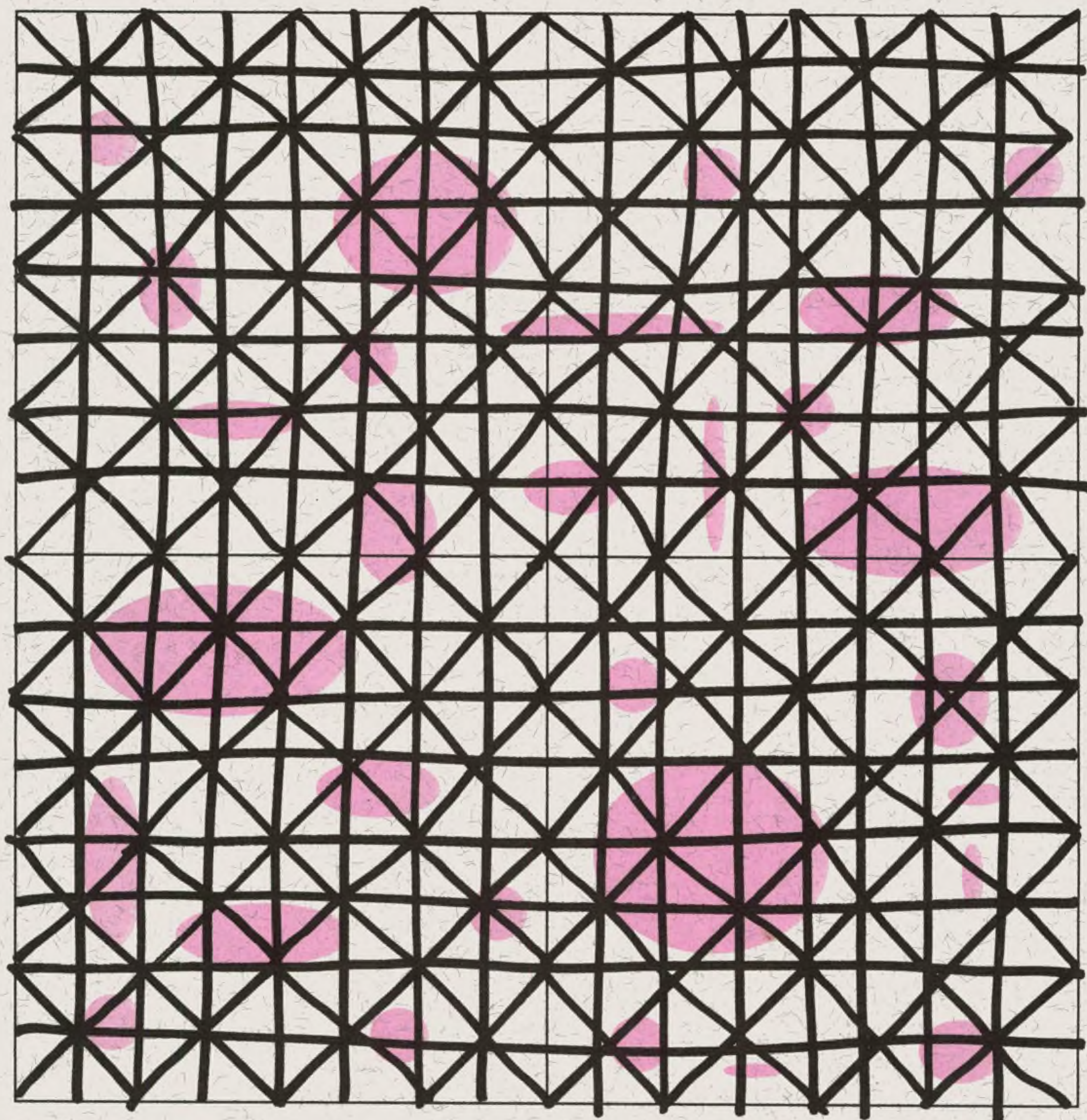
REFLECTIONS:

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING



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A Journal for the Helping Professions

REFLECTIONS:

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

VOLUME 5 SPRING 1999 NUMBER 2

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Dear Editor,

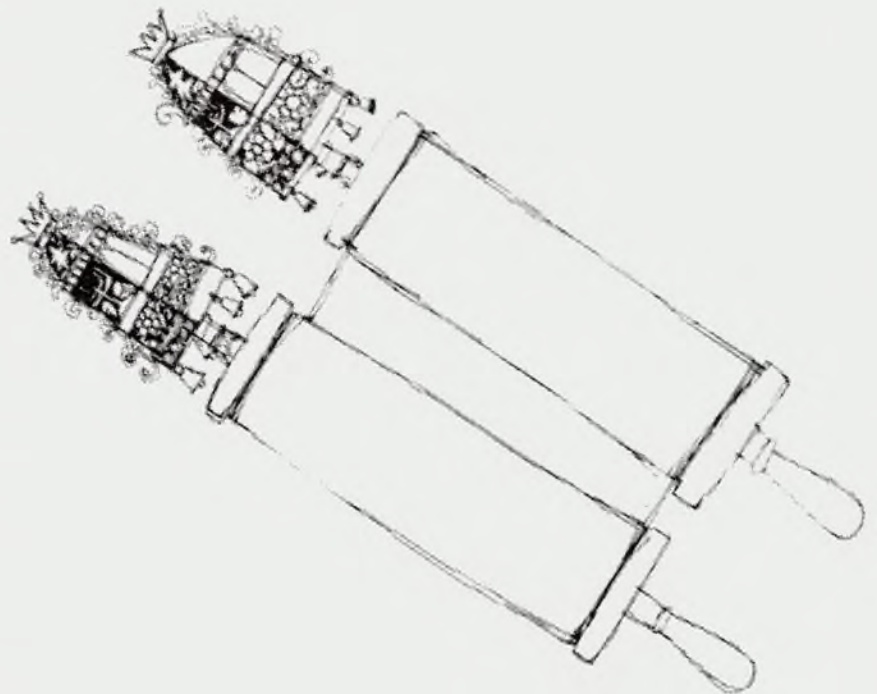
I read the article "Breast Cancer: A Personal and Professional Crisis" by Marian Maram, in the Winter 1999 edition of *Reflections* with feelings of wonder and amazement. This is an article that is both inspiring and eye opening. It reveals a woman with tremendous self-awareness, who can describe a devastating experience without self pity, a skilled social worker who is able to write and describe her perspective in a way that has the potential to have a profound impact on the reader.

I read it the day before I left for San Francisco and the Council on Social Work Annual Program Meeting, but I wanted my physician husband to read it. I left it for him with a short note recommending that he read it. The next evening he called me in San Francisco to say that not only was he extremely impressed (and as a veteran of 30 years practicing, teaching and studying medicine he doesn't impress easily) but he had forwarded the article to the physician who heads the Memorial Breast Center in Long Beach, California. This pleased me enormously as this more than anything can have a real impact on how women are treated in the future. If we, as social workers, by sharing our own experiences, and when necessary, our pain, can alter how others are treated, then this journal has done more than perhaps even the editors ever expected.

I have found the journal to be a constant revelation, always interesting and providing insights into the remarkable experiences of other social workers. According to Judaism there is a belief that states that the purpose of Jewish existence is to "perfect the world" or "the ethical bettering of the world". I believe that Sonia Ables together with her husband Paul, by creating and seeking writers for this journal, have shared in the process of *Tikun Olam*, the repairing of the world. I feel a profound sense of loss that Sonia will no longer edit *Reflections*. However, I am sure that whatever she does she will continue to leave her mark. To both of them, my best wishes and my thanks.

Barbara H. Cohen *(is Director of Field and Assistant Professor of Social Work, Department of Social Work, California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, CA.)*

The concept of *tikkun olam* or repairing the world through social action, is one of the traditional categories of tzedakah (righteousness and justice). The word "*tikkun*" first appears in the book of Ecclesiastes (1:5, 7:13, 12:9), where it means "setting straight" or "setting in order. " The most notable early rabbinic source for the phrase *tikkun olam* is the aleinu prayer, where the phrase expresses the goal of repairing the world through the establishment of the kingdom of God. *-ed.*



This issue of Reflections *marks the last for S. L. Abels as Editor-in-Chief, but she will always remain its founder. As the journal continues and evolves, it will never loose the spirit inspired by her tireless efforts in the name of the helping professions and with the goal of humane social progress. In this final letter to you, she puts the journal in the context of her life, and shares some of the events and concerns that found an expression in its creation. [RR]*

Dear Readers,

To write these words of "retirement" to you, after I have thought them this past year, is like the "Second City" joke, "if you read it in black and white, than it must be true." I have retired as the founding editor of *Reflections*. (There—I wrote it.) And in Bea Saunders' tradition (former Executive Editor, *Social Work*) I am Emerita Editor, *Reflections*.

During the second year of editing *Reflections*, I realized that my sense of place is not a physical entity; it has more to do with my being and doing in context, not where I physically belong. I think we try to fill that empty space, as the patterns that make up reality are missing. *Reflections*, and all the persons connected with it, filled that space for me, with opportunities for learning, creativity, and connections.

The context within which *Reflections* developed, may have been the powerful policy and structural changes within the social welfare system; the profession's heavy emphasis on "scientific writing; " and the new attention across the social and behavioral science disciplines given to narrative knowing. Affected in their daily transactions by the horrific social policy changes, people in the helping professions were searching for ways to become more connected, less isolated from others similarly engaged. The narrative serves as a means to build community, in real ways, and in virtual reality.

Within the same temporal sequence, personal stories/ narratives, were becoming popular in all sorts of media venues. In the late eighties, and early nineties, the personal story became public. Personal narratives became popular on TV, in magazines such as, *MS*, *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and in the academy. For example in 1989, Tappan and Brown (p.182) argued, that the narrative is central to the study and teaching of morality..." (*Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 59). In 1994, when we began the journal I did a library search and found over 3,000 listings for "narrative." Three years earlier, about 400 articles were listed.

At this moment, *Reflections* is the only journal dedicated to narratives about practice, in which social workers, physicians, nurses, researchers, teachers, counselors, community organizers, policy/program practitioners narrate their versions of a piece of their life experience, and the meaning it has to them.

Over these years the editors and I have read and published a variety of narratives that resonate with the meaning of our professional lives. Narratives about working with women that have breast cancer, and how the experience shifts reasoning about boundaries: finding the meaning of private loss and public forgiveness in the context of South Africa; helping others who are economically poor when you have everything except the baby you gave birth to; preparing youngsters adjudicated delinquent to present their case in court, and as a lawyer/social worker not being allowed to appear in court; struggling to be a good teacher, making mistakes and learning from students; realizing how much impact and difference one's born gender is looked down upon if you don't fit the stereotype; organizing the homeless against merciless forces; a spiritual journey working with men who are incarcerated; explaining the meaning of Kwanzaa and the concept of Sankofa; coping with the tension in being/doing, practice/research re: attachment histories of mothers of children with non organic failure to thrive; countertransference; creating programs for Cambodian women that became blind—no longer able to witness the raping and the killing fields; preventing a company from polluting your community and learning the

meaning of citizenship; standing up for women abused as children against the psychological pathologizers; reconciling western treatment and traditional healing; using the story of your being raped to teach students in your course; illuminating The Tiger, loss of homeland, Korean-Talk story, and the socially constructed relations of adoption and discrimination; learning how and why to write narratives; and uncovering the life stories of luminaries, and their interviewers.

What reflections! How wonderful that such rich and resolute practice evidence has been shared by professional helpers, teachers, researchers engaged in helping and social change. John Dewey said, "We reflect in order that we may get hold of the full and adequate significance of what happens" (*How We Think*, 1910, p.119).

We invited Harry Specht, just before he died, to write a narrative for our first issue about his work as the dean at Berkeley. He said he would write, but not about being a dean—for that he would wait until he was no longer dean. In his wonderful memoir about his career, "How I Didn't Become a Psychotherapist" (January 1995), he wrote about the meaning of his life choices: "...if there are any, sound like the homely virtues my mother taught: Be true to yourself; Stand up for what you think its right; Care about people in need. Those are certainly values to live by, but how each of us perceives and realizes these values is a complex matter" (p.65). As Harry was, I too am attracted by the idea of social interaction. We differed. I believe that a desired outcome of all helping structures, that includes psychotherapy, is to connect people to each other in concrete ways, particularly in today's fast technologically correct society. The *New Yorker*, in "Talk of the Town," once stated that our opinions are shaped more by "administration," meaning the TV, than friends, colleagues, and teachers. Add the internet. We are losing our citizen networks.

With some hesitancy I asked Harry to do a revision. After all, he was a significant social work scholar, and I was a first time editor/publisher. Delighted with the editorial comments, he revised his narrative twice. Since that time I have not been hesitant. His memoir initiated a new feature. "Brief Reflections," which gave us an opportunity to publish autobiographies and oral histories of significant scholars and practitioners in social work, therefore adding to the profession's narrative. There are oral histories and acquisitions of professional/personal papers of social work leaders and others, stored in the archives of university libraries, but inaccessible to thousands of social work students, professionals, and academics. We are dearly missing a thick piece of our history, and exemplars for our own professional/ personal lives. A function of *Reflections* is to fill that gap.

Reflections began simply, and I began five years as editor. The morning after a dinner with Bill Meezan and his partner, Michael Brittenback, Paul and I commented about the wonderful stories we had told each other about our teaching experience in Lithuania. Bill had just returned, and we had been there the previous year. We agreed that there are many good and important stories, and the profession is missing out on what happens when you teach, or practice. We tell each other stories, but they are never made public. Paul said, "why don't we start a journal called *Reflections...*" I added *Narratives of Helping Professionals...* After our first go around, at a conference soliciting narratives and subscriptions, we renamed it, *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping.*

The design of the journal had to be different than other scholarly formats; we were publishing "narratives." The CSULB University Print Shop participated in the design and our daughter, Beth Abels, and son-in-law, James F, Sullivan contributed the drawings and the cover. The design and the art work made the journal visually exciting, and distinct from other scholarly journals. All of us know that art can change perceptions, and perhaps world views.

In 1994, while trying to market *Reflections* on our own, Jim Kelly invited me to write a proposal seeking the department's support. Presented to faculty in January, with a support vote in February, we began March 1994. Our first issue was published January 1995.

Reflections continues with strong support by the faculty, our Executive Board, and the CSULB Social Work Department's Director, John Oliver. The new editors begin with the forthcoming (summer) issue. Mary Ann Jimenez, Editor, has Ph.D.s in Social Welfare and in History from Brandeis University. Rebecca Lopez, Associate Editor, also has her Ph.D. from Brandeis. Dan Jimenez will be Art Director.

In 1989 I left University of Southern California(USC) after two years of teaching and field coordination. I had been Associate Professor with tenure at Cleveland State University, a one year visiting professor at Haciteppe University, Ankara, Turkey, a one term visiting professor at both Walla Walla College, College Place, WA and Vytatus Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Teaching social work in Lithuania required that we help students learn to accept intellectual doubt and challenge certainty. Their stories describing the struggle for, and fear of, freedom—"we cannot raise questions as we lived under the KGB so long"—their work in the underground, the death of family members in that struggle, and their investment in change deeply affected us; neither of us has ever faced the risks they took. Sister Pyioscati, the Executive Director of Caritas in Kaunas, Lithuania (Catholic Charities) initiated the social work education program. She is the only holy person I have ever met—her commitments are to humanity and the Catholic Church. For example: most concerned about the spread of AIDS in Lithuania, she provided money for a young physician to learn about AIDS prevention in Denmark, and upon his return to Lithuania he organized a Condom Festival. She believes the church places human life as the highest value.

In the 1950's I married, as did most of this generation of daughters of the depression. I lived in Seattle, Washington and Frankfurt, Germany while Paul was in the Army, and then Boston, Massachusetts where Paul went to the Boston University School of Social Work. During the first summer break we worked at an agency overnight camp that fired, in the mid-summer, four of us who were unit heads because we asked the camp executive to stop the program director from physically pummeling campers. We found other camp jobs where the sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were campers. We then worked at Camp Oakhurst, a camp for severely disabled children and young adults, whose executive was Mel Herman. On the first day of camp, watching three busloads of children with severe disabilities coming off the bus, I ran and hid. Yet, by the end of the first session, my fears and my heart came back to the right place.

We moved to Chicago. I went to social work graduate school, Paul worked and studied in the doctoral program at the University of Chicago. I was active in CORE, we marched on Washington, I was arrested for sitting in, we marched some more, and we integrated Rainbow Beach. I was program director of a South Chicago settlement house that served a Black and Latino/a community, a youth and gang worker in the Chicago Commons Settlement House(s) on Chicago's West Side, and youth worker and special services administrator for young adults with mental disabilities in a Jewish communal agency.

We were fortunate that our neighbors in Hyde Park-Kenwood provided the context for social action, especially around school integration. Tom and Connie Sherrard lived next door; he taught Community Organization at the University of Chicago and worked with the first Black mayor of Gary, Indiana; she was a teacher. Debby Meier, a Socialist Democrat, took us to the Eugene V. Debs celebrations and involved us in local and national socialist activities with Bayard Rustin and Michael Harrington. Chicago had the neighborhoods, cause, and reason to be active in social change and action. The social work community had strong social networks. Although Chicago is very large city, as Simmel, an early 20th century sociologist explained, people stay friends with each other because they have friends in common. We also were a family connected to other families sharing mutual concerns and interests: three daughters, a mother-in-law, a cat, and a dog.

We left Chicago with the same coterie for Paul's new job as Assistant Professor at Case Western Reserve MSASS in Cleveland. I took a job as staff trainer with President Johnson's War On Poverty Community Action Program at the Cleveland Neighborhood Centers. When the city and politics took over, I lost my job and was hired by Leon Richman, consultant to the director of the Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Department (CCCWD). I became Group Services Coordinator, a job of my own making, persuading staff to organize client groups, and working with a group of youths in foster care. Leon left, and my own actions threatened my autonomous job. Carola Mayer, a staff member, and I organized staff to protest the agency's decision to use a large donation to buy and distribute shoes to the children of families on AFDC. (We wanted them to distribute the cash, and to invite a group of persons on Welfare to advise how to do that.) The new Associate Director of Cyuahoga County Welfare Department, and Director of Child Welfare, was distinctly unhappy with our organizing, particularly with our letters to the county commissioners, the agency's advisory board, and the newspapers. He closed out my job, moved me in to a windowless office in the Welfare Department building, and appointed me to the Department of Staff Development. Public agencies find it difficult to fire people after probation, so while staff is on vacation, they take away their office and either eliminate their job responsibilities or give them a job without responsibilities. After a month he relented. I began to train supervisors and administrators, and, with the "heads" of different departments, designed an integrated team—staff members from each service: intake, protective services, foster care, institutional... The team stayed

Sonia at Cleveland

with a family from the start of service to its end—in this way the family did not transfer to a another department each time a new service was required. It was successful, the department directors and I had fun in the design process; it was a new idea they had created and implemented. I left soon after.

Paul was then awarded a teaching Fulbright to Turkey for a year. I was hired to teach group work at Haciteppe University, and our children went to school on the American Air Base. I also joined the protest at the U.S. Embassy against Nixon's bombing of Cambodia, as part of the war against Vietnam, and had my picture taken by U.S. Security Agents. While we were in Turkey, the Director of the Department of Social work at Cleveland State invited me to apply for the position of Assistant Professor to teach social work practice.

Cleveland State University established in the late sixties, provided education to students living within commuting range. Up until that time, going to a state school meant leaving home. Higher education was expanding with new faculty members and eager students. For over 20 years, the coming of fall meant the beginning of school. Classes begin in early autumn, when the sun shines and the leaves turn color. The first day of school shimmers. Thousands of students from the Cleveland Metropolitan area came onto campus. A treasure of students from all parts of that racially divided metropolis. To the immediate East were black communities, people that had moved up North and sent their children to the public university; further East were the white, the integrated and the rich suburbs; to the immediate West the white poor, the Appalachians, white ethnics, persons with physical and mental stress, and public housing for whites only; beyond were the Western suburbs filled with blue collar workers, in the automobile and steel industries, whose sons and daughters were the first generation of college students at

Cleveland State University.

In three years, the Department of Social Work expanded from four faculty to thirteen. When I started, there were no text books as we know them —cumulative knowledge organized for specific courses such as Practice, Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE), Social Welfare, Policy, Research et al. In the first years of teaching I used readings from professional journals (see Alex Gitterman's article this issue), and trade books. Around the middle seventies, social work text books, similar to text books in other disciplines, began to appear. This was the beginning of the information age, the start of an extraordinary expansion of text books and journals. This was also the time of an increasing number of social work students and social workers, and an expansion of undergraduate and graduate social work education. There was a huge market for texts. Using texts for courses is easier than searching non-computerized libraries for appropriate journal articles. Texts began to shape course outlines. Beyond that, the number of published journals expanded, with most inclining toward publishing research. *Social Case Work*, now *Family and Society*, shifted its perspective from publishing articles containing a lot of process data, case material, and essays to articles reporting and analyzing programs, practice theories, and research. By the middle to late seventies it was difficult to find articles in any social work journal that actually described, analyzed, and explained practice at all levels.

It seemed to me that social work was loosing its grounding. Literally. Formal practice knowledge comes from theories developed by eminent social work scholars; and for the most part, social work knowledge is derivative from the behavioral and social science . It has not been generated from its own practice experience.

As a teacher, I tried to use a grounded approach (Glazer and Strauss) to teach practice: asking students to compare their own experiences, their practice, and the readings relative to similarities and differences, and accounting for them. Teaching this way was interesting and ambiguous. It was the student's task to discern the explanation. The students engaged in critical thinking, and used a "research methodology " to generate practice hypothesis to test out in their own practice experiences.

At USC, I taught an under graduate course in Crisis in Human Behavior. I used a number of non-fiction accounts of various crisis in human/social life such as Kai Erickson's *Buffalo Creek Disaster,* Lillian Rubin's story of the man that shot three young men on the subway because they asked him for money, Carol Stack's account of mutual aid among women on Public Welfare living in Gary, Indiana, and other such books. I asked students to generate hypothesis about what happens to persons in crisis by comparing the content of the different narratives. The students discussed and wrote about those differences and similarities in terms of the author's intention; the context, the characters' history, background, socio-economic status, relationships, ethnicity, age, gender; the consequences and outcomes of actions and behavior, and the authors' views relative to the people he/she wrote about. The students read and wrote comparisons of seven assigned books. I think they developed a grounded way to explain, and perhaps understand, crisis in human behavior. I had learned over a number of years that students do not read text books, but they do read interesting, literary books whose center is human beings, their social relations, and their stories.

While in Cleveland, there was an intense campaign in social work education to encourage more research, and to persuade social workers to use research to inform their practice. I wanted to publish a newsletter for social work practitioners, neatly written in interesting language reporting research on social work practice. No one wanted to do it. I thought it a grand idea, but put it away. I knew nothing about publishing, and did not have the ambition or passion then, as I did when we began *Reflections*.

The above takes you on my life's journey as far as what I did and where I went. Now I want to talk about how, through my intellectual roots, I came to believe so strongly in the benefit of narrative. My first roots in social work grew from my experience with Bill Schwartz,

my teacher, mentor, and critic. His work on the interactional perspective changed the way social workers think about practice. He saw the world in the context of social interaction with the task of the worker to further mutual aid. He used to say, as did Skinner, you don't know it until you do it, and/or write it.

Publishing autobiographical narratives and narratives about the work of practitioners, teachers, and researchers enriches the social work narrative, has strengthened the community of members of the helping professions, and has contributed to social action. That does seem somewhat ambitious. We do think mutual aid occurs among professionals as they read each others' accounts of their practice and life experiences. We receive many requests for reprints. I also know there is a large underground copying the narratives for students and clients, and, aside from cost issues, I think it's wonderful.

Frequently we ask authors to amplify the narrator's voice, along with the voices of the other participants in the experience. By showing the voices, rather than telling about them or interpreting them, the voices are no longer subjugated, and are outside the binds of assessment. Bill Schwartz eschewed psychosocial assessments. He made a strong argument that assessments are unhelpful to the worker as they rarely tell the worker how he/she should proceed—his focus was on the here and now. My own interpretation is that a pscyhosocial assessment is a professional arrogance. It is not doing, it is not practice. It is the voice of the client subjugated by the worker, taking from the client a life narrative or purpose, and accessing it. The assessment is the worker's voice, not the client's.

Other roots of my intellectual heritage lie at Cleveland State University, its faculty, and its students. I taught in its interdisciplinary college(First College) and in the social work department. As a young student at Rutgers University I joined with other "progressives" to petition the University "to recruit, hire, and promote Negro (sic) faculty persons." At Cleveland State, in the department's early years, I took that responsibility in a more local way.

The interdisciplinary college's directors, Sam Richmond and Bob Klein, exemplified mutuality and respect among faculty and students. The department's director, Harry Butler, worked to cast a strong intellectual focus. At First College, Richmond taught me the importance of "because" and ethical reasoning. I designed an ethical reasoning methodology, used it in class, and, presented it at Hiram College's Bioethics Narrative Seminar and at an AID'S conference in the first year of publishing *Reflections*.

Ethical reasoning requires non-fiction narratives, not general stories used as examples for NASW Social Work Ethics. Sam used to say that Social Work needs to gather narratives from practitioners engaged in ethical decisions—the process, the consequences, and the outcomes—so that the profession is able to develop a grounded foundation for ethical decision making. In this issue I think Pritchard tries to do that as he examines his experience in committing clients to mental hospitals.

I had a lot of practice experience before and after graduate school to draw on as a teacher, which meant I could tell stories about practice, supervision, clients, agencies and so on. At Cleveland, another practice faculty member and I were asked to work with a group of men at the county jail. All of them had problems with alcohol. The purpose of the group was not very clear. We wanted to help them with the issues about which they were concerned: getting out of jail and not drinking alcohol during daily work leaves. We met every Friday afternoon, and by the time we left, all Ruth Ellen Lindenberg and I could think about was getting a drink! We were confronting our own lack of preparation to work with this group: developing a purpose and identifying, together with the men, how we could be helpful. The men were great con artists, and not in the prison sense. Soon after we started the group, one of our faculty members arranged a "lock down" for us, other interested faculty, and students. It was a horror. I found it impossible to take on the position of a social worker, even

though it was an experiment. After everyone was locked in their cell, one student's real cries startled and distressed us. She was very frightened, but according to the jail's policy, the social worker was not allowed to enter the cell of an inmate after a lockdown.

I did not succeed with the men's group, but they did teach us that we needed to be very clear about our purpose and that they had not come to the group to work—they came to the meeting to get out of their cells. A difficult experience for me, but a good story of failure to tell the students.

About two years before we came to California I organized a conference on the impact of religious fundamentalism on social work education and practice. A student in a secular public hospital was praying with clients, and the supervisor did not know what to do. Our quick and easy solution was to tell the student it was not a social work function. The conference produced papers, a newsletter, and added to the discourse on spirituality.

This has been a long letter. I have tried to examine the links between my professional life and my intellectual history. Writing this letter has reinforced my belief in the need to search for meaning in one's life. Just as I have searched my own life to discern its meaningfulness, so I ask authors to allow themselves to be vulnerable in writing a narrative as it may lead to their discovering something new about themselves and their experiences. The process of making meaning may offer the author and the reader stronger bonds of connection, and lessen the fears we share in taking risks for justice.

