REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Reflections From the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, PhD

The history of immigration to this country is riddled with ambiguities. Most groups immigrating since the middle nineteenth century have been met with strong initial resistance, discrimination, and sometimes violence. The parallels between the contemporary reaction to Latino immigrants and the Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century are striking. The Irish immigration to the Northeast began in the 1840s. The initial migration was a forced one, when the English colonizers of Ireland put poor Irish men, women, and children on boats to America after the devastation of the potato famine, rather than develop an economic and social infrastructure in the country they had occupied. When they arrived, the Irish were met with hostility, as businesses and legislatures in the Northeast, especially Boston, quickly summoned their political and economic power to keep Irish from working in factories, from living near non Irish, and from going to school with their children. The only institutions that welcomed the Irish were the jails and the newly constructed mental hospitals in the Northeast, many of which had wards for Irish immigrants. What was it about the Irish immigrants that frightened the native population? A peasant migration, Irish immigrants came with little education, spoke little English, and had no experience working in the factories that began to dominate the Northeast economy in the nineteenth century. They also came with a foreign religion, Catholicism, which evoked a whole host of prejudices in the native population. They were, in short, culturally different from the native population: poor and unlettered. Yet the Irish immigrants were essential to the growing manufacturing and later industrial economy of the United States. Within two decades of their first entry, by 1860, Irish were working in factories, schooling their children in public schools, migrating to the Midwest, and entering public service in the urban Northeast. Within three decades, Irish dominated police departments and local politics in these growing cities.

Latino immigrants, those who come with and those who come without permission from the U.S. government, are evoking eerily similar reactions. Currently a firestorm of anxiety and near hysteria is fueling calls for more border fences and lionization of private citizens known as Minutemen who patrol the border looking for persons who might attempt to cross into the United States. Here in California, the center of the anti- immigrant fever, both public officials and private media figures are calling for stricter border controls and organizing conventions to protest, among other issues, the possibility of giving undocumented immigrants driver's licenses. Others are demanding enforcement of measures to deport Latino immigrants without official documentation and railing against President Bush's timid suggestions that those who have worked here ought to be granted guest worker status. This whirlwind of anti immigrant sentiment has reached Congress, where a law mandating proof of legal residence for federal identification purposes is close to passage. Yet everyone in the debate is well aware of the importance of immigrants, documented or not, to the secondary labor market; a role that parallels the economic uses of Irish immigrants 150 years ago. Like the Irish, Latino immigrants seem different to some natives: cultural differences and poverty are their defining characteristics to those who want them gone. Latent fear of Latino political power parallels the nineteenth century fear of Irish Catholicism. This fear and prejudice did not stop the Irish American Catholic Church

from establishing a powerful system of parochial schools across the United States. Likewise, active Latino political power has trumped the shop worn cliché of Latinos as the "sleeping giant" of the electorate. Los Angeles has just elected its first Latino mayor since the nineteenth century, and Latino elected officials are taking office throughout the state and, to a lesser extent, the country.

The story of both Irish and Latino immigrations is the story of necessity and hope. The necessity lies in the unacknowledged need for cheap labor under industrial capitalism and the inequality that drives this need; the hope is the well-founded faith among immigrants that life here will eventually be better. We can interrupt this story with prejudice, fear and cruelty, but we will not change its ultimate outcome.

Nuggets Of Gold From Dr. Alex Gitterman

Cheryl D. Lee, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

This narrative came about as the result of the author coaxing Dr. Gitterman (noted social work educator, scholar, group worker, and board member of this journal) into granting her an interview at a Group Work conference last October..

Introduction

In October 2004 in Detroit, Michigan and in New York City in 2005, I met with Alex Gitterman, the well-known educator, social group worker, and scholar. At first, Dr. Gitterman had resisted being interviewed. He was not comfortable talking about himself. I encouraged him to agree to this interview at the Group Work Conference in Detroit because he is one of the most respected social work scholars. I felt strongly that social workers and social work academics would learn from what he had to say and be inspired to read the immense scholarly contributions he has made to the social work literature. I am happy that he relented.

Dr. Gitterman is currently a professor at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work and previously was on the faculty of Columbia University for 34 years, serving as Associate Dean for five years. He was president for two terms of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work and Groups (AASWG) and now serves on its board. He has written on varied subjects, including: social work practice, group work practice, the Life Model, resilience and vulnerable populations, teaching, supervision, working with racial and cultural differences, and social justice. He also serves as the editor for the Columbia University Press series on "Empowering the Powerless." By invitation, he has given annual workshops on teaching at the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting and on group work practice for the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG) at its annual symposia. *Reflections* is proud to publish this interview of Alex Gitterman. He has been a good friend to the journal. Since its inception, he has been helpful to its two editors, Sonia Leib Abels, founding editor, and Jillian Jimenez, the current editor. He has written numerous articles that have been published in *Reflections,* and he co-edited a special issue about September 11th with Andrew Malekoff. Additionally, he is a contributing editor and has encouraged many colleagues to write narratives for the journal.

The Interview – Detroit, Michigan, AASWG Annual Conference, October, 2004

Cheryl: I have been reading a lot of your work in preparation for this interview.

Alex GItterman as a high school senior

Alex: I'm flattered.

Writing

Cheryl: Does writing come easy to you? You've written so much about social work.

Alex: No, writing does not come easy to me.

Cheryl: But you make it look so easy. I thought it would be just natural for you.

Alex: I need to write several drafts before I feel a manuscript is ready to be submitted for publication. For some, it comes easy, but not for me.

Cheryl: If you were talking to new writers in social work and new academics who want to write and make a contribution to the literature, would you have any advice for them? How did you learn to be such a prolific writer?

Alex: I have had a few people to thank for helping me to write. First and foremost, the late Professor Irving Miller, a close friend and colleague, taught me a great deal about clearly and concisely expressing ideas. He was a wonderful mentor. He edited many articles and willed me to write better. His admonitions to this day ring in my ears: "less is more;" never "address" the problem (to make the point, he would wave "hello, problem, good-by problem"); never write "in terms of;" never write "at this point in time" (write "at present"); never "center around" or "focus in on" (center on and focus on will suffice); use short words, active verbs, and so on. He taught me to value nuance and to struggle to be precise in my meanings. When I write, he is on my shoulders lending me his support and critical eye.

Second, my wife, Naomi, writes very well. She is also a social work educator; we review each other's materials, and occasionally have the courage to write together. She often criticizes my excessive use of adjectives. Although I love my adjectives, she is usually right that they get in the way of my narrative. When I listen to her (listening to one's wife is a special skill developed by most Jewish husbands) the manuscript is much improved.

A third influence is Ken Bruffee, a professor of English at Brooklyn College. Many years ago, he received a three-year grant. The idea was to teach writing by having peers critique each other's work. He was interested and committed to the use of group processes and peer learning to teach writing. He brought together 25 professors of freshman composition into New York City over three summers. In the morning, he focused on how to teach writing and, in the afternoon, I taught them about how to use the class group for collaborative learning. The three summers I observed him teach how to teach freshman to write was a tremendous gift for me. I'll share just one thing I learned from him. Before starting a writing project, I used to work on developing an outline to guide my writing. He taught me to first get my ideas on paper, to write a first draft and, subsequently, to complete an outline to guide the second draft. The outline helps me to visualize which of my ideas are underdeveloped or out of sequence.

Teaching & Writing

Cheryl: I noticed when I took your group workshop that you were an incredible teacher. Similar to your clear and informative writing, you constantly teach what people want and need to know. So, if you were teaching people how to teach, and you have done that at your workshops at CSWE and AASWG, what are some ideas for teachers, new teaching academics in social work? What are some tips that might be useful for them?

Alex: Thank you for the compliment. For me, the main challenge is to connect my students with the subject being taught and to connect the subject to the students' interests and learning motivation. Essentially, I work on helping students to actively engage with the curriculum. I have found peer learning to be essential to the teaching and learning enterprise.

Cheryl: I have noticed through reading your work and observing you that you have maintained an enthusiasm for teaching which some who have been in a profession for a long time seem to lose.

Alex: I love teaching – it is both my vocation and avocation. Teaching is in my "bones."

Cheryl: Is your energy the same as it's always been?

Alex: My passion for teaching is as strong as ever if not stronger. Being with young people – and each cohort is different – is a wonderful gift.

Cheryl: Okay. And how do you keep that enthusiasm and not become jaded?

Alex: If you are focused on the interaction between the student and the subject, each class and workshop I teach represents an exciting journey. You cannot get bored, because each learning group is different, posing distinctive learning opportunities as well as challenges. All of a sudden a class takes an unexpected detour, or experiences a breakthrough, or faces internal challenges to mutual learning or the students capture the illusive connections between theory and practice and experience that shinning moment of an "aha." In each class journey, while I am teaching, I am simultaneously learning right along with students, developing a deeper understanding of the subject as well as about teaching it. Student papers and class discussions (as well as field advising, consultations, workshops and occasional direct practice) fuel my desire to write. My writing ideas often come right out of my teaching and consulting experiences. Irving Miller once told me that my writing had "soul' because it was grounded in people's life experiences and not from data sets. My writing comes from what I have learned from the practice struggles of students and professionals. From these exchanges, I am often puzzled or curious about something, an idea germinates for a period of time, and when I feel like I have reached a greater clarity, then I am motivated to write and to share it with others. And hopefully someone then reads it (at the very least my wife, mother, aunt and/or children).

Cheryl: So, your data is life.

Alex: My data comes from my life experiences – professional as well as personal. Almost everything I have written evolved from something I experienced that

GItterman as a senior in college

puzzled me and piqued my curiosity. After much reflection, when I arrived at greater clarity, I then wanted to share my ideas with others.

Cheryl: Is there any favorite writing that you have done or pieces that were especially important to you?

Alex: That's a difficult question. I guess I have a few favorites – a few which had more personal meaning to me than others. It may be easier for me to think about this chronologically. My first two publications emerged from my experiences as faculty field instructor for a student unit located in a large public housing complex. Eight students and I provided social services to approximately 18,000 tenants. One of the students, Dick Wolf, developed a sixth grade group of boys. His practice was fantastic and I learned about group work in a school right along with my student. His work provided me with excellent practice illustrations. This led to my very first publication, "Group Work in the Public School," published in 1971 in a collection edited by Schwartz and Zelba. I think Bill Schwartz had me do ten drafts before he felt the manuscript was ready (Bill was a major intellectual influence in my career.) Somehow the article and book got completed.

A co-authored article, "The Black Client and White Worker," followed in 1973. My co-author was a soft-spoken, talented and gutsy second year student, Alice Schaeffer. She courageously reached for the racial tensions and obstacles in her practice with African/American clients. I became curious about the dynamic of workers and clients, from similar or different backgrounds and its impact on practice. Alice and I wrote about dealing with racial differences. This was one of the early articles to examine this theme and has been republished in several books and, more recently, *Reflections* invited Alice and I to reflect on the article 26 years later.

In 1972, Carel Germain and I joined the full-time Columbia teaching faculty (I had been a faculty field instructor from 1966-1969 and a halftime doctoral student and halftime faculty member from 1969-1972). We worked on a committee to develop two sequential first year practice courses that integrated casework and group work (now referred to as foundations practice). From this collaboration, Carel and I wrote our first article about the "Life Model." *Social Service Review* published it in 1976 and Columbia University Press published our book in 1980. If you are interested, maybe we can discuss the major ideas later. What I would like to say now is that I am most grateful that Carel came into my life as a collaborator, a colleague and a close personal friend. A few months ago Columbia University Press sponsored a reception at the Council on Social Work Education's Annual Program Meeting to celebrate its 25th anniversary. I am very proud that our ideas have had lasting power.

In 1983, "Uses of Resistance: A Transactional View" was published by *Social Work*. In all my professional roles, teaching, advising, consulting and practicing, I was troubled by how the concept of "resistance" was pejoratively used to negatively label clients (and students and line staff as well). So I became preoccupied with thinking about why the Freudian concept of an unconscious defense was used indiscriminately. It seemed to represent a potential misuse of professional power. Everyone else is "resistant:" except the person in power who applied this label to blame someone else. By defining a client as "resistant," agency practices and worker interventions did not have to be scrutinized. By viewing resistances as a transactional phenomenon, it requires examining all the contributing factors, provides various potential remedies, and does not burden the client with being responsible for the problem and hence, the need to change. For example, if an adolescent "resists" answering questions

about her sexual activity in an intake interview with a professional stranger, maybe the question doesn't have to be asked right away? I hope I am not being immodest, but I think this is an important article and I like it.

Cheryl: You mean that the concept of resistance has been used to judge others and to justify ourselves.

Alex: Yes - you put that very nicely. People may resist for different reasons. They may resist because the worker is not responsive to them. They want help with bread and butter issues and the worker wants to engage the client in developing insights. Or clients want help with the hurts in their lives (abandonment, abuse) and the worker wants to do anger management. People may resist because they have different perspectives or expectations than those of their workers. In the article, I try to conceptualize the major sources that trigger resistance, and offer some practice ideas for dealing with it.

Cheryl: What do you do about it?

Alex: Well, the first step is to develop a transactional perspective – tensions between the client and the agency, the client and the worker, the client and her/his pain. This idea also applies to teaching. If students in a class or workshop I am teaching are not participating, defining them as resistant takes me off the hook from examining my own teaching and my contributions to their lack of participation. However, if I define the lack of participation as something happening between us, about how we are transacting and relating to each other, and I am open to examining my own contributions, the discussion itself will go a long way to improving their participation and to dealing with the obstacles to their learning and to my teaching.

Cheryl: You are not going to let things go, you are going to deal head on with what's happening. Would that be accurate?

Alex: Absolutely, that's been one of the most compelling learning experiences for me – to tackle things sensitively and directly. I refer to this as the skill of being sensitively direct. In other words, to make demands for work, but to do it in a supportive manner; to integrate giving support and making demands.

Cheryl: This is very interesting. I hope I didn't derail you from talking about your favorite publications.

Alex: Not at all – you helped me clarify my ideas. I have enjoyed my collaborations with Larry Shulman, including three editions of our *Mutual Aid* book (1986, 1994, and 2005) and countless workshops. He is a gifted communicator. He also was influenced by the writing and teaching of William Schwartz. Our similar views about practice have enabled us to bounce ideas off each other and enjoy a special friendship (at times a little competitive, but reciprocally supportive and loyal).

In 1989, *Social Work with Groups* published "Building Support in Groups." The article identified and illustrated the skills required to foster mutual aid in groups. I think the ideas advanced group work practice and I was pleased to recently learn that the Journal editors have selected it to be republished in a special issue of group work classics.

An article that had great personal meaning to me emerged from a two-semester class experience in which almost half of the class was composed of students of color. The dynamics between a white teacher and students of color, students of color and white students, and between students of color themselves and white students themselves was a challenging teaching experience. The experience was rife with inter and intra racial tensions culminating when a few students of

color confronted me with giving racially discriminating grades. I reflected on this experience a number of years before publishing "Working with Difference: White Teacher and African-American Students" in 1992. I loved this class and still think about it.

The two editions of *Handbook of Social Work Practice* (1991 and 2001) I think added to the profession's knowledge base. I especially valued the opportunity to integrate macro and micro perspectives. Each contributor deserves special recognition for the depth and breadth of their scholarship. The later edition was awarded the Robert Wood Johnson Award for textbook excellence in end of life content.

I hope I am not going on too long, but this feels like talking about one's children and not wanting to leave one out. I published two articles in *Reflections* that had special meaning to me. In 1995, my friend and *Reflections* founder and editor (at that time), Sonia Abels, invited me to reflect on what I learned about teaching from my teaching. This resulted in "Reflections about Learning and Teaching." When teachers tell me that they have found these ideas helpful in their teaching that is music to my ears. Finally, my friend Paul Abels (I think he may be related to Sonia) edited a special group work issue and I submitted "Loss, Grief, and Group Work." It is about the respective contributions and my love for four former group work colleagues and friends (Mary Funnye-Goldson, Irving Miller, William Schwartz and Hyman Weiner) who passed away. They were amazing people and writing about them brought them back to me and to others. Finally, I would like to thank Jillian Jimenez, *Reflections* current editor, for inviting me to co-edit (with Andrew Malekoff) a special memorial issue dedicated to the helping experiences related to September 11th. I hope the special issue made a contribution to the profession's literature; working on it was both personally and professionally meaningful.

Cheryl: I noticed that in many of your articles, you use practice examples. Do they come out of students' fieldwork internships?

Alex: Many come from my teaching; some come from my consultations and workshops. Whatever I teach, I try to use the participants actual practice productions. In my course assignments, I often ask them to analyze their own practice, using the literature to deepen their understanding. If you have not reviewed the *Life Model's Teachers Guide*, I would encourage you to take a look at it. Various teaching instruments such as records of service, critical incidents, and journals are explained and illustrated. The students and I learn a great deal from them.

Cheryl: Your mentioning the *Life Model's Teacher's Guide* reminded me that I wanted to ask you about the Model's major tenets?

Alex: In developing the two integrated methods courses, Carel and I were concerned that social work education separated people from their environments. In casework, students were primarily exposed to psychological explanations of human behavior and the focus of intervention was primarily on client adjustment. So our first aim was to develop a perspective that offered equal attention and focus on people and their environments. Carel was beginning to do groundbreaking work on bringing ecological theory to social work. We found ecological theory derived from the natural science of biology more user friendly than systems theory derived from the hard science of physics.

Carel and I were also concerned that social work education not only separated the people from their environments, but also

separated individual, family, group, and community work from each other. Our second aim was to develop a model that builds bridges between historical divisions among casework, group work and community organization. Thus, we attempted to present notions about an integrated method of social work practice. Our conviction was that a client should not wind up receiving, individual or group or family services based upon the worker's specialization, but rather based upon client need and comfort.

Our third aim was related to the separation between the profession's clinical treatment and social reform traditions. We wanted to develop a model that began to build bridges between the treatment and social reform traditions of the profession. In our first edition, we focused on moving from client troubles to influencing organizations. We drew heavily on Brager and Holloway's classic text, *Changing Human Service Organizations* (1978). In the second edition, our focus expanded to community and legislative influences. I think this part of our collaboration is not as strong as the others.

Cheryl: In what way is it "not as strong?"

Alex: Well, it is not as well developed. In many ways Carel and I had to struggle against the chains of our own micro education and expand our knowledge base. The macro content is simply not as familiar to us. I give us a great deal of credit for the effort, but feel that in the subsequent edition the macro content has to be improved.

Cheryl: What made you refer to these ideas as the Life Model rather than the Integrated Model?

Alex: In reviewing the available literature for these two courses, we found that clients were required to fit into a well-established medical model of social work practice. Our practice, field instruction, teaching and advising experiences suggested that oppressed people often resisted being fit into diagnostic formulations and, in turn, were diagnosed as resistant. Thus, we set out to develop a model of practice that attempted, as close as possible, to mirror natural life processes. Using the metaphor of people on a "trolley car of life," the prevailing medical model demanded that applicants get off their "trolley cars," be screened and enter the professional "trolley car." In contrast, we wanted our students to learn how to jump skillfully onto the client's moving life processes and enter their life space, engaging adaptive processes rather than mobilizing resistive processes. Mirroring natural life processes led us to call it the life model. We also thought for purpose of royalties it would be wise to call it the "life" model rather than the "dead" model (laughter).

Cheryl: What are the other major changes that you made in the second edition?

Alex: While continuing to focus on the integration of methods, we try to spell out much more the differentials in practice. For example, in the first edition we had only one chapter on "interpersonal obstacles." In the second edition we expanded it to three chapters – interpersonal obstacles within families, groups and between worker and client. We also are much more systematic in spelling out how a social worker takes into account issues of class, race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, level of physical, emotional, and mental functioning in practice. I think I have told you more than you ever wanted to know about the Life Model – sorry if I got carried away.

Cheryl: No, it was very interesting to discuss the life model with you. I think it's important to use models that are written and conceived from a social work perspective and plan on using it with my own students.

Motivation to Enter the Social Work Profession

Cheryl: What inspired you to enter the social work profession?

Alex: I think there are two prime reasons. I was a sociology major at Rutgers and in my junior year I took a course in criminology. This course was the first course that really spoke to me. We had several field visits to correctional facilities, one of which was an alternative to a reformatory for first time adolescent offenders, and it fascinated me. The setting was very structured, and every night the youngsters participated in group therapy. I was captivated and asked permission to revisit. It struck me that working with groups was a career I wanted to pursue –helping teenagers through the use of groups.

Cheryl: So, you found a career direction.

Alex: Yes. Another influence was my aunt who had special meaning in my life. She is a holocaust survivor and she came to this country and became a social worker.

Cheryl: That's amazing, that women like your aunt accomplished obtaining professional degrees at a time when it was not fashionable.

Alex: The issue is not that it wasn't fashionable – the issue is that she overcame insurmountable odds to complete her professional education. She was in a small class of about eight students that graduated from Adelphi sometime in the mid-fifties; I saw her graduate and it motivated me. I think these were two significant influences for me.

Influences for Going into Group Work

Cheryl: What influenced your interest in social group work?

Alex: The course in criminology and my aunt are what influenced me to go into social work, but the interest in group work was much earlier. It started in high school through my involvement in team sports.

Cheryl: How did the high school experience influence your interest in group work?

Alex: When playing basketball and baseball, there is something about being part of the team and the bonding that takes place. Being a high school athlete also influenced my acceptance and status with peers.

