

Traveling and Confronting Family of Origin Issues

Over the last eight years, I have traveled throughout the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America. This travel has helped me to confront and resolve many family and family of origin issues. This traveling has brought me closer to the Mayan spirituality and culture, the plight of immigrants, and the diversity of Central America and Mexico. It has brought meaning and focus to my life on a connection to social work with Latinos in the United States, Mexico and Central America. It has also helped me to expand my ability to work with people from other cultures. I present five case examples of social work practice while traveling abroad, where family of origin issues came to the forefront and helped me to learn about myself and others.

During my travels, I participated in doing research at social agencies, performed journalistic work with an NGO, took students to Guatemala, and volunteered as a social worker with social work agencies. These experiences have strengthened me as a person and have made me aware of the family and family of origin issues which are reflected in my social work practice.

The following five case examples will address spirituality, poverty, the plight of children, violence and immigration. I will address each problem, review literature, talk about my experiences with a case example, self-reflect on the experience, and finally discuss what I learned to help my clients.

Mayan Spirituality and Culture: Finding a Strong Connection

Spirituality issues are problems among many of our clients in the United States; Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous fulfill a spiritual void for many of our clients. This need for spiritual fulfillment is evident in global social work practice (Chirico, 2014).

Spirituality is prevalent within the Mayan culture. Molesky-Poz (2006) discusses the cultural and spiritual background of the Mayans. Among the Mayans, there is no theological doctrine but rather practices based on encounters with the cosmos. Mayans gather around an altar offering various natural objects to recall their ancestors and history. They

interpret life in cycles and folds of darkness and light, and there is a commitment to the 260-day Mayan calendar and respect for the forces of creation in the world. In order to celebrate the Mayan past, women wear traditional clothing, which depicts Mayan images and objects, reflective of astronomy, math and mythology. In the Mayan tradition, shamans perform consultation and healing, and Mayans find sacred places.

Growing up in a secular Jewish family I was only marginally spiritual, and rarely participated in Jewish rituals or going to synagogue. My parents were not very religious. I feel that this reinforced a disconnection from my family of origin. As stated previously, I used emotional cutoff as a way to cope with anxiety in my family. This is not an effective tool to deal with family of origin issues. In my training as a family therapist, I learned more about what it was to be a member of a family. Through the loss of my uncle, father, and mother, I experienced the loss of significant others, grief and pain. Searching for a spiritual connection was very important on my journey.

My father was in a nursing home when he passed away. From what I heard, it was very difficult for my father to be away from his family; there was only my mother there to visit him every day. I had the opportunity in January 2015 to visit a nursing home in northern Guatemala which brought back memories of my father, my spirituality and my family of origin.

Case 1: Visit to a nursing home in northern Guatemala

In January 2015, I visited a nursing home in northern Guatemala with about 90 “abuelitos” (grandparents). There are very few nursing homes in Guatemala, but they play a very important role in caring for those in need. The purpose of my visit was to explore how the elderly were cared for in Guatemala. In the nursing home, there were very few women, and most residents were men. There was an atmosphere of caring, but their resources were stretched. The charts for the residents were paper copies with no computerization, and there was a limited supply of medication. Churches would visit the facility to have religious services. There were mosquito nets covering beds because the nursing

home was in an area with vegetation. Seeing this area brought a sad feeling of countertransference; my parents had been so well cared for when they were old. The caregivers for the elderly had very warm hearts; I remember one person who did all the laundry for the “abuelitos”; she had performed this task daily for eight years now. In a developing country like Guatemala, despite scarce social resources, there was still an effort to care for their elderly. There were many Bible verses written on the wall which gave strength to those providing services to the elderly.

On a trip to Chiapas, Mexico during the summer of 2014, I was very tired after a full day of travel to various sites in this area. As evening approached, the mist closed in on the mountains of the highlands in green grandeur. The mountains brought to me a comfort and spiritual closeness, reflected in the strength of the Mayan religion and culture. It was a strong feeling of healing that reinforced the power of a multigenerational connection. Understanding this strong connection of spirituality, family and culture within the Mayan tradition gave me help in working with all families, and resolving my own issues with my family of origin.

Through the strengthening of my spirituality, I have been better able to help my clients. Once, I was called to help a first responder who had watched a woman burn alive. He had no choice to help her because the building was already in flames. I went to the site where the woman had been burned to death, and we went to the window where she last was alive. The first responder prayed and asked this woman for forgiveness. After releasing this guilt, he was able to return to his job as a fire fighter. Within the Mayan tradition, letting go through ritual offerings is an important part of freeing one’s spirit from guilt. As a Mayan shaman asks for forgiveness from the Gods, this responder also relied on forgiveness to make him whole.

Poverty at Home and Poverty in Central America

Poverty is a problem that is endemic in Latin America; there is extreme poverty where people make no more than a dollar a day and have few amenities. It affects the spirit and resilience of people throughout the world (Cox & Pawar, 2013).

Marini and Graganolati (2003) detail the problems

with poverty and health in Guatemala. “Compared with other countries with a similar per capita GDP level, Guatemala stands out as having an inordinately high rate of poverty” (p. 5). Health problems in Guatemala include high rates of infant mortality and malnutrition, fragmentation of health care, lack of health services in rural areas, and lack of health insurance. “A national shame” (2009) reports that according to UNICEF, half of the children of Guatemala are malnourished; in the rural areas, the number is as high as 80 percent, with some children eating only tortillas. The chronic problem has become acute because of the economic crisis, drought in eastern Guatemala, and Guatemalans abroad not sending remittances.

Leonard (2011) reports that Honduras also has extensive poverty. The poor have mainly lived in rural areas and have lacked basic education. 60% of the workforce is unemployed or underemployed with high levels of illiteracy. El Salvador is also dealing with social issues of poverty, such as a high rate of teen pregnancy; every half hour, a teenager gives birth (Gonzalez, 2014). Alcoholism is also an epidemic, with a rate of 27.4 deaths annually for each 100,000 inhabitants (Sermeno, 2014).

Poverty in El Salvador and Honduras can be very extreme. I had the opportunity to accompany church members to a rural area in Honduras in 2012, where men, women and children, had been expelled from their land and were living in the street in makeshift houses of poles and plastic, with no basic necessities such as electricity, bathrooms, or running water. The homes of the people in Honduras were bulldozed and they were now living on the street. The church members brought food and clothing to these people.

When I began to first experience extreme poverty in Mexico and Central America, it made me realize how lucky I was to grow up in the United States. My father and mother had experienced the Great Depression in the U.S., which probably altered their perspective on life. Growing up, they saved every penny that they could in order to prepare for another economic demise. During my experiences as a social worker in the Southern part of the United States, I saw people living in trailers without running water and indoor plumbing. In South Carolina in 1976, I visited the home of a child who was malnourished. While working in Georgia in 2006, I visited many

homes with insects crawling throughout the house or that were without air conditioning during the summer. Children did not have shoes, wore dirty clothes, and lacked books for their education. Traveling to poor areas in Latin American gave me perspective on what my parents and I had experienced.

Case 2: Poverty in central Guatemala

I had the opportunity in the summer of 2015 to assist a social service organization with surveys of a community with extreme poverty. Spending the whole day in this community brought out many issues from my family of origin. Growing up, I had very adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care; the air was clean and pure to breathe. In this community, there were children in desperate need of basic necessities. In this environment I encountered the inability to breathe while smoke was coming from wood burning stoves. This visit to an isolated mountain community brought feelings of pain from seeing the children in such conditions. The coordinator of the trip, on our final visit to a home, kissed the mother of the family and then shed tears. Continuing to work with these people would have brought me secondary trauma. Since I currently have 5 children and 3 grandchildren, it brought me personal pain to see children in these conditions of extreme poverty.

Other experiences of extreme poverty were equally striking, like witnessing children running around without adequate shoes. A child was Deaf and knew no sign language at 9 years old; this child had no training in sign language, because the school was too far away. There was no furniture in the buildings, only beds, and there might have been only one bed for 6 family members. There was no clean source of water; the water was collected in depositories or obtained from a well. When there was cold weather on top of the mountain, there was no source of heat except for clothing. The predominant language spoken in the canton was Quiche (indigenous language), not Spanish. When there was severe weather, there could be mud slides, and the road approaching the community was filled with rocks and holes. Most children did not go beyond primary school, and latrines were used as a toilet for the whole family. Each family had small plots of land where they grew maize. There was fear of a drought with people having malnutrition, and there was no government aid. Some adults could not read or write Spanish. There was a

health clinic miles away; if there was an emergency there would be a lack of facilities. No one had indoor plumbing or effective water systems, and most housing was made from corrugated metal. Some men earned money by selling fruit or videos in Guatemala City while others were agricultural workers, who might earn about 100 dollars per month. Large families lived in these communities, and the women dressed in traditional clothing. There was a lack of electricity and refrigeration in the community.

Reflecting on this poverty from a family of origin perspective makes me think about the struggle of my clients and the loss of significant family members. Working in an environment like this can either create secondary trauma or move one to a higher level of human consciousness. The greatest loss in my life was my mother, who was a very kind and caring person. What I experienced in these areas of extreme poverty was a sense of hope and connection to the land and culture, not a sense of loss and hopelessness. To a certain extent, there is always hope despite tremendous loss or hardship.

As a social worker in the United States, I have worked with families who have lost everything in a state of crisis by fire, tornado, or other natural disasters. Basic crisis intervention techniques normalize the anxiety in these situations. Instilling hope in people who have lost everything is an important skill as a social worker. Being able to handle secondary trauma is very important to being an effective social worker in these situations.

Child Labor in Central America

Viewing the conditions of children in Latin America is difficult; it is tragic to see children without a bright future. Because I am a father of 5 children, I have sensitivity to the needs of children who are growing up. It is hard to watch children growing up in these conditions, and seeing the consequences of lack of education, poverty and the presence of violence. In my own clinical experience, I have seen the damage that poverty has on adolescent development, from violence to drug abuse.

Tuttle (2006) explains that child labor is a key issue in Latin America. Children work in factories, prostitution, armed groups, and the service industry.

Based on 2003 statistics in Guatemala, 23 percent of the work force was between the ages of 5 and 17. Putman et al. (2008) see child maltreatment as a problem in Guatemala: "Rates of violence, including family violence and child maltreatment, are high in post-civil war Guatemala and child sexual abuse is an area of particular concern" (p. 349). Offitt (2008) sees street child labor as a major problem in Guatemala. Street children labor for the survival of their families. Children street laborers normally sell foodstuffs and dry goods and provide basic services.

Case 3: Garbage Dump in Guatemala City

Visiting the garbage dump in Guatemala City in 2012 was shocking. The garbage dump is below the city cemetery in the city, and about 30,000 to 40,000 people recycle various items around the garbage dump. Men and women go into the large garbage dump to sort out various items for recycling. Families live around the garbage dump in order to survive, and they sell these items. It is a daily existence of duress. Frequently, the children of these families receive no education and lack basic necessities such as health, dental care, and clean water. These families face violence and crime in the area surrounding the garbage dump; they live in a red zone.

As a founding member of a juvenile drug court in an American city, I have seen the ravages of drugs on the youth of America. Even with treatment, some of the adolescents continued into adulthood using drugs and engaging in a criminal career. There is an international program called Safe Passages to address the issues of the young people in the garbage dump; they have set up schools and places for parents to work in Guatemala City. This program has a profound impact on the lives of the young people working with garbage. There is a strong counter-transference toward the young people working in the garbage dump, and adolescents in drug court in the United States.

Violence in Central America

Growing up in my family, I never experienced a high level of violence; violence was something strange to me. As a social worker, I have seen violence with child abuse, domestic violence, and people with homicidal thoughts. Violence was dissonant to my way of seeing the world. In my clinical work with adolescent substance abuse, I saw the trauma of both

gun violence and senseless violence; I had witnessed the aftermath of gun violence at a high school during the debriefing of students.

Guatemalans experience insecurity with both drug cartels and gangs (Brands, 2011). There is a history in Guatemala of an authoritarian state government, low tax collection, and inequality. Guatemala has become a center of the drug trade. Drug traffickers move drugs through Guatemala by various means and use corruption to obtain influence on local governments. Organized crime has penetrated Guatemalan institutions. In addition, “padillas” (neighborhood gangs) and “maras” (national gangs) create unstable conditions. Padillas specialize in extortion, robbery, and small-scale drug distribution. Maras participate in drug and arms smuggling, human trafficking, racketeering, and other organized crime. Cruz (2009) sees the development of maras stemming from migration and networking in the communities and prisons. Gang violence, kidnapping for extortion, and attacking bus systems for money are prevalent. The state is not strong enough to raise revenue and administer justice. Corruption and locking up gang members with gang loyalty exacerbates the problem. Guatemalans have turned to their own security guards and vigilante violence.

Machismo and femicide are problems in Guatemala. Bellino (2010) and Ogrodnick & Borzutsky (2011) report that killing of women in Guatemala is a serious problem. With femicide, there is sexual abuse and torture, and there is not careful investigation of cases of female killings. Most of the time, the case does not go to trial and the criminals are almost never brought to justice. Bellino (2010) explains that males have higher-paying jobs, a higher rate of literacy, and hold positions of authority. The 2008 Law against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence is inadequate due to an ineffective police and judicial system which does not give women access to justice. Ogrodnick and Borzutsky (2011) report that in Guatemala poverty is linked to violence against women.

Poverty in Guatemala has not been alleviated and is still a pressing problem causing lack of education, malnutrition, health problems, and death in pregnancy among women. Guatemala has a lack of democratic stability, a prevalence of repression, and

constant violence. Violence against women exists for many reasons, but predominantly because of social exclusion, and the lack of application of existing laws. Women did not obtain the right to vote until 1966. Perpetrators of violence are not being prosecuted by the criminal justice system. Many non-governmental organizations have been formed to combat violence against women with limited success.

El Salvador suffered through a civil war similar to that of Guatemala. According to Villiers-Negroponete (2012), “El Salvador’s war lasted approximately twelve years, took approximately 70,000 lives, displaced one quarter of a million people, and destroyed \$2 billion worth of property” (p. 15). The Salvadoran military was very oppressive of the population during the civil war and people feared death squads. El Salvador, even after the Peace Accords of 1992, has transitioned back to being a violent society. El Salvador has high rates of homicide, kidnappings and extortion. Villiers-Negroponete (2012) discusses the maras (international gangs) that extort money from businesses, assault people for valuable objects, assassinate rival gang members, and work with drug traffickers.

Case 4: Home Visit to Young Adult Victim of Violence in Guatemala

In 2013, I had the opportunity to volunteer for a week at a Catholic school that assisted children and youth in a very impoverished area of Guatemala. One day I went with a teacher to visit a home in the community. The house had no foundation, only a roof of metal, and no furniture besides one dresser and a bed. There was no running water, and smoke filled the house from cooking with wood. In the house with the mother was a young man in his early 20's who had brain damage from sniffing glue (Al-Hajri & Del Bigio, 2010). He had scores of cuts on his body from fights he had experienced. Spending two and a half hours with this family was heart-breaking. I had a difficult time trying to listen to this young man’s story, being somewhat overwhelmed by the gravity of his hurts. However, I was able to make it through the interview.

In the Guatemalan newspapers, there are always articles about people being executed, taxis being extorted, gang killings, and robberies. The focus of violence is mostly on Guatemala City, where there are

red zones which are very dangerous to be in, because they are controlled by gangs. I had the opportunity to travel in a van in a red zone, which was gang controlled. I was warned not to take pictures but took pictures anyway; we traveled with a person who provided security.

In El Salvador there is a great fear of violence by the gangs. They will run drugs, extort people in neighborhoods, and kill for territory. Houses in El Salvador have barbed wire and are within gated communities. In Honduras, the influence of the gangs is very strong. I had the opportunity to visit a rehabilitation facility for drugs and alcohol, where the youth were guarded by security with automatic weapons to protect them from other gangs. At night, one could not depart from the bus station in the capitol of Honduras because there was too great of a threat of being robbed. Instead, there was an alternative place of departure from the bus at night.