The narratives in this journal are non fictional and autobiographical; from personal career autobiographies to stories of practice in prose and poetry. The stories come directly from a professional helper's life. They explore, explain, and describe episodes of helping, changing, organizing, failing, succeeding, challenging, and loving. We have published narratives that are interesting, painful, and sometimes shocking. Each author, as they describe the meaning of their experiences, speaks the personal universal language to those engaged in *Titkkun Olam*, "responsibility to repair the world" [see this issue's Mail].

John A. Kayser, in "Comedy, Romance, Mystery and Tragedy in the Helping Professions... "wanted to discover whether narratives about practice have to make a point. He and I have had a running debate: I have argued "that narratives should be more like literature and art—without needing to hammer readers with the heavy handed 'moral' of the story" (Spring, 98, p.71). John has helped me understand why meaning is so important in an author's work. He believes that the author ought to draw the moral, or make a point to the story. On the other hand I believe a good story contains its own moral imperative.

One Sunday, Paul asked me if "there were people I could not forgive?" "Of course," I said. The next day we asked Charles Garvin to edit a special issue, "Forgiveness," which led to a campus wide event "Private Loss Public Forgiveness." It was in that special issue that we published Linda and Peter Biehls' second narrative, their story of forgiveness at the Amnesty Committee's hearing (South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission) of the four youths that killed their daughter.

Their first narrative in *Reflections* about Amy's death in South Africa and the establishment of the Amy Biehl Foundation included commentary from a wide range of people. Some thought that the Biehls' use of community vernacular was inappropriate, and expressed concern that whites ought not to be organizing services in South Africa. Others thought their work was significant. I asked Wilma Peebles-Wilkins, one of our editors to comment on the article. She proposed several others, such as Kenneth Lutterman of NIH, to write commentary. He did, and sent *Reflections* to Tipper Gore, Donna Shalalah, and other cabinet members. Lutterman and the Biehls arranged for this powerful group to visit some of the agencies the Biehl's had funded. Serendipitously, because *Reflections* published the Biehls' narratives, new opportunities became available for social development.

Things have not always been perfect at *Reflections*. We are a mom and pop journal, along with Russell Rossetto, our

assistant editor and typesetter, and Vilma Chemers, who copy edits the proofs and put a stop to our occasional editorial disasters.

Our monumental mistake: Carol Meyer, known for her smarts and admirable toughness, responded gracefully to my request that she write a "Brief Reflection." Three of the columns about her teaching were left off the proofs, and I did not catch it until after the journal was printed and mailed! I called to tell her, anticipating the worst. She said it happens all the time, and told me how to correct it. She also said she wished she had thought of creating *Reflections*.

The journal has a new feature: "Retrospectives." Ruth Middleman sent us her narrative published in *Children* (1967). We realized its content was quite contemporary, and we published it in its original form with the author's comments. We tried it again with Paul Abels' "Riding with Superman, Batman and the Green Hornet" which was published several issues ago. We now have a "Retrospective" contributing editor, Alex Gitterman. His classic, coauthored with Alice Schaefer Nadelman, is in this issue. Alfred Kadushin's "Games people play in Supervision," *Social Work* (July 1968) comes out this Summer.

I will miss doing the journal. It has helped me to gain new insight about the things I care about, and more awareness about my independence, although Chauncey Alexander calls it obstinance. How wonderfully helpful and supportive many of you have been. Of course I have used this letter to caress my ego. As Leon Ginsberg said, everyone likes to write about themselves.

I am awed by the complex issues helpers face. Publishing *Reflections* made it possible to know much more about what people are doing in the profession, and how and why they do it. I hope our educational and professional organizations become more mindful to the meanings the authors have articulated in their narratives about their practice and their professional careers.

Narratives about what we do, and whom we do it with, invite society to be more empathetic to us and, more significantly, the persons we serve. Many of the narratives also give ample evidence that the concepts of micro, mezzo, and macro are superficial distinctions. C. Wright Mills said it a long time ago: private troubles are public issues.

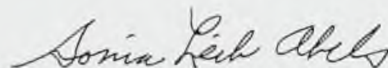
I am still uncertain as to why I made the decision to do *Reflections*. My "Salutatory " in the first issue (January 1995), "a greeting to the readers of the first issue of a periodical," said that "our single mission is to publish narratives of good literary quality that contribute knowledge on ways of helping others and creating social change." I believe that *Reflections* continues to persuade academics, researchers, and practitioners that narrative inquiry is another, albeit different, legitimate way to generate knowledge about practice." *Reflections* continues to publish "narratives" that "convey the meaningfulness of human engagement," "that serve as a medium for discourse," and "that strengthen and expand community bonds."

Thank you to the National Editorial Board, the narrators and the people in their stories, the subscribers, the Executive Board, the faculty, the former and present Directors of the Department of Social Work at CSULB, the University President and Provost, and the two deans (Whoppie is signaling me to speed up) for the opportunity for doing one of the things I had yet to do. I also thank Harold Larkin, Company A, Boca Raton, Florida for his gift to the journal—and all of you who have said that you read *Reflections* cover to cover. That is the most important gift. There are many persons that have done well for this journal.

Certainly the journal will change with its new editors. As I began this letter, the process of leaving engendered feelings of happiness for the new editors for getting to publish the engaging narratives that appear to be arriving every day; and sadness, that I have given up that opportunity. Farewell.

Sincerely,

Sonia Leib Abels,



Editor Emeritus

A Time to Sow, a Time to Reap, a Time to.....Hey! Can You Speed This Up a Little?

by
Paul Abels

A few weeks prior to the writing this editorial, I listened to several discussions on television related to the topic of "time." These were not scientific, or technical appraisals, but related to changes in our culture's changing perceptions of time. One discussion dealt with the changing nature of jokes, and how Jack Benny used to take dramatic pauses prior to the punch line, how successful that was, and how today's comics have to be much faster with the punch line. The audience won't wait. A second discussion related to education and how students now didn't want to take time to learn the classics, and that teachers were offering shorter and less demanding materials. Changes were even taking place in the University of Chicago's hallowed curriculum of classical readings. A third program noted how fast children were in responding to TV and other electronic games compared to older folks. A fourth discussion dealt with HMO's and the limited time they have permitted for certain services, particularly mental health. The final program, though not in that order of severity, featured commentators discussing that American people want a quick war in Kosovo; didn't want to wait out a long war, and had been led to believe that there would be a speedy ending. Nor, said one discussant, did they understand that it took time to accomplish our goals in Kosovo.

While all of these examples are not on an equal par as far as the consequences and impact on human life, they illustrate the trend that has been taking place in our society. Some would say that the trend is a product of postmodern cultural processes. All of us, but particularly the young folk, are bombarded by speedy TV commercials in which sequences flash by so quickly that we are trained to attend, "quick time." The automobile commercials feature cars starting out as a sport car dashing on dirt roads, then on highways, becomes a sedan, changing to a van on a country road, and next seen on the tops of mountains. Instant morphing of characters, models changing their costumes and hair before you even know for sure what they had been wearing. Newspapers, even the *New York Times*, now summarizes the news on it's front pages, International and National news pages, and on the net. No need to read the details. Thirty second sound bites, down to 15 second sound bites.

So what's the point? Time is the point. The point is the that "the devil is in the details." But more often, the "right" is in the details, and no one seems to have time to reflect on the details. And without reflection we end up making major errors. A *New York Times* headline reads, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War." The article goes on to say, "it is unclear whether the President's decisions on Kosovo would have been different if he had not been distracted by his own political and legal problems." Were the decisions about Kosovo made without proper reflection because the President was involved with the Senate Impeachment hearings? Did Congress reflect on how their actions might have distracted the President at a critical time? Would more time for reflection have led to a different decision? The world is speeding up. But not everything can be accomplished "in a New York Minute."

In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux and Tarrou, his friend, take an hour off from their voluntary struggle against the pestilence to reflect about the world around them, and Tarrou says he has discovered through his various experiences that no one on earth is free from the plague.

"And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breath in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbes. All the rest—health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The

good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous willpower, a never ending tension of the mind to avoid such lapses." (p .229)

Perhaps the plague is a metaphor, for hatred, or racism, or religious bigotry. Having time to become aware of it, talk about it, reflect on it, becomes a vital part of doing something about yourself so that you don't spread it. But what if the new plague is "speed" and what is catching, is a desire for "quick time?" Then a legitimate question we need to ask ourselves and find the answer to is, can our profession deal with this type of plague? Are we in tune with the times? We are not going to prevent the crush of speed anymore then we could hold back a diesel train with our bare hands, but we need a practice for the times. We can't take short cuts, nor can we do with practice which has not improved in thirty years. We have the phrases: systems, empowerment, client centered, multicultural, etc. but evidence of increased success is lacking. Other professions may be doing better.

The medical profession seems to have adapted well. Women after birth have to leave the hospital the next day. There was a movement to have them leave the same day, particularly if they didn't have insurance, but that became publicly embarrassing and the Feds stepped in. More and more surgery that used to keep you in the hospital for two or more days is now outpatient surgery. But our profession is not technology compatible. We know that the single most significant factor in whether the client feels they have been helped, is their feeling about the nature of the relationship with the helper, not the theories professed, or the techniques used. And relationship takes time. If the younger clients of today and tomorrow are used to speed, what do we offer them that will reflect the social context of their times. They have leaned through postmodern perspectives, to question the old theories, written by men, or by the representatives of the power structure. They are deconstructing faster then we have been able to construct. Children play parallel to each other on their Nintendo machines, competing for higher scores, but not interacting with each other. We are more isolated from human contact, whether on the phone or with automatic pay deposits, no operators, no bank clerks, and at the drive-ins, no people either.

For those who believe that the answer is in better technology, I would like to refer them to one last item that came to my attention this week. A headline in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 16, 1999, reads, "2 Reports Question Utility and Accessibility in Distance Education" I will not impose the details on you, other than to say, everything isn't rosy. But, the article included an ad to be run by the American Federation of Teachers that is a spoof on the notion of distance education originally done on *Saturday Night Live* by comedian Don Novello, portraying the character Father Guido Sarducci, who discusses the "Five minute University." "In the five-minute university, Spanish is reduced to 'como esta usted' and 'muy bien,' says the ad. Economics is summed up as 'supply and demand.' Theology is simply 'God is everywhere.' Add one more minute and have a graduate degree." The ad goes on to discuss college marketing approaches to video and on-line courses which might infer that there is something wrong in interacting with professors and fellow students "moving past competencies to understanding, perspective and wisdom."

Forget the 50 minute hour. Give me the 5 minute hour! □

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Radical, Skewed, Benign, and Calculated: Reflections on Teaching Diversity

This narrative shares my experiences teaching diversity in an undergraduate social work program. First, I begin by sharing my experience teaching diversity as a Ph.D. student. Second, I discuss my experience teaching social work with First Nations in Canada and tell how this experience influenced how I later taught diversity. Third, I attempt to define diversity and discuss how broad and elusive I have found this topic to be. Fourth, I share different instructor roles I assumed in order to get students to appreciate the importance of this course. In this narrative, "Indigenous" and "First Nations" Peoples are used interchangeably to refer to the aboriginal Nations of the United States. I avoid, as much as possible, the terms "Indian, American Indian, and Native American" because I consider them to be colonized identities. When they are used, it is only in the context of a direct quote.

by
Michael Yellow Bird

Michael Yellow Bird, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Social Welfare, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

When I was a Ph.D. student in the School of Social Welfare at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1986-1992), I wanted the chance to experience teaching before I actually entered the classroom as a full-time faculty member. My preference was to teach a course that would help social workers critically examine the social, economic, and political issues affecting the past and present well-being of First Nations. My desire to teach this course was influenced by the interactions I had with many non-First Nations Peoples, including social workers, who often displayed a lack of knowledge about the most fundamental conditions and concerns of Indigenous Peoples. Many told me they had received little information about First Nations in their educational experiences. Several said they never met an Indigenous person. Some said they had grown up believing we all had problems with alcoholism, or were predominantly warrior-like peoples, or exceptionally gifted spiritual beings with mystical powers. Their lack of knowledge and distorted images were not surprising to me because American society has rarely, if ever, understood or celebrated the cultures of Indigenous Peoples in the United States.

I did not get an opportunity to teach a First Nations social work course while I was a Ph.D. student. Instead, I was encouraged to be a Teaching Assistant (TA) for the undergraduate diversity course in the school. This course focused mainly on practice issues related to race and ethnicity. Gender, class, and sexual orientation were examined within the context of these two topics. I was not clear what teaching diversity was all about, so I asked some of the other Ph.D. students. Several said it was one of the more difficult to teach due to the tensions that arose from critically examining the issue of race with a predominantly white student class. At least a few said to be asked, or designated, to teach the course was more of a punishment than an honor since instructor evaluations were gener-

ally low and student resistance high. These comments concerned me, but I remained excited about the chance to teach. The fact that some course content was devoted to First Nations also made this opportunity appealing.

As the TA, my charge was to facilitate discussion sections to evaluate students' understanding of the course readings; revisit some of the more controversial topics such as racism, white privilege, and hate crimes; and, when possible, help students apply what they were learning to direct practice situations. I enjoyed the discussions and learned a lot about how a predominately white class responded to topics of diversity. Some students remained silent on issues of race, racism, discrimination, and prejudice, preferring "feel good" multiculturalism, which focused on less volatile aspects such as ethnic dances, clothing, foods, and beliefs. Others openly acknowledged the oppression that existed in society. Still others spent a great deal of time trying to convince me that they were not prejudiced or racist and that, in their eyes, they didn't see color because everyone is equal.

When I received my teaching evaluations at the end of this course, I was disappointed that students had rated some of my facilitation skills lower than the overall average TA scores. I had really enjoyed the course and thought that the discussion sections had been lively and that a great deal of learning had taken place. I had also believed students had appreciated my personal experiences and the way that I tried to weave them into discussion. I thought that my efforts to approach diversity in an "honest" and "progressive" manner was also appreciated. To me, this meant that I should not sugarcoat the experiences of people of color, but rather give students true life accounts of the pain, trauma, and struggles that were an everyday occurrence for many. I believed that students would appreciate my honest line of inquiry and, like me, when they were exposed to the censored and ignored truths of the oppressed, they would become angry at the system that had perpetuated a prevarication of equality, colorblind society, and fairness. After all, I reasoned, isn't social work about social justice?

The written feedback from the students in this diversity course was limited and gave me only a slight clue of what their experience was like. While some agreed that the course and discussion sections were helpful and that they had learned something, others were clearly dissatisfied with the course. One student said that the class sections actually promoted racism because the subject was brought up. This student felt that if we didn't talk about it, it wouldn't be a problem. Our discussions made her/him feel uncomfortable and diminished her/his desire to hang out with students of color, for fear they might see her/him as a racist. Another student said I was not a good TA and that s/he had a hard time taking the class seriously because I had shared, with the class, that I had grown up with prejudices that I still needed to be aware of. This student believed that I should be free of all prejudices if I was to teach this class. I was disappointed with my evaluations but hoped that this experience would help me be a better instructor. And, in the event that I should ever teach diversity again, I would have this experience to fall back on.

In 1992, I left the University of Wisconsin and accepted a faculty position in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Here I did not teach a class on diversity but taught a special course on social work with First Nations. I was very excited about this opportunity, but I soon found that this course was a very personal and difficult endeavor. Many of the readings, videos, and guest speakers I used often recounted story after story of the struggles, pain, trauma, and racism experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Much of it was very familiar to me. For example, when we watched videos of how "Indian" residential schools destroyed the cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, I recalled, in very painful ways, how "Indian" boarding schools in the United States had done the same to our people. When a guest speaker came to our class and talked of her tribe's struggle to protect their lands from the provincial government and their children from social workers, my mind immediately flashed to all those Indigenous Peoples in the U.S. who were

struggling to do the same. When we read articles that chronicled the high rate of death among First Nations due to alcoholism, suicide, chronic poverty and disease, I immediately reflected on how Indigenous People in my own community died from identical causes.

Repeated exposures to this heartbreaking information was very traumatic. After class, I often had to retreat from this emotional overload of information because it created a deep sense of loss, anger, grief, and resentment in me. To deal with it, I would sometimes talk to other First Nations Peoples to help me process what I had heard or read. Other times I would sit by myself in my office and burn sage or sweetgrass and smudge myself to get rid of the emotional heaviness I felt. When I felt really bad, I would go into a sweatlodge where I could grieve, pray, and find courage to continue helping my students to understand the struggles of First Nations. In the end, teaching this course renewed my commitment to continue to try to introduce material about First Nations into the classroom.

I left the University of British Columbia in 1994 and joined the faculty of the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas that same year. I started my new position teaching practice in the undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program and shortly after was asked if I was interested in teaching the school's diversity course. I quickly accepted because I believed I understood the subject and could offer a unique perspective on diversity since I was the only First Nations professor in the school. I also thought that this course would offer me an excellent opportunity to introduce social work students to some content on First Nations.

Diversity Defined

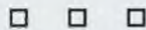
In the past, social workers defined diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. However, the concept of diversity has broadened (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 1998). Lum (1996) states that "human diversity is an inclusive term that encompasses groups distinguished by race, ethnicity,

culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin" (p. 3). Rounds, Weil, and Bishop (1994) add that "variations within groups are often great, depending upon the effects of socioeconomic status, education, family history, identification with ethnic group, and time since and cause of immigration" (p. 7). The 1992 Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) says social work practitioners must use culturally appropriate assessment and intervention skills when working with diverse populations (Lum, 1996). Finally, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states that "social workers should understand culture and its function in society, have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services, and obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression" (NASW, 1996, p. 9).

The above definitions show that diversity is a complicated and extensive area of study and, consequently, is difficult content to teach. One of the most challenging aspects of teaching diversity is trying to cover the immense number of topics in one semester. As I have taught this course I have wondered, as I still do now, how it is possible to give sufficient attention and detail to the numerous dimensions of diversity and what is sufficient attention. I have wondered how to adequately cover racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and disableism in the 15 weeks that I am allotted. When I factor in 15-minute breaks I allow students in each three-hour class period, the total time students spend in this course is equivalent to about 40 actual in-class hours, or a two-week work period. To me this seems like a ridiculously brief time that students spend learning about diversity, especially if any meaningful learning and personal growth is to take place.

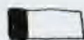
I have also wondered whether some dimensions of diversity should deserve more attention than others. For instance, is racism more important to study than heterosexism, and is sexism more important than ageism? Also, what constitutes

an effective course and instructor, and should a lot of time be devoted to helping students unlearn false myths and stereotypes or should we expect these will vanish by the end of the course? How much of a personal and political agenda should an instructor bring to the course and how does one compose a successful or acceptable resolution to in-class student conflicts based upon ideological foundations? For example, there have been times in class when students with certain Christian beliefs declare that gay and lesbian lifestyles are immoral and accuse me of violating their beliefs when I invite gay and lesbian speakers into class.



My Approaches to Teaching Diversity

Teaching diversity has been a rewarding and very challenging experience for me, and I have found myself trying on different instructor roles in order to get students to appreciate the importance of this course. Below are four of the roles I have assumed. None is mutually exclusive of the others, and I am not suggesting one is better or more effective.



The *Radical*: My Private Revolution

The instructor role I used most frequently when I taught diversity was The *Radical*. In this role, I found myself continually pushing students to move away from the "comfortable fictions" (Deloria, 1992) that all peoples in the United States enjoy equal opportunities and are treated fairly, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, or disability. To this end, I told students they must practice "fierce critical interrogation" (Hooks, 1992) of what they had previously learned or not learned about fairness, democracy, and freedom in the United States. Like Professor Hooks, I believed that fierce critical interrogation "is sometimes the only practice that can pierce the wall of denial" (p. 5).

I was on a mission to ensure that my students did not become passive receptacles of the mass societal amnesia and denial that exists among the American public with respect to its unfair treatment of diverse peoples. I continually shared examples of how majority America had exploited, deceived, and pillaged diverse peoples. I told how hate crimes, colonialism, racism, and oppression continue to exist and to threaten diversity. I told my students the political platitudes, "the land of the free, home of the brave," and "America is the greatest democracy in the world," spoken by so many U.S. presidents, had come at great cost to many of us. I told students economic, social, and cultural privilege for select groups existed at the expense of others and that social workers had to reverse this.

I did not purposely set out to be The *Radical* diversity instructor. My personal experiences with racism, oppression, and colonialism, along with the hate crimes I saw directed at people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and poor helped me justify this approach. As a survivor of European American colonialism and racism, I took a strong and vigorous anticolonial stance when talking to students as if they were 100% behind my private revolution to disrupt and reconstruct the racist, homophobic, sexist, and classist colonial society called America. I tried to incite, within them, a zeal for justice and the courage to fight oppression by speaking passionately, willingly, and honestly about the everyday pain and trauma of oppressed peoples. I convinced myself that they would become angry at the system that had lied to them and become highly motivated to confront the widespread racism and oppression that existed in American society.

The *Radical* instructor role was important for many reasons. First, many students in my classes did not experience the extreme oppression of the people they might someday work with. Most were not students of color or gay or lesbian or did not grow up in extreme poverty. Thus, I believed they did not fully comprehend the personal pain of these oppressive circumstances. Thinking this, I wanted to make them exceedingly aware of the reality and pain of these diverse forms of oppression. I also wanted them to understand that the so-called "pathologies" of diverse

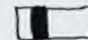
clients were perhaps related to individual problems, but many were often clearly caused and maintained by the political imperialism of a few.

Second, the educational experiences most had before entering my class rarely included the study of hate crimes, oppression, racism, or colonialism. In most of their experiences, diversity and its unique issues and dimensions either were not addressed or were done so in a very narrow and superficial manner. Indeed, Freire (1993) asserts that education uses a "banking approach" where students are passive receptacles (listening objects) and the teacher or school (narrating subjects) deposits selective knowledge which is often detached from reality. Using his ideas, I believed that the domination of student thinking and lack of critical discourse in education kept students submerged in a situation where awareness and response to the oppression of diverse peoples is practically impossible. My charge was to help students confront and disrupt this reality.

Third, I believed that unless students were given a radical social work perspective, they would be domesticated by the social service agencies that they would work for in the future, especially agencies that did not practice progressive services and policies protecting and honoring diverse peoples. Indeed, over the past four years some students who have graduated have called me and remarked how difficult it is to employ a radical approach in their current positions. In their frustration, some have changed employment to find a job where they felt they could use a more progressive approach and where the diversity of the client was a priority.

The radical style of teaching was exciting and liberating to me and created an intense climate in the classroom. Students either loved it or hated it. While several enjoyed the intense debates that arose from discussing such volatile issues as hate crimes, racism, and white privilege, others broke rank by shutting down and not talking or participating. In one particular class, several verbal disagreements broke out between some of the white students and some of the students of color because a small and very vocal group of white students refused to believe that the personal racism experienced by students of color in our very liberal town was true. The more that the students of color argued their point, the more the white students contradicted them. This went on for a good part of the semester. With such intensity in class, students often left angry and distressed. As I entered each class, I regularly found myself trying to help students process strong feelings, reactions, and disagreements from the previous week.

At the end of the course, student course evaluations were mixed. One student stated, "this was a great course if you are interested in liberation and revolution. My interest is in working with disadvantaged populations." Another student wrote that "at times, I felt discriminated against in this class because I was white. More validity was given to minority students statements." Another student said, "I have a very conservative viewpoint that seemed to be wrong. I was involved in another diversity class where the panels were open to *any* questions." Another student stated that "I basically didn't like the course...the course sparked animosity between students." Finally, one student who openly acknowledged the resistance by her/his classmates wrote, "keep it up despite the resistance. The resistance shows just how... important it is for you to continue!"



Skewed-Ethno Diversity Instructor

Being a First Nations person has made teaching diversity a challenge for me. As I have taught this course, I have had a tendency to "over-focus" on Indigenous Peoples and their circumstances. This tendency has generally brought more complaints than praise from students.

However, I did not purposely set out to be unbalanced in my presentation, nor did I realize that I was. One explanation I can offer for this tendency is that I feel most competent and comfortable when skewing content toward what I know best: First Nations. I imagine that in this respect I am not unlike other social work diversity instructors. There are some other justifications I have for this approach

as well.

First, First Nations are among the smallest and least visible groups of color and, thus, easy to ignore. I have felt that extra focus on our peoples helps keep us on a par with better known diverse groups. Second, First Nations have had a long history of being neglected or misrepresented in the literature, media, and society and my extra emphasis was one way of correcting this reality. Third, my previous teaching experiences remind me how little social workers know about First Nations and how threatening past and present social, economic, and political issues are to Indigenous Peoples. Fourth, in some circumstances many of my students' future clients will be Native. Finally, a general loyalty to my group has played a big role in my skewed approach. Since I feel a strong sense of pride being Indigenous, I have a desire to share unique aspects of our cultures. This sharing helps me feel as if our voices are being heard.

As the *Skewed-Ethno* Diversity instructor, my extra focus on First Nations was my attempt to get students to understand and feel the unique pain, trauma, anger, and resentment that exists within our cultures. I wanted students to walk around in our skin so they could realize why so many of our communities are affected by numerous social problems. I also wanted them to know about our strengths and resilience and that we take great pride in the survival of our peoples. I wanted students to know that European-American colonialism is alive and well in our communities and is responsible for much of our distress and struggles. I wanted students to know that we are uniquely different from other diverse groups because we are sovereign nations, not racial classifications. I wanted students to know that our lands and ways of life are still under threat from American society. Most of all, I wanted students to know that I didn't think we needed social workers coming into our territories to save us through copious amounts of psychotherapy or by feeling sorry for us. But, what we need is social workers willing to stand with us and help us maintain our sovereignty and nationhood.

While I felt really good about being able to provide social work students with extra content on First Nations, this approach came at a cost. For instance, one student wrote on her/his course evaluation that the instructor "is a super person, but is rigid and fixated on the Native American culture. There was nothing diverse about this class. With the exception of four panels of non-native speakers and several readings of other groups, there was no diversity presented." Another student responding to my extra emphasis on First Nations wrote "instead of having good knowledge of different areas of diversity—I feel I'm an expert in one but know little if anything about others." Another student said this class had "*way* too much focus on Native population. *Not* what the class was intended to be about."

One semester I focused my diversity course entirely on the diversity within Indigenous Peoples. The course was listed in the timetable of classes as a First Nations diversity course, so students who enrolled understood the direction of the class. My justification for this course was, "hey there are over 550 different Indigenous Nations, and not only is each different from the others, but there is also a lot of diversity within when one considers gender, sexual identity, class, and age." In this course, students were introduced to readings, videos, panels, and field trips that showed the diversity and oppression within First Nations and social work practice models that could be used when working with these groups.

The reaction of most white students to this course was one of enlightenment and uneasiness. Some felt enlightened because they had not ever had such in-depth coverage on one group. Others felt uneasy because they were not exposed to other diversity. One student citing her/his enlightenment remarked on her/his final evaluation, "you have opened my eyes to the oppression that First Nations Peoples have faced, I never knew such things happened. Thank you." Another student said "this course was very interesting and I now feel that I am able to work with Native American clients." Another student remarked "I learned so much in this class and was so

happy the diversity was in the culture of Native Peoples as they are my passion for my work." Another, noting my passion and radicalism in teaching this course, commented that the "instructor teaches this course like an act of revenge." Finally one student stated, "I learned more than I could ever imagine about the Native people, and their heritage and diversity."

On the uneasy side one student said "Although I enjoyed this class, for social work, I would like a more well rounded view of diversity looking at other minorities as well." Another student stated that the instructor "kept saying that we should ideally have a class to study each minority group and that is why he was only teaching Native issues, but we are not in an ideal world and we need to learn about ALL peoples!!!!!!" Finally, one student said, "I learned a great deal about native Americans but since this is a Diversity course I would have liked to learn more about other cultures as well."