Cheryl: So it made you feel good about yourself.

Alex: It increased my self-confidence. Being able to perform under pressure, and contributing to a team effort had a profound impact. I was very much influenced by my high school basketball coach. For a period of time, I even thought about becoming a high school or college basketball coach. However, when I arrived in college and found out how much better other players were than me and that the students who majored in athletics had muscles on top of muscles (laughing), I realized I would have to find a different career path.

Cheryl: So, you became a social worker.

Alex: A social worker, yes and I am a proud one. Ours is a most noble profession.

Cheryl: Were team sports your first experiences that you felt you were of a part of a group?

Alex: A part of a structured group with a common goal.

Cheryl: You enjoyed the group process

Alex: I relished it.

Cheryl: That's an interesting answer because I would have thought it might be later (when you discovered group work) and so it's a good thing I asked.

Alex: From my junior year in high school and throughout my college years, I worked in summer day camps. Between my first and second years of graduate school, I worked in an overnight camp — a well-known one — Wel-Met camps. These were wonderful experiences, which exposed me to the potential of groups as well as some of the pitfalls.

Cheryl: You liked working with children and adolescents.

Alex: Until graduate school, my experiences were largely with latency-aged and pre-adolescents. During my first year placement at Lenox Hill Settlement House, I was assigned to work with an adolescent group. I discovered that I had a knack for working with this age group – I could relate to them with ease and was not thrown by their creative testing. Even more than that, the settlement house shaped my view of social work practice – its philosophy, view of community participation and agency membership has fueled my writing and teaching throughout my career. And even more than that, on a personal level, I met my life's soul mate, my wife as co-workers at this settlement house.

Cheryl: Which graduate school did you attend?

Alex: I was attending Rutgers University; I applied to Rutgers School of Social Work, and also applied to Hunter and Columbia. My initial plan was to remain at Rutgers. I began to have second thoughts, feeling I have been there four years and felt I was ready for a new experience. I was too comfortable at Rutgers. I decided to move to New York and attend Hunter. I selected Hunter because of its size – we had 30 students in the entire class, 4 of whom were group work majors. I loved Hunter and am a very proud graduate.

Cheryl: Did you get a BSW at Rutgers or a sociology degree?

Alex: I began as a joint psychology and sociology major, and discovered that I had much greater interests in people than rats – so I majored only in Sociology. I don't want to date myself, but when I went to school the BSW did not exist.

Cheryl: The settlement house really influenced you.

Alex: Yes, I was exposed to a very different notion of helping than my casework peers. They were learning to complete social studies, develop diagnoses and treatment plans; I was learning about helping a neighbor/ member who came on some hard times. We were being socialized to what felt like two different professions. At that time, I did not understand the divergent roots of the Charity Organization Societies and Settlement Movements. As an intern, I experienced the settlement; I breathed the settlement; I internalized the settlement house.

Cheryl: Do you still think about your former clients?

Alex: I often think about the members; they were tremendous teachers. The younger kids gave me a rough time; I credit them with teaching me about the importance of being real and congruent. I also think about one of my teenagers who committed suicide.

Professionally and personally that has stayed with me.

Cheryl: What do you mean by being real and congruent?

Alex: I was assigned to this pre-adolescent group while I was learning these theories and professional skills in graduate schools. The kids would be disruptive and I would say in a bland voice, "Did you have a bad day at school?" They would become more disruptive and I would continue with these mechanical bullshit interventions. Finally, one kid smacked me hard in the back of my head; I think for the sole purpose to see what it would take for me to become a real person. Well, I was too upset to think about a "professional" response. Instead, I screamed a few profanities, demanded that the kids sit down and I then proclaimed, "This shit is going to stop!" The kids saw me at my worst, yet I did not abandon nor reject them. They were begging me to create some structure and limits. They also wanted me to be real. They taught me the importance of integrating the professional and personal person and that structure and process go hand in hand. Our work began after that episode.

Cheryl: So, you had to be who you are?

Alex: A social worker has to integrate his professional and personal selves into one self. One has to learn from making mistakes, the task is to make newer and more advanced mistakes.

Cheryl: I am learning something from you. It's always hard for me to confront a student that's not doing their work or being disruptive, rude, angry and so I hold back, but you're saying it's better to just say what you're really thinking.

Alex: Yes. There are two processes going on simultaneously in teaching and learning, and the potential for discrepancy between what you teach the students should be done and what you actually do yourself. In reality, more is "caught" then taught. So if you are teaching students to be direct and to speak the "unspoken" and you model the opposite, they will learn to do what you do and not what you say should be done. So if a student is being disruptive, all eyes are on how you handle the disruption. If you ignore it, don't be surprised if your students avoid conflict and negative feelings in their practice. Show them how to make active mistakes (like I did with my kids) – the active ones you can learn from; with the passive ones all you can experience are regrets.

Cheryl: You mentioned that the teenager who committed suicide remained with you. How did he stay with you?

Alex: I knew he was in great pain and involved in various self-destructive behaviors. We made a special connection. I feel I came into his life too late and struggle with what could have been if I had had more time – you know the "What if…?"

Advice to New Social Workers

Cheryl: If you were going to advise new social work students, what would you tell the students, where do you see social work going or what could they do to be effective?

Alex: That's a tough question because what is happening in social work is scary. Social work is losing control over its objectives as well as its methodology. The loss of professional autonomy is a significant threat to the profession.

Cheryl: What do you mean by losing its methodology, can you give me an example?

Alex: O.K. There is increasing pressure to demonstrate that an intervention has worked. To do so, experimental groups and a control group are established. Let's say you have five professionals leading a certain type of group (e.g., an anger management). In order to study the effectiveness of the intervention, you develop a manual that attempts to standardize the practice – to have the social workers do the same things at the same time. The research design is driving the practice rather than the other way around. And practice conformity is antithetical to practice creativity. As another example, managed care requires treatment goals with the expectations that clients will change in a short period of time. The agency executive is under great pressure to make sure all forms are completed in a timely manner and that positive outcomes are being achieved. The executive's pressures and frustrations are passed on to the supervisors, who pass the pressure and frustration on to the workers. And before long the worker blames the clients for not getting better fast enough. It is a vicious cycle.

I encourage my students to hold on to their professional core. While they must represent their agencies, they must not become their agencies. Representing rather than becoming one's agency is what differentiates a professional from a bureaucrat. When they become their agency, they become agents of social control. So if their agency wants them to do anger management, they need to invite the clients to express what fuels their anger – their hurts, their pain, and their disappointments (past and present). The focus needs to be on the stressors they have in their lives that they are having trouble managing. They need help with managing their stressors as well as the associated feelings and not just the feelings alone. An abused youngster will more likely examine how his angry responses are not in his best self interests if he is able to begin with his perspectives and life narrative. The notion is that the social worker mediates between agency demands and clients' needs, that's part of our function, mediating agency demands and clients' needs and it is this function that differentiates us from all other helping professions, (Bill Schwartz offered the profession the gift of clarity of function). This is a complex notion about practice and workers require a great deal of support in carrying it out. If workers cannot find the support in their agencies, they have to find it outside their work. To be supportive of their clients, social workers have to be fueled with support in their own lives. Otherwise, it is too easy to burn out. Our clients need us too much for that to happen.

Cheryl: When you say get your support elsewhere, for your profession, what do you mean?

Alex: Workers need to try to obtain support through their organization, their professional associations, and through personal resources. Day to day we see people with devastating life situations. Without professional and personal supports, I have seen too many workers detach themselves from their clients or burn out. Either detachment or burn out are harmful for clients. Our clients need us to represent their interests and to do so we have to keep ourselves fueled with support.

Cheryl: How about you? Where do you get your support from to teach, write, and work?

Alex: I have a wonderful wife and two children – we are always there for each other. My mother and aunt have provided me with a lifetime of unconditional love and support. I also have friends who are like family to me. Naomi and I have been blessed with long lasting friendships. Professionally, I had a difficult period at Columbia for several years.

During that time, not much support was available to me. So, I sought outside organizations to have my professional needs for support. I became very active in this Association for the Advancement of Social Work and Groups ASSWG, serving as its president for two terms. These colleagues became an essential support group.

My new institution, University of Connecticut School of Social Work, under the leadership of Dean Kay Davidson, is a wonderful place to work. My new colleagues are most interesting and supportive. And at both institutions Columbia and University of Connecticut, my students have been a great source of motivation. And then there are consultations, workshops, and lectures that stimulate and keep me on my toes.

Cheryl: You said as far as seeing social work in the future that the problems are getting more difficult and so social workers need to be supported and they need to mediate between the environment and their clients and the agency. Do you see anything else happening in the profession in the future, like the future of group work, if you looked in your crystal ball?

Alex: I am not hopeful about group work's future in graduate education. While agencies are making an increased use of the group modality, graduate schools are turning their backs on teaching group work practice. While group work is taking off in the practice world, it is totally declining in the academy, in the graduate schools at least. The BSW programs seem to be doing a better job. I really don't understand why the academic realities do not reflect the practice realities.

Cheryl: What led to the decline of group work education?

Alex: Cheryl, that is a complex question. I remember at Columbia an increasing number of students were double majoring in casework and group work. The field placement expected them to work with both individuals and groups. These students were taking 4 casework and 4 group work courses and integrating the content was left to them. Students began to complain that it was the faculty's job to integrate the content. I was taken by their argument and began to feel that they were right, that the faculty had to develop an integrated methods curriculum.

Cheryl: How did that proceed?

Alex: There were two conceptualizations. In one, each method received separate attention – five weeks on group work, five weeks on casework, and five weeks on contextual factors such as organizational and temporal contexts. The other entails developing an integrated model of practice. In fact, one of the aims of the Life Model was to develop an integrated model of practice that build conceptual and operational bridges between the historical trichotizimation of casework, group work and community organization. As previously mentioned our conviction was that the client should not receive services based on the worker's specialization but rather based on client needs. While integrative ideas had an important impact on social work education, I must confess that I did not anticipate a serious unintended consequence: the cause of social group work would be significantly diminished.

Cheryl: The cause?

Alex: The social cause of keeping group work alive, of developing future generations of new faculty who were committed and competent to teach group work. That was lost with integrated methods or what is currently referred to as foundations practice. Another unanticipated consequence was that many of the integrated method and current

foundations courses evolved largely into practice with individuals. Hence, another unanticipated consequence is that with the increased uses of groups in the field combined with the lack of formal group work training, workers skills are declining. This conversation is getting depressing.

Cheryl: Do you think that since group work is increasingly used in the field, it will return in the academy?

Alex: It doesn't look good. Most doctoral programs do not teach group work theory and practice. So I don't see how we will have a faculty cohort to teach the group work content.

AASWG has tried to influence CSWE. We have worked very hard on trying to influence accreditation standards, on developing resources for teachers, on publishing books on how to teach group practice in class and field. While we have made a strong effort, I don't think we have made sufficient progress. I can't look in the future and anticipate if some events will change social work education to be more responsive to group work content, but I don't see any hopeful signs.

Cheryl: So, if you're advising the academy, if you wanted to make some recommendations, what would that be?

Alex: We need to work on finding a balance between teaching students to feel comfortable with being a generalist and deliver services based on clients needs rather than worker specialization; yet, at the same time, to develop depth in specific modalities. The University of Connecticut, for example, is experimenting with providing in the first year both foundations practice as well as advanced method specialization. We are up for re-accreditation. We will see how the approach is evaluated.

Columbia reception: Gitterman returning to faculty after serving as an associate dean

Professional and Life Influences

Cheryl: What are the greatest influences of your life? You mentioned your aunt.

Alex: Well, my aunt influenced me to become a social worker. As a social worker there have been numerous influences. At a group work symposium, I confessed that I am involved in an inter-marriage. I married a social caseworker who subsequently expanded her practice orientation. We have

learned a great deal from each other about social work practice. I don't know if you read "Loss, Grief and Group Work", recently published in *Reflections.*

Cheryl: I did, I loved it. I learned so much about these great contributors to social work knowledge. I laughed at the funny jokes and cried because of its poignancy.

Alex: Thank you very much. Hy Weiner, Irving Miller, Mary Funnye Goldson and Bill Schwartz were profound professional and personal influences as were Carole Germain, Richard Cloward and George Brager. I miss these close colleagues/friends terribly.

Cheryl: You didn't write about Carel Germain, Richard Cloward or George Brager?

Alex: The article focused only on group work colleagues. I have written about Carel and Richard elsewhere and will be glad to share these with you. George is a more recent loss. All of them are deep in my heart – their ideas; our mutual affection and respect sustains me every day.

Cheryl: I don't know if you want to talk about any kind of religion, spirituality, did that have any influence on your life or on your work?

Alex: Yes. Ah…I don't know how to frame it…I'm a spiritual person. I don't follow many religious traditions. I don't go to synagogue. However, I do respect Yom Kippur and Passover and follow the rituals. Yom Kippur is the one-day I go to synagogue to be with my two fathers – to honor them, also to pay respect to all my other family members who perished in the holocaust, other losses, and to be thankful for the love, good-fortune surrounding me.

Cheryl: You had two fathers? I don't want to bring up anything that is sensitive…

Alex: That's okay… you made me think about them. I have wonderful children and a grandson who are central to my life. Neither my son nor daughter is religious, but each in his and her own individual ways respects the holiness of the day. I think they do so out of respect for me. I have no expectations about what they should do, but I feel they are very much with me.

Cheryl: The respect for tradition, your family and your ancestry, are these the main tenets you bring into your social work – respect for family, respect for people?

Alex: I am the same person in all my roles. I have different functions, but I'm still the same person. I treat other people like I want to be treated. My parents taught me that the most important thing in life is to be a good, honorable and courageous person. They valued good deeds much more than accomplishments. You had to be a good person. You had to do the right thing. I married a woman with the same values and am proud that my children live their lives that way – they are kind, respectful and courageous (as is my grandson.)

Cheryl: That's what a good man is, to do the right thing?

Alex: Yes – be fair and treat others with respect. That also means having standards and making demands, but do so kindly.

Cheryl: I think we answered this: the most pressing issues facing social work?

Alex: Survival.

Cheryl: Survival?

Alex: Survival as a profession.

Cheryl: Can you explain that to me?

Alex: Our profession has survived many threats. We have the capacity to reinvent ourselves. When a field of practice becomes less hospitable to social work, we generate new fields of practice like homelessness and AIDS. This represents a significant strength. What I worry about is that an increasing number of graduate faculty members have limited practice experiences. They can teach book social work practice, but understandably have a difficult time teaching practice in depth. So what I described about the quality of group work practice is, unfortunately, also true for individual and family practice. If our graduates are not skillful why should employers pay more money for social workers when they can get related discipline for less money? We don't fully understand that professional practice competence is our route to professional survival. Professional incompetence will lead to the destruction of the profession.

Cheryl: These are powerful thoughts. I wish we had more time to explore this theme more fully. In our brief remaining time, I would like to ask about your personal background.

Personal Background

Cheryl: Were you born in the United States?

Alex: No.

Cheryl: Where were you born?

Alex: I was born in Poland. I'm a child survivor of the Holocaust.

Cheryl: I was afraid to ask about this; however, I think it's very important to talk about because it had to have had an impact on you. How old were you when you immigrated to this country?

Alex: I came to this country when I was about eight years old.

Cheryl: How did the Holocaust influence you?

Alex: One clear influence is that I have a special appreciation for this wonderful country, for democracy and democratic processes. I think U.S. born folks take freedom too much for granted. Surviving also has influenced my strong identification with people who are oppressed and who experience discrimination. I have walked in their shoes – being born Jewish was sufficient justification to have you murdered. Most of my family members were murdered. Being born of color or gay/lesbian in this country leads to cruel oppression – a systematic effort to kill souls. My interest in people's resilience also emerges from being a survivor. Early in my career, I worked in various low-income communities in the Bronx. The people's ability to survive against great odds was ignored in most professional literature. I saw their strengths and resiliencies; others only saw pathology and weakness. I am sorry if I am beginning to ramble.

Cheryl: I hear the profound influence the Holocaust experience has had on your personal life and your professional career.

Alex: Very much so. I have intolerance for bullies – physical bullies, emotional bullies, and ideological bullies – all kinds of bullies. I also react to people who close their eyes to injustice, or line up with the bully, focusing only on their self-interests. They do not see the bigger picture. Any person or group who is treated unjustly and you don't lift a finger to help: Beware; tomorrow may be your turn.

Thanks to my mother's unbelievable courage, her loving me more than life itself, and much good fortune, I was spared. As a survivor, I have devoted myself to having a meaningful life by giving to others. I learned, primarily from my mother, that meaning in life comes from giving rather than taking. When you give to others, life is full of satisfaction. I also embrace life everyday with much joy.

Cheryl: You said you lost two dads?

Alex: I lost my biological father in a concentration camp before I was three years old. After the War, my mother remarried a wonderful man. Gitterman means good man and he was a very good man. My stepfather died at a very young age - 58. My mother was widowed twice by the age of 48. I learned from her the meaning of courage, of not succumbing to the dark demons.

Cheryl: So, you see yourself as a survivor; a resilient person.

Alex: I see my mother, aunt, and myself that way. I have a very special bond with them – I never needed sports heroes – I had my mother and aunt (my aunt has her own narrative of courage and resilience).

Cheryl: Are they still alive?

Alex: Yes they are – my mother is going to be 90 soon. (Alex's mother died shortly after this interview took place.)

Cheryl: It's amazing that you are alive. You're a miracle, and that helps you.

Alex: Yes, my life is a miracle. The experience influenced me very much. A brief example: when I was a social work student, I was very skeptical of most of the psychological explanations of human behavior. They didn't deal with social or historical time, with mass upheavals, etc. They didn't hold up to my life realities.

Cheryl: They didn't hold up?

Alex: They seemed too linear to me. My trajectory did not follow the prescribed sequencing. For example, my latency years were not very happy, peaceful, or calm, yet my adolescence was total bliss.

Cheryl: I know we have to run to a meeting now – thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. It has meant a lot to me both personally and professionally. How about ending it with one of your classic jokes.

Alex: Cheryl – thank you for making the interview easy. I wasn't looking forward to it – I'm much more comfortable with talking about others than myself. Let me think quickly about a "clean" joke that wont get us into trouble with *Reflections'* editorial board...okay, let me tell you about a true incident rather than a joke. When my friend Hy Weiner was the Dean at New York University School of Social Work, he met with a student who received the grades of F in research, F in social policy, F in human behavior, and a D in his practice course. When he asked the student to explain his academic performance, the student responded, without a moment's hesitation, "I guess that I spent too much time on the practice course."

Reflections on the Interview

I have now read most of Dr. Gitterman's writing on social work practice, but talking over his ideas with him helped me understand his theories and techniques in teaching, practice and writing at a more personal level. Just recently I was covering death and dying in my HBSE classes and I found myself talking about the life model and applying it to saying good-bye to loved ones, end of life issues,

and what constitutes quality of life. The students discussed how saying good-bye to someone who is dying is very personal in real life. How making end of life decisions and determining quality of life cannot be manualized. We discussed how the stages of grief are more chaotic than linear. We then talked about Alex's article in *Reflections* about mourning his four friends/colleagues and how he compared his feelings to a grief work group facilitated by one of his students. In his article he reminded us that memories of people who are close to us stay with us and how it's okay, and maybe even good, to think of them a lot and for a long time, and mourn with social support.

It was challenging for me to interview someone of Dr. Gitterman's stature and professionalism. I learned that you have to read everything a person writes before doing an interview, and in his case, that was over a hundred publications. He used his "support and demand" theory on me during my interview with him, which made me want to do an even better job. He demands so much of himself and contributes so much to professional social work and group work. I feel lucky to have had this opportunity and urge you to get to know Alex Gitterman through his writing, a workshop at CSWE, or coming to AASWG where he is always around to welcome new group members. He has been inspiring to me. I've been captivated by his intellect, commitment to social work values and quick wit.

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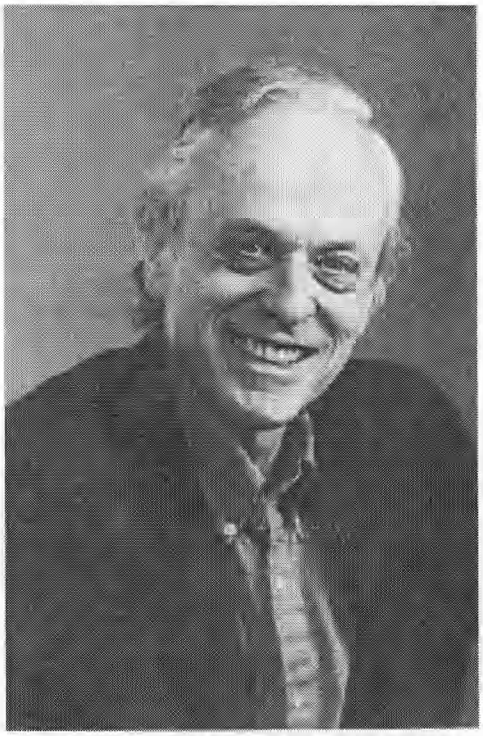


Univerity of Connecticut faculty portrait

Disability: In the Eye of the Beholder

David Prichard, Ph.D., University of New England

In this personal narrative, the author recounts his experiences with 'differently-abled' children that have come to form part of the bedrock of his understanding about people and relationships, and have helped him to understand some of his own strengths and challenges. The author feels that the lessons learned in the his personal and professional life inform him more than any of the academic texts he pored over in graduate school.