Violence is difficult to understand and cope with on a regular basis; it brings out a steady stream traumatic feelings. Fortunately, I never experienced this level of violence within my family of origin. Being scared of violence is not a very pleasant experience. Working with clients who have experienced violence can create feelings of secondary trauma. In all social work settings, one must be effective in helping both clients who are violent and who are victims of violence. Having been in Latin America, I have a better understanding of how violence can impact societies.

When I was flying home from El Salvador, a young man was talking with me about my experiences of anxiety in San Salvador. On the plane we were talking about the gangs, extortion, and the fear of the gang members. As we were getting off the plane, this young man said to his father, referring to me, “El hombre es muy valiente,” (This man is very valiant). I thought to myself that I am not very valiant but humbled by this experience. I am humbled to understand more about violence and how to help the victims and perpetrators who are my clients.

Immigration Issues: Then and Now

My ancestors came to the United States through Ellis Island for similar reasons that Central Americans are

fleeing their countries. Eastern European Jews were subjects to pogroms and other forms of violence in Eastern Europe. Jews fled due to the violence and poverty in the 19th and 20th centuries, and this common bond allowed me to greater understand the people fleeing violence.

According to Chumil (2009) Guatemalans have no other option except to immigrate. Immigrants to the United States experience great anxiety when the transit is illegal. In the U.S., immigrants find low-paying work, and lack the support of their families. There is a challenge to repay the debt to their smugglers. Family members are left behind with remittances of being sent to Guatemala. Illegal immigrants feel unsafe in employment in the U.S.

There are trauma issues related to immigration (Perez-Foster 2001), which include loss of family networks, lack of fluency, children having to conform to norms of a new culture, and major adjustment stressors linked to migration. There may be pre-migration trauma where immigrants experience negative events prior to leaving their country. Migrants often experience adjustment stress symptoms such as depression and anxiety. The first wave of migrants to the U.S. from Guatemala came for political reasons; however, immigration from Guatemala is now for economic reasons. There are an increasing number of women that are immigrating to the U.S. from Guatemala.

According to Abrego (2009), twenty to thirty five percent of the Salvadoran population emigrates. Migration to the U.S. is a critical factor for the survival of Salvadoran families, which results in a transnational approach to living—coming back and forth between the United States and El Salvador. About 40 percent of Salvadoran children grow up without both parents. Abrego (2009) discusses the lives of Salvadoran immigrants to the United States. “The exorbitant smuggling fees, the treacherous journey through Mexico, the terrible treatment in detention centers, and the vulnerability of being unprotected by any legal system—all of these realities plague the lives of unauthorized Salvadoran migrants to the United States” (p. 30).

Case 5: Helping Guatemalan Family in the United States.

In the summer of 2015, I assisted a Guatemalan mother and her children at a social service agency in the southern U.S. This mother was a legal resident and had a job washing bottles for a pharmacy company. She entered the social service complex, and no one could help her due to their lack of Spanish-speaking skills. She was very distraught because her husband was a hundred miles away in a hospital recuperating from a brain tumor operation, and he did not have insurance to pay for further care. I helped her with the Medicaid application, and we connected her to a local church for resources for her four children. I can write and speak in Spanish, and I could understand the pain that she was going through. Knowing the conditions in Guatemala and where she emigrated from was an important connection of trust.

I met one man who spent three years earning money in the same region. It was very difficult for him living in the U.S. without his family, and so he returned to Guatemala. Another man had lived in the U.S. for 8 years and is now having a hard adjustment back in Guatemala. He lost everything when he left the U.S. He felt that he was a victim of being exploited by low wages and lived in very difficult conditions. He recollected that there was no heat in his house, and that one Guatemalan friend probably died of exposure. Guatemalan newspapers reflect on the difficulty of immigrating to the United States through Mexico with financial and sexual exploitation being common practice.

In El Salvador and Honduras, there is a concerted effort to leave the poverty and violence in the country. Whole villages have been decimated by immigration to the United States. Young men and young women either turn to the gangs or decide to immigrate to the United States. On the plane coming and going from El Salvador, there were mostly Salvadorans and very few tourists. There is transnational movement between the U.S. and El Salvador.

Central Americans leaving their countries, like my ancestors leaving Eastern Europe, experienced extreme stress and sometimes trauma. For me, traveling back and forth to Central America gives

me the feeling of what my ancestors must have experienced. It also makes me a better social worker by understanding historically what immigrants have experienced in coming to the United States.

Conclusion

Social work practice is a life-enriching experience; to be effective in practice one must understand their own family of origin. I have been fortunate enough to practice social work since 1976 after graduating from the University of Georgia. I have grown and transitioned from a cutoff within my family of origin to establishing my own family and becoming a family therapist. I have experienced stress as a social worker but have managed it through self-care so that I have not been overwhelmed by secondary trauma from working with clients.

In the last eight years, I have experienced a transformation in my practice by confronting family of origin and family issues through travel. The five case studies reflect this transformation: 1. My visit to the nursing home in northern Guatemala reflects my spiritual journey in life. 2. The visit to a poor community in Guatemala puts poverty in perspective based on my family of origin. 3. My visit to the garbage dump in Guatemala City in the summer of 2012 brought feelings of countertransference from my family. 4. My visit to a family in an impoverished area of Guatemala helped me to understand more about the consequences of violence and its toll on the human spirit. 5. Helping a Guatemalan mother reinforced the importance of immigration among all ethnic groups and the struggle that it entails.

As social workers, recognizing the importance of family of origin issues is critical in practice. Understanding how transference and countertransference affect social work practice is also important. In addition, practicing self-care and not being overwhelmed by secondary trauma is an important element of practice.

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“Borrowed Light”: Reflecting on Learning to Be a Social Worker

Kielty Turner

Abstract: The recent death of my mother has made me think about what my mother, a writer and English professor, taught me about how to be a social worker. This paper includes excerpts from her writing, providing her insight to this reflection.

Keywords: women, caretaker, healer, social worker, mother, poetry

In the spring of 2012, my mother asked me why I had become a social worker. Having heard that people in my field are drawn to the work as a result of disruptions in our own families, she was trying to grasp what had led me to this helping profession. To be honest, her question surprised me in spite of the reality that my mother no longer understood many things due to the aggressive tumors growing in her brain. I answered too bluntly, “I needed to try to understand and learn to deal with our family.”

In this paper, I could focus on the very messy and public divorce which drove me to degrees and careers in both psychology and social work, as well as to several years of my own therapy. Instead, I will answer my mother’s question again with the strengths perspective that she shared with the profession of social work. My mother’s death in 2012 was the most powerful disruption in my very lucky life. I share in this paper some of what I learned from my mother, a loving writer and teacher, providing her poetry as her voice in this reflection. “Borrowed Light” is one of my mother’s collections of poetry. I have borrowed my mother’s light as I have developed as a social worker, learning to empower people by listening to their stories, through education, and by focusing on the positive aspects of life.

One quality of an excellent social worker is to start where the client is, valuing her stories, thoughts and feelings. My mother served as a model for this careful attention to the minute details of a person’s story. “Genealogy” is one of my favorite of her poems. I like to think of it as a monument to the everyday achievements of women, specifically the women in our family. As you read this poem, you can glimpse how my mother taught me to be a “people watcher,” paying attention to what matters to each individual. I base much of my work as a clinician and as an educator on the careful witnessing of a person’s unique story, aiming to be attuned to the specific values and traditions of my clients and students.

Genealogy by Karen Blomain (2005, pgs. 19-21):

How my great grandmother with her sharp needle
and even sharper tongue raised nine
children single-handed after himself was killed in
the mines.

How my great aunt Till baked for the whole town
and could stretch a Sunday
roast to feed her own and whoever else came
to her door in 1930, and many did
pretending to return the school marm’s
borrowed book or tool at dinner time.

How in cool October my grandmother opened
the trunk she’d brought from her New York life,
blue tapestry curtains pulled from high windows;
the next week the neighborhood was full
of kids in flocked snowsuits with braided
shoulders.

How Mary Clark, no real relation, but called
“Auntie”
by three generations, could smell the air in a
sickroom and know
what ailed a body and how to cure a sty by
rubbing it
with a nickel wrapped in a white hanky and three
Hail Marys,
how to plaster for croup and how to calm a horse.
How my cousin Al could sing and play a song
she’d heard only once.

How my Nana’s house smelled of apples and
fresh mint
and flowers burst from her fingertips and her
beds were high off the floor and her radiators
clanked all night
and when I felt sick she’d come each hour
into the room to turn the pillow’s cool side to my
face.

How Sister This or Sister That would leave the convent in the dark to ring the bell for the miners' early Mass to wake the town and clean and fill the candle trays. How even as a child my friend Betty could predict the weather three days in advance.

How my grandmother sold insurance door to door and liquor bonds when she was married and was forbidden to teach and smoked and chewed Jujubes and said the Rosary as she drove the car to each up-valley miner's bar. How she's never been in a plane before but flew into Italy alone during the war to keep her son from a hasty marriage.

How my Aunt Mary's hair turned white overnight When she was twenty-one, the day her brother was killed in a car wreck. And at eighty how she took the bus two hours and three transfers the fourteen miles each way each day for the six months it took her sister to die.

How our big house on Church Street bulged with four generations knitting, tatting, canning, crocheting, sewing, or embroidering any scrap of fabric, saving string through the Depression and three wars.

How we grew up lace curtain Irish: fruit in the house when no one's dead. How the kids next door brought cold potato sandwiches and a mason jar of water for their school lunch, but had five cents for the missions.

How my sister Lucie could make a stone laugh. How my daughter listens so hard with her whole body that she can make you understand yourself.

How somebody told me all of this, whatever I didn't see myself. So that I'd know what to do when my turn came. How I'd be the one to write it all down.

In "Genealogy," my mother portrays the roles of many of women not only in our family but in many families, such as the caretaker and the healer. She describes my role as the listener of the family and her's as the family writer.

For the better part of twenty years, I worked in the clinical practice of social work, mostly with kids who

were struggling with family disruptions of their own. Over time, I changed from needing to help directly to wanting to teach what I had learned. My mother was deeply committed to the value of education, particularly for women, as a vehicle to provide them with the tools to be independent. Barely out of high school, she was married at 17 years old. She had to juggle the responsibilities of mothering three children while earning a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees. As she was working on her degrees, my mother started teaching English and creative writing at the undergraduate level. She was deeply committed to bettering the lives of her students through her role as a faculty member. As a social work educator, I follow in my mother's footsteps, training my predominantly female students to develop the skills and qualities of excellent professionals. Students of social work usually come with scars that they (often unconsciously) aim to heal. My work has shifted from clinical work with clients to facilitating the work that my students need to do to be the best instrument to provide social work services. In her poem, "Soap Opera of the Mind: The Last Class," my mother too aims to do more than just teach English. She muses:

Even those who have taken the course because it is the only thing that didn't conflict with One Life to Live read my summary thoughts carefully, amazed by their growth, ready to admit that a writing class, not just any writing class, but this writing class, has changed their lives." (Blomain, 2009, p.73)

My mother was a profoundly grateful person. She would say "Lucky life" all of the time, even as she was betrayed by her own brain, the persistent tumors regenerating faster than the surgeons could remove them. She (and therefore I) believed that she was going to live to be 89. She visited a fortune teller at 45 years old who made this prediction, so she mistakenly thought that she was just halfway done with her life. When at 68 she realized that she would soon die, my mother said that she never wanted to grow old and be a burden to any one anyway. Her final words were ones of gratitude, "I am so happy to be home." The attitude of acceptance, even of dying, was a gift my mother gave to me. In "Halfway," she identifies her persistent sense of

having counted on her (lucky) stars. The poem also highlights my mother’s loving nature. Remembering the fortune teller’s prediction she wrote:

From “Halfway” By: Karen Blomain (1992, p.61)

Such luminance
we take on faith. And I think – halfway,
imagining the end of light:
the eyes of children, blurry
summer afternoons
the way love shines us, the stars,
without knowing it,
I must have counted on all along.

My mother published two novels, “A Trick of Light” and “The Season of Lost Children.” Her unfinished third novel in the trilogy was to be entitled “Glorious Untidy Life.” This title demonstrates how she approached life. She expected and hoped to have an “untidy life” and she glorified that life in her writing. Our family life was “untidy,” yet I was taught to exalt in the beauty of simple moments. This optimistic “glass is half full” attitude has infused my clinical and academic work. My approach to helping others has evolved throughout the years with a natural leaning toward humanism. I have developed my own spiritual practice, fueled by the fields of mindfulness and contemplative practices. I incorporate mindfulness in my work with students, encouraging them to develop acceptance of others and of themselves. My research interests are also impacted by this learned optimism, focusing on how to foster the development of empathy and self-compassion in clients and students.

This paper cannot include all of the ways that my mother formed who I am as a person and as a social worker. To sum up many of those qualities, I share the poem that was requested most often when my mother performed at poetry readings. This poem captures some of the light that I have borrowed from my mother, the keen observation of herself and others, the sense of humor, and most of all her loving nature. Reading this poem makes me glad, like always, that she was here first.

Old Broads by Karen Blomain (2009, p. 13):

Are everywhere
Even here, Turn around and look,
Yes you, look.
They are doing
The broad jump
The dirty flirty
Bump and if you can’t
Accept it – get lost. Old broads
Don’t care if you approve.
We’ve divorced
Ourselves from labels
Long ago. So
Keep your dirty looks
Your patronizing groans, your high
And mighty eye
Brows. If you don’t like our hair
What we wear,
That we wear on you in grocery lines
Taking too long to write a check
Pick A Melon. Too bad.
We don’t ruffle.
It’s our turn to take
Our Time
And when yours comes, little sister,
You’ll be glad like always
That
We
Were here
First.

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The Holocaust among Holocausts: A Child's Lessons Became the Teacher's

Kim Lorber

Abstract: The Holocaust is recognized globally as a genocide of remarkable cost in life and liberty. My story is that of the daughter of a child survivor, one who lived in 9 foster homes before coming to the United States with her mother and brother at the age of 11. The need to assimilate, learn new languages and simply survive had a traumatic impact my life as the first child of my mother at 22 years old, who did not have a *normal childhood* for me to replicate. She did her best and I did mine for her. I was a parentified child of someone who spoke openly about what her childhood was like. She gave endless responses to my ceaseless queries, like those of other children about the early years of their parents. My mother's suffering, and her mother's, plus the loss of too many relatives – murdered elders known only to me by name – left voids in my childhood. Childhood is idyllic in storybooks; it was not in mine, but my journey and challenges were to teach me to validate my own experiences even in the shadow of the horrific tales of my mother's. The professional help I sought helped me see the power of knowing oneself and developing boundaries. I knew as a traditional-aged undergraduate that I wanted to be a social worker; I wanted to help others and save the world. Life and a lack of clarity about the professional boundaries and skills I would be taught delayed my enrollment. Fifteen years later, I began the journey to earn my graduate social work degrees and am pleased to be a social work professor now. I share with my students my passion for social justice, woven into the curriculum they must learn. It which falls flat without their examples and my own, of what greatness and true evil can accomplish. I have found that my interests in the fields of HIV/AIDS and aging are natural channels for my passion to help and to make a difference when injustice is glaring. I will not be blinded by the audacity of inequity. I empower my students to see issues and consider how they can create social change to better circumstances for clients with whom they work, to whom they listen, and who become empowered because of their efforts. I channel my efforts inside and outside of the classroom to find equity for people with HIV/AIDS and for caregivers who often forfeit everything due to a system that denies the needs of the aged. Meanwhile we await the awakening of possible Ebola, Zika, or other pandemics in the shadow of the ongoing and devastating, inequitable AIDS tragedy. What have we learned? I am not sure. What have I learned? Everything and nothing. I am a social worker and social work educator because there is so much to do and so many students who want to make the journey to social justice for all.