Benign-Content Deliverer

I took on the role of *Benign-Content* Deliverer as a response to the criticism and backlash I received from students in a diversity class who disliked too much content on First Nations and the radical approach in the classroom. While both teaching roles were alternately supported or rejected by various students, in the end my teaching evaluation scores reflected that I was below the teaching mean of other diversity instructors in the school. Being an untenured professor, I had a certain fear of poor teaching evaluations even though I felt I was being effective.

In one class (not the class where I focused solely on First Nations diversity) I employed both The *Radical* and *Skewed-Ethno* diversity teaching roles, which caused students to attempt a *coup d'état* of the class. Several, but not all, went to the Director of the BSW program to complain about the course. Their charge, although they never told me, was that the class was out of control because all students did was argue or complain, and I was not stopping it. They also said that there was too much content on First Nations and that I was not following the course syllabus. They were right on all counts. I did not stop the intense discussions (debates) because I wanted students to hear one another and understand where each was coming from. I especially wanted those students who had rarely faced discrimination to not devalue or doubt the experience of those students who felt it. However, I also wanted those who felt oppressed to hear the lack of understanding that was being expressed by those who infrequently felt oppressed. I thought if both could hear each other, then we could understand how the privileged and oppressed felt.

There was a considerable amount of content on First Nations in this particular class because there were several First Nations students who shared a lot of personal experiences and asked many questions. Normally I do not have many First Nations students in my class, and when this class produced more First Nations students than usual, I was excited and did lean toward helping them validate their experiences and feelings. I didn't follow the syllabus as closely as I would have liked to because I thought the debates provided opportunities to help student see how volatile and messy diversity can be. I thought that digging our way through these messy issues was important to the process of understanding and appreciating diversity.

The BSW program director sent the students back to me to resolve the concerns they had. I asked to hear their concerns and tried to address them. However, we were at the midterm of the semester and for several students, remedying the class was not possible. One student's final evaluation of the class sums up what many felt: "I appreciated the instructors attempts to change the structure of the class and his forthright attempts to address our concerns. However, it was a little too late." Another student stated "the many arguments between students got us off track and behind and made the class seem very unstructured." Finally, one student said "I felt that class time needed to be more structured—too many 'off-the-subject' comments. I felt like this class was a time where students shared their personal experiences and that was it."

Overwhelmed by the student responses, I decided to

try out the *Benign-Content* Deliverer role. In this role, I made deliberate attempts to not feel emotional about hate crimes, racism, colonialism, broken treaties, or slavery for fear of upsetting students. I also made sure that I did not talk about First Nations. And, when students shared personal experiences, I limited their contribution and tried to avoid becoming too emotionally engaged in what they said. In other words, I attempted to strictly follow what was set out in the syllabus.

However, I maintained this role only for the final half of the semester in which students attempted the coup d'état. I felt that this role was untrue to my activist nature and demonstrated low commitment to diversity. I didn't like the detached, objective stance I felt I was forced to take. It felt emotionally and intellectually flat and could not instill enthusiasm and commitment to diversity within the students. Growing up experiencing the personal pain of discrimination, racism, and colonialism, and knowing that it continues to exist in the lives of many diverse peoples, I felt a responsibility to not back away from the messy and unglamorous aspects of diversity.

Calculating Activist

The most recent instructor role that I have assumed while teaching diversity is the *Calculating Activist*. It is a role reflecting the successes and failures of the *Radical, Skewed-Ethno*, and *Benign-Content Deliverer* instructor roles. In this role, I maintain an activist/radicalist stance when I teach diversity. Yet, I also try to calculate when and how this role is most effective and how it can help students radicalize their thinking and actions and nourish their critical thinking and reflection with respect to diversity. For example, I am still trying to get students to be passionate about diversity and I want them to understand that it often takes revolutionary thinking and actions to do this. In addition, I want students to develop excellent critical thinking and reflection capabilities that will help them demand more in-depth studies of diverse peoples and the critical issues affecting their well-being.

As the *Calculating Activist*, I am not about to give up my sense of activism in the classroom because I am still concerned about the well-being of many diverse peoples. I feel the need to continue to bring tough issues such as hate crimes, racism, and class privilege to the forefront of my teaching and classroom discussion because I believe that such issues pose grave threats to diversity. While I feel that understanding the social and material cultures of diverse peoples is warranted, I think it is secondary to the tough issues which threaten diversity. I continue to maintain this thinking because I am concerned about the different forms of violence and oppression that continue to be directed at diverse peoples. For instance, I am concerned about the continued physical violence directed at African Americans, women, and gay and lesbian peoples, and I feel that social workers must undertake progressive, thoughtful, and swift actions against such violence. I am concerned about the bureaucratic and political violence the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), various State governments, and the U.S. Congress continue to direct at Indigenous Peoples in the United States. I believe that social workers must be fully educated about such violence and must rise up against it in an intelligent, yet forceful, manner. I am concerned about the disproportionately large amount of police brutality against immigrants and people of color in this country and the disproportionately large number of people of color who are falsely arrested and remain incarcerated. I am also concerned that 15 million children go hungry each day in this country and that this country continues to exploit the labor of Indigenous Peoples outside the U.S. through free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Finally, I am concerned by this country's judicial attacks upon affirmative action and its movements toward English-only laws.

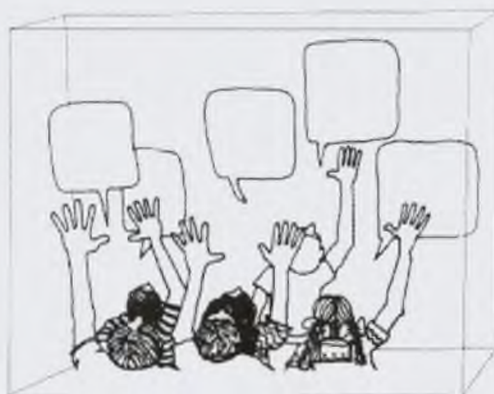
As the *Calculating Activist* diversity instructor, I am compelled to continue to try to radicalize students. However, I am now attempting to do so in a manner that is not so overwhelming, skewed, or didactic. For instance, I continue to move students away from the "comfortable fictions" that all peoples in the United States are treated

equally regardless of who they are. Instead of the more radical approach that pushes my message that "this is the way things are," I now often preface my statements with something a bit more palatable. One of the things I most often say is, "I'd like to do a little mind bending about fairness and equality in the United States with respect to diverse peoples and ask that you remain open to what I am saying." Or I might declare, "What I am going to say about fairness and equality with respect to diverse peoples in the United States is my opinion and the way I see the world." In contrast, as the *Radical* instructor I would have told my students, "this is how it is," and as the *Skewed-Ethno* diversity instructor I would have said, "this is how you should feel and what you should be experiencing."

As the *Calculating Activist*, I am also practicing more restraint when I am tempted to emphasize the experiences of First Nations. More often now, I will share only brief examples of First Nations cultures and/or experiences. Another thing I am doing is allowing more time for students to examine their own diversity and sense of culture. When I first started teaching diversity I had no idea that many white students felt they had no culture comparable to that of people of color. Only after reading their journals and papers did this become apparent to me.

Another thing I have found to be useful is doing exercises that help students express their opinions about controversial diversity topics without having to identify themselves or to participate in intense debates. I still think highly charged debates are necessary. However, it seems that many students in my classes cannot benefit from conflicts that arise from diversity. To help students engage in difficult diversity issues, I've created an exercise called "anonymous brilliance" which I use in the following manner:

I ask students to write a short micro statement (half a page) of their thoughts on a difficult issue (what it means to them personally and what it means to social work). I ask them to make sure that they write with a pen on a paper that does not identify who they are. After giving them several minutes to complete their statements, I put them in a box and mix them up. Next, I ask students to select a paper and read it aloud to the rest of the class. As the students each read their statement, I find something very courageous, important, and "brilliant" about what was written. Finally, the entire class gets a chance to re-discuss what was presented and how it now relates to comfortable fictions, honoring diversity, and social justice.



The *Calculating Activist* is a role that has, so far, worked better for me than the other roles when I review my instructor and course evaluations. My most recent course and instructor ratings for my diversity class (Spring 1998) put me well above the mean of the other combined diversity courses in the school. Perhaps, though, these higher ratings also reflect my time teaching this course and the extra organization I've put into it. Most comments from students are positive regarding this teaching style and course content. For instance, one student wrote, "I enjoyed the diversity panels, the anonymous brilliance and the professor's insight." Another student wrote, "the aspects of the course I enjoyed most was anonymous brilliance and the instructor's thoughts and terminology." Another student stated the instructor "encouraged us to show our diversity. The course functioned in a manner that allowed, encouraged, and forced us to recognize the diversity in the human race. Every group and culture was shown in its true individual aspect, focusing on the total picture and not any one item. I learned more about people in this class than I knew before this class." Finally, one student remarked, "I truly appreciated the professor's sensitivity and

knowledge of diversity. He allowed me to not only look more critically at my actions and those of society, but he also allowed me to take charge of my own education. This class and the instructor have been invaluable to not only my personal education but my social work practice as well."

Endings: Skewed Reflections of *Radical, Benign*, and *Calculating Activism*

I think I've learned a lot about myself and students from teaching diversity. Perhaps the biggest learning is how my personal ideology (radical/activist) and cultural self (First Nations) works and does not work in the classroom. As the *Radical* instructor I learned few students appreciated this approach because it sparked intense discussion and forceful examinations of the comfortable fictions that students had grown up with. I learned I needed to get out my message of what I perceived the world looks like for oppressed peoples, and I also learned that I was in a much different ideological world than my students.

As the *Skewed-Ethno* diversity instructor, I learned I have a great need to share with future social workers the circumstances and concerns of First Nations peoples. I feel like if I don't, who will? I've learned that while students appreciate an in-depth course on social work with First Nations, many will still feel uneasy if they don't get content on other diverse populations. I also learned that if I liberally sprinkle First Nations content in a "regular" diversity course, accusations of "too-much" content can be immense and the backlash fierce. As the *Benign-Content* Deliverer, I learned I could not fulfill this role for long. It felt too passive, detached, and uncommitted to diversity. Finally, as the *Calculating Activist*, I have learned it is possible to maintain a radical ideology in the classroom. However, I have also learned that I had to tone down what I said, felt, and expected of students. I found using different exercises to engage students in the troublesome aspects of diversity is important.

I am not sure how each of these roles have really helped students appreciate diversity. As it was when I was a TA teaching diversity, all I have to go on are the final comments students make about me and the course. I am not satisfied with how we teach diversity in the social work profession; it still seems as if we do a cultural drive-by and let it go at that, convinced we have corrected a great wrong or filled a great void. I strongly advocate for longer courses to help students achieve a greater understanding of diversity. Until we are able to devote more time to this critical subject, I will continue to be a calculating activist for diversity. □

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Commentary on "Radical, Skewed, Benign, and Calculated: Reflections on Teaching Diversity"

by
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Dr. Yellow Bird's article on teaching human diversity content to less than eager students describes well the various stances one might take to present the content. As a teacher of direct practice I take a different route, hopefully achieving similar ends. Social work students, by and large, seem to arrive and pass through their BSW and MSW programs with an understanding of the problems and issues that confront oppressed groups, particularly people of color. Some few even develop a passion for correcting the social injustices.

Many students, however, never see any of these groups as the people they are—how they view the world, how their families operate, their cultural nuances... As a consequence I have taken a different route than Dr. Yellow Bird's. I ask students to speak and write about a group without reference to any problems the group may experience. I want them to recognize any cultural insensitivity of the direct helping approaches they may use. Most approaches are insensitive to cultural nuances and need to be altered depending on a client's cultural home. If you don't understand a client's view of the world, how can you know what is insensitive?

And, yes, I do cover the nature and effects of oppression, but I first want prospective clients seen as people with lives, lives that are culturally rich and sometimes alien to the social worker. I want students to have a curiosity about who their clients are, how they live, what they believe. I want this beginning understanding before I discuss issues for groups. Clients need to be seen as people first, before they are seen as an amalgamation of problems. We have so little time with students that I hope they develop a on-going fascination with learning about others, especially as they will be trying to help them soon also. One of the best statements I have ever heard made to client went something like this: "You are the expert on you. I need you to tell me what I need to know to understand you as a person." This shows an appreciation for the whole person.

Even when I taught a course in racism and discrimination, I also introduced the human faces of the groups oppressed. When else will students begin to see those different from themselves as real and human, and not simply as members of an oppressed group.

Dr. Yellow Bird has developed skillful ways to teach about fighting injustice. I want to teach students to see others as uniquely people first, as oppressed people second, especially in clinical courses. Hopefully all of our students will help others as they fight oppression. □

A Helper's Treasure Chest: Memorabilia from Special Clients

Many helping professionals keep small items from client contacts. These items represent special moments with clients that are etched in the memory of the helping professional. They become "treasures" to the helper. They are reminders of powerful interactions that have changed both the client and the helper. In this narrative, items from a helper's "treasure chest" (a baseball card, a dried red rose, and an eraser) symbolize the lives of some special young people. Readers are challenged to examine symbolic items from their own professional interactions and clientele.

by
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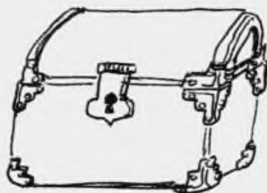

Visit any helper's office and look for client memorabilia. It will be there. Somewhere among dusty texts, photographs, and stacks of papers will be items that represent special moments with special clients. For example, a mental health colleague keeps a miniature pewter elephant given to him by a client. He says it means "an elephant never forgets." Another colleague has a glass apple given to her by her first class of students. She says this first teaching experience led her to change directions in her career. Powerful and life-changing interactions between and among helpers and clients leave no immediate, visible product (except manila files of coded notes). Small items take on great significance by representing these powerful interactions among helpers and clients. The items become a helper's memorabilia, souvenirs, and collectibles. They are the treasured "objects" of professional helpers.

A Treasure Chest

I have my own treasure chest of memories. It is a mauve and brown wicker basket placed high upon a bookshelf in my outpatient mental health office in rural northern Michigan. Scanning it now, I can see a Detroit Tigers baseball card, an origami astronaut, a pencil drawing of a broken drinking glass, a valentine note, a dried red rose, a four-stanza poem about a parental suicide, a baby-blue ribbon from a long dead flower bouquet sent to me by medical students, and a small white eraser with a picture of a red apple and lettering that says "Washington." My treasure chest holds many of my most important awards and accomplishments. It holds items that represent much of my life's work, a work that often cannot be discussed with others. It is a secret world of accomplishments, mistakes, and memories. The baseball card, from an anxious fifteen-year-old youth, will never make it into the awards section of my curriculum vitae. It will not show up in an application to graduate school. It will never be mentioned by introductory speakers at conferences when they describe me (e.g., "Our speaker today attended... university and was given a baseball card from a young man."). It's really too bad that these special treasures cannot be shared. They signify our finest accom-

plishments (and sometimes our greatest "failures"). They signify people that we have met who have dealt with great obstacles. They signify tears, hopes, dreams, and caring. Let me share with you some of these treasured memorabilia.

A Baseball Card

My first glimpse of Larry was of a tall, lanky teenager curled up in the fetal position, feet on the seat of the "client" chair of my outpatient mental health office. His black ski parka was held tightly over his head. His face was buried in his raised knees. An anguished, angry, fifteen-year-old voice called out pleadingly from his protective cover, "I don't want to see you." During the second session, he emerged from burying his face long enough to engage in card games. We played "War." It was just after Christmas. He told me, in a rushed and angry tone, about his own war at home with his new stepfather.

"My stepfather took my game away that I got from my uncle (the one that's my father's brother) and threw it in the trash. He said I was making too much noise. He yells and yells at me all the time. For nothin'! He just does it to be the big man [sneering tone]. So I punched holes in the wall and yelled back. Now I'm grounded for THAT. And HE yelled at me first."

Hmm..., I thought, here was one piece of the power struggle—a boy and his stepfather locked in verbal combat, "upping the ante" at each retort. "It was like he threw out your real Dad's family?" I asked.

Larry's voice sounded choked and strained. He put his face in his hands. "Yes. Even my mom doesn't want me to see my dad. I don't know when I will see my dad again."

And there was another piece of the puzzle. I wanted to know more about his "real" father who visited sporadically. I wanted this father to know his son was hurting. I was angry at him for visiting Larry so rarely. I debated whether to call him. I forced myself to be as open minded as possible and I got Larry's and his Mother's permission to make the call.

I telephoned his father. "Your son needs you," I said. His father sounded just like Larry—angry and abandoned. I was no longer angry at him; I saw him now as a person who was overwhelmed and struggling with his own pain. Larry's father said, "Sometimes it hurts so much when he leaves to go back to his mom's house that I can hardly take it." I could almost see the tears across the phone line. Since I didn't know if I would get to talk to him again, I went with a direct approach. I said softly, "You have to take it. I'm sorry it hurts you. He needs you more now than ever." And he did begin to see Larry—twice in the next month he drove 150 miles across frozen northern Michigan to pick up his son.

After two visits with Dad and a regular visitation schedule, Larry was calmer. It appeared that he could think now without constant explosions. In the next few sessions, Larry and I pretended to be Ninja warriors. "How long can your stepfather last if you stay calm and don't yell?" I asked him. "The person who loses his temper loses the battle." He and I would practice Ninja warrior "mind over matter" thinking. One time he rushed in. "I won one!" he said triumphantly. "My stepfather started to yell at me and I practiced my Ninja warrior. I told myself not to yell. He got even madder and yelled some more and then my Mom told him I wasn't doing anything back and he had to stop yelling and then *he* got in trouble." He was chuckling with delight and bouncing up and down in the chair. Then Larry practiced his newfound mental warfare skills at school. He told me, "Being a Ninja warrior works at school too."

Larry started to "grow up." From a hooded figure curled in the fetal position in my office chair, he moved to the study of electronics, the collection of baseball cards, and the repairing of old motors—age-appropriate behaviors for a teenage male in rural Michigan. He built birdhouses for the chickadees that landed outside his bedroom window in the long Michigan winter.

In the spring, he was gone like the chickadees. He no longer needed to visit me. He was no longer grounded all the time and, once in a while, he even seemed to get along a bit with his stepfather. He visited

his dad once a month now. His grades at school were B's and C's. He had a calm look on his face most of the time and he sat upright and slightly forward in my office chair. I was immensely proud of him. Despite my nagging fear about his long-term relationship with his new family, and my worry that his father would slow down visitation again, I still felt a sense of awe and wonder. Every time I see people heal, it seems a bit of a miracle. I watched him grow from what looked like "infancy" to what looked a lot like adolescence. It was a special privilege to be included in the process.

The last time he came to see me he brought pictures of Air Force planes. Life for Larry had become a mental game, replete with strategic moves. He flipped though a stack of baseball cards and shyly described his beginning interest in a potential girlfriend. "I brought you this," he said. It was a Detroit Tigers baseball card. It said "Ruppert Jones (height 5'10", weight 170#, throws left, bats right, average .255). "

I put the baseball card in my treasure chest. Even today, one touch of the baseball card transports me back to special moments on mental battlefields when a fifteen-year-old youth and I learned from each other. Although I did not tell him directly, Larry taught me to view life as a strategic game. When I am dealing with situations of intense conflict or with feelings of responsibility overload, I think of Larry's gift to me. Mentally, I turn the overwhelming situation into a strategic battlefield, a game of wits, and the situation is no longer the daunting roadblock it seemed at the beginning. I believe that my contribution in this learning interplay was teaching Larry to slow down his thinking long enough to form strategies of his own. His natural aptitude for strategic thinking was strengthened by new skills of delayed gratification and problem solving. He could slip into "mind over matter" mode at will. He quit getting kicked out of school or thrown off school buses, fighting with others, and acting on every impulse. He learned from me. I learned from him. Today, a baseball card reminds me of this life-changing process. In Beckett's Guide, it isn't worth much. A visitor to my office would not suspect that a baseball card in a wicker basket on the bookshelf contained such an invaluable item. If I laid the card out in the open, a visitor might not give it a passing glance. But to me, it is a priceless treasure.

A Dried Red Rose

Tiffany sat cautiously on the edge of the floral chair. She tossed long brunette hair behind her shoulder and twisted it around her fingers when she fought tears in the first interview. She came in with a request, "I need someone to talk to." She lived with an uncle and aunt and her one-year-old son.

She was seventeen years old. She wanted to talk about financial pressures, finishing school, deciding what to do with her life, and arguments with her boyfriend. She had ambivalent feelings about making a commitment to him. She trusted only a handful of people. Her eye contact was fleeting and intermittent.

By the third visit (after a cancellation or two) she wanted to tell me her story. Tiffany described watching her mother being beaten into unconsciousness by a boyfriend and running barefoot into the night to the neighbors to call the police. She was six years old. She described holding a shotgun on this man when she was seven. Frightened relatives took the gun away from her. "I only wish," she said to me between loud sobs, "that I had killed him....that they hadn't stopped me." When Tiffany was eight years old, her mother disappeared after a loud confrontation with the boyfriend. Tiffany's mother was never seen again. Tiffany spoke of her constant search for her mother, saying, "I dreamed for a long time that she would come back. Every time I went to the mall or a festival...I looked for her in the crowd.... I try to imagine what I will say and do when she comes back."

After her mother disappeared, Tiffany moved in with her father who raped her repeatedly over the next six years. She gave me a pleading "don't tell anyone" look and said, in a tone that was somehow both matter-of-fact and angry, "He told me it was normal for fathers to have sex with their daughters. When I was younger I believed it. But when I got older I had to get really drunk when I knew he was

coming home at night so that I could get through it." At fourteen, she ran away. She lived on the streets and took care of herself. She got a job and a new boyfriend, and saved money for a car and an apartment. When her boyfriend found out she was pregnant, he beat her for the first time. Tiffany packed two suitcases and took a bus to an aunt's home. She said, "I wasn't going to have *my* baby go through what I did when my Mom got beat up." She had the baby and returned to school. She got help from the public health nurses. They sent her to me.

Tiffany had a hard time expressing her feelings in words. She'd had a lifetime of suppressing them. We worked with art, poetry, and play mediums. The day we did "Play Doh" families, she formed a turtle for her uncle, a kangaroo for her aunt, a rosebud for the baby son, a teddy bear for the boyfriend, a snake for her father, and a red rose for her missing mother. I picked up the Playdoh rose. "Tiffany," I said with a tremendous sense of inner pain, "your mother is probably dead. And even if she's alive, the mother you did know is dead. It would not be the same." She wept and nodded in silence. It was a long, long silence.

I fought tears myself for the little girl who had suffered so much and yet was so strong. Had I been too forthright, I wondered? Was I trying to push her too fast? I struggled with my own decision.

We had a memorial service later on for the "red rose" mother. We planned it over many sessions. On the day of the event, Tiffany arrived with her uncle, aunt, baby, two red roses, four small white candles, and pictures of her mother holding Tiffany as a baby. We put the pictures in the window. We laid the roses before the pictures. Tiffany passed out hand-written memorial leaflets. They said "In loving memory of June B., who disappeared on Jan. 4, 1988." Tiffany, the aunt, and the uncle each described some memories of Tiffany's mother. Tiffany's uncle said, in a hushed tone, "That picture in the window was taken right after your mother came back from work and she was so glad to see you. You look exactly like her." Tiffany read the leaflet, "To my Mom, who was [her voice rising with

strain] the BEST mom a kid could ever have." She lit a candle for each of us to hold. Her uncle, with head bowed, said, "Your Mom loved you very much, Tiffany. She was a wonderful person." The aunt said nothing. Tears streamed down her face. The baby cooed and grinned throughout musical renditions of Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven" (Clapton, E. & Jennings, W.; 1992, track 4) and Bette Midler's "The Rose" (McBroom, A., 1993, track 7). It seemed to me as if Tiffany's potential for growth, fear of love, and difficulty with trust was captured by Bette Midler's alto voice:

Some say love, it is a river that drowns the tender reed.

Some say love, it is a razor that leaves your soul to bleed.

Some say love, it is a hunger, an endless aching need.

I say love, it is a flower; and you, its only seed.

It's the heart afraid of breakin' that never learns to dance.

It's the dream afraid of wakin' that never takes the chance.

It's the one who won't be taken who cannot seem to be,

And the soul afraid of dyin' that never learns to live.

When the night has been too lonely, and the road has been too long,

And you think that love is only, for the lucky and the strong.

Just remember, in the winter, far beneath the bitter snows,

Lies the seed, that with the sun's love, in the spring, becomes the rose. (McBroom, A., 1993, track 7).

The baby, the only one in the room not in tears, wiggled in Tiffany's arms and tried to make eye contact with us to get our attention. The experience was so powerful; I knew it must have helped Tiffany grieve her mother. At the same time, I feared I had somehow leaped into territory that was beyond my skill level, my legitimate role. Was I a therapist or a min-

ister? Was there a difference at this moment? Did there need to be? With ten minutes left in the memorial service—just after replaying the Bette Midler song Tiffany took one red rose for herself and gave one to me.

In the weeks following the memorial service, Tiffany appeared to be doing better. She took the top academic awards in the graduating adult education class. She got a job and a subsequent promotion. She started college. Tiffany said she wants to be an attorney to help children who experience abuse and neglect. I hope she makes it. Right now, she's a bit more concerned about passing algebra. I still worry about her, but I force myself to think of how strong she has been, how strong human beings can be despite atrocities and pain.

I try not to pick up the rose now so that it won't crumble; it is a dried red rose, brown at the edges of the petals. I learned from Tiffany that love is sometimes accompanied by loss and pain (just as roses have thorns). I learned to appreciate what I have on any given day, for at any moment it could disappear. As Tiffany told a story of losing her mother, I imagined what it would be like to lose my own family. I don't know if she knew how scared that made me. I hope that Tiffany learned from me that she is a survivor; a strong person who can face some of life's most potent challenges. She said only, "I feel a lot better now. I don't cry all the time. I'm not as irritable. I feel like I can move ahead with my life." I hope she learned to trust others a bit more, to be more comfortable with her own feelings, and to understand the nagging fear of abandonment that tugs at her from time to time. I hope I have helped her face some "bitter snows" so that she can blossom in her own developmental spring time. For now, she says, "I trust my boyfriend more now and I am less afraid of losing my son." As a social worker, I want more for her, but part of me is satisfied that she has come a long way in a short time, part of me is focused on how much more she has to do. She has so much more to learn about trusting herself and trusting others, about facing the future, moment by moment.

An Eraser

Jonathon came in the first time with his foster mother. He was eight years old with a stocky build and shining new front teeth with little seesaw nubs on the ends of them. The "adult" teeth still looked a little too big for his mouth. He stared through a smudged pair of glasses, the lenses thick enough to distort his blue eyes. Life, for Jonathon, was serious business. He spoke very little. He moved slowly and cautiously. He studied everything around him, vigilant, like a sentinel in a guard tower. He held tightly to his few possessions and hoarded food. At school, he sometimes diverged from his silent, alert pattern to engage in sudden bursts of intense anger and aggression. He once threw a chair at his foster mother. He had only one request of the world, "I want to go home."