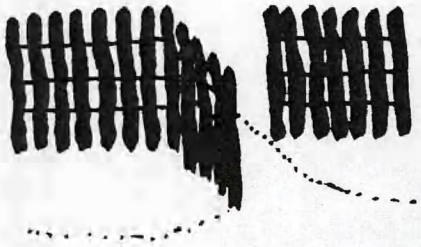
This article is dedicated to my sister, Tara, who in her own way taught me about letting go and about unconditionally trusting others.

Blind Trust: Letting Go

Tara, my younger sister, was adopted when I was 12 and she an infant. Blind since birth due to a congenital condition, Tara, in her youth, epitomized independence. She did not know she was 'different' from other children until she started kindergarten. We lived on a rural farm and Tara had the house pretty well mapped out in her mind. As a toddler, she would go tearing around the house, stopping moments before hitting a wall or piece of furniture, her footfalls echoing off the objects and serving as her 'eyes' as she played.

Tara was very special to me. With her curly blond hair, blue eyes, and infectious smile, she would light up any room she entered and drew natural attention. Her age and sightlessness conspired to make her face an open book. Her emotions and feelings would flutter unchecked across her face, her sightless eyes scanning this way and that as she processed her world. Her eyes would 'gaze' in one direction or another depending on the information she was processing and whether she was thinking or feeling. Decades later we recognize aspects of these phenomena as crucial to clinical work using Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR).

When my mother left the family and started a new life as a migrant farmer on the West Coast with her new husband, my two brothers and I were left to parent then six-year old Tara. During the next six months it became increasingly clear that we were woefully unprepared to care for a young child and that Tara needed more traditional parents. We arranged for her to move 1500 miles away to the deep South to live in a trailer with her adoptive father, my past step-father. I was elected to take Tara to the airport, a two hour drive. I skipped my high school classes and spent the day getting Tara packed, trying to suppress the numbness and pain that I felt as I prepared to say goodbye to my sister.



Tara grasped my hand and happily bounded up the ladder to the plane. As I helped her get settled in, I knew full well that I likely would not see her again for quite some time. My mother's second divorce had been a difficult one and I had never bonded with my past step-father. Tara was excited by the adventure of the plane ride, unaware of the significance of the trip and that the connection she had known with me was forever changing at that moment. My heart breaking, I held myself together as I hugged her, said goodbye, and left Tara in the care of a nameless flight attendant. Later, I stared stone-faced and numb as I made the drive home. I did not have any communication with Tara for the next 15 years.

The call on my answering machine startled me. I had lost track of Tara through the years and had no idea where she was living, other than 'down South'. For years I had carried around the guilt of 'abandoning' Tara and feeling as though I had somehow violated her

trust in me by not making a stronger effort to maintain contact though the years. Heart pounding, I returned her call. I could still imagine her as the slight six year old I had felt forced to abandon, myself a child, so many years ago. The voice was unmistakably hers, and we had an engaged, animated conversation. While my last memory of her had been one of pain and anguish, Tara, understandably, had no recollection of our parting.

I arranged for Tara to attend our next family reunion. I picked her up and we had several hours in the car together driving through some of the more remote areas of New England. Tara had matured into a confident, self-assured young adult, and I was overjoyed to see the same enthusiasm and self-confidence that I had seen in her as a child. During the ride, I described much of the beauty that I was able to perceive in our surroundings, including several moose that we passed during the trip. We talked. As we drove, Tara experienced the beauty of rural New England through my eyes; I witnessed the memories of her childhood through her 'eyes'. With this re-connection, I was able to supplant my last memory of my sister, saying good-bye on the plane, with a fresh, updated and recent memory. Her contact with me was more of a gift to me that she could ever know.

Tara was received with open arms by my siblings at the reunion. Her adventurous spirit ever present, she now was ever curious about her surroundings and wanting to 'join' with the family as if to make up for the 15 years that she had been absent from us.

One of our annual family traditions included jumping off the cliffs of a narrow gorge into deeps pools of water far below. The paths to the cliffs were rocky and crossed with gnarled roots. As we made our annual trek, Tara was full of questions and unhesitating in her desire to join us in this feat. Critical to the jump was judging distance – jump too short and risk striking the wall on the way down; jump too far and risk landing in the shallow waters on the other side of the gorge (it was that narrow!). Tara wanted to jump and would not be deterred. For me the jumps often required a leap of inner faith; for Tara it would be a leap of faith and trust in others.

"I want to jump too. Let me see the edge." Tara used vision-oriented words – they simply held a different meaning to her than that held by most of the seeing world.

"Really?" I asked, surprised, doubt showing in my voice. Here was the trusting child I had been put in the position of abandoning on a plane 15 years ago, and now I was helping her jump off a narrow gorge.

I led Tara up the path to the edge of the cliff where she gripped her toes over the edge and cocked her head to one side. She was listening to the sound of the water cascading off the falls below and the calls of encouragement from my two brothers who had gone before. I recalled the expression lovingly – how often I had seen it in Tara as a child. It was her way of judging distance by an acute sense of sound. She turned her face toward mine, laughed lightly, and jumped.

When it was time to return Tara home, I drove her the 13 hours down the East Coast to what was then my home. We caught up on her life over the past 15 years. I remember putting her on the train at the end of the visit. She had grown to a mature, intelligent and attractive young woman. Full of self-confidence and self-assurance, Tara had maintained the independence and trust that I had loved so much in her childhood. I flashed back to putting her on the plane so many years ago when I believed that I would never see her again. This time I held her close, said goodbye, and as I drove home, sobbed the tears that had been 15 years in coming.

What did I learn from Tara over the years? Most importantly, I learned trust as I watched her trust other people with such total abandon. First as her mother left her, as a six year old,

in the care of her older siblings, and many years later as I led her to the edge of a cliff to jump blindly into the abyss below.

I would like to be able to say that I have learned to trust and to 'let go' with half the abandon that she is able and willing. I do know that the letting go of control involved in trusting relationships has been an issue for me for much of my adult life. In my clinical practice, much of the work I do with clients, particularly those with trust and control issues, focuses at some point on 'letting go'. I am so often reminded of the need of my clients to 'let go' of their grip on parts of themselves that are no longer helpful, to release old memories and experiences, and to jump, sometimes blindly, into that deep abyss. It is in trusting ourselves to jump into the deep abyss that we can truly learn to soar to great heights. I witnessed from Tara the courage to leap blindly into the abyss. I reflect on Tara's leap often as I work with clients who ask me to act as a guide as they are leaping into their own emotional abysses. And I reflect on Tara, at times, as I leap into my own abysses in life.

Independence: In the Eye of the Beholder

When I was a child my family took in a number of physically challenged children through the state foster care system. Some of the children had passed through our home a matter of months while others had stayed involved with us for years. As a young child, I quickly learned that all children, as well as adults, are unique and individual in their varying levels of physical ability. Each of us has some areas that challenge us and others in which we excel. My early life experiences, first with my sister Tara and later with the other 'disabled' children in my family, had a profound impact on me and contributed to my devoting the early part of my career to helping physically challenged children.

I went on to be employed as a member of the counseling staff at a federally funded overnight camp for children with disabilities. Children at the camp would arrive with mental and physical diagnoses including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, deafness, blindness, and developmental disorders. The mission of the camp was to provide children with an outdoor summer experience that would parallel, as close as possible, what non-disabled children experience at summer camp. Campers were involved in boating, camping, canoeing, swimming, arts and crafts, music, and sports. For many of these children the summer camp experience was one of the few opportunities they had to be in a 'normal' environment participating in 'normal' activities where they did not feel 'different' or 'abnormal'.

Active Listening: When Words Are Not Enough

When I first met Brian at camp, he was peering at me over the top of his tortoiseshell glasses. An impossibly slight eight year old, he sat contorted in a small blue wheelchair, his body ravaged by cerebral palsy. On top of his chair sat a manual communication board with pictures associated with words. Though it was laminated, it was clearly worn with age and use.

Over the next two weeks, Brian and I would become largely inseparable, as I wheeled him to and from various activities and meals. Part of cabin responsibilities included dressing and assisting the children in personal hygiene and showering. Boys had no privacy in their cabins; the bathrooms had no stalls and three shower heads lined one wall. Brian never complained as he was carried into the shower room, though he did request to shower after the other boys were through. He was as light as a feather and his small body easy to wash as there was so little of it.

Toward the end of the two weeks, I became alarmed when Brian became feverish and lethargic – this was unusual for him and I was concerned that he was coming down with

the flu. I instructed one of the other counselors to remain with Brian in the cabin and have a nurse evaluate him, while I attended to the rest of the children who were scheduled for an overnight boating and camping trip.

Before leaving for the overnight, I checked on Brain in his cabin. He was curled in as close to a fetal position as his stiff body would allow.

"I'm sorry you're not feeling well, Brian. I know how much you were looking forward to the camping trip."

Brian jerked his head in affirmation. Whenever he was away from his wheelchair, Brian lost his 'voice'; his communication board which was attached to the chair. At these times, Brian could not communicate except with his eyes and facial expression.

"I've asked Tom to stay here with you, and the nurse will be checking in on you. Is that all right with you?"

Another affirmative nod. And a beseeching look.

"Is there something more?" I asked.

Brian looked at me, then his chair, then at me, and again his chair.

"You want to come with us?" I asked compassionately, trying to interpret the meaning in his eyes. "You really don't seem well enough for that, do you think?"

He looked at me again, his bleary eyes opening wider, seeking my understanding, and clearly wanting to communicate my misunderstanding. Again he looked at his chair and then to me, his face straining.

"Hang on a second" I said, and quickly disconnected the communication board from his wheelchair. The board was a large tabletop that attached to the top of Brian's wheelchair. It had the alphabet displayed on it, and a handful of nouns, verbs, and subjects spelled out. When seated in his chair, Brian would also use the board as a table for eating and for resting his arms and head.

I rested the board awkwardly on the bed and adjusted Brian so that he could reach the board with his right hand, the hand with less spasticity.

"C. . . a. . . .t. . . c. . . h. . . .f. . . i. . . s. . . h. . . f. . . o. . . r. . . m. . . e. . . ." he spelled out laboriously, then looked at me with a mischievous smile.

I laughed, as I settled Brian back into his bed. "Will you help me clean it if I bring it back?"

Brian smiled, cocked his shoulder in his version of a shrug, then jerked his hand, his familiar way of saying 'conversation over' and 'see you later'.

It was a beautiful night for camping out, and I thought of Brian as the other boys and I toasted marshmallows that night. His cerebral palsy was a result of forceps squeezing his head during delivery and the resultant brain damage that he suffered. He had an IQ that tested well above average, and despite the severity of his disability had been mainstreamed into the public education system. What struck me most about Brian was his ability to communicate non-verbally, a skill he had to rely on due to the impact of the extreme spasticity of his condition on his vocal cords.

When I returned to camp the following night, I stopped by the nurses station before heading back to the cabin. I was curious about Brian.

"Well, actually he is doing much better," Sue responded to my inquiry. "Looks like his problem was an intestinal blockage, and after we cleared that out, his fever started to go down, and he's starting to feel better. One more enema this morning should fix him up."

"Great," I replied. "We missed him at the overnight, and it's no fun for him to be stuck in bed."

I dropped off the overnight gear and equipment in the camping shed and walked back to the cabin, where I encountered the usual chaos of boys chattering and laughing as they got re-settled into their cabin. Brian's

bed was empty. Curious, I checked the bathroom.

Brian was wedged under the arm of a cabin counselor, his crooked legs dangling. Tom was holding him naked while fumbling to open a package containing the enema Brian was scheduled to receive. I noticed that two other boys were in the showers and a third was washing his hands at a sink.

Brian's eyes immediately locked onto mine, his eyes filled with anguish.

"Brian, we missed you. Are you all right?" I asked, my voice full of concern.

His eyes moved repeatedly and with great determination between my eyes, and the package that was now opened. His face, red with emotion, was a mix of embarrassment and anger. Brian stared at me beseechingly, imploringly. I paused.

"Tom, hold on a second, will you? Brian's very uncomfortable, and he's trying to tell me something."

"What is it Brian?" I asked. He looked at his legs and back at me, then at his legs and back at me. I wrapped him in a towel and took him back to his cubicle, where he could communicate with me using his board.

He was in such an agitated state that it took him longer than usual to control his spastic arm movements to spell out to me his feelings.

"d. . . o. . . n. . . .o . . .t. . . .w. . . a. . . n. . . .t. . . b. . . o. . . y. . . s. . . .t. . . .o. . . s. . . .e. . . .e. . . m. . . .e"

After he spent several minutes of frantic and belabored pecking on the communication board, I finally understood out what he was communicating.

"You want to be someplace where the other boys can't see you?" I said. "Of course, you do. I'm so sorry. I'll dress you and take you to the nurse's station and we can take care of things there."

Brian gazed at me, relief apparent in his eyes.

Brian taught me valuable lessons in communication and in human dignity. First, communication is so much more than what is verbalized through our vocal cords. Brian had developed an exquisite ability to use his eyes and his facial expression to communicate to others. Because the process of pecking out words was so laborious, Brian relied on others to interpret the gist of his messages and to elaborate with questions. Second, regardless of one's physical challenges, all people have pride, self-possession, and a need for privacy and to maintain self-dignity. Tom had insensitively generalized Brian's acceptance of the group shower and bathroom with a comfort in being handled to receive an enema in front of his cabin mates. I can't imagine many people, particularly a pre-adolescent boy, wanting to receive an enema in full view of his friends.

Years later, I saw Brian at the university where I teach. He was enrolled as a student and had a full-time companion to assist him in his studies, transportation, and other activities of daily living. His communication board was now electronic and his wheelchair electric, but the sharp tilt of his head and the peering of his eyes from under his crooked glasses was unmistakable. I wondered if he knew how much I had learned from our time together at camp and if I had imparted lessons of any greater import.

Intentionality: It's the Thought that Counts

Jenny was eight years old, with a wide smile. Rail-thin, her body was usually contorted with the ravages of spastic cerebral palsy. I first met Jenny when her father came driving a large logging truck down the steep dirt road leading to the camp. He was a big man with a barrel chest and large rough hands. As he pulled up to the welcome building, I noticed a small girl in the seat beside him. Her father effortlessly lifted Jenny from the passenger seat, and held her under one arm

as he lifted the wheelchair off the back of the truck with the other arm.

I came to know Jenny well over the next two weeks. Always with a ready smile, she was friendly and extremely bright. Although she was unable to speak due to the spasticity of the CP, Jenny was able to communicate with her eyes, with her smile, and with sign language. The sign language was a challenge due to the mild spasticity of Jenny's arms. Though Jenny could walk, this too was difficult and she usually relied on the wheelchair to assist her. Over the course of the two weeks Jenny spent with us, I saw the wheelchair less and less, as Jenny appeared to lose her self-consciousness about walking. I remember frequently seeing her walking across the campgrounds, her body jerking like a marionette.

Jenny danced like she walked. And it wasn't until I danced with her that I really came to understand Jenny and learned to see past her physical challenges. On rainy days, the recreation hall would convert to a dance hall, and campers and counselors would quickly fill the space, escaping the gloom and dampness of dank, darkened cabins. That day, there was a downpour. I arrived early, and the hall was already full and buzzing with excitement as I entered. Several counselors were dancing with one another; some with campers. Sylvia was dancing a slow dance with Brian, swirling him around and around in his wheelchair, Brian, glasses skewed, holding on and laughing.

Toward the back of the hall, Jenny sat alone, looking bored and distracted. She was slouched in her wheelchair. Her limbs though unusually relaxed and still, were rigid and looked unnatural – arms crossed straight and stiff in her lap, legs flayed in two different directions. As I approached from the side, her face lit up, and Jenny opened her arms in her familiar welcome. Her infectious smile matched the excitement in her eyes.

Jenny loved to dance. At camp she could dance without feeling different, without feeling self-conscious, and without being stared at.

"Jenny ...what, not dancing yet? Or are you already tired?" I teased. She laughed and struggled out from her chair, limbs flailing. Like many people with cerebral palsy, spasticity seemed to increase with excitement.

I offered my hands and we made our way to the floor. Dancing was the only time that I noticed a relative fluidity to Jenny's movements. Perhaps it was that her spastic movements could be interpreted as dance movements, but in any case, the more she danced, the more Jenny looked like everybody else on the dance floor. I believe that it was one arena where Jenny could be different and physically expressive; her unpredictable body movements could be attributed to her dancing rather than pathologized as spasticity. And like all the other dancers on the floor, Jenny could only communicate with her eyes and her smile; even if she were she able to speak, her words, like everybody else's, would have been lost quickly in the din of the music. Dancing fit Jenny – flailing limbs and no words were the norm, and communication occured largely through eyes and smiles.

One of my more poignant memories of Jenny occurred at the end of the camping session. Jenny was waiting for her father who was due to arrive shortly. We had just finished singing and signing our favorite song "Leaving on a Jet Plane." Though Jenny was unable to speak and her arm movements were spastic, she loved to sign songs, and this was a favorite.

As we completed the song, Jenny's favorite counselor, Sylvia, walked by, clapping at our rendition. Jenny smiled broadly and opened her flailing arms wide, interpreted as asking to give and to receive a hug. They embraced and Sylvia almost immediately let out a scream. Jenny's hands had involuntarily locked onto Sylvia's hair and she was

spastically yanking and tugging. The more Jenny tried to stop her flailing the more spastic she became. Her body contradicted her intent.

Jenny's eyes locked onto mine; tears rolled down her face as a large tuft of hair came off Sylvia's head. I compassionately restrained Jenny's arms, and Sylvia gently pried Jenny's fingers from her scalp, tears of love and pain running down her face. The love and the pain in Jenny's eyes remain with me to this day, as she inflicted this unintended pain on someone about whom she cared so deeply.

What I learned from Jenny more than anything is the importance of intention in communication and in interaction. Jenny was more able to let me know her true intentions and the meaning behind her behavior than many adults I know who have full use of their vocal cords. There was an incredible depth of love and caring in the interaction, certainly more than might be suggested by the behavior to an unknowing and naïve bystander.

Jenny also taught me about incongruence in communication. Frequently her eyes and smile would convey one message while her body another. When Jenny became excited, her spastic movements would increase. On more than one occasion I would hold her in my arms while her limbs flailed about uncontrollably. For Jenny, the intention on her part of a hug could quickly turn into a flailing assault. Though her body would betray her mind, her normally sparkling playful eyes would show clearly her intent.

Jenny taught me that intention counts, sometimes more than behavior.

Disability: A State of Mind

I was hungry after an afternoon of playing soccer and looked forward to dinner. Friday was spaghetti night at the camp, and I was ready for a carbohydrate boost. Walking into the dining hall, I made my way over to Michele's table. She was sitting beside Brian and was busy feeding him. Twirling the spaghetti with fork and spoon, she would lift his head and place the fork of food into his mouth. I had not seen Brian since that morning and was pleased to see him. He was seated in his familiar blue wheelchair, his communication board serving as his food tray.

"Brian, great to see you!" I exclaimed. "May I join you?"

His head bobbed in affirmation, blue eyes twinkling and peering out under his tortoiseshell glasses. He peered again at Michele, his way of saying, "Another bite, please."

"Are you up for the canoe trip this afternoon?" I asked. Brian looked at Michele, then at me, and then at Michele again.

"Michele's taking you? Great...maybe this time you'll catch some fish," I teased.

I pulled out the chair across from Michele and sat.

"Yup, we're heading up Pepper Creek and out into the main branch of the Ojibwa River. I hear the fish there are jumping," she offered.

"Man, you gave me a run for my money out there! I thought we had you for a while, but the push for that last goal really did me in," I said to Michele. "You ran circles around us..."

Michele chuckled. "It's all in the footwork, you know, all in the footwork..."

Complying with Brian's eye request, Michele deftly twirled another forkful of spaghetti. Brian jerked his head and strained it toward his glass of milk, his eyes flickering between Michele and the milk.

"Ah, milk it is then," Michele said, acknowledging Brian. She put down the fork, picked up the glass and carefully gave Brian a long drink, dabbing his chin with a napkin as some milk dribbled down, as it inevitably did.

Brian looked from me to Michele and back again, his familiar way of telling us that he was engaged listening to us and wanted us to continue our conversation.

I paused for a bite, and then continued. "Well, to be fair, I do think that our teams were a bit unbalanced. I mean you were a member of the past high school state championship soccer team."

Michele laughed. "I think you just don't like being beaten by a girl." Brian joined in the joke, his lips stretched wide, his back arched, his way of laughing.

We finished dinner quickly, and Michele and Brian got ready to leave. Michele stood, pulled Brian away from the table and wheeled him through the dining hall toward the door.

Michele has no arms. A tragic result of the Thalidomide fiasco of the fifties, Michele had been born with no arms and a fighting spirit to live with her abilities rather than her 'disability'. Michele had been a camper at the camp for many years as a child and over the past couple of years had returned first as a counselor and then as the sports director. I remember fondly her facility with soccer balls. Her feet served as her hands, and she was as capable as anyone in feeding children that needed feeding and caring for campers. I recall driving through a toll both with Michele once and the look of surprise on the attendant's face as Michele reached her foot out of the driver's window to deposit two quarters into his hand. Her van had been retrofitted to accommodate her, and Michele drove with great facility with her feet only. Michele has since married and has several children.