Keywords: social work, Holocaust studies, genocide studies, counseling

I am the canvas of my life experiences, which have influenced the person I have become and my seemingly natural choice of social work as the profession I call home.

I am the child of a Holocaust survivor and my mother's story cannot be separated from my own, even with generational and experiential gaps in our respective journeys. Epstein (1979) presented a compilation of real life stories of the children of Holocaust survivors. This volume was groundbreaking and spoke to me and countless others, even though the details of our personal histories differed.

It is impossible for me to separate the "who" of my self from the lessons taught, intentionally or not, at the feet of my mother, and hers, amidst the aching

void of relatives who existed in name only.

My childhood, filled with family tales some parents might prevent their young children from knowing, led me on a path to fight for social justice. I was always campaigning for some wrong to be righted. I became a lifelong vegetarian and a natural helper to my elders, regardless of the difference in their backgrounds from that of my family.

I grew up in the shadow of demons I could not know, knowledgeable about genocide at an age when children should be marrying off their Barbie dolls. My family was very open and stories were shared; I retained what I could, while some stories stuck at a later age when retold, and I was ready to keep them.

I had a friend whose background made us similar,

although this discourse of the Holocaust did not yet exist between or among survivors and certainly not their offspring. But I understood her mother's broken heart and haunted eyes. I recognized her labor to seem *normal* and raise a proper middle class family when in reality it was she, like my mother, who was really living a life of 'make believe'.

I became the mother I wished my mother had. My knowledge of selfless parenting was non-existent, as my own parent was so young, and her childhood and maternal relationship were often tortuous. I wanted to make this up to her. Was I conscious of this dynamic? Not really. I was a parentified child long before I had ever heard the term. Yet, I tried and we cried, and my grandmother was filled with the litter of demons who had chased, raped, and stolen the life she might have had. She saved her children, lost her husband to the murder chambers of Auschwitz, and brought her family to the U.S. Eventually, I was born.

I applied to an MSW program immediately upon graduating with a degree in French literature. My mother is French, hence the obvious connection and my singular academic goal to spend my junior year in France, which I did. I also deferred my graduate school attendance for several years. My illogical plan ended that goal when I balanced the probability of maintaining my first house – bought at the age of 24 – while commuting to an all consuming job in New York City. The potential of attending that graduate school at that time was not logistically viable. And, in truth, being the keeper of secrets of many, and the kind ear and amateur counselor to too many, convinced me that 24-hour "helping" would not work. Fifteen years later, I had my epiphany. It was time, and to graduate school I went, with a commitment to become a therapist, focusing instead on research and practice within the AIDS and aging fields. I earned a doctorate degree to teach and nurture similarly inspired students.

When my social work epiphany hit, feedback was pretty consistent. In particular, one person said, "It's about time." The fit was good and my wishes to right the wrongs of society now had a seemingly limitless field of horrors to transform into dreams.

I now specialize in the fields of HIV/AIDS and aging, as the convener of the gerontology minor at

my college. My specific area of aging focus is on the needs of caregivers, the most compelling and inconceivable oversight of the inevitable, and the blind eye leaving families devastated by multiple layers of loss. This insidious, too often unavoidable circle, strangles families, causing systemic changes that cannot be overlooked. These devastating gaps in caregiver assistance remain ignored by the powers that can save those who have, do, and will suffer the impossible juggling of work, home, family, finances and finding time and resources in the absence of any such surplus. This is a national disaster, deliberately ignored as many holocausts have been in the history of the world and our current history, as witnesses document yet another unacceptable staple of our nation: what should be done by the *haves* for the *have nots*. Sadly, there are a plethora of circumstances like the HIV/AIDS epidemic and families in need of caregiving assistance, that divide our nation into those who are (un)worthy and (ir)responsible, or not. So many exist within the standards set by outsiders, unaffected, who do not recognize the damage caused. I dread another holocaust of any type.

Caregivers struggle on, sharing the terror and outsider/unworthy status of fellow citizens who do not know if they will be able to pay their bills and keep their home. Meanwhile, someone needs care that is only available from a family member whose other role(s) become challenged, compromised, and often irrevocably changed. Our nation ignored those initially, continually and globally stricken by HIV/AIDS. Perhaps the plight of caregivers in this country can be called a holocaust of sorts, too.

The Holocaust remains part of my life. The lessons learned and the suffering that survived became the most important legacy of my elders. Surely my essence would be the same, absent of the many first-hand tales of survival I painfully listened to, not knowing if it was okay to feel sad when the horrors were not my own. I believe the intensity of this childhood environment, and the innate urgency to stop the ills and suffering in the world were surely fanned by my upbringing.

I cherish examples from my life and continue to learn much from my peers. Elders in my building include Holocaust survivors with advanced Alzheimer's Disease who need protection, beyond the obvious. They are owed better pasts in their homelands with

families long since murdered. They remind me that my choice in profession was sparked by the nightmares of others, perhaps wrapped in seemingly *normal* lives with children and grandchildren, mean while encasing hurts that Freud might hesitate exploring. I became a social worker and ultimately a professor because I felt I could contribute more by igniting the passion of the social work profession in others, while sharing the knowledge base needed to become the best practitioner possible. Like others, I thought I could exponentially help more individuals and systems by providing tools to students, rather than to work directly with seekers of our services.

I love my mother, but this did not prevent the need for years of therapy to understand my own context, which could never measure up to my mother's suffering. Each plight I faced was dwarfed by any of hers. It was not a game of the dozens. This was an internalized experience of not knowing where my suffering began or if it mattered. We all suffer in some way and, hopefully, learn. My learning enticed me to gain the skills to help others as a licensed clinical social worker.

In 1991, the *Hidden Children Foundation* was established. This fledgling international organization sought to validate the experiences of survivors who had not been in concentration camps and instead had other perilous stories like my mother's and Anne Frank's. We attended the *First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II* and ran into old friends and neighbors whose histories had been vaguely shared, mostly about countries of origins, despite many hours and social events spent together. This was a stage of the coming out process for those who concealed their journeys of hiding to survive. An informal group began for the children of these survivors and I became the contact person for *second generation* individuals who wanted to know more. We eventually found a therapist of great talent and a similar background; a formal therapy group was started. Our therapist unveiled so much about the power of family dynamics and individuals' idiosyncrasies, relevant to genocide. I learned. We learned. I worked privately with this brilliant woman and I now love my mother better, understand her a little more, and still wish to protect her from everything far beyond my capability or reality, pre-dating my very birth.

My students experience my investment in outing and fighting institutional racism, genocide, global suffering, and the stories that should never be forgotten about the Holocaust and other holocausts, past and present. I connect the Ebola unknowns and AIDS pandemic to my students' typically sheltered suburban lives, and help them to become advocates and educators. This is life affirming for me; I feel I am contributing something of the suffering and murders of my grandfather and for his entire family. I also honor the memory of my cherished uncle, Guy, "who was born during one Holocaust and died during another," as my mother so eloquently told the National Public Radio (NPR) interviewer during one of the AIDS quilt displays on the Washington Mall. Meanwhile, I hid behind the Washington monument, choking from the confusion of too many thoughts and the flurry of words I might share if I were to be interviewed as well.

Stories prevail. Our family has journeyed to the archives of my mother's ancestors, in Germany, and the hiding place in France where she last lived with both parents. The kind people in this place, smaller than a hamlet, kept her father's papers, *la petite valise*, a lawyer's records of his efforts in three languages, to save his family. We have met people who knew him, my grandmother, and my mother when she was just a child of five or six, in one of her 9 foster families in a hiding place that was her *best* home for two years.

I bring this passion to my students and weave it into lessons inviting discussions about their similar family and first hand experiences. We discuss institutional and global racism about the *haves* and *have nots* and those who seemingly deserve to live and those who do not. After all, actions speak louder than words and we are consumers of statistics. HIV/AIDS is a subject about which I am passionate and, like many, limitlessly saddened. I teach a course about the global realities of this pandemic. How can 50% of AIDS cases be African Americans who only comprise 13% of the U.S. population? Similarly, why are the people of Africa dying of AIDS and Ebola while those in affluent nations benefit and thrive from relevant and available prevention, education, and treatment options? This holocaust is about social value, it might seem, or so it does to me. It again addresses who is worthy and who is expendable, as all genocides do. But this stage of death is preventable and I want my social work students to understand this by making

them teach others about what they learn. They come to understand their power and relish in their roles as educators, hopeful they will have enlightened and saved the futures of one or many who will, hopefully, pass their learning on and pay it forward. This is what I learned from my life as one of the *second generation*, as the child of a Holocaust survivor. This is why I do what I do.

In 1991, I wrote the following piece shortly before my epiphany to pursue that social work graduate school thing for real, having identified my place in the Holocaust history of my family.

Expression of Impressions

The exhaustion is a part of me. So familiar, like my own skin that I no longer remember can be cured of its blemishes. I wear it like the old sweater that was my mother's or his. . . or hers despite the fact that it is made of wool to which I am allergic.

Helpless inside, yet so helpful outside. How can I explain or excuse? Who would understand this huge step already taken in being able to recognize this much? Of even understanding and then recording it in words?

Exhaustion is different from fatigue. It is the scent of the exhumed legacy. It is the primal memory so loud and persistent even when my sense of logic deafens me to its agonized screaming. It is the undertow of my tears, memories I repress but couldn't remember if I tried, like a flavor I craved of something I've never tasted. How can it be?

Why do Jews number so few among my friends? Why are my Christian friends so understanding and supportive of this panic I'm finally acknowledging? Why am I but one of their many, many Jewish friends? Why is my Catholic friend from Brazil who suffered incredible political persecution and witnessed the resultant murders of so many friends, able to understand the intensity and importance of the legacy while my few Jewish friends cannot?

Last night I spoke with one of my old Jewish friends about my anxiety and about my mother's

even more intense version. About how I did not want to share this with her, to distract her from her own frightening, so-long postponed, acknowledgment. My friend said that it helps to feel validated in some area, that one can help another at least a little bit while in the midst of one's own helplessness. I said no. It isn't so. My legacy is to survive. My mother's experience and honorary title is that of SURVIVOR. To be able to squelch anything and everything else in order to live. In order to not die. Anxiety is nothing compared to the barking of dogs, the wailing of sirens, stumbling blindly in the night exhausted, hungry and terrified. No, she is so close to touching her own wound, I will not distract her with mine. My friend understood the distinction from her own American Jewish roots, but that was with her sincere intellect only.

It is not that I mean to exclude the survivors from the 2nd generation meetings. It is that I need to expose my sadness, my frustration and anger at having had such a dysfunctional upbringing. What is so hard about raising a child? I don't know, I have none. Why couldn't you spare me your terror? Why do I have to wear a scar for which I have no memory? I was brought up to respect my elders, to not contradict (well, I try anyway), and to support, even in my own panic and fear, those who lived through it all. I cannot talk freely and seemingly self-indulgently in front of you. As the Hidden Children are only coming to understand, their survival was at a painful price, valid after all even though they didn't die or face the camps, so I must allow myself to admit and mourn my own scars, thirty-three years denied. I want to hold each of you and hear your stories and absorb your tears. But I don't feel strong enough. . . yet. I want to become whole and step out of my pattern of helping at any cost to my own sanity and need. I need to be with my own, the "kids." I know it is somewhere in all of this tangle and honest strength from being so close to my bottomless, inconsolable core. But I feel weak, out of control, without patterned devices to distract or to continue functioning. It is the fear of the new perspective more than of the discovery itself. At least there is a relief, an answer, in the latter.

From this frightened perspective, things have an ominous new meaning. Perhaps it is as tainted as

the functional, strictly structured one I've surrendered to until now, but even in its extremeness there is some grain of truth. I live from the neck up. I use my mind and quick wits in order to know what is going on. . . always. My family had a dog while I was growing up. She was the sweetest, most insatiably affectionate being I've ever met, yet she was terrified of every noise and had bad dreams. The only honestly functioning dysfunctional member of the group. Funny, that. And despite my intellectual defenses that protect my body, which shelters my heart and its emotions, I am brilliantly functional even with my dysfunction. That is why it seems so ironic to me to have to cross over into the terrifying land of "lack-of-control" as I travel to the realm of my real self, my body and emotional memories.

It is in this nameless panic that I resemble my mother most. While I wish I better bore her

external, superficial features, I instead bear the crucial inner ones. I do not feel ashamed. I feel scared, afraid that they, who have always seemed so strong, may not conquer that mountain again. But maybe there is a greater sense of strength from the peace of knowing and completeness. Maybe I was only defensive and protective after all. . . of myself and my mother within me.

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A Coming Out Narrative: Discovering My Queer Voice, My Social Worker Superpower

George Turner

Abstract: This narrative offers my reflection as a gay social worker on coming out. I highlight my struggle to find, embrace and exercise my queer voice, as well as examine how my family of origin informed both this personal and professional journey. It is the embracing of these once perceived obstacles that have enriched my life, given meaning to my professional development as a social worker, and ultimately were adopted as my social worker superpowers. I begin by sharing my coming out story to provide a backdrop. Then, I explore how my own lived experiences and my family of origin helped co-author my professional narrative. I discuss how multiple factors had a hand in: a.) my decision to enter the profession of social work, b.) my choice of practice settings and served populations, c.) the theoretical perspectives that ground me, and d.) the importance of my role as an advocate. I end the narrative by outlining the contrast and similarities between my past and current practice. I hope that in considering the ways that this biographical disruption has significantly contributed to my identity as a teacher, practitioner, and scholar, readers might appreciate their own search for authenticity, and the lessons learned.

Keywords: coming out, LGBTQ, gay social worker, sexual shame, healing

Coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) is often associated with a major event in a person's life. Known as a biographical disruption, Bury (1982) refers to this as a redefining of one's original concept of self in the face of a new understanding often due to an interruption in a person's life story. For LGBTQ social workers, the act of coming out – particularly the reactions of the family of origin leading up to, during and afterwards – can inform, impact and influence their professional identity.

My own journey had collected a concert of damning recordings in play for as long as I can remember. Messages of “you are sinful,” “you have little value,” “you are flawed or damaged goods,” “you are bad,” and “you are not a real man” were as much a part of my self-concept as the color of my hair. But, where did this self-deprecation start? More importantly, how did a voice filled with pride emerge from this trauma? How did the journey through these landmines shape my professional career? These are some of the questions that I explore in this paper.

My story illuminates a life that deviated from familial and societal expectations by challenging my parents' views on education, gender roles, heteronormativity, and sexuality. By sharing my narrative, I own my story and the power to tell it. As an author, I bring legitimacy to my narrative and its

use in making sense of the relationships that I have with the various stakeholders. Through storytelling, I engage in “... a dynamic process of incremental refinement of [my] stories of new events as well as on-going interpretations of culturally sacred story lines” (Czarniawska, 2014, p.38). This is not my first time telling this particular story, but it is the first time that I am sharing it as a scholarly endeavor.

This is a re-creation of my experience, polished and presented. Like most stories, mine is a work in progress. I employ a post-modern lens in that my story is not a pursuit of one truth. It is my truth, but like every story, there are untold, minimized, and exaggerated elements. This is not done to mislead the reader, but it is an acknowledgment that storytelling can be likened to a fun-house of mirrors under constant remodeling. Like most storytellers, I often position myself in a favorable light; I spice up my recollections with specific anecdotes to fit my audience; I filter nuances of my memory through the ever-changing present “me.” I tailor messages for consumption; I trim and edit as dictated by outside rules or boundaries. These are the ingredients of storytelling. Thus, this reflection is a creation of a new version of my story. It is a co-created enterprise with you. It is my search for wholeness. It is my realization of an authentic life.

Coming Out: A Revolutionary Act of Defiance And Healing

In reflecting on my coming out story, I recall pivotal moments that informed my choice to become a social worker. They are the brick pavers on my road to graduate school. These once painful and challenging moments have shaped me into the social worker that I am. What follows are some of the many life moments that moved me closer to choosing social work.