He'd been in foster care for three months. When I asked him if he thought he was going home, he looked forlornly out from the thick glasses and glanced down quickly, saying, "I don't know. They don't ever tell me." He said that he missed his mother. He said that he missed his dog. He said that he missed his two younger siblings. With a worried expression, he said, "I don't know who will make them [his siblings] breakfast now." He said he wished the teacher hadn't seen his bruised face. I asked him what he would do if he could go back in time and have it happen all over again. He said, "I would tell them about not having enough food... but not about John [mother's boyfriend] hitting me and about my mom sleeping in. Then someone would have got us food but no one would take me to foster care." I understood this to mean that if he had it to do over again, he might not have told the school counselor about mother's boyfriend hitting him with the belt and locking him in his room, and that he often couldn't wake his mother up to take him to school because she had been drinking too much. He still might have told them about the times there was nothing to eat in the house. I was surprised at his simple, yet sophisticated, knowledge about the child welfare system's response to child abuse and neglect. I was troubled and angry that he had to take care of others and run the household when

he was just a young boy. I asked him what he did for fun at home. He said, with almost a proud tone, "I mostly didn't have time for fun. I had to take care of things." I asked him, "Do you think it is your fault for going to foster care?" He nodded instantly and said with a firm tone, "I shouldn't have told."

Jonathon played a mean game of Yahtzee and liked to hit the buttons on the copy machine. I told him that it was not his fault that he went to foster care. I told him that it was not his fault that he rolled a certain dice roll in Yahtzee. Things happen that we can't control. The teachers asked him questions and he only told the truth. "Telling the truth may not make things easy." I said, "but in the long run, it is usually the right thing to do." I told him it was not the job of eight-year-olds to take care of all the people and things to do in a house. "I don't have to do them in foster care," he said, "I just have to make my bed." I nodded this time. Could I teach him what "normal" is? Do I even know what normal is?

I gave him the 90's versions of marbles at the end of each session: Pogs—flat cardboard tokens with pictures of sculls, spiders, yin-yangs, and magic eight balls. He especially liked the yin-yang pictures. It seemed a "teachable moment." I said, "Jonathon, people are like yin-yangs too. All people have a little bit of both good and bad in them. It is okay to love someone for their good parts and not like all of the things that the person does." I asked him if he thought this seemed true for anyone he know. "Like my Mom," he answered with a logical tone, "I still like my Mom but I don't like it when she drinks and sleeps too much." "Exactly," I replied. I was proud of him for understanding.

After six months in foster care, Jonathon made the honor roll. He stopped throwing chairs. He began to laugh a little. He said he still missed his mother. She began to show up for his sessions. We were to "reunite" them to prepare for his return home. His mother sent her boyfriend away. She made every visit. She cut back on her drinking. She tried hard to get Jonathon back.

Jonathon began to go home for visits. The second-to-last time he came in, he was going home for good. He showed me a flat, white eraser with a red apple on it. Below the apple, there was lettering that said "Washington." He said he was given the eraser by someone at his school. He was happy about going home, he said, but he would miss some things about the foster home. His glasses were broken that day and he couldn't see very well. He couldn't read the blackboard at school. Mother said his glasses needed a tiny screw for the frame. When I gave him his pog at the end of the session, he handed me his eraser in return. Jonathon, the hoarder of all possessions, had given me his eraser. I understood. It was a great honor. I had received an Academy Award.

When he came in for the final visit, a month later, his mother said she had been too busy to get the glasses fixed. He still couldn't see. He was nearly nonverbal again. He said the boyfriend was not back in the home. He was lying. We both knew it. Jonathon's mother said they would be moving. She was tired of being badgered by the child welfare agency. I felt powerless to do anything. I felt as powerless as Jonathon had felt many times in his life. The court had already discharged the abuse/neglect petition. The legal clout, the "club" that had motivated his mother to make changes, was gone. Things were sliding backward. I felt discouraged. I could only hope and pray for the future.

Now, I have my memories of Jonathon, a little white eraser and some lessons learned. From Jonathon, I learned that life does not deal everyone the same hand. The dice roll is not always fair. As in the Wizard of Oz, "there is no place like home." Home and "attachments" matter above all. They cannot be "erased." I hope that Jonathon learned from me that he is not responsible for the choices of adults. I hope he learned to keep his temper when showing it would be self-defeating. I cannot honestly say if he learned those things. A few minutes of Yahtzee may not make up for a belt buckle and a hungry stom-

ach. The only thing I know he learned is the yin-yang: people are all a little bit good and a little bit bad. I hope that's enough to carry him for a while.

Summary

When we examine client memorabilia, it is an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Search your own office. What small items have clients given to you? Whom do they represent? What do they mean to you? In what ways have you and your clients been changed by the helping interactions? How do you know? What lessons have been learned? These are the questions of a developing helper.

I believe that the wicker basket high on my office bookshelf is a veritable treasure chest of memories of special young people who have changed me in significant ways. A baseball card, a dried rose, and a white eraser tell the stories of Larry, Tiffany, and Jonathon. They are, to me, priceless. They connect me to the "yin-yang" condition of my clients and myself: co-existing frailty and strength, attachment and loss, stability and change, hope and fear. We change. We stay the same. I am better for the moments spent with these young people. The objects they left behind are small, but the ways these clients touched me are not.

A baseball card, a rose, and an eraser are treasures because they remind me of how many people have come into my life and then left me; they are souvenirs from the ebb and flow of attachment and separation within my relationships. These objects are as important to me as my dead grandmother's blue plastic suitcase that I cannot bring myself to throw away and the faded baby pictures in my living room of my now grown-up children. The objects are a cognitive bridge—a memory connector—back to these relationships; they are a reminder of the memories of those whom I have loved and cared for. I have cared for these young people and their stories of pain, adversity, and challenge. It was painful to have them leave me. I have their gifts to keep me in touch with them. The gifts are my "transitional objects."

A baseball card, a rose, and an eraser are also treasures to me because they remind me of the lessons that I have learned from the people in my life who have helped me develop new skills and beliefs. My clients—just like my friends, family, teachers, and, really, all of my relationships—have become threads in the tapestry of the weaving of my life. I believe they have offered me rich learning experiences. My clients have taught me to face pain, abandonment, responsibility, fear, sadness, the unknown, and even death. I am who I am today because of the people with whom I have shared human interaction. I have done what I can to repay my clients by giving them words of support, ideas from my life, and the skills to implement them during the time we were together. Now that we are apart, I treasure the objects they leave behind that remind me of human connections and lessons learned in the journey of my life. □

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Coming Full Circle: A Social Worker's Journey through Abuse and Recovery

In this article, I describe my experience as both a survivor of abuse and a social worker working with other survivors. In the story that follows, the theme of voice and silence, of telling our stories and repeatedly meeting with silence and invalidation, recurs. I summarize what I have learned from survivors as a social worker and discuss the important contributions social worker/survivors offer the profession.

by
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I am an abuse survivor. This is the first time I have acknowledged this publicly. In more than twenty years of speaking, teaching, training, and writing about abuse and working with abuse survivors, I have only recently come to recognize how my personal experience of abuse has impacted my work. My passion for justice, intolerance of inequity, and strong sense of compassion are a direct result of my abuse and the meaning I have made of it.

Survivors of abuse, as well as other oppressed people, heal through speaking our truth. Telling our stories of abuse to witnesses who validate the injustice and pain of the experience provides a necessary experience of trust and relationship (Herman, 1992). In the story that follows, the theme of voice and silence, of telling our stories and meeting with silence and invalidation, recurs.

Social workers often speak about empowerment and challenging oppression (Rose, 1990; Simon, 1994). At the same time, as a profession, we may be reluctant to learn from the experiences of the oppressed. Some social work educators (Black, Jeffreys, & Hartley, 1993; Russel, Gill, Coyne & Woody, 1993) consider social workers who are abuse survivors a potential liability to the profession. These authors describe research on social work students who are survivors and recommend caution in admitting them to schools of social work. In contrast to these authors, I suggest that social work has much to learn from social workers who have experienced abuse. We can listen and learn from their experiences of oppression, benefit from their leadership, and join them in resisting oppression.

In this article, I describe my own experience as both a survivor and a social worker working with other survivors. I then summarize what I have learned from the many survivors I have met in my practice as a social worker and social work educator and discuss the important contributions social worker/survivors offer the profession.

Early Experiences

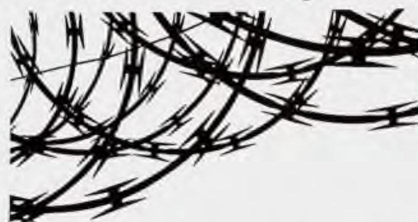
I have been a social worker for more than twenty years. I was drawn to the profession as a young college student in the 1960s because I thought it would provide a context and skills to

work for social justice. I learned early in life that justice is rare. Raised by an authoritarian, critical, and abusive father and an emotionally distant mother, I was often angry as a child. I learned that expressing my anger directly only resulted in further abuse, so I retreated into books and fantasies of a more just world. I remember being distinctly proud when, at the age of ten, from behind the safety of a locked bedroom door, I shouted at my father, "All people are created equal, only some are more equal than others." For once, I had the last word.

When I was twelve, I learned about my own potential for violence. My five-year-old sister had been pestering me while I was making a bed, and I roughly pushed her away. Not knowing my own strength or the depth of my anger, I was shocked when she flew across the room and cut a gash in her head as she hit the door. I was terrified and ashamed, although her injuries were not serious. I had promised myself never to be like my father and now I had hurt my sister. I was afraid that I was, as my mother so often said, "just like my father." I learned that I was capable of violence and vowed to do everything in my power to prevent it.

At the age of thirteen, during the Bay of Pigs fiasco and tensions in the Middle East, I began to recognize the abuse of power on a larger scale. My personal commitment to nonviolence became a commitment to pacifism as well. By the age of sixteen, I was opposed to the Vietnam War and became a strong advocate for peace in my early college years. These political commitments seemed obvious and natural to me. Because of my political commitments and my increasing knowledge about poverty, institutional oppression, and Marxism, I changed my major from German to sociology, with a concentration in social work.

After graduating from college, I began my first social work job at a residential treatment center. There I encountered my capacity for violence again. Most of the children I worked with had experienced abuse at home. For some, anger led to violence and verbal abuse toward staff. As a female residence counselor, I was often the target. I frequently found myself angry and struggling for ways to control my impulse to fight back. I often felt as helpless and



furious as I had at the hands of my father, and it was hard to maintain my commitment to nonviolence. I did not yet understand the long-term effects of abuse or the relationship between oppression and abuse, but I knew what these children were feeling. However, I as well as the other staff also had blind spots. When I look back at the children I worked with, it seems obvious that most of them were sexually abused: the eleven-year-old boy who left the agency with his behavioral and emotional problems apparently resolved, only to be admitted to another facility two months later after returning to his mother's bed; the teenage girl whose father committed suicide after her admission; the nine-year-old girl who repeatedly had sex in the bushes with male residents; the seventeen-year-old boy with normal cognitive abilities who had been confined to an institution for the mentally retarded from the age of five, after his concentration in school deteriorated due to sexual abuse by his father; the teenage girl who repeatedly ran away. We never asked these children, "what happened to you?" or, "what are you running away from?" and so colluded in silencing them.

In my early twenties I became a member of one of the first consciousness-raising groups in my area. Feminism helped me to find my voice, to value my feelings as well as my intellect, and taught me to put my personal experience of abuse into a political context. I learned to listen to women. Having been raised in a family of four daughters with a misogynist father, the discovery that women had something meaningful to say was a welcome suprise. I began to apply feminist ideas to my social work practice and I went back to school for my MSW at the age of twenty-six.

It was exciting to be a young feminist social work student in the mid-1970s. I had volunteered in rape crisis programs prior to returning to school and learned that my passion made me an effective speaker. I continued that work in graduate

school, becoming involved in the early movement against wife abuse and speaking about it in my social work classes. I became involved in discussions about integrating content on women into the social work curriculum, co-taught a course called "Social Work and Women's Roles," and became a graduate assistant for Social Policy. I discovered that teaching could be a consciousness-raising activity (Freire, 1993) and considered an academic career.

My graduate school experience was most heavily influenced by a speaking engagement for the campus rape crisis center. I had been speaking publicly about rape for many years when a seventeen-year-old girl at a high school presentation, whom I will call Diana, asked me for the first time, "What do you do when the person who rapes you is your father?" My co-presenter and I were stunned. Diana told us her story: She lived on a farm and had been sexually abused by her father while her mother was away from home. When she spoke about her experience to the school counselor, Child Protection was called and a male social worker came to her school. She told him what had happened and asked that he let her inform her mother. He agreed, left the room, and immediately called her mother. Although her mother responded with outrage and protectiveness, separating from her husband and filing for divorce, Diana was removed from home and sent to live in a foster home in a nearby city. The incident was reported to the police and charges were filed against her father. The local newspaper reported the story, including her father's name, which identified her in her new school and community. She felt angry, abandoned and very sorry she had said anything about the abuse.

My colleagues and I at the campus women's center were horrified by what had happened to Diana and discussed what to do. Although we had provided support and advocacy for many women raped by strangers, we had never met an incest survivor and were uncertain how her needs differed from those of other rape survivors. We supported Diana as best we could, offering validation and empathy. We also wanted to know whether her experience after disclosing incest was typical. As feminists, believing that "the personal is political," we wanted to intervene at the system level but didn't know enough about how it operated. We convened a community forum, inviting representatives from Child Protection, the local sheriff's office, and probation and local family service agencies to tell us what they knew about incest in our community and how best to support victims. We found that the professionals attending the meeting knew little more about incest than we did. However, they agreed that it was the mother's fault. They didn't really know what to do about it. I asked one of my social work instructors the same question. While supportive, she told me that when she was in graduate school, the consensus had been that, while incest happened, it was more traumatic to the child and to the family to talk about it. Students had been advised not to bring it up. She agreed that it was time to question that assumption.

This was 1976, and feminists all over the country were hearing the same stories on rape crisis hotlines and in wife abuse shelters and were beginning to respond politically. Feminist psychologist Laura Brown (1996) describes her experience of that time:

> What I learned was that this intensely private event was a profoundly political one, and that what I had been taught about listening to incest—to silence, to stereotype, to avoid—reflected a politic about not listening. It is no surprise that when voices began to speak of sexual abuse of children they were feminist voices, women from the movements to stop rape, from the emerging lesbian communities, voices outside of official science and the academy (p. 6).

In 1977, a social worker, Florence Rush, published "The Freudian Cover-up" in *Chrysalis*. The article was a feminist discussion of incest and the societal cover-up that had been occurring since Freud abandoned the seduction theory for the oedipus complex. Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman's (1977) article, "Father-Daughter Incest"

was published soon after.

But the story was not over for Diana. After reporting her father, she learned that she was pregnant. She had an abortion. A blood test was done on the aborted fetal material, although the results were not considered legally conclusive and it was incompatible with her father's blood type. Although Diana admitted to being sexually active with her boyfriend, the blood type was taken as definitive evidence that her father had not committed incest, and the charges were dropped. Once again, the results were published in the local newspaper, implying to the community that her story had been false. Although we continued to provide Diana with support and validation, it was clear that more was needed. I wrote a letter to the state Attorney General complaining about the situation, but the response was that nothing more could be done.

Diana's situation taught me that the actions and attitudes of professionals and the community could compound the trauma experienced by sexually abused children and their mothers. I learned that even mothers who took action to protect their children could lose custody because professionals believed that they were responsible for the abuse. At the time, I believed that with more information about incest, the system could and would protect Diana, her mother, and others like them. I decided to help provide the system with a greater understanding of incest, and of the possible reasons behind mothers' "failures" to protect their children, by researching the relationship between wife abuse and the sexual abuse of children for my master's final project.

Learning about Abuse

When I began my literature review in 1976, I found no articles in social work journals about incest. There were very few contemporary articles about incest at all. I had to do the bulk of my research at the archives of the Child Behavior and Development Institute on campus. The articles reflected the dominant discourse about family violence at that time. Incest was seen as an issue of pathology within the victim, the mother, or the family system. There was very little attention to power relations within the family or the ways these are supported by gender relations in the larger society. Little of the research looked at incest from the point of view of victims or mothers. The consensus of the authors I read, primarily psychiatrists, echoed our panel of community providers: incest was rare, but it was definitely the mother's fault. Several of the articles stated or implied that incest occurred because mothers colluded, condoned, or "unconsciously consented" to it (Machotka, Pittman & Flomenhaft, 1967; Nakashima & Zakus, 1977; Weeks, 1976). In one article (Machotka, Pittman & Flomenhaft, 1967), entitled "Incest as a Family Affair," the authors held a mother accountable for the sexual abuse of her daughter because she worked in the evenings. They considered successful family treatment to have occurred when mother and daughter were helped to reestablish their relationship. The fact that the father refused to be involved in the process made little difference; clearly, the mother and daughter were to blame:

> The mother generally feels worthless as a mother and a woman; sometimes she encourages father-daughter intimacy directly; her collusion is made possible for her by her very strong denial of the incestuous relation...; in effect she is the cornerstone in the pathological family system (Machotka, Pittman & Flomenhaft, pp. 99-100).

In discussing incest with co-workers at the campus women's center, I became aware that many mothers of incest victims were victims themselves. Many of the calls about incest at the women's center came through the Battered Women's Project hotline. In some families, fathers physically abused their wives while sexually abusing their daughters. However, none of the articles I read considered the possibility that mothers were unable to protect their daughters because of their own victimization.

I found little social work or feminist writing about incest,

other than the Rush and Herman works cited earlier, when I began my research. While I would have liked to interview victims and mothers, as a student I did not have access to a sample at that time. Instead, I decided to survey Child Protection workers in my state to see what they understood to be true about incest and wife abuse. Forty percent of workers across the state responded to my survey. Their responses reflected what I was already learning—social workers did not feel knowledgeable about incest, held many contradictory ideas about it, and primarily held mothers responsible. Although 78% believed that mothers of incest victims were frequently physically abused by their husbands, 65% also believed that mothers were as responsible as their husbands for the sexual abuse of their daughters. Eighty-seven percent believed that mothers "unconsciously consented" to incest. The results of my research were published in 1980 (Dietz & Craft, 1980) and others have raised similar concerns (e.g., Davies & Krane, 1996; Truesdell, McNeil, & Deschner, 1986), but mother-blaming continues to be a problem both generally in psychotherapy (Caplan, 1989), and specifically around issues of incest (Armstrong, 1994).

After receiving my MSW, I began working in a Domestic Violence Prevention Training Project in New York State and moved from there into teaching. During this time, I continued to do feminist work, including organizing community task forces to respond to the increasing concern about wife abuse and the sexual abuse of children. Our groups consisted of survivors and mothers as well as feminist social workers working at the level of direct services. We were often at odds with professional organizations in our goals, strategies, and understanding of abuse. For example, I was criticized in a radio talk show by other social workers who worked with survivors for taking the feminist position that incest, as an abuse of power, was inherently violent. My critics did not see incest politically, and felt that to name it as violence implied that all perpetrators used overt violence to enforce their will. The professional task forces, consisting primarily of directors of social service agencies, were receptive neither to feminist understandings of incest and wife abuse, nor to the participation of survivors, mothers, and other "nonprofessionals." Decisions were made at the executive level, and the concerns and needs of workers whose jobs it was to respond directly to victims were not considered. Mothers were still seen as colluding in the abuse of their children.

I left academia in 1985 because of my disillusionment over an experience of abuse of power and lack of resistance. A colleague, also a social worker, was summarily fired by the academic dean when she refused to sign a grant document containing false information. Although I had experienced this dean's abuse of power personally, as had many others, I was surprised by the failure of faculty to support my colleague. One advised me, "If it's not happening to you, turn your head and look the other way." Appeals to the College grievance processes, the EEOC, and NASW proved unsuccessful, and my colleague eventually sued the College. She received her back pay but no admission of wrongdoing.

I was naive and idealistic when I came to academia. Since school had been a haven from oppression for me as a child, I believed that truth, wisdom, and justice would prevail. While I could use my newly found voice to speak out against injustice in the classroom, I had not yet learned that power and control operated in academic politics as well as in the world outside. I was unprepared for the lack of support my colleague encountered when she acted with integrity nor for the silence that resulted when we sought justice. I had little compassion at that time for faculty who were too scared to risk their jobs by speaking out against abuse of power. I left academia for prac-

tice, believing that it would be more personally satisfying to work directly with survivors.

I returned to practice in a program in a children's hospital, working primarily with victims of child sexual abuse and their families. I met many mothers, survivors themselves, who struggled to support their abused children. They had many unaddressed needs of their own and were often challenging to work with. Their children's abuse often brought up unresolved issues from their own trauma, and some blamed themselves for failing to protect their children. I tried to offer respect and support. Although often limited by financial and emotional resources as well as their own past and present abuse, most of these mothers did their best for their children. When I discussed the difficulty of responding both to the mothers' needs and to their children's, I was told that these women suffered from "borderline personality disorder." When I mentioned the frequency of sexual abuse in these women's childhoods, I was told that sexual abuse was secondary to the personality disorder, that it was common for women with borderline personality disorder to be sexually abused because of their inconsistent relationships with their mothers.

I learned two important lessons from working with sexually abused children. One was about resilience: children whose abuse was met with validation, support, and information did very well. I supported families in helping their children understand that what had happened was not their fault, to ascertain the meaning the child had attached to the abuse, and to help the child express the feelings and fears that resulted. The process was usually brief—lasting a few weeks to a few months. The crucial variable seemed to be family support, but some children were able to move on with support from other adults. The children who experienced the most problems were those whose families denied or invalidated the abuse and those for whom the abuse continued. As I began to work with more "disturbed" children, I noticed that their parents were often unable to acknowledge or stop the abuse, were ambivalent about providing support to the child, or had sexually abusive childhoods themselves. However, with support and validation of her own experience of abuse and trauma, even a mother who had participated in the sexual abuse of her daughter was able to take responsibility for her role in her daughter's victimization and begin to repair their relationship.

The second lesson was about the contradictions in the system designed to protect children. As a family therapist in a therapeutic preschool program, I worked with families whose young children had been labeled emotionally disturbed. Sometimes my reports of alleged abuse were considered unfounded when I was certain that abuse was taking place. In one case, I was accused of prejudice against a "mentally ill" mother when I reported sexual abuse of her two young daughters. Despite compelling evidence of sexual abuse, the case was dismissed. I was removed from another case because I believed a five-year-old's report of witnessing her sister's death at the hands of her foster father. In this instance, I had supported the "mentally ill" biological father in his complaint against the county. Once again, speaking out against abuse resulted in silence. I learned that children have few legal rights, and that even when concerned adults advocate for them, escape from abuse is not always possible (Armstrong, 1994). I was so disillusioned by my inability to protect these children that I eventually left the hospital and began working exclusively with adults who, while continuing to suffer from the long-term effects of abuse, were in most cases free to pursue their own recovery.

Learning from Adult Survivors

Survivors need compassionate witnesses who can validate their experiences of betrayal and abuse, help them overcome its consequences, and support their resistance to further oppression (Herman, 1992). Many survivors never experience this response, sometimes as a direct result of the mental health system's failure to hear and respond appropriately to their stories of abuse (Bloom, 1997; Carmen, Rieker & Mills, 1984). As Carmen, Rieker, and Mills (1984) note:

> Increasing awareness of the extent of violence in this society leads us to suspect that psychiatric patients are more likely to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence than to hear voices, yet clinicians are systematic in their inquiries about hallucinations while overlooking the reality and importance of violent assaults (p. 383).

However, I continue to be amazed by the courage, determination, resilience, and compassion demonstrated by most of the adult survivors I know (Bloom, 1997). From my own childhood experience, I recognize their passion for justice, their outrage at abuse of power and societal indifference to the needs of children, and their commitment to supporting and validating others in their recovery processes.

These survivors have had a number of qualities in common. First, and most inspiring to me, is their extraordinary courage. I admire their willingness to face incredible pain and despair and to continue speaking their own truths despite the silence with which they are often met. While it may be scary to witness the depths of their grief, their determination to move through it truly amazes me. Closely related to their courage is their hope, their belief in the possibility of a different future, that life does not have to be as it was in their childhoods. Others have noted that this quality, in particular, is what enables survivors to survive (Deegan, 1990; Higgins, 1994).

The survivors I know have also had incredible determination and persistence. Similar to Bernie Siegel's (1990) observations about cancer patients who beat the odds, they have been willing to ask, even demand, that their stories be heard and their needs be addressed. It is this determination and persistence, I suspect, which often frustrates professionals. I have learned that when I respect a survivor's expertise about her experience and needs, her determination serves to support her through difficult and frustrating processes and does not become an obstacle between us (Saunders & Arnold, 1990; Stiver, 1991).

Finally, these survivors impressed me by their compassion and passion for justice. The many survivors I've met as students were highly motivated and dedicated to ending the legacy of abuse in their own and others' lives. They have been willing to face embarrassment, ridicule, or invalidation as they tell their stories of abuse and recovery. They tell it as it is, and they demand that the profession maintain its commitment to eliminating oppression in all its forms, including abuse. They have taught me many things: that all the research and practice guidelines I've read are less valuable than my ability to bear witness (Herman, 1992), hold respect, and follow their leads; that every survivor's experience of abuse and recovery is different; that it is necessary to face and feel the anger, sadness, and despair even when suicide seems the only way out; and to respect coping mechanisms that look like symptoms: cutting one's self as a way to feel real, to express pain and anger, to take control of seemingly overwhelming feelings; talking about suicide, as a way out of pain that seems unending and unendurable; consuming alcohol and drugs that bring welcome numbing when there is no support, no witness, no comfort available. I've learned that I don't have the answers, but that's okay, because each survivor must find her or his own answers.

Not all survivors are admirable. Some continue to struggle with the legacy of abuse in their own lives and in their relationships with their children. Some repeat the abuse that was perpetrated on them, perhaps because no one has helped them find alternatives. But the majority continue to struggle to be heard in a society and a mental health system that often ignores or pathologizes them.

Many survivors are determined to work to prevent abuse in subsequent generations. Some have gone to work in human services to offer to others what they have learned from their own abuse and recovery (Herman, 1992; Higgins, 1994; Sanford, 1990). And some have found the same invalidation and disrespect as professionals that they experienced in their families of origin or the mental health system: being silenced by colleagues, viewed as

"fragile" and vulnerable to retraumatization in their work with clients, accused of having "poor boundaries" when they acknowledge their own experience, or even being fired from their jobs. I will discuss these issues in the final section.

While working with adult survivors, I gradually began to re-enter academia. I was ambivalent for a long time, twice resigning from my doctoral program. But in 1990, I was asked to teach a class on interpersonal Relations. At the same time, a colleague who had previously taught the course was beginning to teach full time and asked me for suggestions about some of her courses. The support we provided to each other was energizing. She was a feminist and reminded me that the classroom offers an opportunity for both personal and political change. With her support, the course on interpersonal relations became a course on diversity and oppression. I rediscovered my passion for teaching and finally committed to completing my doctorate.

Coming Full Circle: My Own Recovery Process

During my twenty-plus years as a social worker, my attention to abuse has peaked and ebbed. Throughout my doctoral program, I wrote most of my papers on incest and wife abuse, only to focus my dissertation on social work's images of gays and lesbians. Then I took a teaching job for which a primary qualification was experience as a feminist clinician with issues of abuse. I quickly found myself immersed in abuse issues again. Unexpectedly, after making a commitment to my life partner, I discovered that my own recovery was far from complete.