Michele taught me about focusing on our abilities rather than our 'disabilities'. Rather than concentrate on what was lacking in her life and what she was not able to do, Michele had unique abilities that allowed her to excel where others could not. It was here that Michele put her focus.

Death & Dying: Living in the Moment

It was the first night of camp, and that evening we were being greeted with a beautiful dusk. The sun was settling gently over the small lake, the sky a vibrant orange reflecting off high cirrus clouds. I sat on the gently sloping hill of the camp. From here I could see much of the main grounds: the large A-frame cabins to the left and right of the lake front, the familiar horseshoe shape of the waterfront dock, the raft floating out beyond the docks, two pontoon boats used to transport children around the lake.

I reflected on my past two years here. For so many children, the camp experience here was one of the few times in their lives when they could feel as though they fit and were not different from other children. Diagnoses ranged from muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, and spina bifada to blindness, deafness, and amputations. There were also children with developmental conditions, including mental retardation and autism. The camp is carefully and specially designed to allow participants to be able to do all the things non-disabled children do at other summer camps. There is boating, camping, swimming, arts and crafts, athletics. I'd been amazed at the level of accommodation provided to assure a safe and 'normal' camp experience to children with the full range of physical and mental challenges. What struck me the most was how quickly folks at the camp learned to see beyond the 'disability' to the many other dimensions of the children. These were children, and except for their disabilities, they were just like any other children.

I was shaken out of my reverie as the door to a distant cabin opened and a lone figure emerged. It took me a moment and a double take to recognize one of my favorite campers from the previous year. Sara, 12, was outspoken and very bright, and had a wonderful, cheerful sense of humor. Her long brown hair was usually pulled back into a ponytail, and the summer sun accentuated the brown freckles splashed across her face. She was walking awkwardly with metal crutches and moving slowly along the path toward me. I was struck most by the fact that she was alone and that she was on crutches. Her

cerebral palsy was relatively mild, but had confined her, last I knew, to a wheelchair all her life.

"Hi, Sara," I called to her as she neared. "I see that you've had some changes in your life..."

Sara balanced herself carefully on one crutch and waved an arm.

"No more wheelchair!" She exclaimed, her face beaming. "The last surgery and a year of physical therapy...I can't wait to see Nancy. She's going to be so surprised. I told the doctor that I had to be on crutches for camp, I just had to..." She paused, catching her breath. "You haven't seen her have you?"

I laughed. "Sara, it's so good to see you, and I'm so happy at your great news, truly happy for you. And, no I haven't seen either your doctor or Nancy," I teased. "Maybe she'll be in later this evening. I imagine that she's in your cabin again?"

"I hope so...I just can't wait for her to see me walking!"

I stood and smiled. "Come on Sara, I'll walk you to dinner." As we maneuvered the path to the dining hall, I marveled that Sara was walking by my side assisted only with crutches.

That night I slept fitfully, some concern tugging at my consciousness. I couldn't get Sara and Nancy out of my mind. The best of friends, the two were often seen traipsing around the grounds of the camp in years past. They had been inseparable. Nancy, 13, was a contrast to Sara – quiet and shy, blushing easily when spoken to. Her blond hair was short and cut in bangs across her forehead. She had led a fairly normal life until two years ago when her coordination had started to deteriorate and she had been diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. Last year it had been difficult to notice anything remiss with Nancy, except for her slightly awkward gait, a telltale sign of muscular dystrophy. Nancy had appeared particularly pleased with her caretaker role with Sara; the wheelchair also served to provide added support for Nancy, who had struggled with her diminishing ability to walk without assistance.

Children with muscular dystrophy were perhaps the most difficult for me to work with. This disease takes young lives. At the very age when children's bodies are growing and coming into full bloom, they wither and die. I wondered how far Nancy's disease had progressed during the past year, and how she might react to Sara's improvement. Eventually, I fell into a troubled sleep.

My fears were realized the following day. Nancy arrived during the lunch hour, and I was devastated at the deterioration in her physical functioning. Confined to an electric wheelchair, Nancy barely had the strength to lift an arm to control the toggle switch to maneuver the chair. I noticed that not only did Sara and Nancy not sit together, they sat at separate tables.

I happened upon Sara later in the day and asked how her reunion with Nancy had been.

She broke down. "She won't even talk to me. I'm her best friend and she won't even look at me. She hates me...hates that I can walk and she is stuck in that stupid chair." She paused. "After all the times she pushed me around, she won't let me anywhere near her chair, I don't know what her problem is."

Sara was devastated. We talked for quite some time, Sara fluctuating between crying and anger. She was clearly confused and upset by Nancy's rebuff of her. It was a complex issue for the two girls to be dealing with. Sara's physical improvement was in such stark contrast to Nancy's deterioration. Sara would continue to improve; Nancy would wither and die within a couple of years. I felt a deep sadness that two girls so young had to struggle with such profound issues at so young an age.

The girls did re-connect by week's end, though it took a terrible tragedy to bring about the reconciliation: the death of a fifteen-year-old junior counselor. Mark, an aspiring long

distance runner, had been jogging along the camp road when the father of another counselor struck him down while driving back from town. It had been a glancing blow, but Mark suffered severe head trauma and died on the scene. It was a devastating time for everyone at the camp, and a tragic irony that death would visit us in such an unexpected manner.

I never saw either Sara or Nancy again after that summer. I did receive a notice in the camp newsletter a year later that Nancy had died, finally succumbing to the ravages of her disease. She was 15. I suspect that Sara no longer needs her crutches and is likely walking unassisted. e really don't know what the future holds for us, none of us. Whether we are living with a terminal neurological condition like Nancy, struggling with a lifelong medical condition like Sara, or are young and healthy like Mark, life may be snatched away from us at any moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Lessons Learned

My exposure to and experiences with family members with physical challenges have taught me so much. My sister Tara helped me to understand that our bodies will compensate for limitations in other areas. For Tara, this manifested in developing an acute sense of hearing. She can tell if I have lost (or gained) weight, down to the pound, simply by hearing the sound of my footfalls on the floor. While I may have a strong sense of sight, Tara's sense of hearing is a hundred times more acute than mine. Tara also taught me about trusting others unconditionally and relinquishing that elusive, fictional sense of control. Tara could not have experienced the thrill of jumping from the cliff without her willingness to let go of control and rely on trust. In my life, I have struggled mightily with maintaining the illusion of predictability, control, and self-reliance. I cannot experience the multi-dimensionality of life and all it has to offer without giving myself over to trusting and believing in the competencies and goodwill of others.

Perhaps the most profound impact of these life and professional experiences have been an increased understanding that physical limitations are not the only limitations that restrict, challenge, and limit independence. Mental challenges have at least as great an impact and are potentially as restricting as are physical challenges. In my extended family, I have witnessed the internal prisons and self-confinement that occur with the debilitating effects of posttraumatic stress, obsessive compulsivity, and agoraphobia. I have seen the impact of phobias, panic, and depression on loved ones. Physical challenges present very real obstacles to achieving independence for some individuals; likewise, mental challenges provide equally challenging barriers to independent and self-reliant living.

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E-Mail as the Modern SOS: Enlisting Cyber Allies in a "Save Our Undergraduate Program" Campaign

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Social workers' ambivalence about computer technologies has limited the application of new tools to social action projects. An interactionist framework for appraising the utility and morality of technological applications is presented. Additionally, a natural history of how e-mail was used as a "pragmatic technology" to enlist "cyber allies" in response to the threatened closure of an undergraduate social work program is narrated. The social and political context for computer-mediated community organizing is described, and the major components of the improvised change process (guiding conceptions, goals, intervention tools, assessment procedures, evaluation) are reviewed. Post-crisis interpretations of how members of a virtual social network acted together to save the program, and lessons for social work educators and practitioners open to the practical and responsible use of the internet are offered.

Social work educators and practitioners differ from psychologists and other human service professionals. Social workers appreciate that they best actualize imagined futures not by their individual effort but by their collective effort (Forte, 2002). Ideas like "mutual aid," "strength in numbers," "grass roots organizing," "indigenous leaders," and "social support" are familiar to these public problem solvers (Lee, 2000). New technologies, however, are radically changing the ways that educators and practitioners think about community practice and connect people to each other for the purpose of personal and social reconstruction (Wellman & Hampton, 1999).

Will these technologies help or hinder? Social workers are uncertain about the cultural changes likely to follow their widespread adoption. Technological pessimists anticipate that the new and "hyper" technologies (and their control by large corporations) will bring about the loss of client confidentiality, the wasteful expenditure of scarce resources on equipment, the destruction of the local community fabric, the cluttering of the environment with obsolete gadgets, and the disintegration of narratives that sustain the profession (Kreuger, 1997; Kreuger & Stretch, 2000a). Some optimists look forward to the use of the Internet and other new communication tools as ways to invigorate local and global activists (Gonchar & Adams, 2000). Other futurists expect that new technologies will improve the societies that use them (Raymond, Ginsberg, & Gohagan, 1998). Information technologies, for example, might make possible effective undergraduate distance education and web-based instruction, efficient and low-cost staff development and professional networking, and versatile information management in varied social work agencies. Vernon and Lynch (2000) imagine social work practitioners using their homes as offices, communicating with clients by two-way video transmissions, charging for services with E-money, and increasing their professional knowledge on-line.

Pragmatist philosophers propose a conceptualization of technology that can help us replace ambivalence and uncertainty about technological change with purposefulness

(Kreuger & Stretch, 2000b). John Dewey presented one of the most sophisticated statements of this position (Hickman, 1999), a statement influenced probably by his work with Jane Addams at Hull House (Forte, 2003). Dewey's service to the poor and newly arrived immigrants taught him that technological changes may displace and disorient people, but these changes also offer new ways of promoting cooperation and communication. Dewey believed, like many contemporary interactionist theorists and social workers, in "evolutionary naturalism." This is the doctrine that humans "are biological organisms who live their lives interacting with, and also evolving within the rest of nature" (Hickman, 1999, p. 101). Humans meet environmental challenges by using various tools: both tangible objects and intangible equipment. The human facility with languages, for example, is the prized and indispensable tool, and this facility differentiates us from all organisms. Technology, Dewey argued in line with his ecosystems philosophy, according to Hickman (1999, p.109) that technology is "the invention, development, and use of tools of all sorts to resolve problematic situations."

Pragmatists and social workers committed to pragmatism should not separate moral judgments about technology from the application of the technology. A new form of technology, for instance, can be used to create either good or bad social systems. The morality of the application depends on human choice and action, and humans can choose to use technology wisely. "Pragmatic technology" is the name for this approach to using technology: an approach that requires technology users to meet standards associated with high quality person-environment transactions (Hickman, 1990, 1999). Specifically, intelligent and responsible technology users solicit feedback from all parties affected by the technology, check continually the relation of means to ends, implement their designs for tool use in a flexible and open-minded way, support democratic processes, and use technology to develop the talents and interests of all members of the relevant communities

This case study offers a reflective narrative of how taken-for-granted skills with tools for computer-mediated communication became a pragmatic technology. This technology helped me and my colleagues organize a community to resist an attempt to close the undergraduate social work program at which I then worked. Program defenders were mobilized by a common purpose, perspective, and set of emotions. E-mail served as the means for delivering a modern SOS. Our e-mail correspondences became the contemporary equivalent of the international code that sailors and pilots used to signal distress. The rest of this account details how pragmatic technology was use to communicate our plight and to enlist numerous "cyber allies" in a campaign to influence administrative decision makers. Although the data were collected from the public domain and on-the-record conversations, names and places have been disguised. The story telling was inspired partially by Denzin's narratives (1988, 1995) about resistance to changes in the employee assistance program at a Midwestern university and his conception (2003) of a critical social work. The elements of the story are organized in a form developed by researchers committed to qualitative, interactionist, and processual case studies (Abbott, 1997; Fishman, 1999; Gilgun, 1994).

The Problematic Situation: A Thick Description

On Monday, April 24, 2000, a chief administrator of a college where I once worked announced his intentions to meet with the faculty the next day. Tuesday afternoon, faculty responded to the summons and listened to a 90-minute presentation about the administration's achievements in the areas of

fund raising and student recruitment, about the changing profile of students (younger, higher SAT scores, more full time, more residential, more "traditional"), about ambitious and visionary building plans, and about the college's future. In slides and words, the administrator elaborated on his core message of rapid and visionary transformation. All were asked to assist him in transforming the college from an "urban college" to a "public liberal arts college," one that would be ranked with America's best. Two small, elite, and expensive liberal art colleges were identified as setting the standards for emulation.

Goals for student-faculty ratio, average class size, library holdings, number of full-time faculty, and selectivity from student-applicant pools were shared. The administrator reviewed also the revised college mission statement. This included his list of guiding principles. The college "provides outstanding academic programs, encourages service and leadership" and "we are committed to a liberal arts education that stimulates intellectual inquiry and fosters social and civic values" and our "students acquire the qualities of mind and spirit that prepares them to lead lives with meaning and purpose" and "we are committed to service that shapes the economic, civic, and cultural life of our community and Commonwealth" (Mission Statement, 2000, p. 1).

The faculty listened attentively and then the administrator veered from the sequence of topics suggested by his handouts. He announced that his vision would require a "disciplined and focused" examination of several programs including social work and nursing at the undergraduate level as well as our few graduate programs. These "may have to go" if they are not judged "central to the mission" he warned. The nursing program was explicitly characterized as too costly. The termination of the program would "free up six faculty positions" for other uses. The administrator added that a speedy decision was important, and stated that the fate of the programs must be determined by the early fall Board of Visitors meeting. Faculty deference became a quiet but pervasive nonverbal expression of shock, anger, and anxiety. The administrator soon concluded his speech.

The Social Work Program is a highly regarded program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education in 1982. An "internal program review" several years earlier had found that the program had numerous strengths and no weaknesses requiring corrective action. The enrollment had been growing and there were about 140 majors. Graduates from the program routinely obtained the job of their choice or acceptance into nearby social work graduate programs. The faculty had been instrumental in the creation of a college-wide service-learning center, and two of the three faculty members had earned the state consortium's "Social Work Educator of the Year" award. Other college faculty members also favorably regarded the program. However, the administration had previously communicated in several indirect ways mixed feelings about social work.

Generally, the chief administrator had asserted his will and made all the organizational modifications he desired with minimal guidance from the faculty. Typically, major policy and personnel changes by the administration were made, like this one, near the last weeks of the semester. The faculty members were occupied with final grading and preparing to disperse for a break at semester's end. Thus, collective resistance was difficult. The social work educators faced a daunting challenge. Could the social work program be saved?

The Historical and Social Context for Social Action

The educational institution was created in 1960 as a two-year branch of a historic and renowned college. It became a four-year baccalaureate-degree-granting institution in 1971 and an independent college in 1976 (Molineax, 1999). The college is located in a suburban community on a peninsula and served communities in a 45-mile radius. In 1991, the school had the lowest tuition among state senior institutions and the highest percentage of African-American students among the non-historically black colleges in the state (Fleetwood, 2001). Six masters programs were created, and the college added graduate programs in 1992. The first residence hall was built soon after.

In 1996, the Board of Visitors began a search for a new administrator. A former national politician was selected as the school's fifth leader. This energetic administrator took charge immediately and asserted, "we don't believe in incremental progress...we are committed to dramatic transformation" (as cited in Miller, 1997, p. A1). By 2000, a new residence hall and a sport and convocation center had been built. The student enrollment reached almost 5,100 students, and students were increasingly coming from the dense and affluent metropolitan area in the north of the state. Extensive landscaping dramatically changed almost all public spaces, and the school earned a *U.S. News and World Report*'s number two rank for regional public liberal arts schools in the South (Barrett, 1999). There were plans for additional residence halls, a major expansion of the library, a parking deck, and the construction of a $40 million center for the fine and performing arts.

Since the arrival of the new administrator and his team, the state college has been characterized in business terms. The organization has been governed according to the cost-effective calculations, authoritative management style, and growth orientation that characterizes for-profit corporations and that have spread to the delivery of both social services and educational services (Denzin, 1995; White & Hauck, 2000). The local business paper credited the administrator for "acting more like a CEO than a college president" and for running the college "like a business with growth plans," and for his "aggressive" approach (Harris, 2000, p. 14). The administrator endorsed this ideology and cast the college as a "50-million-a-year business, we have over 500 employees, and we serve over 5,000 students/customers" (as cited in Harris, p. 15). One of his stock phrases was that the college offers a "private school experience at a public school cost" ("Trible," 1999, p. 1). The administrator, starting with his first major public statement, committed himself also to an extensive marketing and public relations campaign. He declared, "Our job is to tell the [college] story more powerfully and persuasively and polish it a bit and share it with the world" (Vision 2002, 1996, p. 1).

Organizational Members and Culture

A college is a complex social system composed of numerous interacting groups. Here, relevant groups included the Board of Visitors, the chief administrator and his administrative staff, the faculty, the Faculty Senate, departmental chairpersons, students, alumni, and members of the local community. The faculty and students of the social work program, graduates with a social work degree, and field instructors also had a stake in the college. The administration and faculty endorsed cultural orientations common to their professional groups (Fischer & Dirsmith, 1995). Assistant administrators emphasized political and economic action and focused on legitimizing the chief administrator's vision and his marketing strategy for realizing this vision. The faculty asserted their expertise in curriculum matters and the educational

implications of college policies. Most shared the conviction that academic quality and the integrity of programs were as important as the college's growth. The faculty at the college, as at many other colleges, were also concerned about their disenfranchisement for the sake of "rapid, flexible decision making" more suitable for a corporate model of the ideal organization than a university that appreciated faculty governance (Snyder, 2001, p. 107).

Political Processes and Structures

Power arrangements at the college could be characterized as asymmetrical. The administrator was a skillful, charismatic, experienced, and articulate politician. One faculty senator noted that over five years he has used his skills to significantly reduce the power of the faculty (Burns, personal e-mail communication, April 27, 2000). On all but one of about twenty controversial policy or personnel decisions, the administrator and his administrative staff had outmaneuvered dissenters or bypassed opponents and realized their objectives. Power had been consolidated by the administrator, also, as he has acted on the notion that all employees should conform to his vision. For instance, he discharged more than a dozen upper-level managers in his first three years. He also recruited a loyal provost. A provost is typically the academic administrator of a college. At many universities the occupant of this position has performed, historically, a liaison role between faculty and administrator. The provost has served as a faculty advocate and guardian of academic interests. This had also been changed. The provost under this administration had very limited power, devoted most of his time to service to the chief administrator, and refrained from any independent or pro-faculty assertions.

Membership Selection Processes

The new administration also changed markedly the composition of the college community. The administrator had assured his audiences in his vision statement that the university would "provide access and opportunity to a diverse community" (Vision 2002, 1996, p. 3). Yet, he also regularly touted the increase in full-time residential students and the shift to a student body more traditional in age than that during the college's first 30 years. Faculty recruiters were directed to focus their recruitment efforts on the affluent northern part of the state and cease outreach to local community colleges. The faces of student representatives (tour guides, recruits for the President's Leadership Program, cheerleaders) and the images of the student members in all recruitment publications, in all sets of college web site photos, and in all program brochures are those of 18 to 22 year old, middle and upper-middle-class, mostly white American youth. Recently, staff on the regional newspaper wrote a series of articles on the recruitment shift and the common perception that the college is "weeding out" older, nontraditional students (Barrett, 2001, p. A1). This change has been especially distressing to social work faculty who had specialized in serving students of all ages, all social classes, and all ethnic-racial memberships.

Communication Processes and Technologies

Leaders in the computer services department and the computer technicians had contributed to major changes in the university's "ecology of communication," those information technologies, communication formats, and preferred interactional patterns characterizing the organization (Altheide, 1995). In 1995, most communications between administrators and faculty members occurred by memorandums delivered manually through an interoffice mail system

or by phone. By 2000, all faculty members and most students had college e-mail accounts and all were wired to a campus network allowing quick and easy communication with each other. The majority of public correspondences and announcements were delivered electronically by the network "mailman" either to "everyone," to "faculty," or to "students." On a typical day, a faculty member might receive ten or more e-mails referring to college business events. Much other business (student reports of their absences, announcements of committee meetings, promotion of campus events) was customarily handled by e-mails exchanged between the involved parties. Only sensitive or private items were sent by inter-office campus mail, and phone conversations soon took second place to e-mail exchanges.

A Natural History of the Improvised Change Process

Natural histories are detailed descriptions of temporally extended patterns of action (Abbott, 1997; Denzin, 1988). Natural histories of social work interventions provide information on "what the major actors in the implementation process did" and "how the intervention worked" (Gilgun, 1994, p. 377). The natural history of how the author (the program chairperson and leader during the crisis) and other faculty members, Professor A and Professor B, coped with the threatened closure of the social work program follows.

Tuesday, April 25th. As I was preparing to leave my office in the morning for a field visit, the Provost dropped by and warned me that the administrator intended to recommend the review and possible termination of the social work program at the afternoon's meeting. He would not elaborate. Nor would he agree to persuade the administrator to withhold the announcement, and there was no time to argue. On my return to the school, I informed the other two social work educators. We comforted each other and met for an hour to appraise our predicament and start to conceive of strategies and arguments for our continuance. All of us felt surprised, overwhelmed, and humiliated when the administrator announced publicly his intentions at the afternoon faculty meeting.