Challenging My Sexual Shame

I learned to recognize the power of words early in my childhood. “Sissy!” “Queer!” “Pussy!” “Faggot!” Even today, these schoolyard tools of domination slice through me like jagged broken glass. Furthermore, they provide the foundation for my narrative, a historical landmark for why I have chosen the profession of social work. And, while I could easily skate on the surface of my past or the incredibly warm, stable and good aspects of my youth (and there were many), they are not alone in the formation of me. My story has a past steeped in shame, guilt and darkness. My journey to me, my journey to help others is one of finding my own queer voice, the acceptance of my sexuality, and the beauty of who we all are as sexual people.

Combating Heteronormativity

This expedition to discover one’s sexuality is a common story filled with developmental milestones. I remember very clearly, at a young age, thinking that Tarzan was gorgeous. Sitting there on our living room floor with my brother, Tom, and my dad in his black, duct taped-worn, Lazy-Boy recliner, I knew not to share those feelings. When does a child learn to hide their truth? How do we as caring adults contribute to this inauthenticity?

Combating Binary Gender Role Expectations

I never felt at home in a masculine skin. The script conferred upon me called for being rough, independent, non-expressive, and valuing-thinking over feeling. Seemingly, it was everything I was not. And more disturbing, it vehemently demanded that I abandon those supposedly feminine characteristics that were more natural to me, i.e., listening,

creativity, sensitivity, reflexivity, and caring. I was lost between two worlds: not feeling at home with the masculine script and not allowed to own my feminine strengths. It is the pursuit of this feminine energy, the integration of this half of me, that I have embraced as my way of living wholeheartedly (Brown, 2012).

I was young when I realized that I was different, but I had no words to describe this awareness. The things I liked, the ways in which I acted, the thoughts I had, the feelings I experienced – jumping rope, reading, giggling with the girls – all were not appropriate for little boys. Of course appropriate was pre-determined by my culture, my family, my neighborhood, and the environment in which I was immersed. All of these influences had expectations of how a little boy should behave, and they provided subtle and not so subtle clues about how I should follow those gender role norms.

One particular example I remember vividly was a Christmas of secrets. As tradition dictated, my younger brother, Tom, and I had for weeks gleefully searched all the department store catalogues: JC Penny, Sears, and Montgomery Wards, and dutifully circled our most prized wish list items. We updated, edited, and ranked these items nightly after dinner, practically drooling at the visual stimulation. What I wanted more than any other gift was a head and shoulder Barbie hair model. I believe it came with a mini-brush and comb, but what sticks in my memory was that Barbie had this long, silky, blond hair. And, like a Siren from Greek mythology, Barbie swooned me from the glossy pages of every catalogue.

This sense of wondering why I liked girl things and, if I was gay, highlighted by denial and internal turmoil, is known as “identity confusion” and is the first step in the gay and lesbian identity model (Cass, 1979). At some level, I knew that this was a wrong Christmas present, but I wanted her. I persisted, circling Barbie with a big red line each and every night. The bold red marks screamed (because I could not) like a fire alarm from the page, “I am queer!” Then it happened. My mother took me aside and calmly and quietly told me, “Santa may not be able to bring you everything on your list.” Who was she kidding? This wasn’t my first Christmas. I knew the ropes: make sure that your must-haves were known by everyone – most easily through bright red markers – and ask for plenty of fillers to ensure a great haul. But then, Mom got

serious. “Santa might not bring Barbies to little boys.” Who was this woman? I did not know her. Something had possessed my mother; it was as if a mad scientist had invaded her normally nurturing disposition. I was devastated. As this invader obliterated my hopes for a Barbie, it was as if its real target was to methodically cut away the unnatural, unholy part, feminine part of my being. Message received: hide this side of yourself. I periodically got to glance at this monster in others. Without question, they all followed its bidding. It had an evil plot, a social curriculum on how to be a boy. The onslaught was merciless. Lessons had to be learned. And, it was delivered by the hands of well-meaning, loving people in my life.

That Christmas, though I ripped wrapping paper with excitement, I was a bit less excited knowing that Barbie was not going to be a part of the booty that year. The Christmas secret happened very subtly after the floor was littered with rainbows of colored paper. Mom snuck behind the tree when no one else was looking and brought me a little box. She whispered to me, “Santa wanted you to have this.” Then with a pause she added, “but he doesn’t want you to tell your dad.” And with that, I found a full body doll with long blond hair. It wasn’t Barbie and I knew it was a cheap knock-off doll from our local dime store, but somehow I felt loved. I was seen. I was heard. My truth was acknowledged, in secret and only in part, but that was good enough at the moment.

Protecting the Child with No Voice

I grew up avoiding the other boys and I didn’t like sports. They inevitably wanted to argue and fight in some archaic ritual of sizing each other up. It was as if they could inherently sense my weakness. I recall running home every day after school, away from Frank and Scotty (names changed). I felt alone during those grade school fights, then later it was the name-calling on the bus and the verbal harassment in high school. I knew at some level that I could not share my terror with anyone. Beyond the fear of physical danger every day was the trauma of feeling abandoned. I would ask, “Why?” but I knew why. I knew at a gut level that boys were supposed to fight. I knew that I had no desire to fight and I knew I was broken, wrong and weak. I was like a girl. Thinking now, I wonder, *Where was the school? Where were*

my parents? Who was protecting me? At some level I believed that I did not deserve protection. Where and when did I learn that I was unworthy?

A child expects to be protected by adults. I had good people in my life, but why didn’t they know about this abuse? Why weren’t they there for me? I have to believe that they just didn’t know. This is why I went into social work, and why I teach new social workers now: to help, to heal and to inform. For that small child was me and every other child, I chose social work so that all kids will know that adults care and will protect them.

Helping Youth Become Sexually Literate

Schools changed through the years. The bullying got more sophisticated, but I still felt alone. I learned to associate my femininity and sexual orientation as one and the same. I saw myself as immoral, sick and inferior. My emotionality, effeminate behaviors ...these parts of me were viewed as liabilities to be managed. I believe this guilt and shame was the foundation for me becoming sexually active with girls. This was a violent attack on myself: that inner voice, the self-loathing script, reminded me that I was not a real man. I was not human. I was not valued. It was this self-hatred, that demanded, that I “fuck away the faggot” in me! Using those girls, my friends, became a warped manipulative game that I still count as one of my most shameful acts. I feel such anger at a school system that helped create a boy who felt the need to prove his masculinity. I’m grateful that there were no pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), because I sure wasn’t informed enough to buy contraceptives.

Seeds of Social Justice

It wasn’t until my Junior-Senior year, that I met Lee, the first person that I was able to come out to as gay. We became friends and lovers and like the Velveteen Rabbit, I became real. For the first time in my life, someone knew I was gay. Lee saw me, and he loved me. I felt alive. I felt like I knew me.

That whirlwind summer was my coming out party, a first step to integrating my gay identity, or the acceptance stage according to Cass (1979). During the summer after graduating high school, I met Matt. With his dark complexion, punk-rock hair that must have

stood 12” straight-up, and soft-spoken voice, he was a rock star. Unknowingly, it was Matt who planted the spirit of social justice in my life. He nudged me into my quest to become a social worker and more specifically a sexuality expert. Matt was one of the many queer kids who hung out at “The Mall,” the nickname we gave the Liberty Memorial, a park in Kansas City known for gay men cruising for sex. It’s a sad commentary that the only place LGBTQ teens could socialize with other queer youth was in close proximity to adult sexual activity. One night, Matt was missing. I learned that his mother had placed him in a psychiatric ward for being gay. I was floored with disbelief. Could parents really condemn their kids to this kind of punishment? Could mine? When Matt returned I couldn’t believe my eyes. Matt, with slurred speech and an obvious stagger, shared with a wink, “I’m no longer gay!” He recounted his stay in the hospital, detailing the medications and reparative therapy treatment. A sense of helplessness settled over me as I realized that could be me. Matt never seemed the same. Horrified at the game he had to play to earn his release, I was infuriated that the abuse was never going to end for him or me. But, I was scared too. I vowed then to learn as much as I could about being gay. I needed to become an expert on sexuality. I needed to protect myself. I pledged to stop this vicious onslaught of abuse disguised in misinformation, myths, and blatant ignorance. I don’t know whatever happened to Matt, but the seeds of gay rights advocacy were sown there. I acknowledge him and his tragedy at the hands of the mental health system for sparking my interest in social justice and zeal for positive sex education.

Balanced, Authentic, Me

In retrospect, I could have easily become a statistic and dropped out of high school to avoid the physical harassment. Or during the summer after graduation, surrounded by the lost boys and girls at the Mall, I could have turned to the easily available drugs and alcohol to numb the emotional wounds. Likewise, I could have sought out the pseudo comfort and validation of sex from the men trolling the park. Instead, it was a bad breakup from my first boyfriend, Eddie, which led me to escape. I ran away by enrolling in a college in Ohio, the first in my family to go to college. There I met Lisa, the first person who was introduced to me knowing that I

was gay. Lisa saw the real me and most importantly, she accepted me. She was my anchor, a life-long friend who also became a social worker, a sex therapist and my business partner. My academic career was launched.

My introduction to Lisa was in stark contrast to an earlier coming-out attempt. I had come out to my friend after high school, a person who I had known since 1st grade, and she never talked to me again. I think this had something to do with why I didn’t disclose my sexual orientation to my family until I was in my 30s. I was out in all other aspects of my life and I remember telling my family that I was tired of only being able to talk about the weather. I had systematically edited out anything from my life that could be linked to gay. So dating, vacations, political views, TV shows, research projects, awards, professional goals... it was all off limits. By coming out, I allowed my family to know me. I allowed them to struggle, to grow, to re-tell their narrative of me. It also allowed me to begin the process of integrating my life into one voice; one balanced, authentic me.

Helping Men Live Wholeheartedly

I now feel a sense of pride and ownership of my feminine energy and use it in my work with people. It has become a source of strength that allows me to facilitate people’s healing. This was not always the case. Why are boys taught to ignore their emotions? I was more anxious with male bravado, physicality, and competitiveness. I was much more comfortable with girls. I enjoyed the sharing of emotions, quiet reflection, and social support. It felt like home to me.

For years, heterosexual men scared me. The mere thought of an all-heterosexual, male environment sent shivers down my spine, partly because I don’t know the rules of engagement. The rules I do know, I don’t like or don’t follow well. I often heard the bullying behavior shrugged off with a well-rehearsed recording of “boys will be boys.” What does that mean... emotionally disconnected, violent? That’s what we want for our boys? We violate our boys by denying them of their feminine energy, and not encouraging relationship skills like communication, listening, empathy, and romance – and then wonder why they fail in healthy relationships. Because we are afraid of seeing these female characteristics in males (because they might be gay!), we view them as weak, defective,

and undesirable. Thus with the precision of a surgeon we socially castrate an innate part of our boys, tossing it away like garbage, leaving them disingenuous, incomplete, and often lost as men. In some ways, I'm lucky. A gay man is expected to gravitate toward the feminine. But, the straight man is made to shed that side of his wholeness.

My Decision to Enter the Profession of Social Work

I began working in the field of intellectual disabilities while studying for my undergraduate degree in psychology. There I came across my clients, adults with developmental disabilities, who were seemingly so different from me; their physical limitations and cognitive challenges kept them a world away from me. But I came to quickly see that we had much in common. They, like me, were often seen as either asexual or sexually deviant, something to be controlled and pitied; their true sexual selves were often overlooked and discounted. Through the loving ignorance of well-meaning adults, these people, because of their sexual illiteracy, were continually placed in harm's way. I quickly noted the rampant infantilism perpetrated in the name of safety. In addition, it seemed that there was a cauldron of agendas dictated by the staff du jour. Clients, who were promised self-determination, were not allowed to develop a sexual voice or have it respected (Turner, 2012).

I was initially drawn to the discipline of social work because it provided me a means to an end: becoming a psychotherapist with a clinical license. It was not until later that I appreciated the fit. Social work embodied core values with which I could easily align: service to disenfranchised groups, advocacy for marginalized communities, social justice around oppression; it was the feminine energy of social work that really spoke to me. It embraced the very thing that I loathed for so long – my caring and empathetic nature, my listening skills, my sense of community, connectivity, and relationship. This was my natural voice.

My Choice of Setting and Populations Served

As a practitioner, the issues that have been most central to me have been sexual rights. The influence of my family of origin can easily be seen in this

professional practice choice. Simply, sex was never talked about in my family. Aside from the jokes and sexual innuendos volleyed around at family gatherings, sex education was non-existent and rested on a bedrock of myths and shame.

Two pivotal moments are branded in my memory. I use to joke with my mother, that one of the reasons that I went into sex education was the dismal quality of the sexuality education I received during my youth. Given that my mother and I never spoke about sex, she was easily embarrassed when I was speaking to groups and credited her as my reason to venturing into sexuality education. The first memory is of my mom, who I'm sure had the best of intentions, leaving a sex ed pamphlet on my pillow. I recall being mortified of it being in my room. Somehow it magnified my own shame. Sexuality education had never seen the light of day in my family. But now, not only had it been spoken by the placement of that pamphlet on my pillow, but it had cast a spotlight on me and my sexuality.

The second memory is from fourth grade when I was herded off with the other boys from 5th and 6th grade to a room with Mr. Jackson. There, a film highlighted male puberty. Glaringly missing was any mention of the female anatomy; like the girls in my class, it was absent from the room. I noted that the girls had absconded to a private room with Mrs. Rivers. They later erupted with notable excitement and a sisterly bond. Most annoying was that they had secrets, and they were not sharing. As the identified sissy in my class, all my friends were girls. Girls were told to exclude me (and the other boys) from the contents of their meeting. Thus, my outsider status was highlighted once again. I left our gendered experience embarrassed by the locker room camaraderie of my male counterparts, and abandoned by the girls. Besides, I wanted to know what the girls knew that I didn't.

Theoretical Perspectives That Ground Me

I rely on the Bowenian family systems perspective and the differentiation of self in my clinical work, as well as the strength perspective (Poulin, 2010). Integrating client resilience and their resources is a focus on my strengths-based practice. Early as a social worker, I consumed every book, workshop, and resource available in an effort to concoct a cookbook of

helping. I needed to know there was a recipe within arm's reach in the event a client presented a problem I could not fix. Still uncomfortable with my feminine energy, I grasped for certainty in science (masculine energy), resisting the more artful navigation and uncertainty of relationships (feminine energy). I have evolved to understand that it is not enough to rely on knowledge and skill in the helping relationship; the heart of helping is eliciting genuine human caring, compassion, and connection. Narrative therapy values bringing our full humanness to the client-helper journey, believing this transparency with clients facilitates change and growth (Freedman & Combs, 1996). I strive to bring a more authentic representation of myself to the helping relationship. Fickey and Grimm (1998) not only encourage a more honest sharing of self, but add that there are few risks of this self-disclosure that cannot be addressed through professional boundaries and supervision.

My Role as an Advocate

While my professional career has largely focused on micro-level practice, I like to highlight for my students how social workers often traverse between micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level practice. Often my first advocacy efforts are educating fellow social workers that sexual justice is more than reproductive choice. As important as this area is, the umbrella of sexual justice includes an array of diverse topics including but not limited to: increasing access to sexual health care; reducing LGBTQ health disparities; combating school bullying; fighting for trans-inclusivity; continuing the fight for marriage equality and gay adoption laws; providing comprehensive, medically accurate and shame free sexuality education; calling for representation of marginalized sexualities in the media; normalizing breastfeeding; eliminating rape culture; legitimizing sexuality pleasure; reducing sexuality negativity; and expanding overall sexual literacy. Sexuality is a social justice issue. It can be challenging for even social workers to connect social justice and sexual justice.