I had focused much of my professional energy on supporting survivors and responding to abuse and had spent eight years with various therapists, but my personal process of recovery had been primarily cognitive. I spent a number of years without a committed relationship and found my life interesting, engaging, and fulfilling. It was not until after I made a commitment to my partner, a survivor herself, that my emotional wounds began to surface. Helping survivors speak their truths and be heard had been the focus of my work, yet it was hard to tell my own story while remaining emotionally connected. Intimacy with my partner was terrifying—at times, it was unbearable to look into her eyes. More than once I wondered if I was destined to live alone, if intimacy was more than I could handle. During these moments of despair, in a recovery process not yet complete, I have found inspiration in the lives and experiences of the survivors I've known as clients, students, colleagues, and collaborators. Narrative accounts of abuse and recovery, such as *The Obsidian Mirror* by Louise Wisechild (1988), have inspired me to believe in my own capacity to heal. Professionals, such as Jennifer Freyd (1996), who have experienced abuse and gone on to transform their experiences through research and political action, serve as role models, as do my clients and my students. My admiration for their courage and determination provides hope and possibility for my own recovery.

Changing Political Context

Recently, I read the following statement in the *Journal of Social Work Education*:

> Because there is a dramatic prevalence of a variety of significant trauma in the background of social work students, the probability of similar trauma existing in the early life experiences of social work professionals is high. Therefore, it is imperative that the profession investigate the extent of dysfunction within families of origin and the impact on professionals. The National Association of Social Workers should mandate this research (Black, Jeffreys & Hartley, 1993).

This article and another published the same year (Russel, Gill, Coyne & Woody, 1993) report empirical research comparing social work students' experiences of "dysfunction" in their families of origin with those of students in other disciplines. Both studies found social work students more likely than students in business and counseling to have come from "dysfunctional" families in which a variety of traumatic experiences, including physical, sexual,

and emotional abuse, as well as substance abuse, had occurred. The conclusions of the authors in both articles were that social work educators should be vigilant for possible "negative countertransference biases" and "the tendency to carry a childhood 'survival' role inappropriately into adult social and professional relationships" (Nichols, 1984, cited in Russel, Gill, Coyne & Woody, 1993, p. 127). While the authors of both studies note in passing that abuse in childhood may make social workers more compassionate and responsive to others, the overall tone of the articles was pathologizing and concerned. Russel, Gill, Coyne and Woody (1993) suggested consideration of screening for the presence of "serious mental health problems" among applicants to schools of social work and research "of diverse, perhaps standardized, indicators of current mental health and ...its relationship to professional effectiveness" (p. 128).

These social work educators express concerns about "the mental health of people in the helping profession" (Russell, Gill, Coyne & Woody, 1993, p. 121) and "anecdotal evidence" that many social work students had a history of psychosocial trauma (Black, Jeffreys & Hartley, 1993, p. 171.) The articles move from these concerns to discussion of "dysfunction" and "pathology" among survivors and their families. While both studies recommend further research regarding the impact of social workers' experiences in their families of origin and their effectiveness as professionals, their primary concern seems to be that these experiences may negatively impact social workers' abilities to help their clients.

I have seen no critical response to these articles. My own reaction is similar to my response to the articles I read in 1976. Once again, the meanings of survivors' experiences are interpreted by those who see them through the lens of pathology.

The social context in which abuse and recovery take place is not considered. Terms such as "dysfunction," "pathology," "mental illness," and "wounded healers" do not reflect the strengths and positive attributes which may also result from surviving childhood trauma. Survivors' understandings of their abuse experiences and how they impact practice are absent from the discussion. Research on the resilience of survivors (Higgins, 1994; Sanford, 1990) or the strengths perspective (Saleeby, 1992) is not included. Experiencing abuse seems indicative of both mental illness (undefined) and a tendency toward "countertransference biases." The possibility that social workers' personal experiences of abuse help make them good social workers is not seriously considered. While I agree with these authors that further research to identify the links between traumatic childhood experience and effectiveness as a social worker may be helpful, I would like such research to consider the positive as well as negative impacts of surviving abuse and to include social worker/survivors' perspectives as well as aggregate empirical data.

Shortly after reading these articles, I heard that several abuse survivors who were also mental health professionals had been fired or strongly encouraged to resign from their jobs after revealing their personal experiences of abuse. These workers had been active in the efforts of the State Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services to learn from the experiences and insights of survivors in the mental health system and involve them in planning and implementing services (Jennings and Ralph, 1997). While feminist practitioners such as Herman (1992) and Greenspan (1995) have noted that authentic connection facilitates recovery, some of these workers were accused of improper boundaries when they acknowledged their abuse histories or sought to engage in authentic relationships with clients. One left a job she had successfully held for ten

years because her colleagues became concerned, after hearing that she was a survivor, that she would be retraumatized by her work with clients. Do these workers' actions reflect "unhelpful countertransference biases" or genuine and compassionate connection?

Other survivors have told me, and I have experienced myself, how empowering it can be when the professionals we work with have experienced abuse themselves. It is helpful and hopeful to know that they have felt the anger, sadness, and despair of abuse as well as the pain, frustration, and joy of recovery, and that they have come to a place where they can provide support to others. The inspiration they provide just by being there can be tremendous. As one survivor says:

> Many of the "experts" in the field who are most qualified and have the most success are those who have created methods themselves and discovered that they work. Many of these experts are survivors themselves (Jennings & Ralph, 1997, p. 41).

Judith Herman (1992) notes that mental health professionals' attention to abuse has always depended upon strong political movements that provide organized resistance to the silencing of survivors and their experiences. In the absence of such movements, survivors and others committed to resistance to oppression have been marginalized or pathologized, as Linda Gordon (1989), Judith Herman, (1981 and 1992) and Florence Rush (1980) have described.

I believe that social workers have an important role to play in making sure that survivors' voices are not silenced once again. The response to abuse survivors in public and professional discourse is changing. While the initial feminist response to child sexual abuse named the issue as political, by the early 1990s the focus, even among feminists, was primarily on "treating the adult survivor" (Brown, 1996). As Brown acknowledges:

> We forgot the heritage of the issue, the fact that only a few years ago we were naming incest as a "patriarchal prerogative," not a sign of family dysfunction...So, with all good intentions, we colluded in the psychopathologizing, not of sexual abuse of children, its perpetrators and apologists, but of survivors (Armstrong, 1994; Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993) ... And we almost never heard the voices of resilient survivors; they were absent from the discourse, marginalized by its transformation into a dialogue about psychopathology rather than a dialogue about politics (Brown, 1996, pp. 8-9).

At the same time, concern was being raised about the validity of stories of abuse, particularly those involving recovered memories, and the term "false memory syndrome" was coined. Members of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, some of them parents accused of sexual abuse, have been extremely successful in casting doubt on the testimony and credibility of abuse survivors and the validity of recovered memories. I am worried that survivors are about to be silenced again.

I agree with Black, Jeffreys and Hartley (1993) and Russel, Gill, Coyne and Woody (1993) that social workers should not harm their clients by imposing biases from their own experience. However, this goal will not be served by using standardized measures of "mental health" to screen abuse survivors from schools of social work. I have worked hard in my own recovery process to discover how my abuse experiences enhance or detract from my ability to help other survivors. Many other social workers/survivors have done the same. However, I believe that *all* social workers, whether or not they have experienced abuse, have the same responsibility. For those who have not experienced abuse, learning not to impose biases from their non-abusive childhoods may be equally necessary.

To those social workers who are concerned about the possible impact of survivors on social work and social work education, I suggest that you listen to their stories and consider the contributions their strengths, dedication, and courage can make to the profession. Supporting survivors in their personal recovery is necessary (Black, Jeffreys & Hartley, 1993),

but so is supporting their commitment to justice and social change. I want to work, as a client and as a colleague, with survivors and others who are fully committed to becoming conscious about how their personal experience impacts their work and to challenging oppression on all levels.

Many of my colleagues and students share my views. As a faculty member in a School of Social Work with a strong commitment to social justice, I have found others who want to support survivors of abuse and other forms of oppression in making the unique and essential contributions to social work that only they have to offer. I am committed to speaking out and advocating for survivors within my own profession and in the larger community Now, I will acknowledge that I also advocate for myself. □

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Breaking Confidence: When Silence Kills

This article presents the dilemma faced by mental health practitioners whose maintenance of strict confidentiality may result in harm or injury to the client or to others. As a crisis worker, I spent over a decade working with high-risk clients in community mental centers in rural New England and in a major metropolitan area in Virginia. Having gained some distance from my work, I increasingly question the power and authority granted me as a "professional." I am increasingly concerned about illusions of self-determination and true mutuality between client and practitioner and the role that helping professionals play in social control. Narrative accounts exemplifying legal precedents and ethical conflicts are presented using my own professional experiences with mental health and medical involuntary hospitalizations.

by
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Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person or when laws or regulations require disclosure without a client's consent (NASW Code of Ethics, 1996, section 1.07).

As helping professionals, we are taught that mutuality, respect for human dignity, and self-determination are the cornerstones of positive helping relationships with our clients. Practitioners and clients are seen as collaborators, mutual relationships whose purpose is to empower clients towards improving their particular life circumstances and to increase control over their lives. These are important ideals and certainly pivotal to developing trusting relationships between any two people.

There are times, however, when as helpers we are required to take control, move swiftly and assertively, and act on behalf of society. We have the power to take away from our clients the fundamental right of freedom. Early on in my career, I held the naive belief that helping relationships were truly mutual and egalitarian. It could be that I was not yet ready to accept the mantle of social control agent that society was putting on my shoulders. Or perhaps I simply did not want to acknowledge the power that I had over others by my position.

It was not until I had to strip clients of their basic right of freedom by making the decision to hospitalize them against their will that I came to understand the social control and trustee responsibilities inherent in helping relationships. I found it necessary to expand my repertoire of interventions to include temporary detention orders (TDOs) and involuntary commitment, to re-define "client" to include society, with a duty to protect potential victims from violence. I came to recognize the community protection and social control functions

served by my profession. There are times when I have a legal and ethical responsibility, even an obligation, to act with authority and break the confidentiality implicit in helping relationships. And this often must be done without the permission or knowledge of my client.

This article explores confidentiality, self-determination, and issues of power and control and situations in which practitioners are required to assert control, break confidence, and go against the value of client self-determination. The role of the practitioner in hospitalizing clients against their will and its impact on the helping relationship is discussed with criteria for involuntary commitment exemplified by case study. The Tarasoff ruling and its implications for the duty of helping professionals to warn potential victims is examined.

Breaking Confidence: Helper as Guardian

I remember well the first time that I found it necessary to act against the wishes of a client and act in what I deemed to be his or her best interest. I was a clinician with a community support program in Virginia where I was a clinical supervisor for a continuum of care service residential treatment programs for adults with severe and persisting mental illness. I was responsible for providing case management services and residential support. Bill would be my first "client" contact. I noted in his chart that he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Fresh out of graduate school, I was nervous at our first meeting.

Bill was my age, mid-twenties, and at the time was dressed in khakis, a button-down shirt, and deck shoes. A successful student at a local community college, Bill prided himself in his appearance and maintained an active social life, including recent involvement with a female classmate. He was six-foot-two with blue eyes and well-groomed, shoulder-length blond hair. We seemed to have much in common, and Bill and I bonded quickly as I helped him learn the daily living skills society had deemed necessary for independent living.

Six months later, after losing track of Bill for a couple of weeks, several phone calls to his apartment went unanswered. I decided to stop by for an unannounced visit. As I drove up to his building, I noted that the curtains of his unit were drawn even though it was mid-afternoon and the sun was behind the building. Initially Bill did not invite me in, purposefully blocking my entry with his six foot frame. It was only after I reminded him with gentle insistence that the apartment he occupied was actually rented by the community mental health center residential services that he opened the door enough for me to enter.

I remember clearly the stench of stale cigarette smoke, the drawn curtains, and the darkness of the apartment that drew in upon me as Bill allowed me in. He was alone, and the two bedroom apartment, normally immaculate, was a wreck. Clothes were strewn about the cluttered living room. Dirty plates, bowls, and glasses were on the sofa end tables, the coffee table, and the kitchen counter—many had been used as ashtrays. The kitchen was filthy, with dishes filling the sink and a white plastic trash bag overflowing. Although the autumn air outside was cool, the temperature in the apartment was stifling. Bill was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. He was barefoot. I was struck by body odor as I walked by him and noted with concern his long dirty fingernails and greasy hair. It seemed apparent that he had not showered in several days.

In my inexperience, I was confused by his attitude toward me and felt betrayed by the overt hostility that seemed directed at me. I realize now that Bill was actively psychotic. His delusional thoughts were apparent—he was God and needed to rid the world of evil and the influence of the devil. Experiencing command hallucinations, he told me that God was speaking to him and told him that his roommate, Randy, was a follower of Satan and needed to die. He said God wanted him to kill Randy upon his return. When I expressed my concern for him, Bill's friendly demeanor shifted quickly, and I became the devil, and I was the cause of what was evil in the world. And the evil needed to be exorcized from the

world. The strength of his conviction and the genuineness of his belief was profound. There was no question in my mind at the time that my safety, as well as that of his roommate, was in immediate danger.

Making a swift exit, I struggled with the first of what would become scores of TDOs over the next ten years. I remember well my sense that somehow I had failed Bill and that I should have noticed warning signs that he had been decompensating. I attended the commitment hearing at the local hospital. His sister and his mother both appeared and thanked me profusely for my intervention. Bill was nearly catatonic when I saw him and was continuing to refuse his medication.

I submitted my mental health evaluation to the magistrate who issued a temporary detention order for Bill, thus allowing for him to be detained for 48 hours in a psychiatric facility and undergo a psychiatric evaluation. I had police watching the apartment until the temporary detention order could be issued, so Randy was never in any real danger. But what if Randy had returned? And what if Bill had acted upon his perception of me as the devil? Bill would spend the next six months in the state mental hospital before re-initiating psychotropic medication. Stabilized, he would later return to and complete his degree at the community college.

My concern about Bill aside, what I struggled with the most in this situation was the recognition that society had granted me permission to work with the legal system in taking away Bill's right to self-determination. This flew in the face of everything I had been taught in graduate school and seemed to be contrary to the values relating to client self-determination inherent in social work and other helping professions. To this day I struggle with this contradiction while often wondering what might have happened to Bill had I not acted.

A colleague of mine, new to the profession, was not so lucky. Six months after I transferred Betty to case management for services, she told her case manager, my colleague, that she had ceased taking her medication and that she was hearing voices telling her to kill her mother because she was evil. The case manager forestalled taking action, did not communicate to Betty's mother the threat against her, and did not take action to immediately protect the potential victim against violence. That night Betty went into her mother's bedroom and brutally killed her with a pair of scissors.

After the death of Betty's mother, I felt a tremendous unease over the lack of training I had received in this area. My graduate program had focused on normative developmental theories, personality and psychopathology theories, and skills and interventions associated with various clinical models of treatment. Limits to confidentiality were not emphasized, and the possibility of my adopting a guardian role and a social control function simply was not in the curriculum.

Tarasoff: Duty to Protect

My concern led me to research more fully the limits of confidentiality. I knew, given the nature of my work, that I would be confronting this issue all too often. At the time of my intervention with Bill, I had not heard of Tatiana Tarasoff or Prosenjit Poddar and did not know that there was legal precedence that suggested I had a duty to protect Randy from the threat that had been made against him, or that my colleague had a duty to protect Betty's mother from her daughter.

Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California

In 1966, Tatiana Tarasoff met Prosenjit Poddar, an Indian by nationality, while they were graduate students at the University of California at Berkeley. They dated briefly, and although she told him that she was not interested in a serious relationship, he became obsessed with her. Unable to win her affections, Poddar became withdrawn and depressed and began to neglect his studies.

In the summer of 1969, Poddar entered into weekly outpatient psychotherapy with a psychologist at the Cowell Memorial Hospital of the University of California. During his session on August 18, Poddar expressed fantasies of harming or even killing Tarasoff. The

therapist also learned from a friend of the client that Poddar planned to purchase a gun. Concerned about Poddar's potential for violence, the practitioner contacted the campus police to arrange for involuntary hospitalization, citing the fact that his potential lethality fit California's civil commitment criteria. Due to a lack of understanding of the then novel civil commitment statute, Poddar was not hospitalized, and he subsequently dropped out of treatment. No further action was taken to detain Poddar, and at no time was any member of the Tarasoff family warned of the threats against Tatiana's life.

In October 1969, Poddar went to Tarasoff's home. She was alone. When she refused to speak to him and began screaming for him to leave, Poddar shot her with a pellet gun. As she fled from the house, he followed and stabbed her to death with a butcher knife. The Tarasoff family sued the University of California, alleging that the police had been negligent in not detaining Poddar and that mental health practitioners had been negligent in not warning Tarasoff of Poddar's threats and in not detaining him. The defendants argued that there was no legal duty to protect or to warn (Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California, 1973). On appeal, the California Supreme Court in 1974 held that the practitioner had a duty to warn. "When a doctor or a psychotherapist, in the exercise of his professional skill and knowledge, determines, or should determine, that a warning is essential to avert danger arising from the medical or psychological condition of his patient, he incurs a legal obligation to give that warning" (Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California, 1974).

The fundamental issue in this case was the question of whether reasonable care was used in providing for the safety of Ms. Tarasoff. Although existing codes of ethics provide general directions for social workers and counselors in situations where there may be imminent danger to the client or to others, it was this case that set legal precedence in the state of California for the duty-to-warn principle. The decision radically changed existing law by creating a legal duty to protect the foreseeable victim of the patient's dangerousness where no duty had previously existed in the law. Generally, under common law, a person is under no duty to control the conduct of another or to warn those endangered by that conduct. The Tarasoff court found the relationship between a therapist and a patient to be a "special relationship," which constitutes an exception to the common law. The case clearly reflects a value that in some situations societal rights for safety override individual rights to privacy. Although similar laws do not exist in most states, many professional associations have adopted duty-to-warn principles in their ethical guidelines. The duty to warn has become an integral component of many therapists' application of confidentiality in the client-therapist relationship.

There was a great deal of concern among members of professional organizations that requiring practitioners to warn potential victims would lead to frequent and often unnecessary breaches of the client's right to confidentiality. Further, professionals worried about the chilling effect that might occur in telling patients at the outset of treatment that certain things that the patient may say could trigger a warning to third parties (Beck, 1985).

These concerns led to the California Supreme Court rehearing the Tarasoff case in 1976 and the issuing of a second opinion. This opinion modified the duty to warn as defined in the first Tarasoff opinion, making it in effect a duty to protect. The court held that "When a therapist determines or pursuant to the standard of his profession should determine, that his patient presents a serious danger of violence to another, he incurs an obligation to use reasonable care to protect the intended victim against such danger" (Tarasoff v. Regents of

the University of California, 1976, p. 346).

Over the next several years I had many occasions to apply the Tarasoff ruling to my practice. As a crisis worker, my primary responsibility was to carry a caseload of high-risk clients and to conduct hospital assessments for the area police, jail, and school personnel. I applied Tarasoff very judiciously and prided myself on never "losing a client" over seven years of crisis-oriented work at the Center.

Since that first experience with Bill, advocating for taking away an individual's civil right to freedom, I have conducted mental health evaluations that have led to the involuntary hospitalizations of scores of men, women, and children. The faces of these people remain etched in my mind. Sometimes in the dark of long nights when sleep arrives late, I lie awake wondering how Bill has fared. I feel relieved that while my actions sometimes resulted in the perception of a break of trust between my clients and me, and their temporary loss of freedom, they also saved innumerable lives.

Breaking Confidence: Danger to Self

It did not take long for me to learn that there are other occasions when my job required that I break confidence with a client. Paul was a 42-year-old white, male, police officer referred to me by his supervisor, who became concerned that Paul had shared that he was feeling depressed and that his marriage was in distress. Paul was instructed to get counseling, and we worked together for several weeks, developing a trusting relationship. After our eighth session, Paul told me that his wife had decided to leave him. He shared with me for the first time that for the past several months, he frequently would pull to the side of a back road during his night patrol and sit with his gun, loaded and cocked, in his mouth. We talked at length. He told me that his uncle was a police officer and had killed himself when Paul was a child. He refused to contract with me not to harm himself and, whereas he certainly had the means to carry out his threat, we eventually agreed that Paul needed to take time off from his police duties and to check into the hospital for his own safety. He agreed to admit himself to the hospital when it became clear that the only other option was an involuntary commitment for observation.

Paul did not appear at the hospital and after a great deal of angst, I met with the magistrate and a TDO was issued, to be served by his own police department. He was located by fellow officers in his patrol car with a gun in his lap. After some tense negotiation, Paul was escorted to the hospital. He progressed well and later returned to the police force in an administrative capacity. I learned a great deal from Paul. He knew that I would have to break confidence when he told me of his suicide plans, and his decision to tell me could only have been a cry for help. Yet he could not make the decision to go to the hospital himself and needed for me to make the decision for him. My failure to initially hospitalize him could have led to his death, and I learned a poignant lesson. As much as I wanted to respect individual self-determination and wanted to believe Paul in his promise to go to the hospital, I should have heeded my professionally informed gut feeling and hospitalized him even though he promised me that he would leave my office and drive straight to the hospital. There are times when trust and confidences must be broken for the safety of my client and times that I must make decisions that go against the explicit wishes of a client. I was fortunate that my failure to fufill my social control role ended happily in this case.

I was not quite as fortunate with Nathan, 42, a white male living in his parent's home. Nathan's presenting problem was depression. He was a city employee and worked as a security guard in the city morgue. Working evening shifts, he was often alone and quite isolated, though it was reported that he preferred not to be around people. Nathan reported having no friends. A survivor of repeated sexual abuse by his father, Nathan reported having frequent flashbacks and nightmares. Over the several years that we worked together, Nathan frequently reported varying symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation but always agreed that he would

speak with me first before harming himself. After a particularly difficult several weeks for Nathan and a report of increasing suicidal thoughts, I received a phone call one morning from the trauma center of the local hospital. Nathan had been admitted with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. While the bullet had gone through the brain and remained lodged in his skull at the back of his head and he did lose the hearing in one ear, Nathan was otherwise miraculously unaffected. He told me later that he had been falling asleep with a gun to his head for months and that he truly did not intend to kill himself that night but must have twitched. I wonder, often, if I should have hospitalized him sooner, particularly given his high risk profile—single, white, middle aged, isolated, traumatized.

His life turned around radically after the incident, and the close brush with death appeared to have had a powerful impact on him. It affected me in a profound way as well. I often wonder if I might have hospitalized him sooner. I believed him when he contracted not to harm himself and erred on the side of caution and advocating for self-determination. After agonizing for many months about what I could have done differently, I eventually came to the conclusion that it is impossible to predict all violent acts and that if someone truly wants to hurt him or herself, there is only so much that I as a helping professional can do about it.

A colleague's client did not fare so well. Hinting of suicide for weeks, he secured his chainsaw to the floor, started it, and plunged his face into its gnawing blade, spraying blood, bone, and brain on the white walls and ceiling. I often imagine the horror and responsibility I would feel had I been the clinician in this case, or if Nathan had succeeded in his suicide attempt. It is an awesome responsibility that we have as helping professionals, and while I am not generally in favor of excessive social control, it is impossible for me not to acknowledge that I have saved a great many lives because society, through its laws, gave me the decision-making authority, and, yes, the power to determine for others what is in their best interest.

As an assistant professor of social work, I feel an ethical responsibility to impress upon students the necessity to understand the limits to confidentiality and to learn from my experiences as a crisis clinician. We need to understand that while we cannot take responsibility for the actions of others, the wrong decision on our part may prove fatal for our clients and for others. Although I realize that I cannot prepare students for every potential experience they may encounter, I am hopeful that by revealing to them the uncertainty that I feel in making decisions as a helping professional, they will develop an awareness of the limits of confidentiality and the apparent contradiction between ideal values taught in graduate school and the practical and legal necessities of the "real world."

While I promote self-determination as a value central to working in the helping professions, there are occasions when holding onto this value too tightly may come into conflict with what may ultimately be in the best interest of the client. On more than one occasion, someone that I recommended be involuntary committed to the psychiatric hospital for evaluation has returned later and thanked me for making the decision that saved his or her life.

Threat Towards Property

The Tarasoff ruling has been extended by many professionals to include threat to property. Only once have I found it necessary to break confidentiality for this reason. Mark, a 28-year-old white male, was a client of mine at the day-treatment program. It was Christmas and his parents, needing respite, had left to spend a week in Florida. Mark had ceased taking his medication for symptoms of schizophrenia and quickly de-compensated. I received a phone call from Mark's sister saying that Mark had called from an unknown location and told her that he was going to burn down the fire station. I felt that I needed to call the police and the fire station immediately to warn them of the potential danger to the fire station as well as to the men inside. Mark was located a few

hours later, and after an evaluation, I recommended to the magistrate that a TDO be issued so that he could be evaluated at an area hospital. He was admitted, resumed his medication regimen, and stabilized quickly.

Medical Temporary Detention Order

On several occasions I have found it necessary to have clients involuntarily committed, though they may not be suicidal or homicidal or threatening harm to property but, due to mental illness, for the danger presented to themselves through their inability to care for themselves.

Lisa, for example, was an elderly black woman living alone in a trailer in the rural South. Due to severe arthritis, she had not been able to walk for two years. During those two years, her son had supplied her food which he would leave near her bed. To use the bathroom necessitated her crawling down the hall, so she was not always successful in making the trip down, and the room was rank with the smell of urine and feces. She had not bathed in two years. She had no insurance and was quite adamant about her desire to remain in her home. A mental health evaluation found Lisa to be mentally competent and not in danger. However, when the medical evaluation was conducted, Lisa was involuntarily hospitalized on a medical TDO, only one of two that I saw issued in nearly a decade at the county mental health center. For Lisa to qualify, a medically trained professional needed to evaluate her and determine that she was within 24 hours of death. Committed to the hospital, Lisa was cleaned up and fed well for a week, and then she died in her sleep. Her family felt much better, and I had fulfilled my function of forcing care upon those whom society determines are in need. While her family was happy that she died in the hospital, I nevertheless am left with an uneasy sense of having been manipulated by a system that, through its laws and behaviors, acts as though it knows better than the individual. I am, at times, uncomfortable with the power that I have as a "professional" over identified clients and patients and the control that I have over their lives

and the decisions they make. That is not to say that I would have advocated leaving Lisa to die alone in a trailer in her feces, but it does give me pause as to where lines are drawn and by whom.

On other occasions I was forced to examine my own beliefs around euthanasia and the right that individuals have to take their own lives. Keith was a young man who had decided to commit suicide by starvation. He was a young man and had recently tested positive for HIV. He had spent several weeks on a mattress in his garage and refused to consume anything other than water. He denied being suicidal, but based on his refusal to eat and the apparent shutting down of his major organs, a medical TDO was used to get him the help that society apparently deemed necessary for his physical survival.

I thought of Keith frequently as I watched my father dying of cancer. He and I had several discussions on suicide and had gone so far as to contact the Hemlock Society to determine the most effective and least painful way to end his life. A medication cocktail combined with something as basic as a loose plastic bag over the head to decrease oxygen intake would produce a gradual falling asleep sensation and lead to death. A minister for 40 years, my father had a great deal of experience on the topic, and he talked rationally and with great clarity about planning his death. Having witnessed hundreds of deaths in his career, he wanted to end his own life with a measure of dignity when his health deteriorated to the point that the pain was severe and irreversible and that he felt that it was no longer worth living. Certainly in cases such as that of my father, I am in complete support of the right to self-determination, and had he asked, I would have assisted him in his decision to end his life with dignity, perhaps at the expense of my professional career and even my freedom.

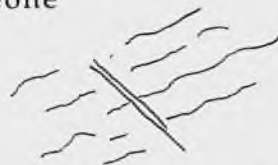
But where do I draw the line and who decides what is

considered suicide/murder and what is euthanasia? What are the limits to self-determination? What right does society have in substituting societal determination and control for self-determination and control? And where do I draw the line between professional and legal responsibilities and personal beliefs and values? And how do I reconcile differences between my beliefs regarding euthanasia and assisted suicide, and my professional and legal responsibilities toward clients?