After the meeting, the social work faculty began the first in a series of hallway conferences. We attempted to assess the administration's possible concerns about our program. Issues like our nontraditional, high minority group composition; our support for a gay student organization; our opposition to the diversion of funds to football; and our criticisms (muted) of the administrator's abandonment of local and two-plus-two transfer students emerged as candidates for "triggers" of the review. But, we admitted that the administrator had not provided a clear rationale and we could not be certain of the cause of his dissatisfaction. The faculty began to imagine alternative ways to defend the program. We considered, for instance, enlisting the aid of several friendly legislators, of the local press, of members of the Board of Visitors, and of some renowned local attorneys. We agreed to begin with a letter and e-mail campaign. The faculty also pledged to help each other maintain a respectful attitude toward the administration, maintain our sense of solidarity with other faculty, and stay focused on the administrator's stated concern about centrality to mission.

Wednesday, April 26th. In a phone conversation, a college leader speculated with me about the administrator's selection of nursing and social work from the college's professional programs. He alerted me also to the handbook's criteria for program discontinuance – lack of centrality to mission, low community or student demand, problems with program management, low program quality, and issues related to financial viability – and to the processes for program review.

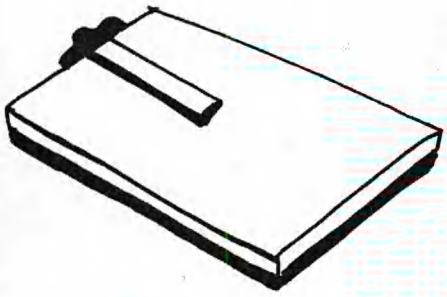
The handbook stipulated that action by the Provost should occur only after formal faculty consultation to include a conference with the Faculty Senate. This consultation had never occurred.

The social work faculty conferred again early in the morning. First, we fretted and imagined quitting or resigning ourselves to dismissal, but believed in the program too much for this sentiment to last. Then we agreed that we should contest the administrator's "definition of the situation" and quickly but diplomatically answer the charge that our program was peripheral. Professor A drafted a letter that I revised slightly and sent by campus e-mail service to "everyone." In the letter we asserted, "This college would be hard pressed to find an academic program here that better exemplifies the vision and mission of the college." We commented on our inclusion of many liberal arts courses in the curriculum, the leadership of our students and faculty on campus and in the community, our demonstrated record of providing access and opportunity for diverse students, and our creation of several service-learning courses later incorporated into the President's Leadership Program and the Honors Program. We called on members of the community to join us in demonstrating to the administrator that the program was central to the college's mission and should not be discontinued.

Late that day, I exchanged e-mails with members of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC), a group charged with reviewing all major curriculum changes. One member sent an e-mail to me and seven other committee members that he expected that "major changes to academic programs would be deliberated by the departments, colleges, faculty senate, and UCC" and that elimination of programs "without such faculty participation would be a major violation of faculty rights" (Professor C, personal e-mail communication, April 26, 2000). I also called the school's representative at the State Council on Higher Education who regretted that the Council has no influence over discontinuance decisions.

Thursday, April 27th. Mornings became the best time to e-mail our calls for assistance. That morning, I sent an e-mail to all those on a list of representatives to a state consortium of twelve social work programs. I instructed them of our plight, asked for their help, and urged them to spread the word. dditionally, I e-mailed the student chair of the planning committee for the annual social work rally, an event attended each fall by about 200 faculty and students. asked for help from social work student leaders in sending e-mails and letters and for a place on the program of the fall retreat. An e-mail to the 35 alumni on our list alerted them to the administrator's call for program review and solicited their help. The president of the advisory board responded very quickly to my request for help and sent an e-mail both defending the program and urging electronic organizing to his list of 80 clinical social workers.

The administrator sent me an e-mail that he appreciated our thoughtful e-mail to the entire faculty and anticipated a constructive dialogue. However, we were a bit skeptical, not optimistic, about our future, and we began exploring various unorthodox options. A faculty person who excelled in the arts of dramaturgy deliberated with me about how social work students might, if necessary, protest discreetly at the college graduation in mid-May. Balloons indicating "I support the Social Work Program," buttons declaring "I am a proud graduate of the Social Work Program," and business cards identifying the graduates' proudest accomplishment as a social work major and handed to the administrator when he shook their hands were possibilities. In our social work classes that day, students indicated their openness to a



formal and public demonstration of their disagreement with the administrator.

Friday, April 28th. On campus, allies were becoming involved. Two students (one a nursing student and daughter of a social work senior) began their own e-mail campaign to enlist other students in writing letters and e-mails, signing petitions, and making phone calls to the administrator. They argued that a decision to discontinue the Nursing and Social Work Programs "seems likely to produce only negative consequences" (Student D, personal e-mail communication, April 28, 2000). A social work student began a traditional petition-signing effort and collected more than thirty signatures by day's end. A brave faculty member leaked some information that raised our fears that the administrator might have decided our fate already. This faculty member e-mailed to everyone a notice that an administrative committee was drafting a letter. This letter advised incoming freshmen from around the state to consider their choice of major because of the termination of the Social Work Program. If sent, another faculty warned us privately, there would be no new social work majors, and the program's demise would be inevitable. Later in the day, the past president of the state's Society for Clinical Social Work, currently a vice-president of the National Federation for the Advancement of Clinical Social Work, pledged by e-mail her support.

Saturday, April 29th and Sunday, April 30th. Many faculty members joined from their homes in an internet conversation via e-mails posted to "faculty." These faculty members added to the computer-mediated discussion started several days earlier on communication problems that had contributed to the current crisis. The faculty complained of meetings by administrators that occurred behind closed doors. Many advocated, instead, for open forums and "real dialogue" between the chief administrator and large numbers of faculty members. Over the weekend, numerous faculty members also e-mailed me letters of support, encouragement, and advice. I responded to each individually and encouraged all to communicate their views to the administrator. A faculty senator and the President of the Faculty Senate confirmed by e-mail their intentions to seek a meeting with the college administrator and to advocate for the threatened programs and for greater faculty participation in college governance. The social work faculty also conferred with members of the group of social work students planning to request an audience with the administrator. These young men and women were high achievers and community leaders. They represented in many ways the administrator's notion of the ideal student. By phone and e-mail, these students later planned their presentation and set up an appointment with the administrator for the next day.

Monday, May 1st. The school newspaper had rarely commented critically on administration activities. However, a combination of e-mails, phone messages, and several personal requests from our secretary, a volunteer on the school newspaper, provoked a cover story (Flemming, 2000). The paper reported on the administrator's "shocking announcement" and quoted a critical and outspoken professor, "As I understand it nursing, social work, and graduate programs no longer fit with the administrator's Washington and Lee-Hampden Sydney model [for this university] ... That is his model. As far as I am able to tell that is not our model. It is an insufficient model" (as cited in Flemming, p. 1). In this model, we would emulate a private, elite, expensive, and residential college that offered no professional preparation or community-

oriented academic programs. In an e-mail to the administrator, I asked for clarification of the administration's thinking, asserted that "the Social Work Program adds to the excellence and energy of the college." He then added, "We intend to communicate that message to you, our students, the college, and the professional community." The college representative to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) conferred with me by phone. He had set a meeting with the administrator to help him better understand the notion of "shared governance." He also indicated that a faculty vote of censure or an appeal to the AAUP for an outside investigation were possible.

Tuesday, May 2nd. After a phone call alert, the administrator visited me in my office at 8:00 am. He graciously apologized for causing us pain and asserted that this is not how he does things. He assured me that the final decision has not yet been made, that he appreciated our "statesmanlike" e-mail to the college community, that college procedures for considering program discontinuance would be followed, and that, if terminated, the program would be phased out over four years so incoming students could complete their studies. He promised to meet promptly with our student representatives. Tellingly, he added that he intended to respond to every letter and e-mail he received, but hoped that this did not become a distraction from the other very important business we all have to deal with.

Conversations with the past and the current chair of the standing Program Review Committee offered some comfort. They told me that traditionally programs are reviewed only every five years and the review process lasts a year. Emergency reviews might be triggered by a Dean but never have been, and there was no precedence for the administrator removing authority from the committee. Later that day, a staff person in the Assessment and Evaluation Department provided us a statistical summary of social work program information including data showing that we had graduated 20 or more students every year from 1996 to 2000, and that we had at least 90 declared majors. He added that we compared very favorably to other majors and were regularly in the top ten for number of graduates.

Wednesday, May 3rd. Early in the morning, the social work faculty met with the Provost. He gave us no answer to our question: Why were nursing and social work selected for review? He refused to advocate for the standard program review process (a year long evaluation in 2002). He reviewed the criteria for termination and indicated without explanation that the review process must be done fast and that the decision about our future was the administrator's decision to make; the faculty and the review committee could only recommend. Later that morning, a fifteen-person group of faculty chairpersons, experienced managers, other leaders, and I met in reaction to the administrator's plan to end programs. Most interpreted this challenge as a troubling indication of the administration's tendency to exclude faculty from important decision-making processes and as an extension of a non-participatory decision-making style into academic affairs.

Group members conversed for several hours. We focused on assessing the administrator's style, interests, and identity commitments. This served as the base for generating and evaluating possible action strategies. Several of us concluded that as a visionary and creative leader, the administrator had little interest in slow and complicated bureaucratic procedures and would probably not be persuaded by logic or abundant evidence regarding program quality. As a former politician, the administrator would pursue his agenda assertively until forces coalesced in opposition to his policy

recommendation. As a master of marketing and public relations, the administrator would be concerned about negative media coverage and public discussion about the unintended yet adverse consequences of discontinuing highly regarded educational programs. Until then, the defense of the social work program had been multi-faceted and our resources (time, energy, and money) were spread thin. This meeting gave us focus.

That day, I composed an e-mail letter to all potential allies of the social work program reporting on our status, reviewing the five criteria for program discontinuance, indicating some of our many strengths, asking for their support by sending letters and e-mails to the administrator, and encouraging recipients to forward my letter to other friends of the program. As an attachment to the letter, I sent the college mission statement. The group of student emissaries consolidated by telephone and e-mail their plans to meet with the administrator and to make the case based on their own experiences for the continuance of the social work major.

Thursday, May 4th. Although our social work faculty taught the value of using the media for social work advocacy in our macro-practice class, we decided to postpone any appeals to the media. We advised our allies, however, that this might be necessary soon. Yet, several students chose to call the columnist responsible for local news. Tuesday morning, a reporter for the regional paper wrote in her column a story indicating that the College "is in an uproar over news revealed by [the Administrator] ... at a faculty meeting that he plans to discontinue the nursing and social work program" and "the announcement has prompted a call for students to launch a protest through petitions, letters, e-mail, and phone calls' (Friend, 2000, p. C1). The reporter commented too that faculty considered the lack of consultation to indicate a "complete lack of concern for their thoughts" (Friend, p. C1).

Later, the faculty of the social work program met with the President of the Faculty Senate. He listened attentively and agreed to convene the faculty senate for an emergency meeting and to request that the administrator rescind his decision or both extend the timetable and publicize the procedures for program review. In the late morning the administrator's secretary requested that the Nursing Program chairperson and I join the administrator in his office before noon. At this surprise meeting, he informed us that he had changed his mind and called off the review process. His letter to that effect was being distributed via e-mail as we talked. It included a statement indicating that because of his many conversations with faculty members, he realized that he had called for program reviews without appropriate consultation, and that he had been reminded that these programs were an important part, and should remain an important part, of the college. He complimented us on our ability to mobilize so many "troops" on such short notice, a tactic he would have used if he were in our shoes, but he asked us to ask our allies to desist and requested that the graduation ceremony not be disrupted. Since a meeting with students had been set before the administrator's change of mind, he promised to hold the meeting later that day. We agreed to these terms and thanked him for hearing us.

Assigning Meaning to the Narrative

Pragmatists and interactionists assert as a central tenet that when the environment blocks human efforts to realize their interests, self-consciousness emerges (Forte, 2001). Pre-reflective habitual action is supplemented by the conscious and deliberate search for new conceptual and tangible tools and "the major source of invention and insight ... lies with individuals as they strive to overcome some experienced difficulty" (Hickman, 1999,

p. 111). Tacit knowledge of the potential of electronic communication, in this case, was the indispensable resource.

Using the logic of the process case study (Fishman, 1999, Gilgun, 1994), I will briefly summarize my post-crisis interpretations of how our improvised action strategies functioned to achieve the hoped-for-outcome and of how well our pragmatic technologies might be used by practitioners facing similar practice challenges.

Guiding Conceptions

Computer technologies are both physical and social constructions (Kreuger & Stretch, 2000b). By chance, I was just completing a book translating major theoretical frameworks into the language of symbolic interactionism and how these frameworks can guide personal and social reconstruction (Forte, 2001). Three of these frameworks helped me appreciate the significance and the potential utility of information technologies for building a resistance movement. First, Kollock's (1999) merger of symbolic interactionist and social exchange ideas into a model of cooperation among members of virtual communities alerted me to the networking possibilities of computer-based communication. He documented how the Internet can drastically reduce the costs associated with producing public goods (like saving a program), especially compared to the investment of time, effort, and emotion necessary for conventional face-to-face community organizing or letter-writing campaigns.

Second, symbolic interactionists theorizing about ideal communities illuminated the ways that propositions about social interaction might help me mobilize effective on-line mutual aid processes (Kollock, 1998; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Successful cooperation on projects undertaken by virtual communities requires certain psychological processes (identification with the group, sense of self as altruistic, abilities to understand the perspectives of other people and groups) and certain social processes (repeated episodes of satisfying interaction, information indicating the trustworthiness of actors, the development of shared norms, and socialization for use of the preferred communication devices). These psychological and social processes were produced or enhanced during electronic deliberations by our allies and contributed to our effectiveness.

Third, critical-interactionist theorists reminded me of the social group work lesson that just communities use democratic processes that promote member participation (Sirls, Rubinstein, Meyerson & Klein, 1980). Distorted communication occurs when powerful actors misuse their power to prevent open and free discourse. The ideal communication situation, in contrast, is one among equals, and one whose "members make good sense, offer rationales for their action, mean what they say, and practice what they preach" (Shalin, 1992, p. 253). We aimed to foster honest communication and to equalize our power relationships with the college administrator.

Intervention Tools

Thanks to new tools for Internet use (Netscape Communicator Browser and Messenger), we were able to supplement voice mail and snail mail requests for support with e-mail. This allowed fast and effortless communication with widely dispersed allies; the creation of address cards for the individual and group members of a rapidly expanding network; message dissemination at any time of the day; multiple e-mail mailings with one mouse click; censorship-foiling tactics (a planned shift, if necessary, to home-based Internet service providers, for example); and the easy use of e-mail reply, forward, save, and print procedures. More important, the Internet allowed extensive community organizing with a manageable expenditure of

time and money. Our cyber allies were ready and willing to pay this price to defend our social work program. They were committed to their social work identities and valued political advocacy. They trusted each other, and they were willing to demand to be heard during college deliberations. It also helped that the administrator, as he had declared previously, had limited use for e-mail and that his assistants seemed to underestimate its potential for mobilizing opposition to administrative policy proposals.

Assessment

A college is an environment rich in resources. The opportunity to engage experienced faculty, administrators, deans, agency directors, clinical and community-based practitioners, and students in the assessment process gave us a rich, multi-perspectival understanding of the administrator, his proposal to consider discontinuance, and the likely response to various action strategies. Especially helpful were assessment recommendations related to the administrator's frequently declared "students first" commitment and to his determination to present a positive image of the college to new markets for student applicants.

Access to college resources also made possible the use of multiple approaches to data gathering and thus the "triangulation" (Gilgun, 1994) of the best position for program advocates. Methods included content analysis of news stories about the college found in the online archives of the regional paper and the school newspaper, analysis of e-mails sent to the whole college, and analysis of Faculty Senate minutes; participant observation, especially at meetings with administrators (meetings where extensive note taking is normative); individual interviews with colleagues from different departments; numerous ad hoc focus groups organized around questions like "What do the administrators really intend?" and "How might we persuade them to listen?"; and secondary analysis of official college statistics.

Goals

The focused yet urgent nature of our objective contributed to our success. We aimed to evoke a public declaration from the chief administrator that, at best, he would rescind his request for a discontinuance review, and, at least, he would support a faculty-led, by-the-book, one-year review process. College members who have pursued more ambitious goals – the affirmation in deed as well as word of the principle of shared governance, for example – have been unsuccessful. The members of the "Save our Undergraduate Program" campaign, also, honored our commitment to conduct ourselves in a consistently professional and civil manner. Morally ambiguous means to achieve the goal were avoided (although contemplated as appropriate in more desperate circumstances that fortunately never arrived).

Results

The blending of on-line, voice-to-voice, and face-to-face organizing made a difference. My tally of e-mails shows that in only one week we had enlisted the help of at least 45 cyber allies. These included a college program administrator, four faculty members, three current social work majors and non-majors, 12 members of a local social service agency, three sets of parents, six community practitioners and agency directors, 13 alumni, and two faculty members from other colleges. (It appears that numerous others communicated to the administration but without sending me a copy of their correspondence.) Each had responded to our electronic request for help by writing to the chief administrator. Noting the administrator's commitment to the courtesy of responding to all letters, we believe that he suspected the

start of an avalanche. Proceeding with the plan to review and terminate the Social Work Program despite such opposition would have been very time consuming.

Both the quantity and the quality of the e-mail appeals to the administration were impressive. Many alumni attributed their career successes to the social work program and commented on the many different public problems they work, thereby, to solve. Practitioners and field instructors wrote of the program's preparation of skilled and committed community servants and leaders. A program assessment expert spoke of the program's rigor, high quality of instruction, cost efficiency, sensitivity to diversity, and solid reputation. Parents shared their pride in the sons and daughters who graduated from the program and worried about the harm and injustice that would be associated with the program's termination. Many commented on the absence of alternative programs nearby. Agency directors attempted to educate the administration about the variety of social work roles, the importance of the profession to the lives of many people, and the regional demand for social workers. All e-mails communicated pro-program statements with intelligence, eloquence, passion, courtesy, and determination.

Lessons

The current political-economic environment in the United States presents many challenges to progressive-minded and critical social workers. We need every tool we can muster. Recent advances in technology offer us a whole new set of tools. From this experience, I have made a commitment to myself to maintain my computer and its software in a ready-mode; to add constantly to my address book, e-mail addresses of potential friends and allies; to communicate frequently with many of these friends; to monitor on-line newspapers, college discussions, and department announcements for clues of likely threats; to protect my reputation off- and on-line as trustworthy; and to explore further the opportunities provided by new technologies for promoting democratic and just communities. While the specific events told of here will never be duplicated, these lessons might encourage other social worker educators and practitioners to use technology in practical and responsible ways to meet comparable threats to their programs, their students, their clients, or their careers.

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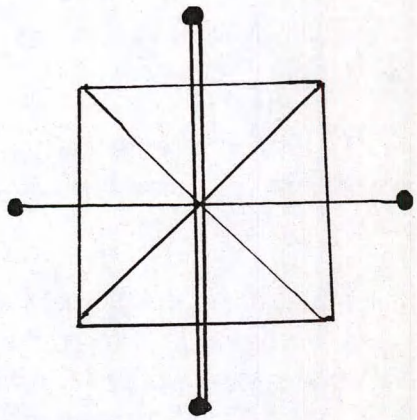

Call for Papers
Special Issue

Social Work Practice with Southeast Asian Populations
Guest Editor: Brian Trung Lam

This special issue focuses on the resilience of Southeast Asians in social work, allied human service, and helping professions. *Reflections* seeks narratives that encompass experiences in teaching, personal histories, professional practice as well as the design and implementation of successful interventions related to South East Asians.

Narratives may address but need not be limited to the following:

- Experiences or studies that illustrate, in a traditional professional helping context, the differences between help- seeking behaviors of Southeast Asian populations and the help- seeking behaviors of the mainstream population.
- Experiences or studies that explore resilience in research or clinical practices related to Southeast Asian populations.
- Experiences or studies that illuminate immigration histories, cultural norms and beliefs that are sources of resilience, or serve as a source of empowerment to either the practitioner or the client.
- Experiences or studies that report how cultural blue prints have been integrated into clinical practice, macro practice or social work education.
- Experiences or studies that address ethical dilemmas, particularly those uniquely associated with Southeast Asian populations and how these dilemmas are resolved.
- Experiences or studies that reflect the narrator's personal struggle in understanding social justice and equality issues.
- Experiences or studies that reflect the narrator's personal history and how that has impacted him/her professionally.
- Experiences or studies about the process of acculturation that had an impact on the narrator's professional development.
- Experiences or studies about the importance of various networks of social relationships within the community and how the involvement with these networks influence worldviews and coping strategies among Southeast Asians.

Mail manuscripts to: Brian Trung Lam, Ph.D.
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Manuscripts are due by: September 30th, 2005

DELUSIONS– A TALE OF TWO SOCIAL WORKERS: A HOSPITAL NARRATIVE

Rita Wilder Craig, M.S.W., Humber River Regional Hospital, Toronto, Ontario

The following is a personal narrative depicting encounters between a staff social worker and an elderly female patient on a psychiatric ward. The genre of personal narrative is suggested as a means of describing the social work role in various settings.

Delusions – A Tale of Two Social Workers[1]

Once upon a time, everything was understood through stories. Stories were called upon to make things understandable.