I showcase to my practice class how social workers navigate along the continuum of practice by sharing a story of when I engaged with state lawmakers around a policy that did not allow the word "sex" on a Missouri license plate. I use this story as an

example of macro social work in my practice class to demonstrate for students how social workers often ground their advocacy, tying it to larger policy implications and to social justice. The World Association for Sexual Health's Declaration of Sexual Rights (WAS; 2014), states, "Sexual rights are grounded in universal human rights" (p. 1). I further ground the discussion within current events to demonstrate that sexual justice is social justice. As a social worker, I know that sex negativity can often be used to fuel oppression, leading to the silencing of sexuality around breastfeeding mothers (Burns, 2013), survivors of sexual trauma (Adler, 2013), and even social work dissertations (Hayoun, 2015). I work to eliminate toxic messages and repressive policies that ban positive sexuality education and knowledge to the shadows. Silencing sexuality creates an environment ripe for sexism, misogyny, homophobia, trans-violence, and sexual misuse. My sexuality advocacy acknowledges sexuality as a human right and strives to illuminate communities beyond the sexual dysfunction, disease, and disaster model (McGee, 2003).

The license plate policy as it stood was vague, biased, non-representative and sex negative. Furthermore, I argued that the policy contributes to a culture of sexual shame, keeping people, specifically my clients, from seeking sexual health care. I could have easily become frustrated with the state's bureaucratic process. I connect that to how social workers are called to change oppressive systems. My privilege allowed me to accept the invitation to present my case in our state capital. However, I was intimidated. Again, I challenge students to see this as an example of how one person can make a change. I highlight that my training as a social worker prepared me to support my arguments through research. We process what makes advocacy effective. Students appreciate my speaking first-hand about my attempts to normalize sexuality, to advocate for sexual health care and to give voice to my clients' struggles around sexuality. By sharing this story from my own life, I made advocacy tangible, social policy meaningful, and social justice real.

I begin my story in 2014, when I won a one and a half-year battle with the State of Missouri over a personalized license plate. My petition was rejected in 2013, for a personalized plate, SEX DOC, on the basis that the word "sex" was "obscene and patently offensive." After several failed attempts to appeal by

phone and letter, in January 2014 I argued my case in the state capital, Jefferson City.

The commission reviewing applications had no guidelines to make these decisions, but unilaterally rejected all applications with the word “sex.” By advocating for a governmental body to not contribute to the stigmatizing problems related to sexual health and to not make policy based on personal, sex negative views, is social justice work. For me, this became about reclaiming the dialogue from one of sexual shame to sexual literacy. Putting SEX DOC out there is a way to help people start a conversation. Too often, others are trying to silence conversations on sexuality. My clients suffer from this shaming and I didn’t think the state of Missouri had any place in perpetuating this kind of psychological harm.

One of the two attorneys for the state asked, “how do you explain that to a five-year old?” As a sexuality educator, I saw this as a great opportunity to expand the conversation into real and practical applications. I gently tried to show the attorney how that could be a teachable moment, one where he as the parent could pass along his own views and values about sexuality. I think he, like many parents, was scared and not sure how he would approach a potentially uncomfortable topic with his child. So I shared the book “It’s Perfectly Normal,” (Harris, 2009) which is a phenomenal sex-ed tool for families. In some ways, this felt like another day at the office; providing sexually accurate information so that parents can raise sexually literate children. Most parents want what is best for their children and most want better sex-ed than they had. They just don’t have the comfort or skills. That’s where I often come into the picture to help parents craft a message and plan for talking with their kids.

One of the attorney’s stated, “There’s a lot of questions out there, when you put the word ‘sex’ out there in public... That’s really the gist of it and why we denied it.” Addressing this concern, I responded, “The word sex is already out in public.” I believe his statements were based on fear and that he saw this as a personal duty to protect children, his children. It also echoed a common myth about sexuality education: that it is one big conversation about reproduction at some ambiguous age when the youth is old enough. However, censoring my license plate

because of your discomfort with sexuality is akin to putting your head in the sand. I empathized with the attorney, sharing his concern for providing a safe community for children, but also expressed my belief that ignorance is not an effective strategy. Thus, it should not be the basis of public policy.

Contrast and Similarities of My Past and Current Practice

I am a licensed clinical social worker and certified sex therapist (American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists) with over 20 years of practice experience. I have an active private practice specializing in sexual health, where I provide sex therapy. I work with couples and individuals on a variety of sexuality issues, including painful intercourse, erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, coming out, infertility, infidelity, fantasy negotiations, and body image, to name a few. My own sex education and sexual shame are clearly instrumental in directing my clinical specialty.

Clinical

During the early years of my practice, despite the research that acknowledges that self-disclosure of a helper to clients can be useful (Frost, 1998), I was less differentiated and hiding my gay identity was very much on the agenda. Additionally, I desperately desired to be perfect – to have all the answers. This was a direct result of my own internalized homophobia. Perfection had long been my strategy to counter my own sense of inferiority. Perfection is the illusion of control, and control often seemed like power. I desperately sought power during times of uncertainty and fear. And nothing unleashed those demons of anxiety like a straight, blue collar, hyper-masculine, male client. This was my kryptonite. Also, I recognize that I can have strong reactions to characteristics or values that I associate with lower socio-economic communities. They can provoke strong emotions within me. At warp speed, my childhood can flood my present, washing over me the memories of that rural, impoverished community along the Missouri River where I spent my formative years. These embodied responses are sewn into the fabric of my professional identity. They can be a source of pain, but they can also be a light to profound social work.

When (and I am humbly aware that this is a conscious deliberate action, not one that is organic for me), but when I allow my whole self, including my queer self, to join the therapeutic process, then I am more present and more effective in facilitating growth. Constantly judging where to hide the gay stuff is a distraction. It spurs into action a fight-or-flight reaction. Without the distraction of my own stuff in the way, I am able to join clients in an intimate relationship of healing. This vulnerability is powerful and being able to model it for clients is my social work superpower. That doesn't mean I always get it right, but I have gotten better at getting back to center when I veer off my truth. As I practice my truth, a sort of queasiness gurgles in my body now, when disingenuousness creeps into my voice. It is my call to bring balance back into the interactions with my clients. I continue to hone the skill of listening to my voice, not the distortions. Calling upon my queer voice, a balance of the masculine and feminine energy, to nurture the relationship with my clients, is good social work. This is fundamental about intimacy: a willingness to be known by others, to take a risk and to be vulnerable.

How is my practice different now? I focus less on using a therapeutic technique or the notion that it is my job to lead my clients to a cure. I understand better the concept of use of self (Dewane, 2006) and feel freer to harness the power within this social work tool. By bringing my authentic whole self, I am more present. I am more relaxed. I allow myself to be flawed. I do not need to hide behind professional boundaries and can utilize self-disclosure as a powerful healing tool. When I move from intellectualizing (masculine energy) towards wholeheartedness, I acknowledge and embrace my feminine energy. I feel more connected to my clients. I often feel raw and struggle to stay in this place of vulnerability. My client and I can mutually search to identify challenges and strengths without expecting me to have all the answers. We are both mutually responsible for the journey. Keep in mind that remnants of some ill-founded sense of professionalism (masculine energy) will often whisper to me during my work. Like a school-yard bully, it scours the recesses of my insecurities, wielding them like a bat to taunt me. Old self-doubt can give rise to an army of voices chastising me with, "Don't get too close," "Helpers never self-disclose," and "You must have all the answers."

Teaching

I teach a large undergraduate course in human sexuality. It is here that I believe a more balanced, authentic queer voice impacts my teaching in a unique way. I bring my entire self into the room, including my gay self. Others have discussed coming out as a teaching tool and its benefits for students (Gates, 2011; Newman, Bogo & Daley, 2008; Satterly & Dyson, 1998). I come out to my class officially during the seventh week—the LGBTQ lecture. Despite the fact that this is but one class during the semester, I believe that I trigger a reaction in many of my students. For some, my coming out is seen as a negative. This is often heard in comments on student evaluations stating that I am "pushing a homosexual agenda." These students wrestle with the idea of an out professor and that manifests in a variety of ways, including that any attempt at a balanced representation is viewed as a "gay agenda." This distortion is easily understood in that most students have been socialized in a heteronormative educational setting, shielded from diverse points of view and any acknowledgment of people who are LGBTQ. For other students, my transparency is welcomed. In every class, I have had students who are themselves struggling with coming out, approach me tearfully to say, "thank you." I'd like to think that my honesty and genuineness has made a difference in their lives.

And it isn't just gay kids that resonate with me bringing a more authentic voice to my teaching. Inevitably, I have students struggling with sexual dysfunction, shame, and insecurity who approach me and express gratitude for the sharing of sexual knowledge. Last semester, a female approached me after class as I was preparing to leave the lecture hall. I was erasing the whiteboard, my back to her, and I heard her voice drop and I knew that it was coming. I put down my eraser, turned around and leaned in. She barely got two words out and the tears began to roll down her cheek. She said that she had thought that she was broken. She and her husband had been trying to become pregnant and they had failed. She indicated that they were unaware that penetrative intercourse was needed. Another young woman embarrassingly confessed that after our last lecture she had apologized to her boyfriend for sexually shaming him. Both students share some version of their own search, a journey to wholeness. I believe that it is my choice to live authentically, bringing my queer voice into the

classroom, that has spurred those students' journeys.

In my social work practice classes, I bring this awareness of a balanced, sex-positive, feminine/masculine voice to my students. I try to help them discover their full voice. I've noted how receptive students are to this approach, particularly the male social work students. They often acknowledge their own struggles to find a fit in a predominantly female profession. So we explore how males can reclaim their feminine voice. I also draw connections for my students to the messiness of social work. Using the vitriol verbiage of the school-yard bullying I endured, I ask students to wrestle with their discomfort with swear words. This is often the vehicle for clients to express themselves. Will we connect or become offended by their choice of words, annoyed in their inability to speak proper English, lost in their loudness, impatient with their silence, or afraid of their difference? Additionally, I share that social workers are often invited to witness a client's pain and it is often ugly. A client sharing, "I felt that I had to fuck the faggot out of me," as I had as a teen, is being vulnerable, not intentionally inappropriate. Clients can share horrendous accounts of self-hatred, abuse, trauma, and woundedness. It can be scary for us as professionals and may trigger our own traumatic memories. Pain can look like anger, fear, violence, and a host of other uncomfortable expressions. As social workers, we learn to manage our own anxiety as we sit in a space of our client's pain. I hope to prepare new social workers to look beyond a client's outbursts and to see the client, hear their voice and honor their story.

Often I attempt to facilitate a discussion-based learning environment to build students' critical thinking skills, and to help them shape well-structured views. I recognize that the power imbalance between me and my students is always in play. Instead I choose the benefits that being my authentic self brings to the learning environment over the façade that I am maintaining some sort of blank slate for learning to organically unfold. Interjecting myself into the classroom is a huge responsibility.

Scholarship

I have what some have labeled a saucy vocabulary. My dad was an over-the-road, truck driver, and my

uncle was a Methodist minister, so I'm sure that there are some family genetics for the passionate weaving of moral messages within colorful truck-stop tall tales. It is my voice, and as a social worker, it is one of my gifts that facilitates rapport building.

As a qualitative researcher, I am a storyteller. In the pursuit of others' stories, I seek to discover or facilitate marginalized voices in my research. It is here that I honor the saucy vocabulary of others, their dictionary, and the importance of not sanitizing voices. Voices can be vulgar, insensitive, angry, uneducated, and hurt. My goal is to elicit the authentic voice of others and I have come to embrace that it is through my own authentic queer voice, a voice that affirms both the feminine and masculine within, a holistic energy that brings me closest to that goal.

The addition to my professional identity as a researcher brings me back to old scripts, messages that somehow discount my gifts as a clinician (feminine energy) in favor of more scientific and valid academic pursuits (masculine energy). Even my choice of qualitative research over quantitative methods may be viewed with a sense of sexist devaluing. Yet, my scholarship focuses on voice and it feels like home to me. My research is grounded in a feminist and emancipatory paradigm, guided by an interest in how systems of privilege impact the intersection of race, class, ability, gender, and sexual orientation. Through an exploration of voice, my goal is to illuminate the lived experiences of disenfranchised groups and to expose meaning where little or none existed.

My dissertation research (Turner, 2012) and current scholarship draws upon my own search for voice as I attempt to illuminate the experiences of adults with intellectual disability and a sexual voice, (Turner & Crane, 2016, in press). The importance of sexuality within my professional development as a social worker also informs a line of scholarly inquiry exploring how social work can solidify sexuality as a substantive sub-field. My line of research inquiry will continue to explore the normalization of sexual pleasure (Turner & Crane, 2016) and illuminating voice. Both are easily traced to my own personal narrative and the influence of my family of origin.

Conclusion

Implications from this narrative include using

qualitative research to: a.) identify how marginalized communities and individuals find their authentic voices and cross-analyze for common themes, b.) illuminate the factors that contribute to a gay child or gender non-confirming child feeling like they are accepted and celebrated as part of the family, c.) explore why men do or do not feel welcomed into a female-dominated profession such as social work, and finally d.) highlight the landscape of questioning youth as part of childhood identity development.

As a social worker, I have come to value my disrupted biography as a clinical tool and inspiration for my scholarship. In the re-telling of your story, you exercise your voice; you claim your power; you claim your authentic self. My objective was to share my story, “the long-lived narrative” in an attempt to sift through the “sediments of norms and practices” (Czarniawka, 2014, p 45). It is this process of illuminating the stories of clients and listening to their unheard voices that has inspired me to become a social worker. In searching to honor the voices of others, I recognize that I must be vigilant to honor my own. It is my own search for wholeness that allows me to be of use to my clients. Stepping out of the lie, a life that was only half-fulfilled, a life that was fraudulent, I abandon a cultural norm that socialized boys (and girls too) to be incomplete, to embrace only half of their humanity. By tapping into my own journey, I tap into my own social work superpower. The search for authenticity is a universal theme. It is the commonality shared with my clients. In searching to reach my full human potential to capture my queer voice, I can be a guide. My queer voice allows me to be fully recognized; it recognizes the richness of my human potential. That is why I am social worker. I lay claim to my queer voice. And, while I sometimes am fearful of being whole, both masculine and feminine, and I sometimes quiet my queer voice out of shame or I over-correct and try to butch it up, I honor my voice today and share it with you.

I’m still a work in process. Ironically, sitting here on National Coming Out Day, October 11, penning this manuscript, it dawns on me that my internalized homophobia continues to bully me. Doubt hides in my shadows, whispering into a frenzy the taunts of my childhood. With the ease of an unwelcomed house guest, my shame-demons cozy right up to my self-esteem. They casually urge me to weigh the

potential risks of coming out in academia. My old nemesis, self-hatred, who was never fully banished, but had only slunk to the depths of my psyche, leaps to the opportunity to criticize me, asking insidiously, “What will be unleashed if your story becomes known? Consider the consequences!” and “Faggot, you don’t matter!” It happens so organically that I often don’t note its presence. Yet, today, I elude their assault. Today I am strong. Today, I share my authentic self—a queer, male, social worker. Today they fail to silence me. Today my social worker superpower, my queer voice, is victorious!

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Pain and Joy in School: Reflections on Becoming a Social Worker

Judy D. Berglund

Abstract: This article is an account of family-of-origin issues regarding sexual abuse and sexual assault experienced by the author in her childhood. The article relates her practice of school social work and reflects on her own experiences in school. The story begins with her first job after graduate school in the 1980s. All names have been changed to protect identities.

Keywords: childhood sexual abuse, school social work, flashback memories

When I arrived at the elementary school and found the message waiting in my mailbox, I was a little mad at myself for not arriving earlier. Each school I worked at was at least twenty miles apart and I lived another thirty miles from the closest one. I had found that school social workers were not always accepted by teachers and other school staff because we were never at the school when they had free time. Since I was only at this school one day a week, I had to talk to this teacher that day. And I had to interrupt her classroom in order to do it.

Walking up the wide staircase to the second floor classrooms, I was nervous. I was a shy person and I already learned that teachers planned every minute of their day. I wasn't excited about having to interrupt her. The school building was old and huge, with big oak stairs and railings, and heavy oak doors to the classrooms. It reminded me of my elementary school. For some reason I was feeling small.