Lines in the Sand

Ethicists are struggling with these issues and with the implications that emerge when we begin to extrapolate. Who decides where we draw the line? The examples drawn from my own experiences may seem clear to me, though others may have elected other options and still have made appropriate decisions (who defines appropriate?). Certainly there are scenarios where the decision to break confidence is decidedly unclear, where the practitioner must struggle with questions of social justice, social control, self-determination, and even the question "When does life begin?" The responses to these questions may not always be as clear as we would like. While ethical guidelines may be clear about duty of the professional to protect, the waters are often quite muddy.

What responsibility does a society have, for example, to protect a batterer from an abused woman who says, "Next time he lays a hand on me, I'm going to kill him," and she has the means to carry out the threat? If the husband is warned, the woman is likely to be in for a severe beating, or perhaps will herself be killed. To her it may feel as though it has come down to a choice of kill or be killed, particularly in a legal system that historically has done little to instill faith in battered women that they will be protected against batterers. By warning the batterer of the threat against him, am I not putting my client at risk? Is this social justice? And who decides? From where does my power over clients and others derive? As someone



who has seen the effects of battering on family members, I can imagine the rage and the internal justification of killing in self-defense and can imagine feeling very conflicted about warning a battering man that his battered partner has threatened him. Is it my right to decide who lives and who dies by my reporting or not reporting threatening behavior? I know whom I would prefer to see live in the battering relationship.

What about the person who tests positive for HIV and informs you that he or she is going to continue having sex with HIV negative partners? Numerous articles dealing with issues of confidentiality and HIV-infected clients can be found in the literature (e.g., Gostin & Curran, 1987; Silva, Leong & Weinstock, 1989; Rosmarin, 1989). The American Medical Association AIDS policy states that if an HIV positive person is endangering a third party, the practitioner should 1) attempt to persuade the infected client to cease the endangering behavior, 2) if this persuasion fails, notify the authorities, and 3) if the authorities take no action, warn the endangered third party (Rosmarin, 1989). It would appear that social values favor protecting others at the risk of restricting the limits of confidentiality between practitioner and client. In Kathleen K. v. Robert B. (1980), the court found that it is one's civic duty to protect third parties against the transmission of herpes. What is the function of social workers as agents of social control? When do we become tools of repression rather than sources of help?

What about the pregnant client who is an active poly-drug abuser and whose use may lead to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other developmental difficulties? With the increase in public awareness regarding this issue, it is perhaps inevitable that society will develop laws to protect the lives of unborn children, holding their rights above the rights of the mothers. There is a notable paucity in the literature on this issue. Is it inconceivable that future practitioners will be required to report other drug-abusing women to Child Protec-

tive Services for child abuse toward the unborn child? Who determines at what point the fetus is a human being with individual rights? And where does the woman's right to make decisions about her body enter into the discussion?

Why do I feel so much more comfortable breaking confidentiality in some scenarios than in others? Is it not a slippery slope that we are starting down? While the values that I adhere to may make me more comfortable with my social control function in some situations rather than others, the reverse may be the case with another practitioner coming from a different ideological perspective.

I end this article with more questions than answers. The experiences that I have presented are very real to me and have had a profound impact on my views of myself as helper as well as social control agent. I hope that the questions, while supportive, challenge the limits of the duty of professionals to protect their clients and others. While I am appreciative of the case law and ethical guidelines that allow me to protect potential innocent victims and to protect clients from their own self-injurious acts, I wonder about the increasing expectation that as a helper I am expected to act in the role of social control agent, about the increasing limits to self-determination, and about my potential role in thwarting social justice.

Though it has been several years since I last found it necessary to break the confidence of a client, I continue to struggle with these issues. While there is plenty of case law and ethical guidelines to help guide us in practice, there is also a great deal of room left for interpretation. As I head into the next millennium, I suspect that the waters will become muddier still. □

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Homelessness: A Service Learning Course

A group of homeless people, largely alcohol and drug abusers, had settled into living in and around our lower campus area. The situation upset university people for a variety of reasons: feelings of insecurity as they left buildings after dark; anxiety and guilty consciences about poverty in our rich nation; and not knowing how to respond to panhandling. In response to removing the heating grates and the student protests that followed, the Chancellor formed a "Committee on Lower Campus" to come up with a humane solution to the problem. Part of this solution was to develop a course on homelessness which had a field component to it. Twenty-five undergraduates were placed in agencies that worked with people who are homeless. This article describes the course, which was wonderful for students, exciting for the teacher and agency supervisors, and, we think and hope, helped some homeless individuals.

by
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Here is how it started. Our lower campus at the University of Wisconsin is a comparatively decent place to hang out if you are homeless and alcoholic or on drugs. It does not have a bed, toilet, or roof, but students are more tolerant than most, and there are grates over the heating pipes which offer some warmth against the Wisconsin winters. Understandably, some students, staff, and faculty felt uncomfortable leaving the buildings late at night. It is not clear if the homeless people were asking for money or harassing people, or if it was mostly a matter of having one's conscience pricked, but the situation was bothering people.

Upset citizens of the University complained, and the complaints got to the Chancellor's office. A decision was made to remove the grates, and then, predictably, some students protested by sitting in the Chancellor's office. Here comes the unpredictable part: The Chancellor's response to the students was: "You are right. There has to be a better way." Bless our Chancellor.

Out of this was born "The Committee on Lower Campus," appointed by Chancellor David Ward in May of 1995.

> "The committee, comprised of faculty, staff, students, and joined by individuals representing the community at large, will address issues of safety and related concerns involving the lower campus. The panel will offer recommendations containing ways to:
>
> - improve the safety of students, visitors and employees on the lower campus;
> - inform and involve members of the university community in ways to deal effectively with lower campus safety challenges and concerns;
> - increase university community awareness of the complex issue of homelessness;

- suggest ways in which students, staff and faculty can join existing community efforts addressing homelessness; and
- mobilize campus and city personnel and resources to jointly assess and address the need for alternative temporary shelter."

This committee met regularly, and while I did not join it until after it had been meeting for several months, I was enormously impressed with the sincere goodwill of all people concerned. Another thing caught my attention: The Chancellor's Office was represented by a dean, various professors and "higher ups" were there, and people who worked in the trenches with homeless individuals were represented, the latter being an outreach worker and a policeman. It was noteworthy that the committee wanted to hear, foremost, from the people in the trenches. I never heard a disrespectful word from anyone in the meetings. Quite the contrary, compassion and thoughtful problem-solving were the dominant themes.

Police officers from on- and off-campus began meeting with a group of agency directors to share information and strategies for addressing the needs of unconnected homeless people. The Committee unanimously recommended funding for a "Lower Campus Case Management Position" to provide for greater safety for all concerned. The committee also reached consensus on the need for police to exercise a policy of tolerance towards homeless people, i.e., to discontinue the practice of ticketing the homeless for trespassing and/or drinking alcohol as long as they kept peaceably to themselves.

Several members of the committee talked about the need for strategies that focused on long-term solutions. One of those strategies was to involve students, staff, and faculty in community efforts. To "...invite faculty to revisit the curriculum in various schools and departments...to include service learning and community outreach, as well as...intervention approaches" (Barrows, 1995).

Service learning has long been a dream of mine. If the powers that be would just let me run the world, or at least the educational system, I would institute mandatory service training and work for all students from the 6th grade through the Ph.D. But back to earth: the Chancellor's Office said it would fund a service course taught on homelessness. In so doing, it was hoped that students would join the University administration in trying to alleviate the problems on lower campus, rather than just demonstrate in the Chancellor's office. Right from the beginning, the service learning component was envisioned as students working with and for social service agencies, in hopes of finding homes and treatment for people who were homeless and possibly AODA.

For the past seventeen years I had run a service ("field") course on severe mental illnesses in our community. Because approximately 1/3 of homeless people also have severe mental illnesses, I was already well connected with the shelters for homeless people, as well as the treatment centers for AODA, so I asked for the job of teaching this course. My department said "go for it," and even gave me a semester's reduction of one course so I had time to bone up on homelessness and develop good student placements in the community. The course was up and running in September 1996.

Altruism

Does true altruism exist? If conversation is lagging among academics and students, try asking that one! You will not get definitive answers, but it will liven up the discussion. I do not have an answer, but I believe it is healthy for people to do good for others. Most students are eager to help out in this troubled world, but simply do not have the time to do so. If the opportunity is provided by giving class credit for hours spent in the field, two important things are accomplished: 1) Students will have the time to do the work, since it becomes part of their

school curriculum; 2) Professors can assign academic work along with the experiential to better ensure that students know what they are doing, and do it well.

Call it altruism, call it selfishness in making oneself feel good, call it whatever you want, but when an elective course on homelessness was offered September 1996 it filled up faster than courses in human sexuality that I have taught.

In addition to the above, enthusiasm and offers of help came from both within campus and the wider community. People from the Morgridge Center for Public Service, which promotes, organizes, and supports a variety of public and community service opportunities for U.W. students, faculty, staff and alumni called and offered to help find student placements. The policemen on campus offered a lecture on "safety issues" for the class. The president of the Wisconsin chapter of N.A.S.W. called and met with me to offer his interest and expertise. Professors from other departments (English, Nutrition, Business, etc.) called and expressed interest in developing similar classes. The head of the Bureau of Community Mental Health called and offered a guest lecture on policy issues. All of the agencies we tapped to place our students for practice experience replied with enthusiasm and the promise of on-sight supervision. Twenty agencies that work with homeless individuals were called upon to accept student placements. The outpouring of interest and help was wonderful.

Homelessness:
A Service Learning Course

In planning the course on homelessness the focus was on three different groups: 1) social work students; 2) community agencies that dealt with homelessness and alcohol and drug addictions; and 3) people who are homeless. How could the course be developed to meet educational goals, some community/agency needs, and be helpful to homeless people?

Right from the earliest planning stages, students and agencies were eager to participate. Students are almost always eager to get off the school bench and into "hands-on" work. Agencies are overworked, underfunded, and understaffed. Taking students involved freeing up some staff to supervise, as well as providing an orientation to their agency, but they were all more than willing to provide this to get the extra help that students provide. In most cases, the passions and idealisms of students more than compensate for lack of experience.

One of my most delightful moments of teaching in over three decades, came from a 21-year-old senior: "I'm working with this woman who has severe schizophrenia and she's homeless, and she's an alcoholic, and there are only seven weeks left in the semester. How do I cure her?" I did not talk about "realistic goals," etc. We just chose a good starting point, a shelter that accepted her condition. At the end of seven weeks the woman had a roof over her head, and did say, "Thank you for caring," when the student accompanied her to her first AA meeting. That "thank you" solidified the student's desire to become a social worker. The student also learned a great deal about the ravages of schizophrenia and the horrors of alcoholism and also something about the complexities of our social service system. The agency was happy to have a very difficult case off their hands for a bit. My guess is that in this particular case, the student's starry-eyed idealism went a long way towards starting the homeless woman in a helpful direction. We will know more next semester when a new student takes over.

But I digress! The course is presently designed to accept 25 undergraduate social welfare majors. It meets for one and a half hours a week on campus for classroom learning, and each student also does five hours a week in the field working in various agencies. It is assumed that an additional two to four hours a week are spent on readings and assignments.

The course has a dual focus: 1) The larger political, economic, racial, and social causes of homelessness; and 2) the specifics of homelessness in our city

and on the lower campus. The theory and research of what is currently known about effective interventions with homelessness is studied, as well as the major gaps in our knowledge and policies of non-help. The heterogeneity of people who are homeless is looked at: men and women, children, teens, young adults, elderly, veterans, different racial groups, rural and urban, dual diagnosis with AODA, serious mental illnesses or developmental disabilities, and criminal behavior.

An attempt is made to translate the above knowledge into practice skills for helping individuals who are homeless and into advocating for policies that will address some of the inequities in our country that cause homelessness. To quote my colleague, Dr. Mary Ann Test: "To acquire the skills and muster the courage to do things differently...." (1996).

The most important elements of this course seem to be the following:

1. Excellent field placements and agency supervision. The "hand-on" experience of the students, and the willingness of people who are homeless to be our teachers.
2. A marvelous teaching assistant, Kristi Carr, who spent a large part of her time circulating from placement to placement, observing and talking with students and supervisors. This time in the field accomplished two main goals: 1) keeping an active, strong tie between the University and the community; 2) seeing first hand how the students were doing; answering their questions; picking up little troubles before they became big.
3. A format that includes weekly student presentations about their field work. They can use their time to either teach us something they have learned in the field, or to use the group for problem-solving around field issues.
4. A series of written assignments in which students are asked to link theory (presented in class and by the assigned readings) to practice.

Student Reactions

"I have learned about the multiplicity of factors forcing an individual to be without housing... Just hearing their stories has opened my myopic eyes."

"I am finding that the people I work with have a lot of courage. What I have learned from each individual would take volumes to express."

"I used to stereotype a lot of homeless as being mean alcoholics. This view has drastically changed...Many suffer with mental illness, and it's so awful to see."

"So much I have learned... it has made policies more important and statistics more personal. This class is the best I have taken in all of college."

"I got to thinking about what it must be like to be a child living in a shelter..." "I was so naive, so sheltered from 'real problems'...." "Instead of words on paper or faceless old men I ignore on the streets, I see real people. I have gained respect for a group of extremely unfortunate people, and have lost the ability to ignore...." (All seniors).

"On State Street and where U.W. Madison meets the community, you don't have to look far to see them huddling in doorways, sitting on benches and napping in bus shelters. For the most part, people avoid making conversation or eye contact with them. Rarely, if ever, does a smile or other form of outward recognition or kindness come their way. To many these are the invisible people-faceless, nameless and homeless. But to Kathy Shawkey and Sarah Walsh, the 'invisible' now have names, faces, voices and feelings" (Arnold, 1996).

On the first day of class students wese asked their motivation for enrolling. Almost all expressed anger and indignation that in the city that *Money Magazine* voted "#1 place to live in the U.S."—the richest country in the world—people are living in the streets in disgraceful conditions. Beyond a doubt, it was a biased group of students to begin with. Even so, it has been heartening to have the entire class indicate a powerful ex-

perience as they moved from theory to practice and had the opportunity to try to help a few people leading such hard, joyless lives.

Were there a few problems too? Of course. Not all the placements were equally as good; some of the student presentations rambled on, and so did some of my lectures; and for some students it took time to understand that an alcoholic, mentally ill woman who had been living on the streets for two years was not going to be "cured" or even helped in three months.

But on the whole, this course seemed to be very good for all of the students on several different levels. Exams and papers reflected significant academic learning. Facts, theories, and statistics hold in the memory better when they are associated with real people in the real world. Clinical skills were practiced, refined, tossed out, and revamped. The complexities of human stories did not fit neatly into theories. It began to sink in that maybe it was not a matter of "resistant clients" but more a matter of we do not know how to help, or there are not enough resources to help, or the resources are not adequate. "Blaming the victim" was no longer an abstraction, but rather something students could see happening to poor, homeless people.

Perhaps the biggest good of all was what this work did for the students. Simply put, it made them better people. Most people in academia, students and professors alike, come from middle-class backgrounds. We tend to see people who are homeless in terms of deficits ("multiproblem" folks). Students in this course wrote and talked about strengths and coping strategies of many homeless people. "How do they survive?" "I don't believe I would have the strength...."

Based upon what students wrote in their journals and papers, what I observed in classroom, and what supervisors in the field wrote about their work, I would say that students matured, became much "softer," less judgmental of others, and above all got fired up to do something about our national disgrace of homelessness.

People Who Are Homeless

We assume the course was good for students. Did we help any of the people who are homeless? It is too early to tell. Maybe the ball started to roll in the direction of sobriety for a few people. Places to live were found for some. The work load was lightened a little bit in some of the agencies. There will be a few more professionals who are committed to helping homeless people, and they will have had some experience in the area. Maybe in the future when these professionals are working 40-50 hours a week in the field, they will help more homeless individuals or get some badly needed policy changes to take place.

If one counts the "existential moments" of life as important, then I am sure the students were able to improve at least a few hours in a few peoples' lives. Sometimes that is all one can do. The whole experience of teaching this course brings to mind an old tale heard years ago of the small boy and the starfish. As I recall it: A low tide stranded millions of star fish on the shore, and they were dying. A small boy was frantically throwing star fish back into the sea. "What are you doing?" said his Grandfather. "There are millions and millions of these fish, and you cannot do anything about this." "I bet the few fish I tossed back into the ocean don't feel that way," replied the boy.

Teacher Reactions

Teaching a service learning course provides the opportunity for total involvement in the subject matter and the student's learning process. The intellectual grappling with ideas, theories, research and the literature are there, as in any course. In this kind of course you also see some of the emotional and maturational development of students. In addition, the teacher and students get to have dynamic interactions with community agencies and with people of all kinds. This kind of teaching gets one out of the Ivory Tower and into the outside world.

A striking example of

this comes to mind. In my syllabus and in my opening lecture, I make an effort to break down stereotypes about people who are homeless. I emphasize that many such people have had bad luck from birth on up, that they are more like us (than different) in their needs and wishes....and so on. Most of our undergraduates are from the "Lake Wobegons" of the Midwest and are quite shocked by their first encounters with homelessness, alcoholism, and serious mental illnesses.

Even though I believe the above, I am also aware that an occasional con artist does exist and that there may be dangers out in the field. So the second class period is taken up by a guest lecture from our campus policeman to talk about safety issues. This policeman is very well trained in the specific area of homelessness, and he is a humane and kind gentleman. But his lecture is full of admonitions (as is my syllabus) about: "Don't loan money, ride in a car, give out your telephone number or address, get into a closed room with an agitated hallucinating person; keep a physical distance of at least 2-3 feet..., etc." We surely do not give out such a list of warnings before attending one of our own social gatherings. So which is it: are we alike or different? A double-bind message if ever there was one.

The literature cites many explanations and theories about poverty, and it may be mostly right. The reality of the streets adds other complexities, and it is also correct. All of this is self-evident, of course, and academia does not emphasize simplicity, but getting into the streets adds other dimensions. It also adds lots of conflict to teaching and learning. Both teacher and student have to learn to live with many ambiguities.

As a professor I had become used to professing over the years! (Profess: 1. To affirm; 2. To make a pretense; 3.To have or claim skill in or knowledge of; and 4. To affirm belief in; according to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd edition.) I usually start a class by asking: "Any questions?" Response: "Will... be on the exam?" In the service learning course, when I said, "Any questions?," the response was a one hour class take-over, and it was not idle chit-chat either. This called for an immediate revamping of plans, and from that point on the format was 45 minutes of student presentation and discussion to teach or problem-solve, and 45 minutes of teacher lecture. Grading the student presentations helped keep them high quality. Timing them kept us to a reasonable schedule. Beyond a doubt, the student presentations of field experiences were the crux of the course.

A striking feature of service learning is how well the theories and facts stay with students after they have had field experience. One of my colleagues, a genetics professor, actually gave the same genetics test to two similar classes of undergraduates, one class that studied only from the books, and the other only from the field. The students from the field class did significantly better on the test. I would expect the same from students in the homelessness course, and will test that for myself in the future.

Another striking feature that moves me deeply is what the students learn directly from their clients. Book learning and lectures do not bring tears to the eyes; clients do. Aside from the policeman's lecture, students were soon talking about their clients' bravery, courage, abilities to cope with the untenable, and their humanity in the face of inhumane circumstances. It is one thing to read about auditory and visual hallucinations and crossed wires and transmitters in the brain. It is quite another to have a young homeless man with schizophrenia tell a student his own age about his past hopes and dreams. Then the next day the student sees the man screaming in terror, as voices rage their savage messages. The auditory hallucinations became much more than neurotransmitter gone awry. "There but for the grace of God go I," is a theme often expressed in class.

Summary

Service learning is BIG — it is comprehensive. It brings the community and the university together, keeping the Ivory Tower more reality based and the agency perhaps more up to date on theory and research. There are many public organizations and agencies desperate for the extra help students can provide. There are many people leading lives of desperation who need and deserve all the help they can get. As fellow human beings, we owe any help we can give. It is good for all concerned.

Learning takes on a richness that affects the mind and the spirit and probably one's moral development, too. Service learning challenges the students — they really love it. It does good works in the community, and we think it helps people in need. This course did help clear up the problem on lower campus, as housing was found for most of the people who had been hanging out there. It may even change the teacher's life. It certainly did mine. □

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Beneath Still Waters: Legacies of Quiet Men

In a narrative linking the teaching of group work with experiences in which people who are quiet by nature, the I discuss the importance of presence, belonging, mutuality, and "counting." While our profession relies greatly upon words, this narrative asserts that quietness and resonant communication can also convey much about human relationships.

by
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After 18 years in social work practice and nearly 12 years of teaching, I have come to know many things. One is that it is possible to touch other lives in deep and lasting ways and that such moments of synchronicity and resonance often occur unexpectedly. I have also come to know that one cannot force such moments to happen, that one must be open to the possibility of creating the circumstances in which they can occur. I've learned that people touch other lives by being totally present with the other person, by genuine caring, and also by knowing that such connections are often formed in ways beyond words. Those of us who are quiet by nature often become keenly sensitized to the nonverbal dialogue that occurs between people. Such constant awareness is as incorporated into the art of our practice as are words and skills. This is a narrative about that topic, circumstances in which people can come to know ways of touching one another's lives, of connected knowing, and about creating the experiences that enable others to enhance those potentials in the educational process of becoming social workers.

We Are Both the Message and the Messenger

As a social work educator, I have tried to teach effectively by applying my knowledge, my practice experience, and my self in the service of others' learning. I strive to teach in a way that will strengthen students' capacities to tap their reservoir of compassion and humanity, as well as their intellects, so that their future clients will be more humanely and effectively served. I continually try to create forms of dialogue that may be developed and nurtured in a class milieu that fosters the learning of both the formal content and the more ineffable spiritual aspects of social work.

I often use the notion of helping students "find their voice" in working with others. By this I mean their unique ability to convey (and be receptive to) thoughts, feelings, genuineness, caring, and the meaning, in addition to the words employed, in establishing a good working relationship. They are the voice that sends the messages, they are the voice that can make words music, and, if they "connect" with people, both their voice and their greater

message are heard. Learning to convey such notions can be effectively done using creative classroom activities to augment more formal lessons. To foster the ability to know others, what we do in the classroom must be congruent with what we teach students to do with clients. To do this we must first work to create a "we" that works together to achieve mutual goals.

Students often have vague preconceptions that they must discover "magic words" and that if they know and utter such words at precisely the right moment, desired change will happen. Similarly, many fear (though rarely openly state) that there must also be words that, if said at the wrong moment, will effect awful events. They often overemphasize the spoken word as they begin learning skills. Students are aware of nonverbal language before they take my courses but see such communication as only a vague adjunct to the spoken word. They see silence (or that communication outside of sound) as something, at best, to be reached into (Shulman, 1992) rather than as the universal ground of communication that utterances embellish. What I try to nurture and develop are students' capacities to use that great body of communication in relationships and knowing others.

When I began wrestling with writing this paper, I was engaged in teaching an abbreviated summer course in group work. In that course, I tried to teach specific techniques and to use narrative to convey a broader understanding of the nonverbal aspects of knowing others. In one class session, a discussion with a student provided a serendipitous opening into the subject of this essay—ways of achieving connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), of touching others' lives, and of becoming a social worker.

In a class exercise, students were divided into two groups and asked to do exercises to accomplish two things: 1) to interact to create a sense of "we" among the group members, and 2) to role play various steps in the group process. One group did a lively and animated job of their assignment and the other a terse and brooding job of it. The quieter group finished first and I met with them separately to process what had occurred. Students began talking about how in that week many of them had encountered financial dilemmas, personal problems, and so forth. They felt that others had sensed their stress without having to explain it in detail. They felt that their collective accumulation of problems, and their empathy, made it difficult to "get into" a role play. Afterwards, I ended the exercise and class with a brief discussion of what had and hadn't worked and why one group was seemingly upbeat and successful. The class ended and many students stayed to talk with one another or me. Between conversations, one young student, Coreena, hesitantly handed me a note.

The gist of Coreena's note was that she thought teachers too often equated happiness, a lot of talking, and conviviality in classroom exercises with success. She suggested that sometimes "melancholy" things come up and though people are not happy while talking and are rather quiet, they do communicate verbally and nonverbally and that important things get done and sometimes painful things are shared. Thus, she said, such groups are also successful in their own way. I was struck by several things: the first being her courage and forthrightness, the second being the accuracy of her observations, and the third being another spontaneous observation that followed. She said, "I'm a very quiet person and people don't always understand quietness—sometimes my quietness even seems to make people angry." I must admit that I never perceived Coreena as being "quiet." Her facial expressions were usually active and pleasant—rather like unfolding flowers when she beamed in class. Her nonverbal expressiveness always spoke volumes. We discussed ways that quietness is perceived, that it often makes others uncomfortable and that it can sometimes even evoke anger in others. While there may be auditory silence in the absence of words, the whole person can radiate other messages that may or may not be consciously received and, also, others may make inaccurate interpretations of silence.

Like Coreena and others, I am, by nature, a quiet, taciturn person. In teaching, I must allow for that trait yet impart what I have come to know about human relating. What I convey is a sense of overlapping mes-

sages—about how "we" are doing, about the topic, about purpose, about dialogues, about how and what I am striving to communicate, and about the feedback I'm getting from them. This same fusion of information about messenger and message and response often occurs in practice.

Cultivating one's capacity for relating and communicating and caring enables one's whole being to speak or hear volumes in situations where words alone are insufficient. Regarding such tacit knowing, one of the major characters in the fine new novel *The Wrecked, Blessed Body of Shelton LaFleur* (1996) succinctly observed to the young man he was teaching that there are times when he didn't even need to hear someone talk to know what was inside him or her. So it is in working with clients or students. There is a need to learn many ways to resonate with what's within another's heart (Kelly, 1984; Buber, 1967) and to let students know that a momentary loss of words is not a death knell in relating—it may, in fact, be an opportunity to hear what's beyond the smokescreen of words.

When dialoguing with students, I try to respect that impulse which brings many of them into the field—the impulse to care. That calling is a gift, but a gift often obfuscated by words and by others' discomfort with the altruism of caring. The desire to relate compassionately to others is part of the resonant music of being human (Brussat & Brussat, 1996). Social work at its best and at its most effective has its roots in compassion and spirituality and social justice. It is also best taught by nurturing the thirst for resonance with, and caring for, others (Josselson, 1996).

Words and skills and policies may embroider and grace impulses to care for others but will never substitute for the ability to experience that calling. That distinction needs to be understood by students. But, how does one come to appreciate such things? Some things, including the possibility of deeply touching another's life and how that happens, must be illuminated and learned by experiencing them. This is the sort of coming to know that is difficult to reduce to words; experience and sharing stories of experience are probably more effective ways of learning meanings in such instances than is rote learning. One way of imparting such understanding is to share examples of experiences in which people have come to such knowing. The following are stories of events in the process of my own coming to know and appreciate quiet communication, resonance, and the joy of touching another's life.