Parry & Doan (1994)

Introduction

I began writing hospital narratives as a response to the stress of working in a dramatically changed hospital system (Globerman, 1999; Globerman, White, & McDonald, 2002). The downsizing and restructuring that began in the 1990's in Canada had pushed many of us to work at a frenetic pace that allowed little time for emotional processing. I found the writing helpful both in facilitating this processing and in bringing into sharper focus the extent to which these structural changes had impacted our working lives.[2]

It was only after I presented the narratives at public readings, however, that it became clear they could be helpful in other ways. While feedback from social workers expressed feelings of validation and connection to the stories, non social workers reflected surprise at the challenging nature and complexity of our work. It was these latter comments that led to my using narratives as a means to convey a more realistic view of our role in this setting.

"Delusions" was written after I moved from medicine to inpatient mental health.

A Tale of Two Social Workers

The story of Elizabeth Stewart (one of my patients) started when she was brought to the hospital after being observed "pacing outside a supermarket and talking to herself for over six hours." She was to tell me later that this (chart) description was not accurate. She had been both "inside and outside" of the supermarket and had on occasions "sat down for a couple of hours".

The apprehending officer recounted that Elizabeth had told him he was very rude to interrupt her, as "couldn't you see I am speaking to someone." When the officer replied "No, I couldn't," he quickly discovered that Elizabeth didn't take kindly to her sense of reality being questioned. Hospital staff were also quick to find out that such an approach, followed closely by any inquiries regarding possible next of kin, was met with swift disengagement.

Elizabeth was an 80-year-old, white-haired, attractive, articulate, and well-educated woman. Her posture was upright and her demeanor regal. She informed us all just after admission that she was actually

"Lady Stewart" and that we could use this title if we wished. In general, when professional staff were summoned by her, they left feeling that they were being brought to the principal's office for some yet unknown misdemeanor.

When I first handed Elizabeth my card, she looked at it carefully. She then informed me that she too had been a social worker. Although I was skeptical at first, when she said she "specialized in group work rather than case work," I felt this must be true. Who else but a social worker would use the now rather dated term "case worker"? She asked me where I went to school and then told me that she had attended the same university. "Although they did not have MSWs then – just certificates," she stated.

Elizabeth told stories about past clients and also about some of the famous people who had taught her. In many of the stories about clients, her strong sense of social justice was clear.

Elizabeth also told me about her many personal and professional accomplishments. These were so impressive that when she told me she had won The Nobel Prize but had not yet had a chance to pick it up, I could almost believe it.

Elizabeth's social work stories were interspersed with others which she would recount in our daily meetings. These stories had two main themes. The first was that the man she had been married to was not her real husband nor was he the father of her children. I later learned that the person she claimed as her real husband was a onetime physician acquaintance of her brother. This belief was so fixed that she had obtained I.D. with his name, had named him as her joint power of attorney, and had on occasions sent letters to her children using his last name. Elizabeth had held this belief for the majority of her married life, much to the distress of her family.

On one occasion, when her psychiatrist referred to her by her "official" name, Mrs. Stewart, Elizabeth asked him why she had to suffer for the hospital's sense of history." I tried to stay out of trouble by always calling her "Elizabeth," fighting my English upbringing that told me this was impolite.

The second theme that surfaced more recently was that this "other" husband could communicate with her over radio waves using the principles of particle physics. When Elizabeth was first admitted, she would adjust a radio, which was situated in the air just above her head, to tune in better while she was talking to me.

On one occasion she told me that the message was actually for me. Her "husband" was working at the "Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Penetang" (a hospital in Ontario – now, not surprisingly, renamed). She said he wanted *me* to visit him there. I hardly knew what to say, but eventually I told Elizabeth that it was not possible for me to take such a trip. "Nonsense," she responded. "Give me your card. I will speak to your supervisor and get permission for you to go and be paid for it." I was so taken with her concern that I get paid for the trip that I gave her my card and told her the name of my manager.

At this point many days had passed with no one showing up to visit her. "What else can you do to find her relatives?" the team asked me in rounds. I recounted my considerable but so far unsuccessful efforts. Elizabeth's purse had disappeared in the ER and she would only give us her name.

Apart from the next-of-kin issue, the team wanted "collateral information." They wanted to know the truth about Elizabeth. I thought a lot in the following days about the "truth." Why should Elizabeth accept our truth, the psychiatric "DSM" truth? "Her truth" had won her a Nobel Prize. From her point of view what did the grand narratives of psychiatry have to offer, other than a diagnosis? Elizabeth never gave in to that truth. She hung on to the

end, insisting she was in hospital for "medical reasons only." Perhaps, apart from anything else, it was this spirit of not giving in that drew me to her.

The next time I visited Elizabeth, I asked her how she "as a social worker" would assess her present situation. She looked at me. "It's the ultimate in reality and absurdity," she stated. This sounded quite reasonable to me so I asked her to explain further. "Well," she replied, I was married to a man for six years that no one else was able to see." This wasn't quite what I expected. However, I tried to stay with her and asked if this was something like "The Invisible Man." She looked at me as though I were a rather dim student. "That's trite rubbish compared to what I'm talking about," she replied, and then proceeded to explain at length her theory of particle physics.

At the end of this she looked at me and asked, "Do you think I'm hallucinating?" I thought carefully before responding. There are a number of ways in which one could address such a question. I slowly answered, "I'm not sure." "Good," she said, "One should never be too sure about such things."

As days went by I made subtle attempts at getting information on possible next of kin, but I also returned because Elizabeth was so interesting. I asked her to tell me what it was like being a social worker all those years ago. I longed for her thinking to clear so that she could really focus on this. It was at those times that I wondered what it must have been like for her family. Did they also yearn for her thinking to clear?

Elizabeth told me she once ran a mental health facility in England. "I saw the people the psychiatrists gave up on," she stated. She also spoke about being a published author and a social activist there. All true, I was later to learn.

Elizabeth did not hesitate to chastise me for not acting as she felt proper for a social worker. When on one occasion I made a note in her presence, she informed me that when she was a social worker, she always waited until she left the room before making clinical notes. I made sure never to make notes in her presence again.

One day Elizabeth told me she needed more clothing and, amazingly, gave me a telephone number that she assured me belonged to her son. She also told me she had another child, a daughter, that she did not speak to.

Elizabeth's son Andrew was distressed to hear that she had been found outside a supermarket. "I usually get calls from ritzy retirement residences," he stated. Andrew told me he would come to the hospital with his sister, Claire. He added that their father had died many years before in England. He believed her "other" husband had also since died.

Andrew and Claire told me with some amusement of an incident that took place during one of their mother's many past admissions to hospital. Elizabeth had organized all the patients being detained under the Mental Health Act. She urged them to call in the Rights Advisors and demand hearings to free themselves. This created havoc on the ward and after a couple of weeks they decertified her and sent her home. "They had had enough," Andrew stated. I tell this story to my colleagues. "I guess old social workers never die," one comments.

Despite hanging out on occasions at retirement residences, Elizabeth would tolerate no suggestion that she might actually live in one of these establishments. She told me many times of her intention to return home, noting that she had always "managed well."

But when Andrew visited his mother's apartment, he had been shocked to find cigarette burns on the furniture and bed, and soot covering cupboards and walls. Even more troubling were the charred remains of plastic supermarket bags that Elizabeth had been using to dispose of her cigarette butts.

The superintendent told him that there had been fires in her apartment and that the fire department was called several times.

Dr. Hunter and I decided to speak to Elizabeth together. He explained that he could not let her return home at present because of safety concerns, and that she would continue to be held under the Mental Health Act.

When Elizabeth demanded details, Dr. Hunter told her that he had received information that she had not been safe with respect to smoking and that the fire department had been called a number of times. "No," she corrected him. "They were called only once. The other times I put the fires out myself."

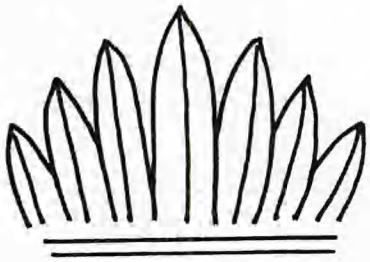
After this meeting Elizabeth refused to speak to either of us for several days. Although we had little choice, for the first time we had actively questioned her version of events, namely that she had "managed well." We were later surprised to hear that when the Rights Advisor visited, she declined the chance of an official hearing.

By this time Elizabeth had been in the hospital for several weeks and her "length of stay" was becoming problematic. "Nursing home" was being suggested in rounds if Elizabeth was not yet safe to go home. I tried to imagine what life might be like for her in such a place. Would she be kept in a locked unit "for her own safety?" Although our unit was locked, Elizabeth was able to go outside to smoke and to the cafeteria more or less whenever she wanted. But things weren't quite the same in nursing homes.

Eventually, I approached Elizabeth and suggested that in order to give her more time to recover, we should make an application to an inpatient psychiatric assessment unit at a well known geriatric facility in Toronto. Not that I believed Elizabeth needed further "assessment," but I once worked at that facility and knew that they would be more likely to keep her long enough for a fuller recovery. Although Elizabeth objected to this initially, she eventually agreed to the move, but only because she "knew the director personally."

When I went to say goodbye to Elizabeth, she told me that I had been a disappointment to her as a social worker as I had not assisted her in her wish to return home immediately.

When I called the facility a week later, the social worker told me that Elizabeth had been given a private room and that staff were careful to always knock and wait for her to answer before entering. She confirmed that Elizabeth did know the director personally and that he had already been to visit her. Although Elizabeth was still telling anyone who cared to ask that she was there for "medical reasons only," she continued to take her psychiatric medication, as she had in my own hospital. Months later I met the social worker at a conference. She told me that Elizabeth continued to improve. Her apartment was refurbished and she had returned to her former life in the community.



Post Script

In my encounters with Elizabeth, I would often think back to an author who wrote on the topic of oral history. Portelli (1981) suggested that the significance of oral sources frequently rested not in their adherence to the facts but in their divergence from them, in which case imagination, symbolism and desire entered. He noted that even though the facts may lack credibility, "psychological truth remains." As social workers especially in the field of mental health, we are often faced with the psychological truths of our clients that may

or may not coincide with the truth that "collateral sources" provide. This is what makes social work such an interesting and challenging profession, especially during those times when we are involved in discharge planning and the patient is felt to be at personal risk.

Conclusion

The personal narrative has been described as being both as old as time itself and a new and exciting innovation. It is often seen as part of a postmodern trend that seeks to give voice to "ordinary people whose lives and selves would otherwise be rendered invisible" (Rainer, 1997). It is however, not the kind of writing generally done by social workers (Swenson, 2004).[3]

Narratives act to humanize patients by allowing a thicker description of their lives and situations than could ever be captured in a medical chart (Davis 1991). They also allow for a deeper appreciation of the value and uniqueness of the social work role. Therefore, by taking some of the stories we hear and using them in our own narratives, this form of writing can be seen as a tool of advocacy for both ourselves and our clients (Chambon, 2004).

For social workers, this seems especially important now, not only for those of us in hospitals whose positions are being threatened (Nelson, 2004), but for those of us in the general community who are engaging in "image campaigns" in order to bring forward a more realistic view of our work (Jackson, 2004).

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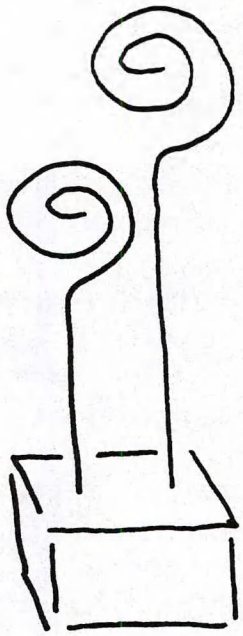
(Endnotes)

[1] An earlier version of "Delusions..." was presented at the National Social Work Conference in Saskatoon in June 2004.

[2] "A Day in the Life of A Social Worker" was the first narrative to be publicly presented. It was presented recently at the 4th International conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health in Quebec City in May, 2004, with the subtitle "Presenting our role Through the Personal Narrative."

[3] For other recently published personal narratives, see the author's "'I Remember You'–A Brief Encounter in Palliative Care" in the *Journal of Palliative Care*, and Carol Swenson's "Dementia Diary" in *Social Work*.



The Rose Bud ~ A Personal Narrative

Carrie A. Newton, M.S.W., California State University, Long Beach

This narrative explores the author's experience as an individual born with an upper-limb anomaly. The narrative will explain how the experience of growing up feeling different led to the understanding and empathy the writer, as a student of social work, inherently feels for clients she works with.

"If your right hand is a rose, Carrie, your left hand is a rose bud." These words of my mother's hold great meaning to me now as a mature and confident adult. However, the journey to this meaning through a childhood full of insecurities was a long and rocky road.

When I was a freshman at the University of California, Irvine, I had a wonderful Resident Advisor who always planned activities for his residents in order for us to bond. During one activity in which we were asked to form a circle and join hands with our fellow residents, I realized my heart was pounding, my palms had become sweaty, and, knowing my own reactions to anxiety, it was likely my face was a dark shade of crimson. *I did not want to hold hands with anyone.* Whereas the common act of hand holding is something of an enjoyable experience in our culture, for me it was one of my most despised actions. I left the room that day, unable to join hands with the resident next to me and unable again at eighteen to face my own insecurities.

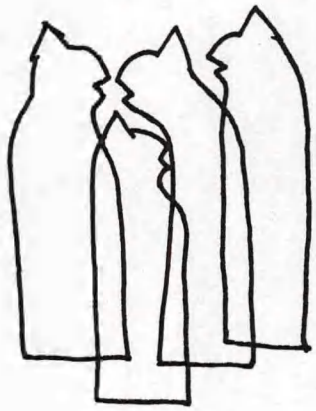
Growing Up *Different*

Since the time I began first grade at six years old, the act of holding someone's hand, whether it was my best friend or a stranger, haunted me. The physical reaction I experienced that day in college was something I had experienced my entire. I was born with a left hand that is one-third the size of my right hand. My fingers consist of short stubs of skin accompanied by small bones. The doctors never really offered my parents a good explanation of why my hand developed this way. My mom has mentioned that they referred to it as simply "an act of nature." To use the words of one of my fellow classmates in the sixth grade, my left hand resembled an "alien's hand," which is exactly how I saw it for the majority of my life until college. I never wanted to associate my left hand as being a part of me; it was an entirely separate entity.

I was raised with wonderfully supportive parents and siblings, who taught me that having a slight physical difference did not make me any less of a person. On the contrary, my parents always conveyed to me how special I was to be different from the masses. However, at that point in my life, being special did not supersede the fact that I was different. When you are young and struggling to become comfortable in your own shoes, different can be the only word that matters.

Elementary School Experiences

Going to a Catholic elementary school was intimidating enough for a six year old. The plaid uniforms, strict rules, and church services were all so new and overwhelming. My teachers stressed compassion and friendship, which I did understand, having come from a family that also taught these principles. Establishing friendships and treating others with compassion were actions that came easily and naturally for me. I loved developing close bonds with girls in my classes and giggling with them for hours. I was eager to start a new school year and meet new friends. As someone with two older brothers, I was anxious to develop friendships with females. I attended that school from kindergarten through the 3rd grade.



It was during one of the many church services we attended as a class in the 1st grade that I began to question the meaning of what we were being taught. Day after day we would discuss principles of compassion and friendship and were asked to find places for them in our own lives. During the service, there was always one portion when the priest would ask the students to grasp each other's hand as we prayed. From our seats in the wooden pews, no one would ever dare to question a priest's order, but rather follow his actions quickly and diligently. That day I clasped hands with my classmate to the right and then with the classmate on the left. *I thought nothing of the situation.* In fact, I enjoyed the chance to interact with my classmates. That day, the girl on my left was one of my friends, a girl whose company I had come to enjoy in the classroom. However, after about ten seconds, I could tell that she noticed something was different about my hand. I did not want to say anything, but when she began looking down at my hand and twisting our clasped hands to get a more thorough look, humiliation consumed me. Then after a long, arduous pause, as if she was deciding her next course of action, *she let go of my hand.*

That was the moment when I realized that I was different from my peers. It did not matter whether or not I was special, as my parents had taught me. I was different. I did not see anyone else who was not holding hands. My right hand was still firmly clasped by my classmate on the right. It was my left hand. That left hand was the problem. This girl was my friend, and she chose to let go of my hand.

Questions raced through my mind about what it meant to be a compassionate and friendly human being. Wasn't my friend taught the same things as I? Hadn't she learned that we should secure a place for compassion and friendship in our lives? Was she still my friend now that she noticed I was different? The question that came to plague my heart more than any other was the question of whether or not everyone was like my friend. Would I ever be accepted?

Continuing to Struggle

Over the next few years of my life, in the 2nd and 3rd grades, I would continue to struggle with these questions, searching for answers yet usually succumbing to the influence of my own self-loathing. This was not to say that I was not a strong and outgoing girl. I made many friends, participated in school activities, and remained as close as ever to my family. I was a healthy and vibrant girl, adoring of friendships and full of compassion for others. What I was not was comfortable within my heart of who I truly was. My insecurities did not allow for me to acknowledge my difference. Rather, they drove me blindly towards self-doubt.

After that day in church, my spirit grew slightly darker than it had been that morning. An action by a six year old that to some would have seemed silly and insignificant to me was truly life altering. One simple action had made me ponder whether this was how I would be treated for the rest of my life. Three years of the same situation occurring with other classmates tainted my perception of acceptance. I began pulling my sweater sleeve down over my left hand so it would not be visible to anyone. My feeling was that it was better not to acknowledge my difference; that way I would not be singled out. During that first year, when we would have to hold hands in church, I would use my brilliant sweater trick and no one would seem to notice. I remember one boy asking me if my hands were cold which because my sweater was covering my hands. I thought, "Great!" Now I had a new excuse as to why I hid my hand.

Advocating for Myself

However, as my education progressed, it was quite obvious to everyone that I had a physical difference. I was good at hiding my

hand, but I could not hide it all of the time. Most days were fine, with no one mentioning it or staring, but there would be days when someone would make a comment or blatantly stare. In the 3rd grade there was one girl would terrorize me with the same question everyday: "Why is your hand like that, Carrie?" The answer that I had been taught to say was an answer that I understood: "Because I was born this way." However, as curious children often do, this girl would ask me this question incessantly. It came to the point that the sight of her evoked the same physical reactions that I experienced when I had to hold someone's hand. I would see her sauntering up to me, usually in front of many other classmates, and my heart would pound, those palms of mine would get sweaty, and my face would turn that wonderful crimson color I became so well acquainted with.

One day, I reached my breaking point. After asking me yet again about my hand, I took off my sandal and smacked this girl in the arm, sending her crying to the teacher. For a little girl who had never hurt anything, this was a considerably significant moment for me. Although I was disappointed in myself for using physical means to exert my frustration, I was proud of finally sticking up for myself. That day it was *I* who had her name on the board, and it was *I* who had to stay in from recess. My bullying classmate received nothing but condolences. However, it was *I* who grew a little taller that day with the realization that although my strategy had not been the best, I did have the vim and vigor to advocate for myself and my feelings. I was still nowhere near being accepting of my hand as an important part of who I was, but I had come to the realization that I did not have to be a target of social scrutiny. Finally, I realized that it was up to me to do something about my situation.

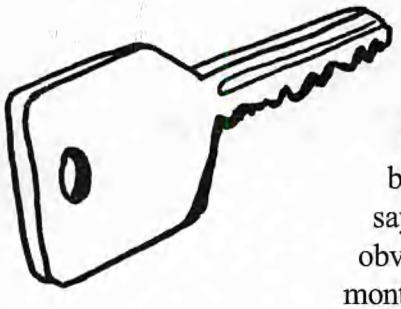
Unbeknownst to me, on that day, I began my journey towards becoming a social worker. Social workers advocate for those who are less fortunate and help them learn to empower themselves and to seek the lifestyle they wish to have. I look back now with the realization that at that young and naïve age, I understood that insulting other human beings by attacking their dignity and human worth was not acceptable. I knew in my heart that a slight physical difference was not a reason to allow others to impose their own fears and insecurities on me. I knew that there were others in a similar situation as I; I wanted to help.

A Change of Pace

After a move across town, I began the 4th grade in a new school. This school was a public elementary school and I was happy to be away from the Catholic school. I had not come to terms with the fact that the school preached compassion and decency, yet so many of my classmates had not treated me in this way. I had lost interest in my faith completely after those experiences in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, mostly because the church signified my most distressing childhood experiences. Memories of being forced to hold hands were more influential than my beliefs and thus, I had no emotional connection to the church after that point.

From the moment I started my new school in the 4th grade, I was more confident with who I was. That is not to say that I still did not cover my left hand with my sweaters; I continued to do so on a regular basis. However, my new intent of wanting to advocate for myself and against injustices I had endured stuck deep within me, urging to break free.

Although I no longer had to be confronted with the anxiety church gave me, I did face new challenges. One challenge that became my new nemesis was the pull-up bar. Every month or so, during physical education class, our teacher would have the class line up to do as many pull-ups as we could. It was beyond me how the teachers could not see



how humiliating this was for those students who could hardly do one pull-up. Because my left hand was barely large enough to clasp around the small bar, my teacher would single me out saying that I did not have to do them, obviously assuming I could not. For many months I accepted this offer with relief.