"Come in," Mrs. Bennett gruffly replied, to my knocking. I glanced through the window and saw that she was standing in front of the class, instructing them on something second graders needed to know. When was the right time to interrupt? I never knew.

"Well, are you coming in or not?" she said, obviously annoyed at my interruption. The children in the classroom all stared at me. They were so quiet.

"Yes, Mrs. Bennett, I got your message about a referral and was wondering when we could talk?"

"And you are ...?"

"I am the school social worker," I sort of stammered. I was so nervous, and felt so small and scared.

"Well this morning would have been nice, around

7:30, but I suppose you weren't here then, were you?" she asked, accusingly.

Why couldn't teachers understand that as a school social worker for the whole county, I couldn't be at their beck and call? It would be nice, but I was only scheduled at this school on Tuesday mornings from 8 to 11:30 a.m. Why was I feeling so threatened?

"How about after school then, around 3 o'clock?" she asked.

"I won't be here at that time. I am sorry," I replied.

I realized how inadequate the time allotted for each school district in this county was, but funding for school social work services was scarcer than funding for educating the students. It was frustrating and this was only my first year as a social worker. I'd only graduated in the spring.

"Well, just wait in the hallway and I will be there when I can." Mrs. Bennett said, dismissing me and guiding me out the door.

As I stood there, I felt humiliated, sad, scared, and alone. My heart was racing. The building felt so familiar; the door to the classroom heavy, with a large, glass window. The teacher, unfriendly, unkind, and scary. Then I remembered my second grade classroom, my teacher and my school building.

I cried often in second grade and my teacher was always exasperated with me. She would take me to the girl's restroom and spank me with a paddle, yelling at me to stop crying. One day after the spanking, she was leading me back to our classroom and she noticed that the window to another classroom door was missing. She pushed my face into the opening, saying, "Now this classroom can see what a baby you are for crying." I remember the humiliation.

At the end of the school day I would go home and report to my mother that I hadn't felt well that morning at school. She would invariably ask me how I was feeling then, and I would reply that I was okay. I was scared to tell her about the paddling because I thought she would be mad about my being in trouble. I never told her about the paddling and neither did the teacher. I hadn't thought about second grade for a long time.

I was born in a small town in Arkansas and we were poor. My father had a sixth grade education and my mother, fourth. We lived without indoor plumbing but always had a roof over our heads and food on our table. My parents worked hard at manual labor jobs and, before I started school, I went to work in the fields with my mother and her sister, picking cotton. I had four sisters and three brothers.

My father got a job outside of Chicago when I was in second grade and would come home about every other weekend to visit. My mother's family was close and her unmarried brother moved in with us while my dad was away. We eventually moved to the Chicago suburbs, where, thankfully, there was no paddling in the schools.

I was a bright student and enjoyed school after second grade. I especially enjoyed fifth and sixth grades. My fifth grade teacher talked with me about going to college, as if it were a given. My family never talked about such things and it was intriguing. In the seventh grade, I entered junior high and puberty. Again, I was really shy and most of the kids I knew in elementary school were not in my classes in seventh grade. School seemed to be more difficult, but the hardest part for me was that a boy in my classes continually grabbed my breasts, whenever he got the chance. He would do it in a crowded hallway, in an uncrowded hallway, and sometimes in the classroom. One day I'd had enough – I couldn't handle the humiliation any longer. The teacher was out of the classroom and Eric walked by my desk and groped me. I never knew if anyone saw what was happening, but no one ever came to my rescue. I got up and ran from the room and ran into the teacher in the hallway.

"What are you doing out of the classroom?" Mrs. Eastman asked, "And why are you crying?" I told

her the whole story.

"Where did he touch you? Which breast? Both breasts? When did this happen? Did anyone else see it happen? How many times has this happened?" The Vice Principal questioned me. "These are serious allegations and we want to get it right." He touched his own chest, squeezing his breast area, as he was questioning me. I was so embarrassed and afraid, and felt like I was being violated all over again. During that time of my adolescence, random men would mention my breasts. It seemed I was a magnet for perverts, and since I never talked about it, I never knew if it was happening to anyone else.

As a result of his behavior, Eric was suspended for the rest of the school year, which was about a month. I was referred to the school social worker, Leo, which turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Becoming a social worker

Leo was kind, understanding, gentle, and really listened to me. I started to open up with Leo, but I still couldn't tell him everything. At the time I was depressed but I didn't know why. It felt as though Leo was the first person who cared about me and cared about what my life was like. He liked me, had faith in me, and saw something deep inside that was worth saving. I felt so special. This was a person that I could talk to, that paid attention to me, and who didn't try to hurt me in the process.

I saw Leo for the rest of my school career. He really helped me get through adolescence. After graduation all of my friends went off to college. I got a job in a local factory because that was what my option was, and what was expected of me. No one in my family went to college and there was certainly no money for that kind of thing.

While working at the factory, I began taking classes at a community college. After three years I decided to apply to a four year college, full time. When I visited friends at college, I realized that school was something I was interested in, and something I could do. I got a degree in sociology, graduated with honors and with the award for Outstanding Graduate in Sociology that year. I went to graduate school and became a school social worker. Finally, I felt I had arrived and who I

could do for other children what Leo had done for me.

After that first year I became less shy and more assertive about meeting the needs of the students that were referred to me. I encountered other teachers that were unfriendly, but I didn't have the same reaction that I'd had to that second grade teacher, the classroom, and the building.

I found, however, that talking about sexual abuse and discovering childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, or harassment was hard for me. I remember a high school student talking about a boyfriend that was demanding and controlling. I pounded my fist on the desk, telling her "he has no right to treat you that way." My emotional reaction to her story was strange to me. I don't think she noticed how strong my reaction was but it stayed with me. There was something in her story that felt familiar. I remembered a similar reaction to a presentation about childhood sexual abuse in graduate school. I'd had a strong emotional reaction but didn't understand why. Leo had once shared with me his suspicion that I had been sexually molested at some point when I was younger, but I denied that anything had happened. I couldn't remember a time that it could have.

Talking about childhood sexual abuse continued to be a difficult subject for me. It wasn't that I didn't believe it when it was presented to me, it was just that I never *saw* it. I never went there consciously. It was a subject that was not a part of my lexicon. The topic made me anxious.

Discovery

My older sister called to tell me about a memory she'd had, in which she put her son in residential treatment for substance abuse and upon returning home, started to clean out his room. While cleaning the room, and feeling extremely sad about her son, she had a memory about being sexually abused.

"Judy, I have something I want to tell you. I had a memory today of being sexually molested when I was a kid."

"Who did it?" was my response. I didn't at all feel surprised by her memory, but anxious to find out

who abused her.

"Uncle Ray."

"What?!" I was astounded. Uncle Ray was our beloved uncle. He was everyone's favorite. He spent time with all of us and all of our cousins. He'd never had any children of his own and he'd lived with us when I was in second grade. He slept in the same bed as my brother and me. Sleeping arrangements are difficult when living in a four room house.

Second grade: the fear, the feeling of being small, the stress of being sexually abused. I was now able to understand why I went to school crying in second grade. I was able to connect the strong feelings that I'd had about the unfriendly second grade teacher and the building that was so familiar. I was having a flash back to the experience of the abuse, and the traumatic incidents that I had to deal with when I got to school. I wasn't able to tell the teacher or my mother what was happening to me. I buried the whole experience and covered it with shame. Even after being assaulted by my seventh grade classmate, I wasn't able to connect my feelings of sadness with what had happened when I was in second grade.

Over the years, through therapy and hard work, the memories slowly came back. My older sisters and I have talked about the abuse, but my older brother and younger siblings have no memories of it happening to them. I changed jobs and worked in children's mental health services where I was immersed in stories of childhood sexual abuse.

Teaching others

When I look back on my years as a social worker, I wonder how much I have missed. I feel very sad at the thought that I could have missed something that children were trying to tell me. A student in a middle school told me that her friend was getting strange phone calls from a teacher. I asked the student if she thought her friend would talk to me about this. When the friend reported who the teacher was, I was surprised. Again, he was a nice man, liked by everyone, and he appeared very kind. I knew that I had to believe the student and I did. The teacher admitted to the phone calls and was fired. The student felt relieved and safety. I learned that everyone is not what they appeared. It felt empowering that I was there to

help this girl.

After years of working in children's mental health services, providing direct services, and supervising other social workers and psychologists, I started teaching in a BSW program. I found that I enjoyed teaching and training others, but I felt conflicted about leaving direct service to work full time as a social work educator.

"Who will take care of all the clients I am leaving behind?" I asked.

"Your job now is to teach the next generation of social workers to be the best they can be. That way you are reaching more clients than you ever could on your own," my new colleague said wisely.

And so I got my doctorate and started teaching full time. I try to keep my hand in direct practice when I have the time, because I really love being a social worker. I am a passionate teacher and I often tease my students that I will *haunt* them if I find out that they are not doing the best that they can, while working with clients.

What I have learned

I have learned that being present with yourself and being present with your client will help you to not miss what a client is trying to tell you. When someone really listens to you with an open heart and mind, they are being present. I use mindfulness meditation as a way of getting students to focus on learning in the classroom, and as a technique to help themselves stay present with the client. I take my role as an educator of social work professionals very seriously. It is my duty to train the next generation of social workers to understand themselves and their clients, to know themselves, so that they do not miss anything.

I believe that it is important for social workers to examine their reasons for being a social worker. A lot of us come to the profession due to family of origin experiences and have to understand them in order to be an effective social worker (Smith, 2014; Barter, 1997; Nuttal & Jackson, 1994; Gore &

Black, 2009; Regehr, Stalker, Jacobs, & Pelech, 2001). My experiences have contributed to who I am as a person and as a social worker. My reflections of my personal experiences contribute to my expertise as a professor.

As a society, we have changed dramatically since I was a child, and the topic of childhood sexual abuse is more out in the open. It is still a very devastating process for people who have been victimized and the issue of re-victimization is an important one for social workers to understand.

I recently saw Leo and we reflected on the impact he had on my life and my decision to become a social worker. I am forever in his debt, and am so grateful that I was able to be one of his clients. He is still practicing after all these years, and still making a difference in the lives of others.

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Family of Origin: Lessons from Exile

Hadidja Nyiransekuye

Abstract: Family of origin is a special cocoon into which each individual is born. It can offer warmth, support and protection, or it can be a source of heartache and pain, if it does not offer the nurturing we often crave. Exile, the forced displacement of individuals and families from their homeland through events not of their own making, can be a life-changing experience during which decisions are made hastily to ensure the survival of the people involved. Families are torn apart because of exile. Family members die alone; some get lost and are separated from the group. The separations create a hole in the heart of the family. The experience leaves scars that are hard to heal, and in turn impacts future decisions for one's career path or the meaningful relationships one can build with family and friends. According to Hutchison (2011), there is no one way to define family. *Family of origin* may mean the nuclear family, comprised of a mother, father and children. It may also mean in addition to the direct parents and their biological children, the uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and in-laws. For the purpose of this paper, the second definition is used to define family of origin.

Keywords: social work, refugees, family, Africa

My Lived Experiences in My Family of Origin

Early on the morning of July 14, 1994, I was awakened by noise of a different kind. Goats, sheep, and cow sounds; children calling their mothers. At first, I thought I was dreaming, because for the last three months, that time of the day was rather quieter after shootings and beatings of victims of the genocide, which was happening at the time. When the noise persisted, I went to the door of the apartment I was staying in at my parents' house, and then to the gate of my father's compound. I peered into the peephole, and saw on the road a long column of fleeing people with their farm animals and bundles of mattresses and clothes on their heads and backs. I realized then that the war, which had been raging through the country for the last four years, had finally reached Gisenyi, my hometown. I just had time to put a wrap on top of my pajamas and put my baby on my back, before running to alert my mother about what I had just seen. Two hours later, my family of about 20 people joined the column of other fleeing families to the border between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, then known as Zaire). Our first stop during the flight from Gisenyi was at a relative's parents' house. Right away, her family had to find us water and tea to drink. I could imagine their minds turning in circles, wondering how they were going to host this large gathering of relatives-by-marriage for an unforeseeable length of time. I was the first to react to this dilemma. Being familiar with the Center for Disabilities in the DRC, I decided to go there and find out if they would take

in my children and me. My dad had the same idea of relieving this family of the burden of caring for all of us. He took my two mothers, the grandmothers, and my younger siblings to a distant relative of ours. It was both sad and heartwarming at the same time to see my family's industrious side to finding solutions to our plight by putting all their ingenuity and resourcefulness to work.

The bombing started late the next day. Shells were falling on the fugitives –Rwandans fleeing their country, my family among them –as the new Tutsi rebellion army took control of Gisenyi, the last town on the Western border with the DRC. Many refugees died, and children were separated from their parents. I had been hiding under a bed at the Center for Disabilities. Every time a shell fell somewhere close, I shook with fear for the baby I was carrying on my back and for myself, and I did not know where one of my four kids was. In the confusion and haste of fleeing to the center, my second-to-youngest daughter had gotten separated from me. So I frantically ran back and found her. I felt embarrassed that at that particular moment, I was not thinking of the rest of my family. I knew that my two sons had been briefly reunited with my husband sometime in the past month; but because my husband had been forced to flee two months earlier and barely had a place himself to sleep, he could not keep our sons with him. The boys, ages 11 and 12, had been placed with a Tutsi family from Burundi, whereas my husband had taken on a job as trucker's aid. However, at that time, we were more worried about staying alive than being together. The disruption was even a welcome relief as long as we were all still

alive. Radio and television announcements declared that the borders into Rwanda were now closed. Nobody could go in or out. I stood at the other side of the border and turned my eyes to Mount Rubavu, the mountain, which at its foot lay Gisenyi, my hometown. It dawned on me that there were indeed people who had so much power they could decide whether or not I would get to live in my ancestor's home. That realization made me feel very small in the world, and the weight of longing for a home to be together with my family of origin, or knowing whether they would be safe, was overwhelming.

On day three of the exile, I woke up to another tragic sight: piles of refugees' bodies, dead from cholera. Every family I knew, or met then, was impacted by the disease, and mine was no exception. In less than a week, the disruption to my family of origin was inconceivable. We lost an uncle, two cousins, and my cousin's baby. My cousin's wife lost a brother. Refugees were dying like flies; victims of exhaustion, unsafe drinking water, and lack of sanitation. The Congolese were disgusted and could not hide how much they despised us, telling us to take our cholera and our dead back to Rwanda, and that Congo was for the Congolese. Consequently, the refugees (my family included) were asked to leave the city and relocate to a camp the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was establishing on the outskirts of the city, some ten miles north.

A former colleague of mine suggested I try to find a job because with a bachelor's degree in education, I was the most qualified in my family; but at the moment, the only available jobs were in the medical field or in social work. I then realized my language skills, which had always been an asset, were useless; I could not help my relatives or myself, nor could I get them the help they needed: shelter, food or medical care. Envious of my friends who could access such help, I could feel a heavy blanket of helplessness and despair envelop me. I promised myself two things: to never become a refugee again, no matter what, and to get a degree in a medical or social work field. I needed skills I could use anywhere, any time. I wanted practical skills that would not become obsolete with circumstances.

When one of my younger nephews got really sick at the refugee camp with cholera, my father decided we

should all go back home to Rwanda where we could give proper a burial to our relatives. The nephew's illness was a determinant, because he was one of two children my younger sister had left behind, when she died 5 years before; my father had promised his dying daughter that he would raise them as his own, and that nothing would ever happen to them. We fled our country for fear of dying, and now we were dying anyway, so there was no point staying in the DRC. My sister could not go back with us. Her husband and his brother had decided that we should not trust the new government in place in Rwanda. They preferred to follow other refugees until they were all allowed to come "with dignity." That meant the winning army needed to negotiate with the army that had lost the war. It never happened; and my sister, her husband, and their five children stayed in the refugee camp for two more years before they were forced out by another invasion of the camps by the new Rwandan army. The invasion caused even more death and more disruption of the family fabric.