Perhaps my own tendency to quiet communication is inherited, but I tend to think of it as a trait learned young. A pale child of poor parents who left their home in a city to live in a small, all white, all Protestant, Indiana town, I was a painfully thin boy of mixed Welsh, Jewish, and Black ancestry with a keen sense of being different and out of place. Quietness was modeled for me by my father and grandfather. I think my father, in particular, had discovered its ability to render him somewhat invisible in a place and time when such differences greatly mattered. The tacit message was that quietness offered some protection from life's unpleasantness. When I recall such things, further associations with tacit knowing are triggered. For example, when I was small child, my grandparents would take the grandchildren out into the yard after sundown on cloudless evenings. Placing a blanket on the ground, my grandfather would invite us to lie on our backs and look at the stars. He softly and sparingly spoke of the immensity of space, that each far star was a sun like ours, and that each star held the possibility of life. Those were big thoughts for a little kid like me to digest. He would lie with us and we could sense the immensity of creation from his nonverbal awe and from the knowing of him. We did this watching and imagining quietly and slowly and gained a tacit sense of eternity and an appreciation for the enormity of simply being—to know beyond words that life is wondrous and that the creation of things emerges from silent emptiness (Carse, 1994; Rinpoche, 1994).

We children compre-

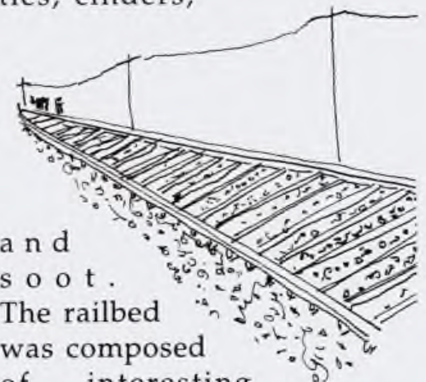
hended in ways beyond words that it was not that we were small creatures in comparison to the immensity of what we saw but that we were simply immersed in the greatness of possibility. From such moments I comprehended the metaphoric equation of words with stars. Like stars, words best shine when appreciated in the context of silent communication. Also during this period in my young life I learned to love poetry. My grandmother adored poetry and impressed upon me the notion that words ought to grace sentiments toward others and ideals rather than substitute for them. Quoting Emily Dickinson, there are things we experience, she taught us, that leave "...no scar, [but make an] internal difference where the meanings are" (1965, p.154). Such epiphanies in my child's mind shaped my conceptual frames for apprehending the world and later influenced my practice and my teaching. The first of two other linked experiences occurred in that same part of my childhood and helped me understand the power of subtle moments in relating. What follows is a more lengthy story of those experiences from my childhood and young adulthood. The memories evoked by the very act of writing the story remind me that the foundations of human dialogue and human compassion are often quiet and not built upon noble words (Bateson, 1987).

Finley

I first recall meeting Finley Steward when I was 10 or 11 years old. When I now recall Finley, I do so from the memories formulated and stored by that younger self in another time, place, and social circumstance. I must confess, though, that my adult mind cannot completely articulate the feelings, impressions, and observations of my younger self.

Finley Steward lived in the small town in which I lived. He was referred to as the "town tramp," a term which has since taken on a different and more derogatory meaning. In that place and time he was a rarely seen figure who lived on life's margins and minimized human contact; he also successfully escaped all diagnostic labeling other than "odd." Before I ever met him, I'd asked my mother and grandparents about "that old man who wore the dirty old clothes." They gave me his name—actually both of his names. He sometimes called himself Willie de Weece; apparently, no one was sure whether Finley or Willie was his true given name. Little else was known about him other than as a young man he had worked as a hired hand for two spinster sisters in a neighboring town before withdrawing into a more reclusive and itinerant life. Though he was reclusive, I came to know that in simple and unintended ways people could still enter his isolation and affect him. I also came to know that he could reach out and affect me in enduring ways.

Of a seeming advanced age, Finley was a short man with chronically soiled hands, a deeply tanned face, and, regardless of the temperature, a man who always wore many layers of filthy clothing. He sported several days' growth of whiskers and crudely staved off the development of a beard with scissors. Finley had a very pronounced body odor—months' or years' worth of accumulated and caked sweat and dirt. My grandparents characterized him simply as "odd" but intelligent and harmless. I first met Finley after my family moved to a house immediately adjoining a grain elevator and a New York Central Railroad line. The rail line still teemed with the last of the old steam locomotives and reeked of tar-impregnated ties, cinders,



and soot. The railbed was composed of interesting stones such as quartz, small fossils, and agates. It was a veritable gold mine to the rock-hound I'd become, and I spent my summers searching for rocks for my collection. While searching I would sometimes see Finley forlornly walking the tracks.

The rail lines that cut through town were Finley's paths home. His "house" was an old, abandoned railroad storage

building near the rail depot a half mile from my house. On one sweltering July day, I was searching the gravel hoping to add to my collection of miniature fossils when I looked up to find Finley walking slowly toward me. Hesitantly, he approached me and when he came near he quietly asked what I was doing—that he'd seen me so occupied many times and wondered what my searching was about. By his manner he seemed timid but intrigued and certainly not a threat. Nowadays, children would probably be warned to flee at the sight of such a character. I was not so warned; the message from my family was to treat everyone with respect regardless of their "station" in life. Though I'd said a shy "hi" to him on a few occasions when I'd unexpectedly encountered him in alleys as I'd walked home from school, that was the first time he ever initiated a conversation.

I told him of my collection of rocks and fossils and showed him some of the things I'd found that day. He pointed out one bright white, flaky quartz stone as being one he liked. I asked if he wanted it and he very hesitantly said "yes," took it, and thanked me. Finley then did what I later discovered he'd never done before—he invited me to come to his house and see his own collection of stones.

As Finley talked, his face brightened and he said that in his years of roaming and scrounging for things, he'd picked up a lot of "pretty" rocks and had made a special place where he could display them. I sensed that he was talking about something for which he felt pride—these were seemingly his treasures. I also felt his hesitation about having a visitor see his home and sensed fear—fear of the loss of his invisibility and of being vulnerable, of being ridiculed, or of losing something of value. It had never occurred to me to speculate what he must live like, let alone to judge him. I didn't think about being trusted by him; I was merely intrigued by the possibility of seeing some new rocks and minerals, possibly from far away places. Several days later I decided to visit him to see his "treasures." What I experienced that day and years later evoked empathy and a way of knowing beyond words. Only recently have I tried to put those experiences into words.

With misgiving, I walked from the hot railbed through the dusty weeds to the windowless door in the front of the shed that was Finley's home. I knocked softly and waited for what seemed an eternity. I heard nothing and knocked once again, and then I turned to leave. Some seconds later, I heard a soft voice ask, "Who's there?" I gave my name and told him I'd come to see the rocks he'd mentioned. I think that was the first time I'd ever given him my name. It sounded as though he began untying a rope, which must have served to secure the door to the frame and provide some measure of safety. In a few seconds he opened the door a crack and looked at and around me. I again sensed fear and I remember being nonplussed by this—it had never occurred to me that I could evoke fear in an adult. Only later did I come to realize that it was not I that he feared but rather the crack in his isolation that I symbolized. He hesitantly, quietly, allowed me to come in, saying that the only way to get to his backyard gallery was through his one large room. I entered and my conscious awareness of being able to know another's reality was forever changed.

Finley's one room "home" was filled floor to ceiling with old clothing. To get to the rear door, it was necessary to stoop down and crawl through a tunnel in the clothing. In the middle of the tunnel was a side shaft to a chamber formed within the pile. Scented by years of perspiration, the chamber he had formed was his place to retreat and sleep. The shed had no heat or electricity, so the burrowed space provided a measure of warmth in the winter. Crawling further, I dodged a reeking old enameled chamber pot that was his toilet and then emerged into the backyard.

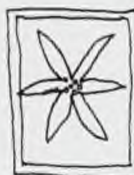
The backyard was a grassless area about thirty feet in diameter and was floored with packed earth. Its boundaries were demarked by old scraps of lumber nailed between box elder trees. Sitting in rows on the lumber were stones of various sizes and types, colored

glass bottles, and brightly colored pieces of junk. I looked at the display and felt disappointed, having imagined more exotic things. Though Finley was quiet and tentative, I felt his pride in his menagerie. In a moment of what I recall as a sort of empathic epiphany, I felt some of what he felt and realized that the beauty and meaning he saw in his stones was real to him and that my appraisal was my own—no less nor more subjective than his (Saari, 1991). Seeing that old man thus, momentarily feeling what he felt, I started to become consciously aware of experiencing empathy with a stranger and of the sense of knowing someone by way of that connection (Belenky, et al., 1986).

I carefully examined each rock and commented on its uniqueness and the way it sparkled in sunlight. I told him how much I liked, even envied, his collection and that perhaps we could trade if ever I got enough good things that he might want. Other than that we spoke sparingly and soon lapsed into silence. After a few minutes of further looking and after awkward good-byes, I exited back through his burrow.

In the years that followed, I periodically saw Finley. When our paths crossed, we would wave in friendly fashion but spoke little; our dialogue was in large part nonverbal but we did ask how each other was doing and acknowledged our shared interest. In those years I grew taller and thin and bookish and he grew more quiet and stooped and withdrawn. In that period I never met anyone who had any notion of how Finley lived. I kept my experience to myself, fearing that sharing what I'd seen might make him the butt of ridicule.

Ten years later, my parents' house was destroyed and, following a family diaspora, I moved alone across town. Soon to graduate from college, I was influenced by the nonviolence and social concerns of Quakers and was to become a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War. For my alternate service, I became a social worker. At this juncture in my life, I had my last meaningful contact with Finley. I was sitting on my porch on another hot July afternoon just watching cars drive by. Life was not always exciting in rural Indiana. Glancing down the street, I saw a familiar, stooped figure amble my way. Finley walked with a wide gait that I can still picture. He shuffled along with his head down and his eyes fixed on the path ahead. Though he was aware of his surroundings, this habit seemed to preclude meeting another's gaze. I thought he'd likely walk on past and not notice me. But, as he came near, he hesitated and then came directly across the street and up my front walk. Only then did he look at me directly. His eyes appeared more aged and tired than I remembered as a child. As he approached he reached inside his shirt and pulled out a wrinkled and soiled envelope. He handed it to me and said "I wanted to mail this to you last Christmas but I didn't know where you lived anymore and I didn't have a stamp for it anyway." Then he lowered his eyes and waited for me to open it.



I opened the envelope and in it was an obviously inexpensive Christmas card with a red poinsettia on the front. On the inside he had penned the following few words with a surprisingly flourished hand "You were always my friend. Merry Christmas, Willie de Weece." I was stunned by the simple words and immense meaning but merely said "Thank you...this is a nicer gift than I can tell you." With that he hesitated as if to say more, then gave a slight wave, turned, and walked on down the street assuming his usual downward gaze.

I did not see Finley again after that. Ordered away to another town to do my alternate service as a social worker, I began my career remembering that subtle experience he'd provided about human relating. I occasionally heard about Finley from townsfolk on the rare occasions when I returned. Finley reportedly became noticeably demented after I last saw him and was somewhat forcibly moved to the county home about seven miles away. Apparently he ran away from the home regularly and followed the rail line back to his old abode. After several such excursions, someone bulldozed and burned his shack and belongings so as to deter him from running away. Probably, those actions were well intended, but Finley returned home for the last time to a denuded lot with neither his build-

ing nor his gallery in the trees left standing. He was found sitting quietly on the packed earth that had once housed his treasures and returned to the county home. After his return he withdrew into absolute silence to his bed and died shortly thereafter. A broken heart makes little sound. Broken dreams less.

And so, I became a social worker and after practicing for many years, I've moved on to become a social work educator. In my current role I'm learning to meld the fundamentally correct social work curricular content with my own conceptual framing and experience in the actual "doing" of social work. In teaching the importance of relating languages, both verbal and nonverbal, I've found it necessary to model or exemplify that which works in practice while working with the students themselves and to contextualize the message of how to practice in stories and narratives.

I use our classroom relationship(s) as a form of laboratory in which knowledge, caring, and ways of conceiving the topic are transmitted. I am mindful of Nodding's (1991) suggestion that the experience of being cared for may be a prerequisite for learning to care for others in a helping relationship. I care about my students; they matter to me, though the expression of that caring is not always easy to deal with. It is often not easy for quiet people, and particularly quiet men, to convey thoughts and feelings and how they fit into the warp and woof of relationships for fear of humiliation in expressing them (Josselson, 1996; Tagore, 1914). But, in doing effective social work, such messages (both tacit and overt) must be available. The ability to do this is, I believe, especially important for social work students to learn if they are to respond to the compassionate or spiritual aspects of their calling to the profession.

To enable students to learn about compassion and trust and caring and genuineness, I share occasional stories of self-in-practice. I try to create the same open and trusting environment that I suggest they learn to create so that they feel free to share their own stories. They are free to own their knowledge and thoughts and feelings and perceptions and use "I" and "we" in our verbal and nonverbal dialogues. In small ways they come to know me and I them. By experiencing such activities together, we all change (Kramp & Humphries, 1992). Through stories, journaling, and narrative accounts, it is possible to foster moments of epiphanous understanding, establish dialogues, construct meanings (Parry & Doan, 1994), and foster a sensitivity to the possibilities in future dialogues when they enter their social work careers (Duck, 1993). In doing these things, students often blossom, though I probably have learned more from them than they've learned from me.

And finally, when I think of the subject matter in this essay—teaching the place of words, presence, silence, dialogue, relating, connected knowing, and how people become nonverbally articulate—I wonder why my interactions with Finley still so often come to mind and why caring and justice and human relating has come to matter so much to me. In unforeseen ways, that lonely, quiet, old man has had a lasting influence on my life's work. From him, family, and others, I learned to better comprehend subtle connectedness—a form of knowing that is not readily reduced to words. From them I also learned of class issues, racism, and the myriad forms of exclusion. I learned that people need to feel that they "count" for something, that they matter to someone (Thurman, 1996). To paraphrase the poet W. S. Merwin (1994), I learned to know that my knowing came not from words but almost from another language. I have also come to know that spoken language only sings as part of the harmony in unspoken dialogue, and though that silent dialogue is not readily reduced to words, it is graced by them. I learned, too, that moments of resonance and connectedness may have profound and lasting effects on people.

To me, when I was a young man in a small Indiana town on a day long ago, Finley became an unintended hero (McAdams, 1988). His kindness, consideration, remembering, and feedback about the times our paths crossed, and his acknowledgement that I mattered to him and that the narratives of our lives had intersected, enabled me to know about the knowing of people in quietly powerful ways. That led to my enduring quest as a prac-

titioner-turned-educator, to pass along gifts given to me by Finley and other quiet and caring men. □

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The White Professional and the Black Client Revisited

Originally published over a quarter century ago, "The White Professional and the Black Client" confronted the difficult issues that face social work as a discipline attempting to improve the lives of marginalized groups. Just as racism persists today, so does the article's vision of fighting interacial tension by building worker-client relationships founded upon mutual respect, honesty, and trust. The article is presented on page 71 as it appeared in Social Casework, *53, (MAY 1972) pp. 280-291.*

by
Alex Gitterman
and
Alice Schaeffer Nadelman

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Alex:

We were situated in six-room ground-level apartment in one of the buildings. As the faculty field instructor and director of this service, I attempted to provide community, group, family, and individual services which could then be duplicated in other public housing complexes. We worked with individuals who had personal difficulties: marital troubles; concerns about their children; or difficulties with institutions which impinged on their daily lives, such as the Department of Welfare, the Housing Authority, and the Board of Education. We organized a tenants' association and building safety systems, initiated orientation programs for new tenants, and developed group services in the public schools.

The work of one of my students, Alice Schaeffer, was particularly memorable. Alice, a young, white, middle-class woman, had a natual gift for practice. I wish I could take credit for her professonal talent, for her ability to provide genuine caring and support and, at the same time, to probe and explore painful and taboo material. However, the truth is that while I was her formal supervisor, she was my informal teacher. Her work with a thirty-year-old, black mother of seven children crystallized practice issues confrontng white workers and black clients in the helping encounter. Her practice spoke to me. This young woman had the courage and skill to deal with explosive and sensitive racial content.

Her practice resonated with me. I began to focus more on issues related to race in my other students' practices as well as in my own supervision and teaching of students of color. Several years later, I invited Alice to collaborate with me on this article. At that time, I was

very much into existential literature and it provided the framework for the article. As I reflect on the article, more than twenty-five years later, I realize that I was too enamored with existential thought and should have explored other bodies of knowledge (e.g., oppression). I do, however, believe that the article made an important statement and captured Alice's and my vision.

Alice:

Mrs. R., one of my first black clients, told me that our working together made her feel less alone. She said it felt better to share her troubles with someone who cared, even if the caring didn't always produce results. She said that my caring about her made it easier for her to care about her kids, that each small success showed her kids that they, too, could succeed. She said she had learned a lot from our work together—how to work the system, how to try different approaches, how to deal with the social workers who took my place. She knows I learned a great deal from her. She said that her life had become better in so many little ways that really mattered, even if the overall picture had not changed. She said she was glad we kept in touch even after I left the agency. She encouraged me when I returned to school, although she warned me not to get too smart or I'd never catch a man!

And then she died. She was only 35, but because I was younger and so much more protected, her years seemed greater. She had lost over 100 pounds, had become a speaker for Weight Watchers, and proudly displayed her "before and after" pictures. She had helped her older kids through the ups and downs of high school and was looking forward to their graduations. She was talking about trying to get a GED. She said she no longer felt like the loser of her family, that her mother and sisters had begun to give her respect. Her marriage, while still diffecult, had become more of a partnership. She and her husband were excited about her unexpected pregnancy. Although it was unplanned, it seemed to symoblize many positives: she was thin enough to actually become pregnant; looked good enough to attract her husband; felt good enough to want him to want her again; felt ready to bring a new life into the world. She said the baby would be special, born of strength rather than weakness, born of hope rather than despair. But her strong spirit could not sustain her body, weakened by nine pregnancies, chain-smoking, and regaining and losing hundres of pounds. Mother and baby died in childbirth, leaving a motherless family of seven.

I was the only white person at the funeral. I sat with the family and cried with them, even as I tried to give some small comfort. They included me in their grieving and in their planning for how to go on. They obtained services to supplement the extended family's efforts to keep the children at home together: financial aid to supplement Mr. R's meager earnings and after-school care so the older kids could continue their high school programs and activities. They had all learned how to work the system.

Alex and Alice:

As poverty, racism, and oppression continue to permeate our society, both white worker and black client are ineluctably affected by their respective experiences and social roles. More than twenty-five years ago, we wrote about our vision for overcoming the mutual unknowns and mistrusts emenating from the societal racial divide. Today, in our respective professional roles, we remain committed to challenging the interpersonal tensions rising from racism and other prejudices in order to build relationships based on mutual respect, honesty, and trust. We also recognize that workers and clients sharing common backgrounds may also experience differing perceptions and expectations. We remain committed to confronting the anger, resentments, and fears—whatever their source—which inevitably affect each of us but need not paralyze us. Our vision remains intact: professionals and clients can and must overcome their fears for "only to the extent that the worker and client are able to reach and touch each other as real human beings is it possible for genuine services to be delivered."

□ □ □

Alex Gitterman and Alice Schaeffer

The white professional and the black client

The unknownness between persons must be challenged by demanding that their feelings, including the rage, fear, and mistrust, be shared and squarely faced

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As we become increasingly conscious of the depth of racism in our society,[1] and as tensions between blacks and whites continue to surface, it is imperative to examine the impact of these racial pressures on the helping professions—especially upon those encounters that find the white professional trying to serve the black client. It is not an uncommon experience, for both black client and white professional, that the supposedly therapeutic contact is a frustrating and unsatisfying one during which service is neither delivered nor received. Each party may tend to "explain" this result by blaming the other, and at present there is a substantial body of Literature—professional and popular—attacking the inadequacies of both white professionals and black clients. The stereotypes are familiar: the middle-class white professional is labeled as distant, unfeeling, uncaring—if not actually racist, malicious, and punitive;[2] the lower-class black client is stigmatized as unmotivated, resistant, inaccessible, and lacking mature personality development and family organization.[3]

Because of these negative experiences, question has been raised within the professional and lay community as to whether white professionals can, indeed, provide meaningful service for black clients. This question has stimulated vigorous debate and will continue for years to come. It is not the intention of the writers to attempt to answer this question. Rather they choose to view the present situation as given—one in which because of social service manpower conditions and the needs of this country's population, white professionals *do* work with black clients and will continue to do so. Therefore, the crucial issue becomes, *How* will this work be carried out—what can white professionals *bring to* and *do in* the encounter with black clients to make their services most useful? The writers address themselves to this concern by (1) identifying the obstacles emerging from the black-white encounter that impede the development of a helping relationship; (2) offering a professional vision, a frame of reference, that lends itself to a meaningful black-white engagement and (3) presenting case material to demonstrate one worker's struggle with these obstacles.

[1]See, for example, National Advisory commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,* (New York Bantam Books, 1968).

[2]Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 77.

[3]James Farmer, Stereotypes of the Negro and Their Relationship to His Self-image, in *Urban Schooling,* ed. H. C. Redman and R. L. Featherstone (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 135-50.

Obstacles inherent in the black-white encounter

The problems confronted in the white professional and black client encounter may be perceived as emerging from, and being obstacles to, the joint effort rather than as flaws or faults of one party or the other. Three basic situational factors define the framework and substance of the encounter between middle- class white professional and lower-class black client: institutional racism, social distance, and mutual unknownness. These factors greatly influence what the client and professional bring to the encounter and how they perceive and deal with each other.

The encounter occurs in the context of American society—its culture, norms, and values. This context is essentially a racist one based on a history of black slavery and oppression within a culture of white dominance and supposed superiority.[4] Race is a crucial dimension in American culture and carries with it a host of rigidly institutionalized roles and connotations. Both black client and white worker have experienced this racial dimension in the course of their lives; indeed they adapted to it, reacted against it, incorporated it, rejected it, struggled with it—each in his own way—but certainly they have not been able to avoid a self-consciousness about race and its significance in America.

One direct consequence of the institutionalized racial positions of blacks and whites is social distance. This consequence is further accentuated by the differential of available opportunities through which whites are able to attain greater social mobility than blacks.[5] In many ways, the specific helping encounter represents a microcosm of these societal conditions. The white professional is of the middle class, well educated, and functioning within and according to the rules of the established system. He has a fair degree of power over his own life as well as power over his client and the service his client needs. The lower-class black client tends to be poor, is less well educated, and has fewer tools and opportunities to help him negotiate the established system on its own terms. As he perceives it, he has little power over his own destiny, including the outcome of his encounter with the white professional. Both parties perceive that the white professional has the upper hand—both in the larger society and in the specific encounter between them.

As a result of these conditions, there emerge two separate and distinct experiences, each somewhat unknown and alien to the other. It is this very quality of mutual strangeness which characterizes the initial black-white encounter. It may be camouflaged, denied, or rationalized. The void may be filled by stereotvped "knowledge" and preconceptions, but the essential unknownness remains. Not only are the two different, but, not having lived or known each other's differences, they can only speculate about them. They see each other and the world, and are in turn viewed and treated by the world, in different ways.

Thus separated by race, money, education, social position, power, and lack of real knowledge of and feeling for the other's life experience, the white professional and black client come together. They face each other and are Confronted with the necessity of doing something together. The reactions they may have to each other and to the situation in which they find themselves are the dynamics of the encounter with which they must cope in order to work together. In essence, both professionals and clients are what they are, based upon their past experiences and the society in which they live and interact. They do not know each other; they do not trust each other. Indeed, they most probably have many feelings about each other, themselves, and their respective positions which in reality impede the development of trust and con-

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[4]See, for example, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Harnilton, *Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Eldridge Cleaver, Soul On Ice (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968); Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt, *Institutional Racism In America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Protest in the Sixties* (Chicago: Quadrangie Books, 1970); Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1964); and Sidney M. Willhelm and Elwin H. Powell, Who Needs the Negro?, *Trans-Action,* I:3-6 (September-October 1964).

[5]For statistical description, see Elizabeth M. Eddy, *Walk the White Line* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 12; Clark, Dark Ghetto, pp. 3-55; Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, pg. 65), pp. 65-82; and Arnold M. Rose, Characteristics of Socio-Economic Status Amongst White and Non Whites *in Urban Schooling,* ed. Redman and Featherstone.

comitant mutual honesty. First, there is suspiciousness and fear between them. "What is the other really thinking and feeling? What does he really want? What does he really mean? How much does he hate me, blame me, or want to con me? How can he hurt me or take advantage of me?" The phenomenon of fear and suspicion has been discussed and documented in many sources as coming from the black client.[6] It is an equally active dynamic for the white worker. It is an inevitable consequence of the three basic factors already identified. This phenomenon is in part a reaction to, and in part a precipitator of, the fear and suspiciousness of the black client. It is both a defense and an offense. Regardless of whether the white professional is aware of it, the black client usually is.

There is also anger between them. Once again, much has been written, especially in recent years, of the rage that is felt by black people.[7] The White worker also feels anger of which he may or may not be aware. He may be angry at the black client for being so troubled, or helpless, or dependent, or hard to reach. He may be angry at himself for his inability to do very much to really help his client; or he may be angry at the client for being angry at him. The anger is there on some level. It is most likely that the client perceives it even if the worker does not.

There is also pain between them. This pain is one of the most complex dynamics because it stems from so many different sources. There is pain and suffering connected with whatever presenting problems caused the client to seek service. There is, of course, the underlying pain of being black in white America. There is also the pain felt by the worker in response to his client's pains and in reaction to them. In addition, there is the pain from the guilt felt by each party—guilt by the client for having problems with which he cannot cope and in being in a subordinate and powerless position—and guilt by the worker at having the feeling that he is somehow responsible for his client's problems or that he cannot really do anything to alleviate them. Most profoundly, there is guilt caused by repressed anger and other negative feelings experienced by both.

Furthermore, there is defensiveness and guardedness between them. Keeping each other at arm's length may decrease the hurt and danger, make them less vulnerable, and somehow ease the struggle. If they blame each other, perhaps they can avoid looking at themselves. If they have ready answers for all accusations, real or imagined, perhaps they need not really listen to each other or touch each other. If they try to relate by masking their feelings. perhaps they will he safer. They may deny, avoid, project, rationalize, internalize; externalize, or just plain lie. The defensiveness and guardedness between worker and client are of the encounter and are not characteristic of either worker or client. Rather, they become a reaction and an obstacle between them, which come out of the situation and must be perceived and dealt with as such. In a real sense, both worker and client are simultaneously victims and perpetuators of these obstacles.[8]

A professional vision

Nevertheless, there is hope. Despite the obstacles between them, worker and client do express a need for each other in the very act of coming together. The client requests some kind of help, and the worker and sponsoring agency indicate a willingness to try to provide it. This force pulling them toward each other even while myriad counter-forces are pulling them apart may be seen as a potential underlying symbiotic attachment between worker and client.[9] William Schwartz has postulated a "symbiotic" relationship between the individual and society:

. . . each needing the other for its own life and growth, and each reaching out to the other with

[6]Grier and Cobbs identify the fear and suspicion as a defense for survival and refer to it as "cultural paranoia . . . in which every white man is a potential enemy and every social system is set against him unless he personally finds out differently." See William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 149

[7]Grier and Cobbs, *Black Rage*, pp. 1-17, 152-67; and Charles Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), pp.58-67.