However, after months of escaping the pull-up bar, I realized that I had never actually tried. It occurred to me that everyone always assumed things about my left hand, including myself. My insecurities had led me to automatically underestimate my hand. Remembering my new promise to self-advocate, I asked my teacher one month if I could attempt to do a pull-up. My teacher was supportive and hoisted me up to the bar. With all of my classmates watching from what seemed like miles below, I struggled to gain a firm grasp on the bar. Although I did not have a good grip with my left hand, I slowly pulled my weight up until my chin was just about parallel with the bar. I had done a pull-up! I let go with my hands and fell back to the sand beneath. My teacher said she was proud of me and for once, I was proud of myself *and* my left hand. I began to wonder what else my hand could do. I also began to wonder if I could learn to stop disassociating my left hand from the rest of my being. After all, it was a part of me.

Later that same year, I was at recess watching my classmates have relay races across the "monkey bars." Back and forth, back and forth they would fly across the metal until they reached their teammate who would fly back in the other direction. Much like the pull-up bar, I had never attempted the monkey bars. One day I decided that if I could do a pull-up, I just might be able to do this as well.

I approached the bars and my excited classmates. I asked one boy if I could join the team. The boy looked at me, then looked at my hand, and stated, "You could, but I don't think you can do this because your hand is too little. We go really fast when we do this." Embarrassed, I shrugged and started walking away when one girl, who would turn into one of my lifelong friends, stated, "Why couldn't she do it?" I turned around to find one of the best girls on the relay team questioning the boy. She smiled at me and said, "You can join my team." Elated at the invitation, I climbed up the steps to the bars. I did not make eye contact with the boy who had turned me away. Once everyone was lined up, someone yelled, "Ready? One, two, three, go!" I held on tightly to the bars and began swinging from rung, to rung, to rung. Although I certainly did not come in first place that day, I completed my journey across the bars and learned yet another thing my left hand could do that I never imagined it could.

High School Presents New Challenges

By the time I was matriculating to high school, I had come to the realization that I could be a happy and confident person, capable of establishing and keeping close friendships despite my physical difference. The close-knit group of friends I had during my final years of elementary school and middle school rallied around me, celebrating my unique qualities while supporting the fact that I was struggling with my physical difference. Knowing how I felt regarding my left hand, none of them ever pressured me to "get over it" nor did they feel embarrassed around me, as the children in my previous school had done. I look back on those girls and am truly grateful for their compassion. I think it is that period of one's life when true friends are of the utmost importance. They had helped me gain the confidence I needed during those tumultuous adolescent years.

Luckily, I found yet another cohesive group of friends in high school. However, despite the support these girls offered me, this time there was a new factor arousing my insecurities yet again: boys. Of course every teenage girl struggles with self-esteem issues

in high school. The high school atmosphere can pressure teenage girls in terms of what to wear, how to style their hair, and what to physically look like. Social pressure can become completely consuming for many teenage girls, myself included.

With both my first boyfriend and other boys with whom I went to the occasional school dance, I would never let them hold my left hand. When they would reach out to hold my hand, it was *I* this time that would pull away. At the time, I could not think of anything worse than getting rejected by a boy I had feelings for because of my left hand. Of course, at that age any boy who pays attention to a girl is a "future husband," so I was determined not to let my left hand get in the way of future husband material. Rather, I would always position myself when walking with a boy to be on his left so he would be able to hold my right hand. Unfortunately, this behavior would continue through my first years in college. When I reminisce about all of the effort I went through to do this, I realize exactly how ambivalent I still was about my left hand. High school presents new challenges to every girl and boy. As for myself, my adolescent struggles towards becoming more accepting of my left hand had been forgotten amid my new high school scene.

One way I coped with this high school self-consciousness was to face it head on by enrolling in drama classes. Being on a stage in front of my peers, I thought, would not allow me to hide any part of myself.

As the months went by, I became more and more confident as a performer. I surprised myself with my hidden talent for acting. The very first assignment given by our teacher, who always expected nothing but professional-level work from each of us, was to perform a monologue in front of the class. At first, the thought of being so incredibly exposed on that stage, pretending to be someone I was not and speaking alone for ten minutes, seemed daunting.

After a week of scouring drama books, I finally found a monologue that I felt I could perform well. Something about the passionate words of the female character spoke to me. The monologue was based upon a young girl who was speaking to her mother about life, friendships, and love. What struck me about this piece was that the character's mother was dying. Being only fourteen at the time, I wondered what it must have felt like for that young woman to be having that conversation with her mother, knowing that she might never have it again. I immediately thought of my own mother and how I would feel if faced with that situation. My emotions overwhelmed me and I used them as I practiced my portrayal of this character. Looking back, I realize now that what I was doing was learning how to *empathize.* As social workers, we are taught that out clients do not always need our sympathy, but they do need our empathy. Our ability to learn to place ourselves in our client's shoes, if only for a moment, is immeasurably important. I have found that I am able to provide the best support for clients when I am able to imagine how they must be feeling and, if I were in their shoes, what I would want from a social worker.

From then on, I used my newfound empathy for the characters that I portrayed in my performances. After that first monologue, my teacher, knowing full well that I had never acted before, pulled me aside and said, "So what is your secret?" When I explained what I was doing, he smiled and simply said, "Well there you go." It would be this same teacher who three years later would pull me aside again and make one of the most significant interventions in my life.

One day before I was to perform a scene with two of my fellow classmates, my teacher asked me to speak with him at his desk. Over the past three years, I had come to respect and admire this man as a teacher and a friend; anything he said to me I always took to heart. He said, "Carrie do you know what you do

when you perform?" Confused, I shook my head. He smiled and said, "For three years now whenever you perform you let your sweater cover your left hand. Do you realize that you do that?" Now embarrassed and feeling my face turn crimson, I again shook my head. The truth was I had not realized that I had been doing this. I had become so wrapped up in my performances of other people where I could lose myself, that I had not made the effort to continue my own effort to be comfortable in my own skin. My teacher stated, "You need to know that nobody cares, Carrie. I know it is difficult when it is you who is different, but you need to realize now that no one cares. You are who you are and that is what people love about you." Dumbfounded, I didn't know what to say, and to this day, I can't recall how I responded. What I do know is that up until that point no one had ever taken the time to say those simple words to me. I knew in my heart that these were the words I needed to be telling myself all of these years, but it took someone who noticed to say it for me.

After that day, I made the effort never to cover my hand, either on the stage or in the classroom. *Nobody cares.* Powerful words that meant more to me than anything a sixteen year old could have wanted. My teacher had done for me what I would learn to do for others as a social worker, which is to validate feelings while simultaneously affirming their worth as a person. I realized that my teacher had been taking a risk of his own that day by confronting me. He could have simply ignored my actions and let me go on the way that I had been. However, he took the initiative to intervene. Quite often I think about what it would have been like for me if he had not taken a chance that day. I like to think that I would have been able to eventually tell myself the same words. However, remembering the path of insecurities I was once again heading down, I am not confident I could have done this. Moreover, I would have hoped that someone else would be willing to risk his or her own embarrassment to confront my insecurities and how they influenced the way I presented myself.

Reaching Out

At that point in my life, it was time to take what my teacher had reminded me of and what I knew in my heart and slowly but surely learn to accept my body the way it was. In high school I was part of a political studies program called *Civitas,* in which students were required to complete 500 hours of community service during their junior and senior years. My mom had the idea for me to work at the Easter Seal Society and was instrumental in helping me begin volunteering at that site. My time at Easter Seals was one of the most important experiences that influenced me to become a social worker working with older adults.

I did not know what to expect on the first day, and I was nervous that I might not be a good fit at Easter Seals. What I did know was that I would be working in a day program for adults with disabilities. The adults in this program ranged in age from 30 to 70. Before that time I had never worked with adults. Like many teenage girls, I had always had babysitting jobs, and was also a French tutor to a younger girl, but I had not had the experience of working with someone who was older than I was. I questioned whether these individuals would want to work with someone who was only sixteen years old. Would I be able to relate to them?

When I walked into the room where my program was located, I was immediately surrounded by about ten adults, some who had been diagnosed with mental retardation and some who had physical disabilities, all wanting to know who I was and if I was going to stay. Overwhelmed by their honest and welcoming attitude, I immediately felt at home.

On that very first day, a woman known as Kimmy* who had been diagnosed with

mental retardation when she was very young, approached me, enthusiasm radiating through her eyes. Kimmy grasped my left hand and brought me to the table where they were going to finish an art project they had begun the previous day. When Kimmy grasped my left hand, I did not let go. I felt so welcomed in that room, surrounded by individuals who were all unique in some way, that I was at peace with my physical anomaly. What struck me was that none of these extraordinary individuals seemed to care at all that they were different. One man had only one leg. One woman, because of surgeries on her foot throughout her life, had a severe limp. Another man was confined to a wheelchair and could not hear well. Nevertheless, I remember thinking that I had never been in the presence of so many individuals who were at peace. To them, enjoying the day was the priority. I knew that I was at Easter Seals not only to work with these individuals, but to learn from all of them in terms of accepting my own physical anomaly.

Over the course of the next two years, I volunteered with these individuals mainly during the summer months and during holiday breaks from school. The staff at the program showed that they had confidence in me, as they allowed me to work individually with some of the participants. One of the men in the program, Tommy, who was in his seventies, had some behavioral problems that would cause the other participants to isolate themselves from him. From what I had learned about him, he did not have much family support and although his diagnosis was not made known to me, looking back it seems as though he may have had schizophrenia. Tommy was a good worker, always willing to help. He was one of the first participants to invite me to eat lunch with him during my first days in the program.

However, there were days when Tommy would become agitated and use obscenities with the other participants. When I was asked to sit and work with him, I remember feeling apprehensive. Would I know what to say or how to help? What did I know about Tommy's life? What triggered him to become so agitated? Yet, I realized that I needed to use the tool I had developed in my drama classes: empathy. Tommy was not a character in a play. He was a real human being who needed support and comfort. I began to wonder what it might be like for this man to not have family waiting for him when the day was over and how it must feel to have the other participants not want to have anything to do with him. I delved into my thoughts about how I felt when people stared at my left hand or made rude comments, as the children in elementary school had done. I wondered if Tommy had been through many of the same experiences because of his difference. I empathized with him, knowing what it was like to become angry, and wanted to help. As a social worker, I now know that what I was experiencing was counter-transference, as I related many of the participants' situations to my own. However, I believe it was the magnitude of the counter-transference that helped me to empathize with those participants, or as I like to see it, my first clients.

I do not remember what it was that I said to Tommy that day. What I do remember is that there were many more occurrences of his agitation during the day program just as there were many more occurrences of catching myself feeling insecure or ambivalent about my left hand. However, I learned a major lesson of social work early in my life: my work would never be finished. There would always be a situation when I would need to call upon my skill of empathy to help understand why clients were acting the way they were and what the circumstances had been during their lives that led them to act in a certain way. As in my situation, there is always much more to a person than meets the eye and it becomes the job of the social worker to truly listen to

that person. Only in their own words can people express what their life has presented them with and how those experiences shaped them. Only after listening to Tommy and empathizing with his situation could I help him to settle down and begin to feel safe in his environment. I realized that is all that I ever wanted for myself as well. I yearned to feel safe in my environment and know that those who surrounded me would accept me the way that I was.

A Worthwhile Experience

The two years I spent working with the adults at the Easter Seal Society solidified my love for social work. I realized how much wisdom I could gain from older adults who had experienced the world so many years before I had. Those individuals helped me to become more accepting of my own physical anomaly than I had ever been before. They taught me that no matter how someone may be physically or mentally different, it should not affect how brightly their spirit can shine. As part of the program, we would plan day trips around the community to destinations such as the grocery store, the mall, the bowling alley, and even to the haircutters. For many people, these activities are taken for granted and disliked due to the time they can take away from more enjoyable activities. That was not the case with these individuals. They took pride in even the simplest of activities. To them, being a part of the community meant that they could experience what most experience on a daily basis.

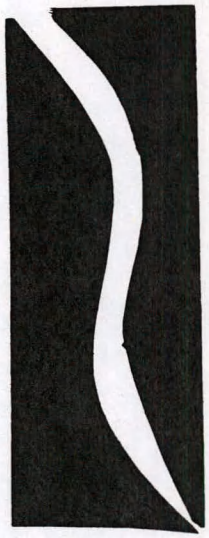
On one summer trip to the bowling alley, the man who had only one leg was not able to bowl. However, he took so much pride in keeping score for the rest of the participants that his enthusiasm was contagious. Smiling broadly from ear to ear, he told me, "This is more fun than I have had in a long time. You have to plan this again." Never once did he comment on how unfair it was that he was not able to bowl like the others. Never once did he comment on how a different activity should have been chosen to accommodate his needs. *I held him in the highest regard.* I realized that I needed to develop an attitude similar to this man. I thought back to all of the time and energy I had spent over the course of my life worrying about how others perceived my left hand. I thought about how many tears I had shed over my hand, knowing full well that there was nothing I could do to change my situation. It was time to embrace my physical anomaly. It was time to hold myself in the highest regards.

Conclusion

My right hand is my rose, and my left hand is my rose bud. Such a simple and wonderful way to view my physical anomaly. If only I could have come to accept this early on in my life. But then, as a social worker, I know that a journey of self-discovery is necessary for growth. I do not think I would be the same person I am today if I had not endured the experiences that I did. I needed the experiences that both darkened and lifted my spirit to truly become a self-aware individual. I feel that I would not be as effective as a social worker if I could not relate to my clients' struggles towards acceptance of their situations and struggles towards self-advocacy. Whether or not a social worker has been through exactly what a client has experienced is not always relevant. However, as a social worker when I am presented a situation that I am not able to directly relate to, I rely on the power of empathy to help me understand what it might be like to live for one day in my client's shoes.

My experiences in high school did not completely eradicate my insecurities, which did creep up on me from time to time in college. The day when I could not participate in my Resident Advisor's activity called my attention back to the insecurities of my youth. I knew that they would slowly resurface if I did not fully commit myself to acceptance of my left hand as an important part of who I was.

The acceptance of my left hand came full circle during my junior year in college. On a first date with the man who would turn out to be the love of my life, I once again pulled away when he tried to hold my left hand. He did not say a word. I remember feeling flooded with relief at his acceptance of me as I am. He never did mention my actions and he never would until I brought it up years later. Finally, on one sunny day in June, when he again tried to hold my left hand, I contemplated everything I had learned and everything I knew in my heart about acceptance, *and I let him.*



Carrie A. Newton is a recent M.S.W. graduate from California State University, Long Beach. This narrative was a project for her thesis requirement. Questions and comments regarding this narrative can be addressed to the author at: cookiesandcream428@hotmail.com.

* All names within this story are pseudonyms.

Call for Papers

Special Issue: The Beleaguered Administrator
Guest Editor: James J. Kelly, PhD

Beleaguer (bç lç' gër) vt. *1. to besiege by encircling, as with an army; 2. to beset, as with difficulties; harass.*

Are you a **beleaguered administrator**? If you are an educator, administrator or supervisor in the helping professions you may feel that you are.
Think of the challenges you face: impossible work schedules; conflicts between service goals and agency demands; ethical dilemmas; racial tensions; difficult clients and even more difficult co-workers; an abusive boss; budget cutbacks; agency funding demands; arcane and contradictory program guidelines; poorly trained students or workers. Any of this sounds familiar?
In this Special Issue of *Reflections* we want to hear from you.
As you face the twenty first century, you have learned how to confront and overcome the challenges of the beleaguered administrator. Perhaps you make do with the ways things are. Or, you change your work environment. You may decide to resign and move on.
In your paper, describe what happened to you. What administrative challenges did you face? Did you overcome them? What did you learn? Were there tragedies or happy surprises along the way? What advice do you have for those who follow you?

Manuscript Guidelines:
- A cover page must list the title of your paper and all authors. For each author please indicate e-mail address, mailing address, and phone numbers.
- The second page must list the title and a brief 50 to 100 word summary of the paper.
- If References are included, please follow requirements of the latest edition of the *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association.
- Your paper must be typed and double-spaced and it should be no longer than 30 pages. Please submit three hard copies to Dr. Kelly's address below.
- Manuscripts are due to Dr. Kelly by September 1, 2005.

Direct inquiries and papers to:
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Personal and Professional Ethics: Post-Workshop Thoughts and Growth

Gary L. Villereal, Ph.D., Western Kentucky University

This narrative is a result of the author conducting a three-hour ethics workshop for a local Texas Chapter of NASW. The challenge of merging personal and professional ethics is integrated through the conducting of a workshop that led to new ways to monitor ethical standards.

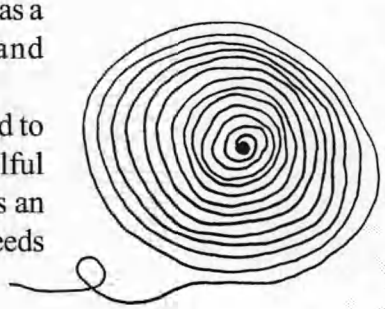
When I was initially asked to do an ethics workshop, which is required content for licensing in Texas, I thought of past ethics workshops that all seemed to focus on models for professional decision making. When the President of the Rio Grande Valley Local NASW Chapter, Gilda Bowen, initially contacted me, she mentioned that the last ethics workshop focused on decision making and a *different approach* would be welcomed.

As I thought in an exploratory manner and tried to figure out a different approach, I realized the idea of assessing how my own personal and professional ethics eventually merged could be the foundation for developing a workshop that focused on the integration of personal and professional ethics. I knew that I wanted to cover basic foundation material such as morals (conscience) and how they develop, the acquisition of values from life experiences, and the cognitive processes that lead to the adaptation of right and wrong standards of behavior. For myself, I think the morals I developed early on are somehow more ingrained and almost unchangeable, whereas my values have shifted and changed over time as I have grown and matured personally and professionally.

My current perception of personal versus professional values and ethics is one and the same. However, early in my career my values and ethics often competed between personal and professional, with the winner determined by the setting, time of day, and situation. At work or any other work situation, my professional ethics basically ruled. During my own non-work time, my personal ethics ruled. This does not mean I did illegal things during my own time, but I made clearly different decisions based on whether it was a personal or professional situation. A very simple and basic example would be that during work, if a client said something to me, there was no question that it was between me and the client (excluding duty to warn). In a non-work setting, I would by no means consider something said to me as having elements of confidentiality unless it was specifically requested, which would change the situation for me to a professional setting.

Values are the guiding principles in social work and have to be considered in relationship to both personal and professional standards that are either self or organizationally imposed. How personal values guide social work intervention differently than professional values do is individually driven. These types of differentiation guide many ethics workshops that deal with dilemmas, decision making, and how to weigh relevant factors with critical analysis to arrive at an informed decision. I wanted to explore through the workshop both personal and professional values as well as a means to develop an awareness and integration process of them.

One of the main topics that I wanted to address with the participants was willful blindness. I define willful blindness as an *effort* to turn away from an action that needs



attention. Willful blindness is when one sees a situation that needs attention and chooses to ignore it. According to Goleman (1997), "There is an almost gravitational pull toward putting out of mind unpleasant facts" (p. 244). He is referring to lies that protect and allow social interaction to flourish by not being totally truthful to others and at other times utilizing self-deception to protect or convince oneself of a certain fact. In willful blindness there is no intent to lie to another or oneself, but to just put something out of sight and mind. As an illustration, I have occasionally directed clients to give their marriage one more chance even when one of the clients seemingly decided that the marriage was not in his/her best interest. I have allowed my belief in the sanctity of marriage to encourage the client to try rather than to support the client in exploring divorce. I have since learned that the more I supported a client's decision, the more effectively things worked out than had I imposed my willful blindness to support my own ideologies. This is known as client self-determination.

After years of practice, I began to have an understanding that I did not know everything I thought I knew. Much of what I learned was the need to *unlearn* personally driven decisions. This realization is often hidden in our own rationalization when we are unwilling to accept that we do not inherently know what is right. I realized that I also relied heavily on my own personal experiences with religion and spirituality. If a client or family acknowledged practicing a religious faith of which I had knowledge, it was easy to engage and direct these clients to use their beliefs to further develop strength and support their situation. Upon deeper reflection, I now recognize that I overlooked or just ignored references to religion or spirituality that were unknown to me in a dramatic case of willful blindness.

I have also seen frequent utilization of willful blindness by students who are easily moved to refer a client to another *expert* when the client presents an issue they, the students, do not want to either work on or deal with interpersonally. How often have I and others in our profession turned our heads just far enough away to overlook the actions of other colleagues, rather than initiate a dialog regarding what we determined to be questionable behavior? It is not easy to confront someone who is using alcohol inappropriately (referred to as an impaired professional). I must admit that in this situation I have turned to a colleague who is a recovering alcoholic to intervene, because who better than someone who has been there? Why did I, or why do others, avoid this type of uncomfortable confrontation? I attribute the *excuse* of not knowing as being willful blindness because it is just easier than the confrontation.

Another example of willful blindness relates to personal and professional growth. I know I am not the only professional to say (or to hear from colleagues) that they/I need to apply to themselves/myself what is recommended to my clients. However the actual application to self is easily overlooked and results in taking no personal action to improve self. I view this as a direct act of willful blindness that excuses all of us as professionals from having to practice what we preach.

An often overlooked contradiction by students and professionals is the common declaration that they trust what their clients say to them, and then they proceed to question what their client has just said by responding with probes for more details. Early on in my clinical days I recall asking a client how he felt about his mother (I had already told him I trusted what he told me), and when I got the reply that he hated his mother I was somewhat shocked and said "I do not believe you really hate your mother." Was this willful blindness or naiveté that challenged my own professional competence? This incongruence

displayed evidence that use of words and phrases can contribute to the experience of ethical dilemmas.