My Choice of a Practice Setting

Those experiences in my family and country of origin subsequently impacted my choice of a practice setting. For reasons of safety, my children and I sought asylum in the United States, consequently separating from the rest of the family, including my husband. Several years later, I had the opportunity to enter the masters of social work program (MSW) at a prominent U.S. university. At the time, my intentions were to get on a community track to take those skills back to Rwanda, and to work with my people in post-conflict communities. In the MSW program, my concerns were different from those of my classmates. I wanted the language and skills to address poverty and trauma in the context of a third world country, survivors of genocide and war. I told myself that I had done enough work on the ground and knew what the issues were, but I now needed skills that would place me in a position where I could impact the decisions that were made about my community and my people.

The community track I had chosen turned out to be focused on practice within the United States. My field placement at a homeless shelter further convinced me that I was learning skills I was not sure how to transfer into the Rwandan context. I learned that although homeless people are very poor people and often have mental health issues, I did not have the "cultural

language” to work with them. I once shared with a group of American women my reflections about my field placement, and one of them asked, “So are you going to build gathering places in Rwanda?” I smiled and did not respond; but I was thinking that back in Rwanda, each home in my community naturally serves as a gathering place for community members. For one school project, my group had to design an after-school project for school-age children. I remember hearing my group mates suggest to build a playground or a recreation center (rec center, as they called it). For me, they were speaking a foreign language. I had no clue what they were saying or why school children needed a recreation center. This illustrated well for me that even the concept of poverty is socially constructed. I, as a Rwandan, had come from a collectivist community. Unlike in the West, we are still a *Gemeinschaft* community, where individuals identify with the community, and relationships matter so much that if a bill needs paying, it is more about who has the money to pay for it. In contrast, there is the *Gesellschaft* community, where individuals are responsible for themselves and must pay their own bills; if not, they endure the consequences (Hutchison, 2011).

For a society that was recovering from a four years’ war and genocide, the priorities were about addressing basic needs—food, shelter and health care—and the replenishing of livestock. Even during the war, children were safe as long as they could not be connected with adults who were wanted. It is true that we had a rather large number of children who had lost parents to war, genocide or disease. These children needed families to take them in, not recreation centers. The fact that Rwanda is a tropical country means that people, especially children, play outside without worrying about inclement weather. The realization that I needed to switch world views so that I could practice social work in the U.S. made me wonder how much of this new society I still needed to know in addition to the regular concepts we learned in social work classes. Social work is not a value-free profession; we draw from our practice competence by understanding the social-cultural connotations of the settings in which we operate.

At the homeless shelter, we distributed bus tokens and disposable diapers, as well as provided childcare, GED preparation lessons, and card

making. At the time, we opened the facility at 8 a.m. on Monday morning and closed at 5 p.m., five days a week. My first question during a staff meeting was, “where do the women go after we close and on weekends?” It scared me to imagine women and children on the street, even in the winter. I thought that if Americans can be homeless in their country, what would happen to outsiders, such as me and my children, should the need arise? I learned about other concepts too. I found out about child protective services and the notion of a foster care system, that took in children whose parents could not take care of them. I learned about food stamps, government-subsidized housing, and school social workers. There are a plethora of social services designed to address the issues facing American disadvantaged groups, but I needed to know them, understand them, and be able to connect the clients with those systems of service. I felt I was a complete misfit to serve the American poor, and I would be more useful serving continental African poor, whose context I understood better.

For four years, I saw my country invaded and my people displaced, and turned from thriving, self-sufficient communities into beggars. I saw the war culminate into genocide while the world watched. A United Nations (UN) battalion stationed near my house systemically refused to help my young children, who were fleeing the massacre, cross into safety, when the border was only two miles away. And yet, my neighbor, who did not even have a gun, risked his life by hiding my husband, knowing that he was putting his own family at risk, by protecting a man who was wanted because he was a Tutsi. I was in complete disbelief that UN soldiers were told not to intervene because they were there to keep peace, not to make peace. I thought it was nonsense. Then and there, I wanted skills that would allow me to stand, or sit at that UN gathering, which could make life-and-death decisions for my family, my people, and my community.

Impact on My Client Population

In the second year of my MSW program, I decided to work with refugees and asylum-seekers. I realized that I was never going back to practice in Rwanda because it was not safe; thus, I turned to refugee and asylum-seekers who, like me and my family, had lost their home country, and were most likely as confused about the American system as I was. My husband died the

night I graduated with my MSW, and the children and I were not able to go back for the funeral. I felt very guilty for abandoning him in his time of need. Later, I could empathize with many of the respondents interviewed for my dissertation research study, who felt the same guilt when they could not go back for funerals of loved ones, who died after the respondents had resettled in the United States. At the same time, I understood that the international community stood by while my people were being massacred, and I wanted skills and a special voice to take advocacy and policy making to those high places.

Impact on My Theoretical Perspective (Social Constructivism)

After completing my MSW, I was strongly encouraged to pursue my Ph.D. The formulation of my research question for my dissertation was informed by my own experience in my family and country of origin, and subsequently in my MSW training. The refugees I worked with could not come right out and ask for their rights, but would tell me in private of their needs and challenges. Earlier, during discussion about research topics and formulation of research questions, I listened to my classmates' topics and questions, and could not understand why mine were different than theirs. One of my classmates was researching female sexual offenders; another was interested in transgender issues. I wanted to talk about refugee issues and refugee-producing conditions. I wondered if I were not sophisticated enough in my thinking. It was by researching Gergen's (2001) social constructivism theory that I felt vindicated. One of the premises of social constructivism is the assumption of multiple realities, the acknowledgment that reality is co-created by people who share experience, and that language is the conduit through which communities make meaning of their shared experience. The fact that my classmates had different research interests did not negate the validity of my own interest in the lived experience of my participants. The topic lent itself more to political science than to social work. I once attended a workshop for doctoral students entering the dissertation phase and was reminded that as a social worker, I should be thinking more in terms of practice. My question at that time was, "What does it mean for refugee women from the Great Lakes Region of Africa to be recipients of

refugee services during the first four months of their resettlement in the United States?" I was interested in the lived experiences of my participants. Those experiences seemed to intersect with my own, and it took my advisor, who specialized in qualitative research, to make me realize that all my preconceived information belonged in a phenomenological "epoche" or bracketing, which is putting aside everything you know or think about the topic, before entering the field for your research (Creswell, 1998).

It was thanks to my understanding of social constructivism that I was able to advocate for a client, a mother of nine, who did not understand why her case manager required her to separate from her older children so she could continue to receive services. The client complained to me, saying, "I lived with all my children in small tents in refugee camps, and we were fine. How can [social services] say that the house is too small for all of us to live together?" This example is one indication of the fact that practitioners who are proponents of Erickson's developmental stages may believe that a child over the age of 18 is an adult, and should be encouraged to live on his or her own, or else the child would be exhibiting issues of confused identity; whereas in collectivist societies, it is perfectly acceptable for a young person over the age of 18 to continue to live with parents until the young person gets married or moves away because of work. It proves that there is not just one way that the world is; there are multiple ways, and they are all valid.

Impact on My Role in Advocacy: Refugee Congress Advisory Board

My lived experiences in my family of origin directly impacted my desire to incorporate an advocacy role into my later career as a social worker and educator. Although in the United States, I have given many presentations and lectures on my experiences and their impact, more formally, my advocacy has taken the form of work with the Refugee Congress and subsequently, the Refugee Congress Advisory Board. The focus of this organization is to bring together the voices of refugees to speak for them and about refugees. The Refugee Congress was the brain child of the UNHCR in its American regional representation. It was created at the time of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Convention that created the UNHCR in 1951. In August 2011, refugees were called to be an active partner in programs and

policies that were designed for them locally, nationally, and internationally. In the three years of existence of the Refugee Congress, members, including myself, have met with state representatives in Washington D.C., and in our home states. We have created committees that advocate for family reunifications; refugees with special needs, such as the elderly, minors, and the gay, lesbian, and transgender refugees; and more importantly, the asylum seekers who are incarcerated in different places in the country. I have taken on the task of collecting stories of survival, with implications for successful integration and family dynamics. This is an ongoing project that I intend to complete as time allows.

The experiences of my family of origin have been the mirror through which I approach my teaching, and my practice of social work. Most recently, at the American university where I teach, I have introduced a new course, "Social Work with Immigrants and Refugees," which has been well

received on other campuses. It was offered at my school this past summer, and hopefully, will continue to be offered in future semesters.

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Holding the Hope: A Path to Becoming a Social Work Educator

Nancy Meyer-Adams

Abstract: This narrative describes events in the author's family of origin which included numerous losses and complicated grief experienced by all family members. There were many obstacles put before this family and there was a social worker who intervened at a pivotal point in the author's life. These experiences began a journey to a career in social work and social work education. This is a narrative about holding hope for others until they are ready to hold it for themselves.

Keywords: parental loss, grief, social work career, educator, chronic illness

Holding the Hope: A Path to Becoming A Social Work Educator

My mother died early on the morning of January 12, 1965. I was 10 years old. She was 38. She had been diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis years before. My family buried three infants prior to my birth, due to complications stemming from my mother's illness. Fortunately, I was delivered safely. My sister was born healthy five years later. My mother had been intermittently ill during the first 10 years of my life. The morning of her death was at a time when her disease was controlled, so it was a sudden and devastating loss to my father, my sister and me.

The saga of sudden and devastating loss continued just ten days later when my maternal grandmother, Esther, suffered an aneurism and died instantly, leaving my maternal grandfather in a state of complicated grief that he would never really recover from. Within two weeks, my father, age 37, planned two funerals and made plans to move my grandfather from his home of thirty years into ours. As I remember the story, my grandma Esther was the person my father was counting on to help him care for "his girls," making her sudden death even more devastating to our family. Somehow my father continued, doing the best he could for us. I wonder how he ever dealt with such grief. His own mother was beginning to experience signs of early onset dementia and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease by 1970.

As I reflect back on these events, it is a wonder that it took me so long to seek a social work career and eventually to become a social work educator. I grew up in what I would describe as an urban Midwestern, White, middle class neighborhood located in one of the best school districts in the city. My parents struggled to afford to live there, but wanted to

provide the best possible environment for our family that they could. However, as I write this narrative, it occurs to me that possibly my path to the social work profession was laid from the beginning.

This series of losses of key women in my pre-adolescent life came at such an important developmental life stage. I learned to live in a family experiencing major chronic illness and complicated grief before I had any real understanding of what that meant, but it shaped the course of everything that followed. It is important to note that I believe my father did the best he could in dealing with his own grief, and trying to raise two young girls as a single parent in the late 1960s. However, by the time I reached 15, I was what some might describe as a "classic parentified child." I had taken on the role of trying to keep everything going in our household and I was charged with caring for my sister for the majority of each day after school, until my father returned home from working very long hours. We were "latchkey kids" before the trend, or even the term, was part of this country's culture. It was certainly an uncommon occurrence in our neighborhood.

What happened next might be thought of as predictable based on this series of life events. I, of course, had no idea at the time that I was following a path that should have led me to seek the assistance of a social worker. I became involved with a boy in my freshman class in high school. We fell in love, or so we thought at the time, and I became pregnant with my first child at the age of 16, in the winter of my sophomore year. After much discussion and many arguments with my father on how I was ruining my life, as his plans for me were to be the first in my family to go to college, I decided to get married and start my own family. Much later in life, I realized that my actions created even more devastating loss for my father, and a sense of failure for him as a parent. It

would take years for us to finally reconcile. This choice also meant I was forced to drop out of school as there were no alternative high schools for pregnant teens in 1971. I finished my sophomore year by concealing my pregnancy to everyone other than my closest family members and gave birth to my daughter on what would have been the first day of my junior year. I found myself pregnant again and 13 months later gave birth to my son one month prior to my 18th birthday. I remained married to my children's father for the next seven years, but they were difficult years with many separations. I became a single mother of two at the age of 25. I supported our family as a waitress and bartender, working multiple jobs and very long hours just to survive. I wanted my children to have a different life than I had. As it turned out, these circumstances created my family's next generation of "latchkey kids," taking care of themselves much more than they should have in their early years.

There was a giant leap forward on my path to becoming a social worker professional when I discovered that my son was suffering from drug and alcohol abuse at age 16. His father and I checked him into a residential treatment center to seek help with his addictions, which we felt were already ruining his life. My family was touched by the social worker who did the intake and assessment that night. It was my first experience with a social worker. She helped me feel that there was hope. Hope that we would make it through this, and that my son would survive. At the time, I struggled with how we had gotten there and where we might end up. I struggled to understand how the choices I made as a teenager may have continued my family of origin's saga of grief and despair. I felt hopeless. Over the course of the next several months, the social worker helped me get to a point of letting go of some of the guilt I was carrying about ruining my son's life by not being there for him. I still clearly remember the moment that she said to me, "you were doing the best you could, given all the circumstances. You were able to recognize the need to seek help for him and your family when you needed it the most." What I understand now is that she held the hope for us until we were ready to hold it for ourselves.

Luckily, my son recovered from his addictions and was able to finish high school. Being a high school dropout and understanding the importance of

education, my dream was for both of my children to complete school and hopefully go on to college, just as my father had at one time dreamt for me. My son and daughter both started college a few years later, and they even encouraged me to go back to school. So in 1992, at the age of 37, I earned my GED and decided to enroll in the local community college. I loved being in the learning environment again, and after a few bumps in the path, I started to thrive. I still had not chosen a major. I entered college looking for more of a technical degree, something I could finish quickly that would lead to a job. I was still waiting tables and knew I needed to find another profession sooner rather than later. Having dropped out of high school 20 years earlier, I figured my choices were limited. In the beginning, it did not occur to me that I could work to achieve the higher levels of education required to become a social worker.

Class after class, I got more interested in learning and communicating with other students and professors. While waiting to get accepted into one of the technical programs, I took some humanities courses. Soon I was invited to join the honors program. My professors inspired me to set goals I had never imagined for myself. As I reflected on how a social worker had changed the course of my family's path, I explored the requirements for a social work degree. I had the opportunity to talk with professors about my goals. I found professors who supported me and provided me with hope. They became my mentors. I spoke with social work professionals who helped me see options for employment. The path was becoming clearer.

As I planned to complete my Associate's Degree at a community college in southern Florida and transfer to a local four year university as a social work major, I attended a transfer student day event. At that event, I met the next social worker who would change my life. She was the director of the social work program at the university. She looked at my transcripts and said, "you are well prepared to start with us and I think you are going to be very successful here." That meeting and those words were the moment I knew where my path was leading me. I had the opportunity to work with her once I became part of that program. She became one of the most influential mentors in my life. After earning my BSW, I was accepted into the MSW Advanced Standing Program at the same university. As I was finishing my MSW degree, my mentor encouraged me to apply to a Ph.D. program. She knew

how much my relationships with my professors meant to me throughout my academic journey. She recognized mentoring qualities in me. She encouraged me to follow a dream from my very distant past of being a teacher. To be a teacher in the social work profession, and to train new social workers to assist individuals and families, as other social workers had assisted me, was an inspiration beyond anything I could have imagined prior to meeting my mentor. I followed that path, and completed my doctoral degree four years later. In 2002, ten years after earning my GED, I received my Ph.D. My father and my children were with me to celebrate the proudest accomplishment of my life at that time. My children have also beaten the odds of being born to teen parents whose mother was a high school dropout. Both have received the highest academic degrees in their professions. Interestingly, they both entered the helping professions as well. My son earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology, and my daughter earned her degree as a Doctor of Chinese Medicine.

What has transpired since then is my growth as a social work educator and practitioner. The past twelve years sometimes feel like a dream. After teaching social work at the collegiate level for 12 years, I have been promoted to Director of one of the largest schools of social work on the west coast. As a practitioner, I have been able to work directly with children and families as a school social worker, where I specialized in grief work with children. The personal perspective from my own family of origin

events gave me the opportunity to help some of my young clients realize that they are not alone in their feelings of grief over the loss of a parent, and that there are others who can and want to support them, as they move through childhood and adolescence.