[8]For good discussions on the white professional and black client relationship, see Julia Block, The White Worker and the Negro Client in Psychotherapy, *Social Work*, 13:36-42 (April 1968); Dorcas Bowles, Making Casework Relevant to Black People: Approaches, Techniques, Theoretical Implications, *Child Welfare*, 48:468-75 (October 1969); Esther Fibush, The White Worker and the Negro Client, *Social Casework*, 46: 271-78 (May 1965); Esther Fibush and BeAlva Turnquest, A Black and White Approach to the Problem of Racism, *Social Case-*

all the strength it can command at a given moment . . . [based on] . . . the person's urge to belong to society as a full and productive member and the society's ability to provide certain specific means for integrating its people and enriching their social contributions.[10]

This formulation suggests that a fully realized and healthy society can develop only through fully realized and healthy people and that to the extent that any segment of the population is diminished, total society suffers. It is therefore in the interest of the whole society to enable every single member to become fulfilled and productive, and it is in the interest of every individual member to have a healthy society in which he can grow. On the other hand, a counter potential also exists—one in which the relationship can become parasitic and mutually destructive. These potentials represent two extremes on a theoretical continuum, neither of which exists completely in a real society. A part of one potential, however, coexists with a part of the other in any given situation. The question to resolve is: Toward which potential do we want to strive?

In the specific encounter between the white worker and black client, occurring in an admittedly imperfect and sometimes destructive society, there is still potential for a symbiotic relationship. It is found in the fact that the worker is employed by an agency that has been charged with the responsibility of serving people who have difficulty obtaining and utilizing society's resources. Concomitantly, lower-class black people in need of assistance are encouraged to look to these agencies to provide the needed services. Thus, there is a direct societal mandate for workers and clients to attain a goal together. This goal may or may not be realized, and the forces impeding it are tremendous. However, because such a symbiotic potential exists—because the racist, master-slave, parasitic microcosm can be countered by a mutual need, mutual aid microcosm—the potential can begin to be uncovered and realized through a professional orientation.

The orientation envisions the helping process as a mutual endeavor between active participants, each trying to reach and touch each other in the giving and using of help. This emphasis on mutuality is crucial because it counters the superiority-inferiority dynamic within the relationship. It says that it takes *both* participants to do the job—that they are equally important, that they must listen to each other, that they must recognize each other's rights and responsibilities, and that they must respect each other.

The notion of active participation directed toward reaching and touching each other emphasizes the emotional engagement deemed necessary for the accomplishment of real and black client in opposition to passive or secret observation and analysis. This part of the vision attempts to counter the forces of isolation, alienation, and unknownness. It says, "Get in there and do, open up, make mistakes, express what you are feeling and thinking." It also encourages the worker actively to support the client's desire and efforts to combat the social conditions affecting his life by struggling beside him. It say's that the worker cannot be an uninvolved outsider who ignores or minimizes those societal factors that contribute to his client's problems. What is envisioned is an endeavor in which client and worker jointly tackle relevant social problems in contrast to the situation depicted in Kenneth Clark's indictment of unhelpful professionals.

The pervasive need to turn one's back on any clear evidence of man's inhumanity to man exemplified in the cool objective approach is possibly most clearly seen . . . in the detached professionalism of many social. . . . Some members of these helping fields too often define as objectivity, what to the client, feels more like insensitivity. Furthermore, in their preoccupation with the problem of the individuals and their insistence upon reducing him to a manageable system of assumptions, the disturbing and dehumanizing social realities behind his personal agonies may be avoided.[11]

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work, 51:459-66 (October 1970); Jean Gochros, Recognition and Use of Anger in Negro Clients, Social Work, 2:28-34 (January 1966); Harold Rosen and Jerome Frank, Negroes in Psychotherapy, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 119:456-80 (November 1962); and Barbara F. Shannon, Implications of White Racism for Social Work Practice, *Social Casework*, 51:270-76 (May 1970).

[9]*Webster's New International Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "symbiotic."

[10]William Schwartz, The Social Worker in the Group, in *New Perspectives on Services to Groups: Theory Organization and Practice* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1961), p.15.

The foundation of this professional orientation is the belief that the black client has the right and capacities to determine what he wants to do and the strength to move himself in that direction. With this perspective, the worker does not set himself up as the omniscient expert trying to direct or control his client. Carl Rogers states that "it is the client who knows what hurts, what directions to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried." [12] The worker reaches for what lies within the black client—his desires, dreams, aspirations, strengths, become a source of help, a resource to be used by the client as he grows. If the worker really believes in the client, he can lend himself in the encounter without having to impose himself. Thus, the potential conflict between different value systems—between different judgments of right and wrong, sickness and health—is mitigated. Such judgments are basically irrelevant. What matters is the client's choices and the development of his ability to recognize his options and take advantage of them.

The worker can give of himself freely, offering his knowledge, opinions, and feelings. He can also offer a vision of how things might be different for the client by affirming the client's right and ability to use what he wants on his own terms. Thus, the vision emphasizes the client as his own person, making his own way. This vision contrasts with a view of the black client as powerless, submissive, inferior, or someone to be led by the expert. The worker strives to stay with the client as he offers his faith in the client himself.

Can I meet this other individual as a person who is in process of *becoming*, or will I be bound by his past and by my present? If, in my encounter with him, I am dealing with him as an immature child, an ignorant student, a neurotic personality . . . each of these concepts of mine limits what he can be in the relationship. If I accept the other person as something fixed, already diagnosed and classified, already shaped by his past, then I am doing my part to confirm this limited hypothesis. If I accept him as a process of *becoming* then I am doing what I can to confirm or make real his potentialities.[13]

Finally, the orientation is essentially a *human* one in which white worker and black client struggle to gain the freedom to reveal themselves as real human beings. It is based on the belief that growth occurs primarily through interaction between real people who have weaknesses and strengths, flaws and attributes, and who can benefit by revealing them and coming to grips with them and each other.

Crisis, shock, confrontation, resistance, struggle, rejection, defeat as well as joy, silence, the excitement of discovery, the peaceful smile, the gesture of affirmation and growth—all these enter into the process of therapy in which real persons rather than ghosts engage in the challenging struggle of wills and the ennobling pursuit of meaning and value in living.[14]

The orientation challenges the unknownness between worker and client by demanding that their feelings—including the rage, fear, and mistrust—be shared and squarely faced If the pain is avoided, the humanness is avoided; life is deadened; black client and white worker remain apart, relating to each other only through masks. The obstacles between them grow because they are not confronted; they destroy all potential for real help to be given or received. Only when the risks are taken, when the pain is felt and lived through, when there is struggle and confrontation, when black client and white worker open themselves to each other, can they be freed to experience the caring that can be between them.

The essential ingredient is the capacity of the therapist to love his patient—to say to him that . . . you have a listener and companion who wants you to make it. If you must weep, I'll wipe your tears. If you must hit someone, hit me, I can take it. I will, in fact, do *anything* to help you be what you can be—my love for you is of such an order.[15]

Case illustration

The following excerpts illustrate the struggles of one white social worker and one black client to

[11]Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, p. 77

[12]Carl Rogers, *On Becoming A Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), pp.11-12.

[13]Ibid, p.55

[14]Clark Moustakas, *Existential Child Therapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p.3.

begin to establish a helping relationship based on mutual honesty and trust. The focus on the helping relationship does not imply that the development of this relationship was the primary concern of worker and client. Rather, the central focus was, and had to be, the services desired by the client and the joint- efforts of worker and client to meet the client's needs. However, aside from specific concrete assistance which could be offered somewhat impersonally, the major part of their work together involved struggling with intimate and painful problems and necessitated a sharing, honesty, and trust between worker and client. Thus, the helping relationship was the vehicle through which service could be offered. The excerpts selected trace the course of the work between client and worker, highlighting both the obstacles within the encounter and the efforts made to deal with these obstacles.

Mrs. R, a thirty-year-old black mother of seven children, called the neighborhood social service office to request help in finding summer camps for her older children. The worker receiving the call was a twenty-two-year-old, unmarried white woman. After discussing the request briefly on the telephone, the worker offered to gather information on camps and to meet with the client in her home to discuss the matter further.

The struggle for mutuality

From the beginning, the worker emphasized the need to develop a mutual definition of what was needed, ways to proceed, and expectations of each other. Her reason was to let Mrs. R know that they would have to be real partners in the endeavor in order to get anywhere and that neither one could impose a point of view upon the other. This beginning was an attempt immediately to challenge the potential obstacles of distance and power differential. These obstacles, although present in every helping relationship, are heightened in the black-white encounter because of institutionalized racial attitudes in America. The worker realized that she would have to demonstrate that she really meant her words of mutuality by listening for subtle cues, drawing out critical responses, and guarding against pushing Mrs. R into actions about which she might be hesitant.

WORKER: I brought Mrs. R information about camp for the children and talked enthusiastically about their going. She seemed pleased but began anticipating that things might be wrong with the camp. At first, I tried to explain away all her objections; then I realized she might have mixed feelings about sending them to camp or might fear I was trying to railroad her into just any camp. I tried to draw out this feeling by saying that maybe all these questions on her mind made her unsure about wanting to send the children away to camp. She said she did want them to go, but only to a good camp. I added, "And one you can see for yourself is good, not just because someone says it." She smiled and said she had to make sure. I said that I was glad she checked me before I started running away with my enthusiasm and that it certainly was up to her to get all the information and make the final decision on which camp was best.

The client responded to the worker's efforts to extend herself—illingness to work in Mrs. R's own home, promptness in gathering camp information, and responsiveness to Mrs. R's wishes—by beginning to share some of her other concerns. These concerns included Mrs. R's despair about her severe obesity and her desire to obtain a homemaker so that she could enter an inpatient weight reduction program, her difficulties with her ten-year-old son who had been expelled from school and was frequently in trouble in the community, her sense of being overwhelmed by the demands of raising seven children without a consistently available husband and father, and her struggle to survive the strain of coping with the institutions impinging on her life—welfare, schools, housing.

The worker made an offer of help with these concerns, trying to present an intensive, flexible service that Mrs. R could make use of in her own way. Although no attempt was made to deal with racial factors explicitly in the early sessions, the worker make every effort to set a tone of partnership, respect, and getting to know each other which would challenge the potential obstacles of the black-white encounter.

WORKER: After about an hour (at the third interview) I said, "Listen, I want to ask you about an idea I've been thinking about, and I hope you will be able to let me know what you really think about it." I asked her about the possibility of my using my last few months at social service to get her really started in help for herself and her family, by seeing her three times a week and being available to her for variety of services: just

[15]Grier and Cobbs, *Black Rage*, p. 180.

talking, helping in meetings with such other agencies as housing and management, helping her with physical tasks, or figuring out problems about the children. She smiled and said no one ever had done this for her before. I said I wanted to lend a hand to her efforts and maybe things could be worked out better for her. She then began talking about past workers who had tried to help her and how little they had accomplished. I said that I heard a warning, like the one she had made once before, that we should not get our hopes up because nothing could be done.

She sighed and said no one ever really did anything for her. I said I could understand that it often seemed hopeless and maybe it seemed too much even to try again. She said that maybe this time would be different. I agreed, but hearing her express this hope worried me that she might expect the impossible of me or become angry or frustrated if changes took a long time. She laughed and said sometimes she became angry at her worker. I said she had a right to get angry and could at me, but still we could not accomplish miracles and maybe she would be disappointed again. She said, "I know, just one step at a time." I said I thought it was not much, but it was all we had. She said, "That and more nerves than brains." We both laughed.

The specific course of the work was guided by the nature of the problems being tackled by worker and client. If concrete assistance or material goods were needed, the worker lent her efforts to the client's own attempts to obtain them. If outside systems or institutions needed to be dealt with to obtain better services for the client, worker and client strategized together, with the worker accompanying the client, whenever necessary, to lend support, skills, and influence. If the client was struggling with personal and family problems, the worker offered help with these problems.

Always, the emphasis was on the task at hand and developing the best ways for worker and client to work together to deal with the tasks before them. The obstacles and tensions within the black-white encounter were viewed as potential impediments to a successful service and therefore had to be confronted and challenged in order for the work to proceed.

Empathizing through honest sharing

Having decided, however tentatively, that they wanted to try to work together, black client and white worker had to struggle to begin to close the gap of distance and unknownness that separated them. They had to risk revealing themselves, thereby becoming more vulnerable, but also more human and accessible to each other. In defining themselves for what they were and how they felt, worker and client were confronted by their real differences—not only in race, but in class, education, social position, and outlook on life. This was a painful, halting process. There was no right way to do it. In the struggle, a bond began to develop between them.

Worker: We talked a while longer and I had to leave. As I stood up she said, "That's a nice dress, you look good today. Are you gonna meet your boyfriend?" I thanked her but must have appeared embarrassed. She said, "Why do you always get embarrassed when I ask; about your boyfriend?" I was silent a few seconds, and then said that she was right in sensing that I did get embarrassed. I said I was not sure why, but thought it might be because I did not feel I should share my personal life with her since I was there to help her. She said maybe if she knew I had problems, she wouldn't think about her own so much. I said maybe that was true but it wouldn't help her work on her problems to think about mine. She said, "You have problems? Don't kid me." I asked, "Do you believe I don't have problems as you have?" She agreed. I said that I knew she thought I had a better life than she had and was more fortunate, and in many ways it was true.

I said that sometimes I guess she'd resent me for it because I was in a position to help her, and she might wish that the tables were turned. She smiled a knowing smile and said that such a situation would be nice. Then she asked, "You do have some problems, don't you?" I said that I did and I guessed all people had problems, although they might be of a different nature. She said that she sometimes felt life was hard only for her and that she wished others had their share too. I said it was natural to feel that way, especially when things were going bad for her. I said it was all right even when she wished I would find life a little difficult.

One day she asked me where she could buy inexpensive beds (two of her children needed beds). I suggested a large department store. Mrs. R howled, slapped me on the back, and said, "Girl, you are crazy." Her friend joined in the laughter. Then they informed me about the prices at that store. I admitted I had never shopped for beds and was just guessing. I felt embarrassed by my ignorance and guilty that I had never had to learn to shop with as little money as she had to do. I did not know what to say, yet it seemed all right to say nothing.

Confronting anger and suspiciousness

If there was to be real honesty between them, worker and client had to face the painful areas of negative feelings in the relationship. Especially in a black-white encounter in which anger, tensions, and fears are almost built into the situation, an attempt to deny or avoid them would have implied that the relationship could not withstand them and that honesty had to be limited to "nice" feelings. Moreover, when it really came down to the basic issues, they still had to "play the game" with each other. Making this black-white experience different necessitated squarely acknowledging the negative feelings. This acknowledgement was a difficult task, and at times the worker's own apprehension prevented her from tackling it. Nevertheless, the necessary direction remained clear even when it was not successfully followed.

WORKER: Then she began talking about another social worker, an investigator she had known. She said she liked them mean and rough; then she could hate them and know they were enemies and that there was to be a battle. She said the nice ones were sneakier and they double-crossed one with a smile. I asked, "Do you always have the feeling that you can't trust anyone, that behind the smile they don't like you and will double-cross you?" She said the worst thing was that the smile cooled off her anger and took her off guard. I said, "That sounds as if it could mean me, at least sometimes. I know you're still afraid to trust me and I have a good idea of the reason, since you have been let down so often."

I said that I also knew that sometimes when _she was angry, I cooled her off by being nice. I cited a recent incedent when I had not visited when she expected me and then I telephoned to say I was sorry, so that she didn't feel she could scold me after that. She laughed and said, "You are something, else, you even remembered that." I said I thought she did too. I asked if she had been very angry at me then. She laughed and asked, "What do you think?" I replied, "But you couldn't show it or tell me?" She said it didn't seem worth the effort, and then I had called to apologize. We both smiled at this "cooling out" piece. I said that maybe now that we have talked, it will be easier for her to tell me next time I upset her or make her angry or make her feel any kind of way. She nodded and said, "Maybe it will."

During the next half-hour, the sarcastic exchanges that seemed to mask deep feelings were very frequent. First she said, "I hear you have a maid—like a rich kid." I said I guess sometimes she thought of me as a rich person. She laughed and said she didn't, but she knew I surely was not poor and couldn't know how hard it was for poor people. I said that was true, and sometimes it would bother her, that maybe life was better for me and that was one reason I could help her. She said that I was a "do-gooder."

At this time I should have picked up her anger, but I did not. I said I just wanted to help her and her children if I could. Then she said, "I bet you'll leave here as soon as you can get something easy." I said that I guessed she thought that I wanted to leave as soon as I could. She said, "Sure you do, you're just here to get experience. Like the student teachers. I don't blame you." She went on to say that she would do the same thing in my place and go where it was easier.

I asked if it would make any difference if I said it wasn't true for me, that if I could get a job here, I would stay. What I meant was that my words would not change the feelings she had about me. However, she said, "Sure if it's true, say it; I don't think you are a liar." I said, "What I mean is that some part of you does think I'll pick up and run to a nice rich area in the suburbs as soon as I can get out of here, and just my words won't t really affect that." She laughed and said, "Well, you will go back to the suburbs, won't you?" I said I could see how angry she was about the possibility that I might leave her. She said that she wasn't angry but that she just knew how it was. I said that I presumed that all people who helped her eventually left her. She could not respond to this statement, but agiain asked if I was leaving. I said that I had told her before that I would be leaving in May—not because I wanted to, but because my job here was over. I realized that by making excuses I was cooling her out but I could not tolerate her anger and sadness coupled with my own.

Challenging racial obstacles

Although racial position and attitudes were deeply entwined in every experience and feeling between worker and client, it was important in the course of the work to confront the racial dynamic explicitly. Again this area was painful, and the temptation to avoid it and feign "color-blindness" was great. The worker had to demonstrate her own willingness to reveal her racial attitudes before Mrs. R would risk sharing hers. It was crucial that worker and client relate directly to themselves as white and black and not discuss race on a theoretical plane, denying, its impact

on themselves and their work together. Only by facing their differences and trying, to share the meaning of their own black and white experiences could they begin to bridge the gap of racial distance and unknownness.

WORKER: Mrs. R said that the only other person she had ever talked to a long time ago was Miss 0, a social worker, and she was different too. I asked if she were black or white she said she was white then stopped to think and said, "I'd never have believed I could talk like this to a white person" She said that the way white people treat colored people made her angry. She said it made her angry that she had to call white ladies "Miss" and they called her "girl" or "Frances." She said, "If you're white, you're right, if you're black, stay back."

I said that blacks did have a pretty bad deal in America and I would expect her to be angry and bitter. She said life was difficult for a black person and the whites never let them pick themselves up. She added that mixed marriages made her furious because it was "like the black needed the white to get ahead." She commented that it just infuriated her to see an interracial couple in the street. I asked her why she felt so strongly about it, as if it were a personal insult Mrs. R replied, "Listen, it is an insult. My mother looked white and I was the black child of the white mother and that was a terrible feeling."

She began talking about herself and how she had never had a break in life. Then she said, "Colored people never get much—no decent jobs, no education, nothing." I said I knew it was very rough to be black in America. She said, "It's rougher than you could know, you just can't imagine." I said, "I guess you're saying I really can't know how it is, how it feels what it's like to be black because I'm white." She said that was true and that the black people had it worse than any others; they just received a rotten deal from the whites. I said, "I'm one of the whites; does it bother you sometimes that I have more than you, that I can't even begin to know how life is for you?" She said, "No it doesn't bother me, that's life." Then she paused and said, "Yes it does bother me, it bothers me a great deal. The whites can do anything and get away with it, but let a black man or a black child make a slip and they get the works!"

She continued, "And you know the worst part is when the northern whites make like they care, and we know they don't. At least in the South they're honest; they hate us and they say it." I said, "I guess I fit in here too, I am one of the whites who acts as though she cares, and you're not sure whether I do. Maybe you are not even sure if I don't hate you." She shrugged and we were both silent. I said it was hard to get that out and now we felt uncomfortable, but it was good that we had made a start in talking about this subject—her feelings about being black and my being white did matter, and so did my feelings and we should try to share them.

Challenging the sense of worthlessness and hopelessness

The intensity of pain and hardship suffered by Mrs. R was sometimes enough to overwhelm both worker and client and caused both to experience despair, defeat, hopelessness, worthlessness, self blame, and guilt—all obstacles to productive work together. While the worker was struggling to deal with these feelings within herself, she also had to show Mrs. R her faith in her and her vision of hope and progress for her. At the same time, she had to guard against making empty declarations of concern or minimizing Mrs. R's tremendous burdens. The worker had to show sincere concern. By letting Mrs. R's pain touch her, by opening herself to the closeness between them, and by staying with Mrs. R through difficult times, the worker showed that she cared, that Mrs. R mattered to her and that she believed in what Mrs. R could accomplish.

WORKER: I did not try to talk her out of her sadness. When she seemed to have run dry and looked to me, I said, "For a while I guess you'll just feel totally hopeless and not even have the energy to try to do something but after a time this hopelessness will get less and your stronger part will come out, and then I'll ask you what you want to do." She showed a spark of anger and said, "*Do*? There's nothing that can be done." I said I didn't believe that and knew that some part of her didn't believe it either and would want at least to try. She challenged me and said, "You tell me what to do, how to make all the problems go away." I said, "Now you are challenging me to do the impossible and I can not. Let us pick one problem and try to work on that." She began discussing her obesity—the embarrassment, physical discomfort, and her resulting isolation. As she gave vent to these feelings, she started to think of ways to deal with the problem—specifically, inpatient weight reduction programs. We began to think through the steps needed to get her into one of these programs.

Mrs. R indicated the way she would like all the arrangements to be made and we began

developing strategies for proceeding. At one point I said to her, "Listen, I've never fooled you up to now, and I'll try not to as we work together. We both know it will be very difficult for you to lose weight and begin to make things better for yourself and your children; however, something about you makes me believe in you and your ability to do it and get some of that better life you want." She was silent for a while and then said, "No one ever said that to me before."

As I stood up I must have sighed because she said, "You're gonna go crazy, taking my problems so seriously." I asked if she meant I shouldn't take her problems seriously because they weren't my own. She said social workers never really cared about their clients; they just listened and nodded and then forgot. I was silent for a few seconds and then I said, "I have to care. I know you and I have feelings for you." She was stunned and said, "You know, I think you're really telling the truth." I asked, "Did you think no one could really care about you?" She said she didn't think anyone ever really did. She kept marveling, almost talking to herself. She said, "You really did something; I just told you about that money and expected you'd forget about it and then you go and think about it and even tell your supervisor and then you come up and do something. You really did something for me." She repeated, "I think you really care." I could only nod. As I walked through the door she said, "You know, if you don't change—I mean if you somehow manage not to get hardened so that you hear so many problems that they don't mean a thing—you're going to be a good social worker."

Contact as real human beings

Through it all, Mrs. R and her worker were just two people—of different race, class, social position, background and fortune—but still just two people struggling, against tremendous obstacles, to do a job together. They accomplished no miracles, overturned no oppressive structures, proved no major point, and left no lasting mark upon the world. Although they had a great impact upon each other, they were not really changed in dramatic or visible ways. They continued to function in their own worlds, in their own ways, separated by so much, and still scarred by the racism of America. However, because of their step-by-step efforts, they began to make a dent on the terrible problem that had previously overwhelmed Mrs. R and on the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness that had made her believe things could never be any different. They made only a beginning. They struggled and suffered and shared and fought and loved and cried. With every moment of profound and intimate sharing, they reaffirmed the potential of two human beings to reach and touch each other.

WORKER: I winced and Mrs. R noticed it. She said, "I guess you think I'm a bad mother." I said, "I know you saw me react when you yelled at Tony and I won't lie to you: I don't think you're a bad mother, but it bothered me to hear the way you talked to him. It bothers me even more because I know that's not really how you are or how you want to be. When you talk to me you come across so differently. I believe you want to be a good mother and want to give them something good. However, when you let all your anger and hurt come out on them, you're hurting them and going against what you really want." She was silent and I said, "Maybe you're thinking, 'Who is she to tell me these things; she doesn't know how miserable it is and what a poor life I've gotten stuck with.'" She replied, "That's true, you don't know, so it's easy for you to talk, but still I don't always want to yell and be mean to the kids. It's just that sometimes I get so angry that things are like this for us that I'm afraid that if I beat them I'll kill them so I try to yell and let the anger out so I won't hit them so much.

I said that I had some idea what it must feel like, although I couldn't feel it as she could—how just seeing the children reminded her of all she wanted for them and couldn't give them, and also how they prevented her from having freedom and the things she needed in her own life. She shook her head slowly and there was pain in her eyes, "That's some of it; there's so much more; I'll try to let you know how it is."

We talked about her needing help to manage all her problems and her large family. I supported her feeling that it was not her fault that she needed help and that her problems were real and very serious. She told me about the group she had been in at the mental health clinic because her social worker there believed it would be good for her to have something to do and people to talk to other than her children. Then she found it was a group for recently released hospital patients many of whom were still psychotic. They talked to themselves and sometimes lost sight of reality for moments. She said she was very frightened by them and also upset that she was placed in a group with them. She said, "Look, I know I'm nuts, but I'm not that nuts. Maybe some day I will be, but let me get there in

my own time. When I have nervous breakdown, I want it to be my very own and not taught to me by members of my therapy group!"

I literally howled at this speech. She was very pleased that I responded in this way, and we both laughed. I said I know she wasn't really kidding and had a great deal of serious feelings about this problem, especially about being crazy, but she'd said it in such a great way, seeing the comedy of the situation, that I had to laugh. She said, "Sometimes if you don't laugh at ridiculous but painful situations, you just go nuts." I said, "You know I'm glad you let me see this part of you, the part that can laugh and be warm even in the midst of pain." She said, "You know, I'm glad we can laugh together."

Conclusion

The writers have identified those critical societal conditions of institutional racism, social distance, and mutual unknownness that profoundly influence the white professional-black client encounter. In this encounter, as in society, it is the white professional who has the perceived and defined power, status, and control. This predefined, institutionalized role relationship triggers deep feelings of mistrust, anger, fear, pain, and resentment within both worker and client. These feelings represent potential obstacles to the development of a helping relationship through which desired services can be delivered. Certain kinds of social services, such as assisting in budget preparation or making referrals, may be effectively offered without the establishment of a helping relationship. However, when desired services involve more complex needs and deeply felt and intimate struggles, the helping relationship becomes a crucial vehicle. Moreover, this relationship can be effective only to the extent that it is open, trusting, and real. Thus, those obstacles that impede the development of such a helping relationship must be dealt with by worker and client in order for them to work successfully together.

The writers have attempted to define some of the specific obstacles within the white professional-black client encounter and have offered a way of approaching and dealing with them. The writers do not suggest that the basic social problems involved in institutional racism will be mitigated through the described frame of reference or social work skills. To provide an effective and needed service to the black client does not change the society in which he must continue to live. To the extent that some segment of a black client's life can change and become more satisfactory to himself, however, something significant has been accomplished. The primary proposition is that by challenging the obstacles of the white professional-black client encounter and by working in such a manner that worker and client can build a helping relationship based on trust and honesty, the client can begin to demand and receive more of those services he needs and desires.

The specific case illustration demonstrates how a deepening helping relationship—which both worker and client struggled against the obstacles keeping them apart to make themselves known, real and available to each other—freed the client to demand and make use of ever more extensive and intensive services. By developing trust in the worker, the client was able to demand a variety of services. She obtained country camp placement for her older children, secured minimum standards from the Department of Social Services, and developed a more successful working relationship with the Department of Social Services worker. She also improved communication with her housing manager, clarified the fine system and successfully challenged several situations in which fines had been incorrectly levied, gained reinstatement of her son in public school, was admitted into an inpatient weight reduction program, and obtained homemaker service for her children. In addition, she was enabled to open new avenues of understanding and exchange among family members, develop a greater emphasis on dealing with family problems without violence and recriminations, and begin to deal with deep sources of family tension.

In essence, the client's acquisition of entitled services was always the major emphasis, rather than the work on the obstacles in their relationship. However, only to the extent that the worker and client were able to "reach and touch each other as real human beings" was it possible for genuine services to be delivered. □

Thanks Sonia!

REFLECTIONS:

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