My understanding of the impact a social work educator can have on the lives of students allows me to speak candidly in my classes about my family of origin and my life experiences. I strive to impress upon my students, at both the BSW and MSW levels, how important and impactful the work social workers do can be. Additionally, I try to impress upon my students that social workers need to listen to our clients, and to understand that everyone has a story, and that story plays an important role in why he or she is seeking the assistance of a social worker. It is also imperative for me to help students understand one of the importance of the one thing that saved me and my family, time and time again, over the course of my own life: there are many times when we, as social work professionals and educators, must be able to hold the hope for our clients and at times, our students, until they are ready to hold it for themselves. In fact, that may be the one thing that social workers can do to inspire people to move forward when they need it most. I know it was for me.

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The Effects of Adoption Throughout the Life Course: A Personal Reflection on Adoption, Work and Family

Pamela A. Viggiani

Abstract: This article presents the personal narrative of the author, who discusses her experiences with adoption across her life course. The narrative relates the author's personal experiences with adoption to her decision to enter the social work profession, and her use of life course perspective to inform her teaching. The article also discusses the way in which adoption experiences relate to the author's commitment to studying, teaching and changing structures of oppression through increasing students' awareness and commitment to righting social injustices. The importance of human relationships is also discussed both within the context of personal experiences with adoption and professional experiences in social work. The author concludes that familial experiences with adoption profoundly affect both choice of profession and theoretical perspective.

Keywords: life course perspective, oppression, privilege, human relationships, social justice

I come from a family that values people. My parents—hardworking, middle class individuals—put a premium on the importance of relationships in general and the importance of relationships within the family in particular. My father is a first-generation Italian who grew up in a mid-size northeastern city in a largely, if not solely, Italian neighborhood. My mother was of German and Irish descent and lived in an adjacent neighborhood. They met in high school and married after my mother completed her nursing training.

The importance of people is an intergenerational, familial value (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012). My mother's mother always took individuals in to live with her family: the young mother that needed a place until she could get on her feet, the gentleman from church that had fallen on a bit of rough spot. My mother, the oldest, was often cast in the caregiving role. A role that she took on without complaint, but one that had a profound effect on her own career choice, as well as her choices as a future mother. My mother always wanted to be a nurse like her grandmother. Although there is no doubt my mother wanted to emulate her grandmother, the career of nursing also fit into the values her family held regarding caring for people.

My father's house was simply just full. It was full of relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters and brothers. The more people, the better, and the more merry for all. However, my father was deeply affected by the sudden loss of his mother, Aunt J, as she was known by all, when he was 14. Aunt J was greatly loved and was deeply missed when she died in her forties

from complications related to pneumonia. My father, the youngest child of five by 10 years, was left in the care of his eldest brother and sister, who moved back home with her new husband, to help her father take care of her youngest brother. Both my aunt and my uncle looked after their baby brother to the best of their abilities. My father's father was simply too bereaved to spend much time with his youngest son. When my father discusses the death of his mother during his childhood, he is always sure to mention how his suffering lessened by the presence and love of his sister and brother.

It was with this combined history of the importance of people and of family relationships in the context of helping and caring for one another, that my parents united and formed their own family: my family of origin. In many ways my family started off as stereotypical. Two years after my parents married, they started their family with the birth of my brother, and two years after his birth, I was born. After my brother and I arrived, my parents waited a bit, but soon welcomed my sister who is four years my junior. My parents had completed their family at that point—or so they thought. They took great joy in their children and they encouraged my siblings and I to develop close relationships with one another. Even though my parents had completed their family, my mother felt compelled to help others the way her mother had helped so many. My father was accustomed to a full house, and remembered how his siblings came together to help him, so he, too, had a desire to help others. Because of who they were and are, and likely because of their families of origin, my parents took people who needed a place to stay into their home, and

welcomed them as part of our family. This was one way my parents could help others and share the love they felt for family. As mentioned, relationships and people, all people, were important to my parents. They felt there was no better way to let people know they were valued than by making them part of the family. Thus, we had a young girl, K, live with us for several years because her mother, one of my mother's patients, had died, and her father had fallen ill. K's father requested my parents' look after his youngest daughter as her older siblings were not in the area. K was reunited with her siblings after being part of our family for several years. After K, one of my mother's former nursing students lived with us, as she had nowhere to go. As we got older, my parents never said no when we asked to have our friends, who were having trouble at home or who were kicked out, stay with us. This value of the primary importance of caring for people was deeply embedded into my consciousness.

During my childhood, my mother, who had her RN, went back to school to complete her bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing. She did this while working full-time. So, she and my father worked as a team to make sure there was a parent present at dinner, at our school events, and at our sporting events. They involved my maternal grandmother, as she was charged with making dinner for my siblings, my father, and me on nights my mother was at school. Although my father could have very easily made dinner, I realized much later in life that having my grandmother cook for us, and having our family eat with her at her apartment, was one important way my parents made sure my grandmother remained a vital part of all of our lives, and we of hers. The shared meals that she truly enjoyed preparing, usually with one of us at her side to help, ensured that a close intergenerational connection was maintained.

It was during this period of full-time work in a city 45 minutes away for my father, full-time work and part-time school for my mother, and general family busyness, that crisis struck in my mother's extended family. I clearly remember the turmoil, for I was 12, and tuned into the adult world around me. My mother's youngest brother was married and had three young children. My uncle's family had always struggled. Both my uncle and his wife had trouble maintaining steady employment and adequately

caring for their three children. My grandmother, mother, and mother's sisters tried to help their brother/son, his wife and their kids. The extended family tried desperately to connect my uncle and his family to services. Services my uncle and his wife always ultimately refused or eventually dropped. The extended family also supplied material goods and money on a regular basis. These gifts, of course, were never able to remedy the myriad problems of poverty, in a permanent fashion.

I remember visiting my uncle's family's various homes. The homes were always in ill repair, they were typically unkempt and I recall them always being too cold in the winter, and too hot in the summer. But what I remember the most were my three little cousins. Their clothes were never new and were always a bit too big or too small, they always seemed to have a bit of a cold, and they loved to gain the attention of their senior cousins. The eldest of the three, S always sat on my lap and loved to cuddle. I loved to hold her, and as a young girl, wanted desperately to have more control over what happened to her and her siblings. Periodically, my uncle and his family were without essential resources such as heat and/or water. These periodic crises were typically resolved quickly due to extended family interventions. However, one cold winter's night, my mother's sister called her in a panic. My uncle and his family had come because they were without heat or running water, and were likely going to be evicted. They were all camping out on my aunt's floor. There was a strong possibility that child protective services were going to become involved with the family. My aunt was near the breaking point. She and her husband had three kids of their own and were working poor: struggling to make sure their family was able to have food, clothing and housing.

The crisis resulted in a family meeting that involved my grandmother, mother, my mother's sister and their youngest brother, my uncle. He was again without work having been fired from his latest job; his wife did not work either. The children, then ages five, four and one, were being left unattended to and unfed. My uncle and aunt admitted to being overwhelmed and feeling that they were unable to meet the demands of parenthood due to the poverty they faced, as well as some personal issues and challenges they individually struggled with. Because my aunt and uncle clearly articulated their distress and their current inability to adequately care for their children, and as a result of

having exhausted other options and resources, the family proposed that my uncle allow his sisters (and one sister-in-law) to temporarily take the children until he and his wife got back on their feet. None of the sisters was in a position to take all three children, each having three children themselves and not having a great deal of extra income. However, the family felt if they could keep the siblings in the extended family (what we now call kinship care) and prevent foster care placement, they would be able to make sure the siblings and their parents all maintained regular contact and would hopefully be reunited in a speedy fashion. It was after this conversation that my cousin, S, at age five, came to live with our family.

My five year old cousin (who eventually became my sister) coming to live with us was most certainly a traumatic disruption in her life. A trauma that only she can likely speak to and effectively about. As a five year old, she had little say in where she would go. She simply had to go where the adults in her life directed her. I am certain that her early childhood experiences combined with the assimilation into our family had profound effects on her life: some good and some bad. I can say that today my sister, S, is happily married with two young children of her own. She is college educated and works in a professional job. She lives in close proximity to both me and our other sister.

My sister's experiences are hers to talk and write about. However, I can speak for me as it marked a disruption and turning point in my family of origin's trajectory (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). This was an unplanned event. My sister's arrival to our family was an event that occurred so quickly that my parents had no time to personally reflect on, or consider the full meaning of, during a crisis that they simply responded to, 34 years ago, in hopes of having a positive effect on three of my cousin's lives.

For my part, as a 12-year-old, I was thrilled that my favorite little cousin had landed in our house. My childhood mind thought only in black and white. My family's house was certainly more safe and secure than my cousins' previous houses. Plus, I could help care for her. This temporary fix of two sisters and one sister-in-law each taking a cousin eventually became a permanent fix, as my uncle and my aunt

were unable to obtain and/or maintain a job or home, and consistently struggled with ongoing personal issues. After many long discussions and much thought and reflection, my aunt and uncle felt their children would be better off staying where they had lived during the last three years. Thus, three years after my cousin, S, came to live with us, my aunt and uncle relinquished parental rights and my parents formally adopted S. S became my sister. S's sister and brother were also adopted by my aunts' families at the same time

As our family of five expanded in an unexpected way to a family of six, we struggled and rejoiced. My younger sister, J, loved my cousin, S. However, as a 9-year-old she was not always pleased that her youngest child status was so suddenly, and as it turned out permanently, gone. My brother was pleased with the additional sister, but as a busy high school student, he was not home a great deal. My father struggled with the financial implications of raising four, rather than three, children. My mother wanted to make sure all of the members, including the newest member, of her family, were thriving. After the initial bumps associated with an addition to our family of five, we jelled into a family of six.

I was profoundly affected by the addition and eventual adoption of my sister, S. I loved her dearly and was deeply protective of her. I was moved when she chose to come to my room and sleep by me when she had nightmares. I was always glad to have her around as she watched what I was doing. I felt it was my obligation to be a good role model for her. However, it wasn't until I was pondering graduate school that I began to reflect on and understand how S's adoption influenced my decision to pursue a masters degree in social work. I wanted to enter a profession that valued relationships the way my family taught me to value them. My family's acts of compassion allowed me to see firsthand the profound implications of the "central importance of human relationships," and the essential role they play as "vehicles for change" (NASW, 2008, p. 6). I suppose in that stage of my career formation, I was aware that relationships on the micro-level could affect positive change. I wanted to learn more about how to extend my lessons from my family to client-worker relationships.

As I began to study social work, I became interested in macro level factors that could have played a role in my

family's life. I began to understand the child protective system, including the foster care system, with all of its strengths and weaknesses. I became fascinated with how my family's decision was interwoven with policy. This greatly influenced my decision upon my completion of my doctorate to work as a legislative director at my state chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. This job allowed me to directly advocate for policies that would support individuals and families, while advocating against policies that would be detrimental. However much I enjoyed working as a legislative director, I felt pulled in the direction of teaching social work at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

As I began my academic career, my teaching and scholarship focused on issues of social and economic justice, as well as issues of diversity. The experience of adopting my sister forever affected the way I viewed the world, and was one of the primary drivers of my interest in social and economic justice. As I grew, I began to step back and reflect on my sister and her parents' lives. The experience of kinship adoption was quite positive for my family of origin, despite some adjustments, and some ups and downs. My sister's biological parents, my aunt and uncle, certainly had personal agency, and made many decisions regarding their children's lives (Hilton & Elder, 2007). Likely, the hardest decision they made was to relinquish their parental lives with the hopes of affording their children a better life. The decision my aunt and uncle made caused me to wonder about larger sociopolitical and cultural forces that played into their lives. For instance, how had my uncle's inability to complete college affected his ability to obtain a job that paid a living wage that could support his family? How had the lack of affordable housing contributed to his inability to provide a safe space for his children? How had the lack of sufficient social welfare and mental health programs played into his eventual inability to even provide the basic necessities to his children? These larger social and economic justice issues are those which I challenge my students to explore in their cultural diversity and social policy classes.

My sister also influenced the theoretical frameworks that guide my professional work and my personal understanding of individuals within the life course perspective, as it views individuals as linked with

their environments. The societal contexts within which we find ourselves can work to cumulatively advantage or disadvantage us (Newman, 2008). Through my sister, I saw the profound effects poverty had on my aunt and uncle and their family's lives. I also witnessed how the cumulative advantages of a middle class life, which provided economic security, privileged me. When S joined my family, she began to benefit too. She had amazing resilience as she had thrived in less than ideal economic conditions which resulted in less than ideal home conditions. However, S's life trajectory was undoubtedly altered when she entered her adoptive family environment. The family she entered provided her with opportunities that resulted in her attending college and embarking on a professional career, and allowed her to now live in an economically secure household with her two children, to which she is able to pass the cumulative advantages. It is not surprising as a social worker that I find the life course perspective useful in understanding individuals in the context of society and society's culture and institutional structures. The life course perspective helps explain the way that individuals interact with the environment, and the way the environment acts on individual development and growth. So, I find myself drawn to the it when striving to understand the individual. However, my personal experiences with my sister, in which I witnessed the deleterious effects poverty had on all aspects of her biological family's lives, fueled my interest in institutional factors associated with oppression, power, and privilege. It also led me to both study and teach in the areas of race, class and gender.

S also had a profound influence on how my husband and I chose to create a family. S's adoption and the love I have for my sister convinced me that adoption is a positive and legitimate way to create a family. My husband is convinced too. We have four children. Two are biological and two are adopted. One of my children was adopted from South Korea and the other, from Ethiopia. Our family, a blend of adopted and biological children, is amazing. The incredible gifts my children have given me and my husband with their very being is difficult to put into words. The experience of adoption is one that we entered into with the idea that "it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness" (Roosevelt, n.d.). The number of children in the world and in the United States who are currently without families is truly astounding. Having the privilege to adopt children has provided my family

with the opportunity to experience love in many every day, surprising ways. The love that is experienced within the context of the family, and the largely positive socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes of children adopted internationally, are encouraging to adoptive parents and families (Misca, 2014). However, entering into adoption on either a national or international level causes reflection into the dynamics of privilege and oppression, and how they play into who is adopted and who adopts. My personal experiences grappling with these issues and how they are intertwined, in a very real way, to both my entire family and to me as an adoptive parent. They have caused a great amount of critical, personal reflection, and have repeatedly drawn my attention to not only the immense responsibility I have to all of my children to provide them with a sense of self, safety, and cultural belongingness, but also to the wider society, in actively working to dismantle the structures of oppression that work to disadvantage so many on both the national and global levels.

The personal is professional. My personal experiences absolutely influence my thinking as a social worker. The experiences I have had with adoption in my family of origin influenced my very decision to become a social work professional and faculty. These familial experiences taught me the importance of two of the foundational, ethical principles of the profession: “the central importance of human relationships” and the necessity of “[challenging] social injustice” (NASW, 2008, p.5). Within this professional context, I attempt to act upon these principles in a consistent and relevant fashion in the courses I teach. Courses regarding policy and policy advocacy focus on the value of social justice and the principle of challenging injustice (NASW, 2008). These courses encourage students to advocate for policy implementation and policy change that will result in moving our society (at least in an incremental fashion) toward more justice. The courses I teach on cultural diversity, privilege, and oppression, encourage students to be both self-reflective and conscious of the world around them, with a particular attention paid to how

we structure our society in micro, mezzo, and macro ways, that perpetuate social injustice. We can use this consciousness to become an ally through the development of relationships and then to making change. Most profoundly, the life course perspective is interwoven into all of my thinking and teaching on social work. The way in which our lives are connected with one another in a complex and interconnected fashion within a broader sociopolitical context is important, and adoption so clearly illustrates the complexity of our interwoven lives across a life course trajectory.

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