As professionals we need to believe that we are competent. When incongruence is evident, it is a clue that one is operating with willful blindness. As my personal and professional ethics merged, ethical dilemmas became less (internal congruence) and I seemed more willing to reflect, examine, and explore what I needed to do to maintain awareness of professional competence and developed ways in which to monitor myself objectively.

In gathering my thoughts for the workshop I was asked to give, I sensed be the important ingredient was an awareness of personal and professional ethics and a beginning for an integration process. I wanted participants to *challenge themselves* with risk-taking, self exploration, and *honesty*. It was my hope that by discussing my own experiences with willful blindness, the participants would begin to take their own risk by participating in an exercise that called for identification of one of their own acts of unethical behavior. The actions were reported anonymously by groups (7 to 10 persons per table) so that no one person could be identified as a "bad social worker."

As I faced an audience of 120 plus, mostly social workers with BSW and MSW degrees, I thought about how the format of the workshop would lead the participants to an understanding of how their own morals and values developed and guided their decision making. The logical next phase would be to examine the manner in which one thinks and makes deductions (either deontological or teleological) and the role willful blindness plays in this process. This would set the stage to ask the participants to share both negative and positive ethical acts respectively. I realized that I was asking them to ultimately explore, take risks, and admit to unethical actions or behaviors. As they wrote down their unethical act (anonymously) and put it into the middle of their respective tables, one representative compiled the list of questionable and/or unethical acts and read these unethical acts to the entire audience. A verbatim sample of responses included:

- Re-scheduling a client appointment under false pretenses, i.e., lying about having other commitments when there were no other commitments.
- Billing an hour for a case management meeting that was only five minutes.
- Billing for a case management appointment that did not occur.
- Having lunch rather than doing a home visit.
- Reporting Continuing Education Units for a workshop that was not attended.
- Rating a workshop presentation highly when it was poor to not hurt the presenter's feelings.

Startling honesty! But I was lost for a moment as to where to go from there, so I immediately thanked everyone for participating, especially for their willingness to take the risk of self-disclosure. I was unprepared for many of the candid disclosures that came from the different groups. As I processed these disclosures, I found myself re-examining my own process for getting to my current ethical practice state: the merging of personal and professional ethics. I continued to think about these responses following the workshop. They prompted me to think seriously about what is expected of new BSW and even MSW graduates. I do not believe that these types of acts or actions are being frequently reported to the Texas Social Work State Licensure Office. These disclosures suggest the presence of self monitoring and, on the rare occasion, some of these incidents may come to someone else's attention. I would suspect, however, that too many are brushed aside by means of willful

blindness and forgotten or dwelled on with guilt.

Although it has always been my intention, I do not fool myself by thinking I have been completely ethical throughout my career. Today, to me there is no difference between acting ethically and legally. However, experience and maturation have led me to this point in life. The NASW Code of Ethics (1999) does not address obeying the law relative to stopping at a stop sign, proper turns, speeding, or accepting incorrect change when it is more than what is due. These are all too often self-monitoring actions and reflect the highest standard of personal integrity. With closer scrutiny of self, I have found it simply too uncomfortable to accept incorrect change even if it is only a dime too much. It does mean an active effort to hold myself to the highest possible standard of ethical behavior at all times.

I work to be ethical in the here and now but this is after many years on earth; it did not happen upon graduation. Through my process of ethical maturity, self monitoring, self-reflection, and accepting my professional ethics as integral to my personal ethics, a merging of the two occurred. My effort to present an ethics workshop that did not focus on ethical dilemmas and decision-making models resulted in clarification of a practice model that encourages ethical maturity with self-monitoring, self-reflection, and acceptance of *professional ethics as personal ethics*. This is what I refer to as **honest ethical practice**.

When I asked participants at the end of the workshop for feedback, a number mentioned that they felt a sense of relief that they were allowed to express an unethical action and/or that it was disturbing but helpful to know they were not alone in some unethical action. More importantly there was a pervasive feeling that *now* is the time to stop unethical actions and work at acting ethically during all situations.

There needs to be an objective, quantifiable way to measure the degree of ethical practice that would reflect a sense of ethical grounding. A colleague and I are taking the next step to develop a personal and professional ethics audit that will provide a self measure to determine one's degree of ethical grounding. This is similar to what Reamer (2000) has done with a call for agencies to conduct a management audit.

Unexpectedly, what also surfaced was that some of the participants reported a sense of having cleansed past unethical actions by proclaiming, writing out, and facing possible residual guilt feelings that had not been addressed. This may serve as a catalyst for a willingness to merge personal and professional ethics by becoming aware of the importance of the effect of incongruence and resulting dilemmas. Throughout the workshop, I focused on modeling and speaking openly about my maturing process and eventual honest self-awareness. To what extent can I base my perception of the workshop as worthwhile? I am confident that the subject matter touched the participants positively and, I hope, provoked growth toward ethical maturity and self-awareness. It should be evident that as I reflected back on this ethics workshop, I greatly benefited as the presenter.

Closing Thoughts

In an effort to make sense of what I experienced, it is important to note that the workshop was a forum for my own learning (not an original objective) that related to the discovery that we, as people, need to mature and grow continuously. As professionals,

maturity and growth must come in accepting that the greater good of all is represented in adaptation of a standard of ethics that is not individually driven, i.e., NASW Code of Ethics.

I attribute my own experience of merging and integration of personal and professional ethics as a willingness to create congruence in my life, maturing experientially, honest self-awareness (always being on the alert for willful blindness), holding myself to a higher standard of personal integrity, and accepting a professional standard of ethics as my personal ethics. I truly believe that anyone can take these steps to move toward a merging and integration of personal and professional ethics, but it takes work and it will occur not by thoughts only, but by actions and reflection.

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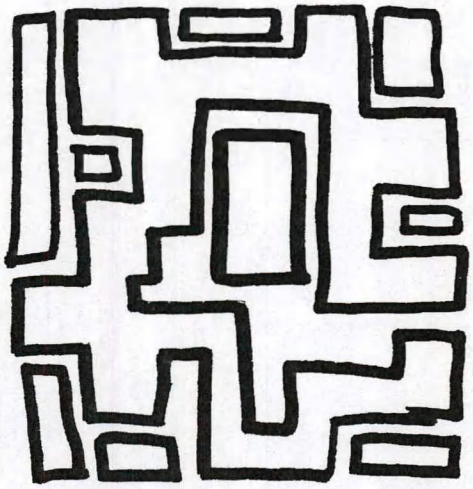


PLANNING PARADES: MY STUDENTS AND ME

Cynthia L. Garthwait, MSSW, University of Montana

The process by which the author became a gerontologist is described through the metaphorical use of parades. The narrative suggests that a similar experience can be provided to students by helping them notice the parade of elders in their lives, enter the parade they see, recognize the sociohistorical context of the parade, make meaning of their observations, and commit to the welfare of elders. The narrative account of the shift from gerontological social worker to professor of gerontological social work proposes suggested ways in which students can be exposed to the field of gerontology in ways that will encourage them to consider entering this field.

"Oh honey, you don't know nothin'." Spoken by a 98-year-old woman whose age was double mine, these words reverberate embarrassingly in my memory today, even though they were spoken six years ago when I remarked during a visit to her nursing home that, at 49, I was only half her age. Rapidly approaching the 50-year mark myself, I believed that I was finally a credible social work practitioner with people much older than me. In my effort to acknowledge her extremely full life and to appear appropriately modest, I confidently commented that she had experienced an entire lifetime more than I had. Her response reminded me of the first time a client pointed out how much I had to learn. My gerontological social work career had just begun at age 22, and I was told by an 80-year-old male nursing home resident that I looked 12. Even at age 22, I realized that I was being invited to openly and respectfully join a parade of characters who would ultimately shape my views of life, myself, my profession, and the aging process. I was becoming a gerontologist.

After each of these two incidents, which took place 27 years apart, I contemplated the meaning of these elders' comments and accepted the fact that my recently acquired degree meant little to those whose lives I was entering. Neither person actually said that I had no knowledge of what it meant to be old, but had they said so, they would been accurate. Still, I interpreted the elders' comments as an invitation rather than a criticism. Had I not been exposed as a young girl to the possibilities of aging well, had I not been professionally trained to work toward self-awareness, and had the elders I was working with not pointed out my need to learn from them, I might not have *NOTICED THE PARADE* in full view before me.

Since that time, having worked with older adults my entire career, even as a social work educator, I have labored diligently to acquire knowledge and skills that would enhance my ability to work well with elders. Even now, as a professor of social work with a specialty in gerontology, I count those two significant experiences as valuable lessons. Both stuck firmly with me, as many others have done, as lessons in humility and genuineness. Was it not a foolish, even reckless, move for my employer to include in the social work job description for a tender new social worker the social well-being of the residents of a nursing home, all of whom had experienced so much more in life than I had? What did I know that could help them in any meaningful way?

At age 49, I remembered those questions because of the blunt reminder that my client had lived her life in places and times I could only speculate about. Even as I drew near to the 50-year mark myself, I acknowledged, both to myself and my 98-year-old client, that I still did not know how it felt to lose a spouse, to experience unwanted dependency at the hands of an unwelcome interplay of chronic illnesses, or to replay my life script internally

in search of meaning and purpose. That experience waits for me, and even though I *ENTERED THE PARADE* long ago, I know there is still much to learn. My hope is that I will learn my lessons graciously and will be able to effectively and wisely bring my students into the parade that I now see has no beginning and no end.

Calling myself a gerontologist now is a matter of pride, but being a gerontologist when I began my career in social work was seen by some of my professional colleagues as a lowly calling. Having just completed a federal training program in aging that supported my graduate education, and having eagerly accepted a position as the director of social services in a large nursing home, I was asked an unforgettable question by a colleague. She asked why I had chosen to pursue gerontology as a career, and even suggested that it was because I could not find another job. Offended, both for myself and my future clients, I quickly realized that this chosen field of mine carried with it little respect within my profession, although I knew even then it would ultimately allow me to march in a remarkable parade of meaningful moments and memorable characters, experience a maturing of perspective, develop comfort with paradox, and catch a glimpse of the possibility of aging well. That realization and numerous meaningful moments with my elders have been my best teachers. Because of them and the ways in which they have enriched my life, it has been my mission in social work education to *ORCHESTRATE A SIMILAR PARADE* for my students, offering access to the spectacles, songs, sounds, and sadness that often mark the time spent with older adults.

I wish I could point to one elder, one exquisite experience with a person facing life's end, or one unique and life-changing moment that led me to know that gerontology was my calling, but none in and of themselves changed my life sufficiently to lead me into gerontology. Such a personal account would perhaps be inspiring, but it would not accurately describe the real ways in which most of us find our life paths by being touched, nudged, and led by others. My experience resembles more a patchwork than a sudden revelation. Each member of the cast has added to my understanding.

The Parade Before Me

The patchwork nature of my path to gerontology contained snapshots of lives well lived, gifts of insight from those I have served, and challenges born of the mistakes I have made. Each of these pieces, experienced individually in time, brought partial understanding to my eyes and heart and provided individual clues to follow. Passion for working with elders was inspired early in the ongoing parade of my life. This passion became solidified as I learned, was challenged, grew, recognized and opened gifts of wisdom presented to me, and became grateful for the opportunity to march in this sometimes somber, sometimes celebratory, parade alongside those ahead of me in terms of years.

Always evident to me was the fact that others did not see in older people the same charm or attraction that I saw, and I can only speculate about some of the reasons for what I consider to be their inability to take a strengths perspective on aging. To be fair, I am not attracted to working with other populations about which my colleagues care passionately. However, I have come to see that my personal parade to this point, both personally and professionally, has been orchestrated, facilitated, supported, and chronicled by those whose lives have touched me in ways that have influenced how I see the world and its inhabitants. My colleagues have not been so lucky, I conclude. It has always been my belief that people without this passion for gerontology just do not yet know the rewards of this work.

Unintentionally Taught Lessons

Many people I have known, when in the presence of older adults, especially the frail elderly, see only the dependency and decline associated with age. Although I, too, clearly see those aspects of aging, they do not and never have constituted the entirety of what comes into view for me. I also learned about personal accomplishments in the sagging of shoulders, a hardy work ethic in gnarled fingers, compassion in a tender touch, and spiritual and mental toughness in the setting of a jaw. Some of my ability to take this perspective is a debt I owe to my parents. My father spoke compassionately and respectfully about the group of octogenarians who waited for him to unlock the men's clothing store where he was a retail clerk in the small Midwestern town where I grew up because he genuinely appreciated their daily stories and their seasoned outlook on life. My mother took me as a matter of course to the local nursing home to serve communion and play piano for residents wishing to continue their connection with the church. I learned well their unintentionally taught lessons about positive aging and about service to elders as not only giving, but receiving. Grateful for having been given the eyes to see what elders have to offer as well as the heart to care for them, I have admiration for my parents' everyday acceptance of aging, which also included careful attention to the needs of my grandparents who lived with us. Their lessons to me, not intentionally, were given in action more than in words.

College work as a nurse's aide in a nursing home helped me confront fully the challenge elders face to live with dignity in the midst of declining health and intrusive daily care and procedures. My failure to fully protect my clients' dignity because of my immature frustration with providing intimate physical care was sometimes more apparent to those I served than was my compassion and willingness to serve in the most menial and yet most loving ways. The patronizing words I spoke to a man embarrassed by his incontinence when what I really wanted to do was connect with him in a truly genuine manner afforded me important lessons in being real. My parents' nurturing of my critical thinking skills and their lived-out compassion for those about whom others did not care, combined with my concurrently taken college courses teaching me to inquire, challenge, and create, brought critically reflective questions to my work. Why do nursing homes exist, and how is it that they have become the norm for elder care? What is it that makes us so reluctant to speak about death with those who thirst for an empathetic ear? Why do we seek after youth and avoid growing old at all costs? Why do some cultures value those who have aged, while others cast them aside? How have we come to a place where monetary rewards for working with youth exceed that given to those who work with elders? Who gets to decide what it means to age well? What is my responsibility to challenge the injustices I see, and how can I work to empower elders? What knowledge, skills, and values will stand me in good stead in this work?

Learner and Teacher Both

The recipient of a Federal Training Grant from the Administration on Aging while in pursuit of my MSW, I found myself being encouraged to be a part of answering those questions, to pose many more like them, and to gain not only high level interpersonal skills with elders, but social policy and program development expertise. A practicum seminar focused entirely on aging, an extremely good opportunity for those of us planning a career in aging, afforded me the chance to delve deeply into the issues of aging, both challenged and supported by other students also learning about aging at their respective sites.

People whose lives brushed mine as we paraded together through the aging process,

they as sojourners and I as support, return to me as memories and at times as indictments of my lack of skills, but always as examples to be used in teaching. The 88-year-old woman whose lifelong bitterness over the deaths of her husband and sons tainted her view of life only strengthened my resolve to choose acceptance over anger should I face similar losses. The 94-year-old Alaskan Native woman whose oral history I had taken taught me about standing strong in the face of racism. A remarkable 80-year-old man taught me that love and passion never cease, and a 95-year-old woman showed me how profoundly the hurts suffered as a child at the hands of a cruel parent can color one's experience of the world for over 90 years. A 75-year-old man learning to transcend a painful disability inspired me with his ability to make sunshine, laugh at adversity, and see opportunities rather than obstacles. Others whose names and faces I remember taught me about gratitude, endurance, perseverance, forgiveness, tenderness, resolve, and the power of spiritual maturity. The 88-year-old woman I call a friend showed me the traits I now associate with vitality in old age, including sassiness, good humor, flexibility, commitment, orneryness, faith, independence, interdependence, and the will to accept life as it comes, most recently facing with faith and grace the suicide of a grandson. Eighty-nine years into his life, another man showed me the importance of staying true to one's values by rejecting material goods as a measure of wealth.

Families of nursing home residents I have served modeled love and patience, adult children played out the dramas of their families before me, impoverished elders showed me the disparity between those who have resources and those who do not, and my attempts to secure services taught me about societal attitudes toward aging, as well as how social policies are often more influenced by politics than by need.

Each of these experiences taught me to *NOTICE THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT* of the lives I was impacting, as well as to recognize that the meaning assigned to their experiences and mine were colored by history, culture, and power. I soon understood that it was impossible to understand a person unless I could begin to place them in time. My teachers, both in the field and in the classroom, taught me to *MAKE MEANING* of my observations and my associations with elders. My family had taught me that meaning comes from service, and as a gerontologist I recognized my calling. My sometimes helpful efforts to assist them in finding meaning in aging reinforced my growth.

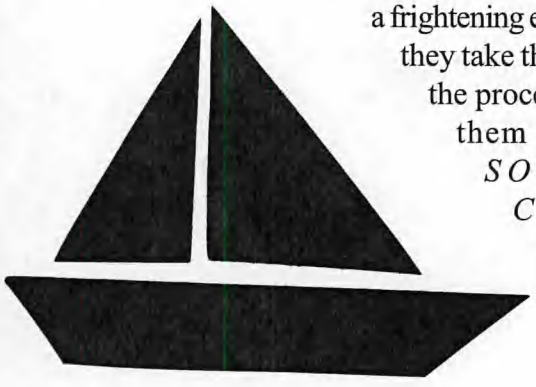
Twenty-six years of professional work with elders in a variety of roles and capacities – including nursing home social work, a private psychotherapy practice with older adults, social services consultation to nursing homes, and currently social work education – have combined and congealed in a way that confirms my choice of gerontology as a career. Teaching every single gerontology course with a service learning format that involves my students with elders in a meaningful, personal, and up-close manner has allowed me to see older people through their fresh eyes. My students learn about life by asking elders about dying, and they learn about autonomy by seeing dependence. When my students reflect on their fears, their misconceptions, and their appreciation of the chance to engage in a significant and meaningful interpersonal encounter with an elder, I sometimes am lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the parade in which they are being invited to march. I hear them say that learning about aging, combined with precious time spent with an elder, changed their lives, and I smile. I read their journals and witness them gaining insight into the strengths of the frail old person they thought had nothing left to contribute, and I smile. I watch them develop strengths-based

and empowering communication skills with elders, such as life review and reminiscence, and I smile. I hear them question societal attitudes, discriminatory social policies, and the status quo, and I cry. I remember doing the same. The parade continues, and my students are invited.

Parade Planning Strategy

If I thought, as a social worker turned professor, that I would need to provide inspiring experiences to my students, I would be unable to do so. In fact, intimidated by the prospect of shouldering such a responsibility, I would not be able to engineer a spectacular, life-changing experience for my students in order to help them explore the possibilities of gerontology as a career. In fact, I want them to find the parade themselves. Toward that end, what I could do, and what would be more meaningful, is to create similar yet unique spaces of possibility for my students. Then, if I have taught them the skills of appreciation, of perspective, of openness, of insight, and of seeing with the eyes of one who wishes to understand, a parade unique to each student could commence. That I can do. That I have done.

My hope is that my contributions to my students' education, combined with personal experiences they may have had or relationships that may have enabled them to see broadly, will allow them first of all to *NOTICE THE PARADE.* Not everyone does notice, I know, but surely my students will be different. They must take the risk of *ENTERING THE PARADE,* perhaps at first a frightening experience for some. Should they take this step, I can begin to trust the process which I know can lead them to *RECOGNIZE THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PARADE*, whereby my students see how the stages of human life are intricately connected, and how attitudes, politics, culture, and economics impact the life parade. I can lead them into oral history taking and life review with the help of the *Century in Review Socio-Historical Timeline* I have developed, which helps guide students' interviews of elders, place them in time, and compare their own lives with those of their clients, reflecting all the while on the delightful possibilities of connecting with someone who has lived through times that previously were only lifeless history lessons.



Given their openness and my willingness to guide their thinking, students who recognize this context will *MAKE MEANING* of their observations and their work. This involves a clarification of their own values about aging, appreciating a life well lived, and coming to a new understanding of their own role in the parade. When students arrive at this point, I am confident that they will *COMMIT* to the welfare of elders, which means challenging the injustices of social policy and negative attitudes toward aging, and living their own lives in such a manner that aging will be a meaningful experience. Cognizant of the cycles of learning and experience, I know that students will cycle back to the noticing stage at surprising points in their learning, this time reminding themselves to see with fresh eyes. They will now have learned to see, engage, recognize, understand, and resolve to be a part of what they see. I will have done my job.

Because literature and film can eloquently portray life in ways that are deadened and limited to partial understanding when relegated to a class lecture, students become passionate, outraged, emboldened, enlightened, and at times even radicalized when given access to learning through such means. Readings such as *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom and *Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence both give voice to elders facing aging and death, but in very different ways. Movies such as *Surfing for Life,*

Camilla, Trip to Bountiful, Whale Rider, and *Strangers in Good Company* draw students into the social, spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual lives of older people in ways that none of my lectures, however academic or passionate, could ever do. Panels of elders brought to the classroom setting who have been asked to give their views on almost anything can inspire, engage, madden, and sometimes mystify my students. I provide my students a standard of excellence in intergenerational social work by sharing with them *Best Practices in Intergenerational Social Work,* developed by a community-based intergenerational advisory board made possible by a John A. Hartford Foundation grant to my institution.

Grateful for my students' openness to such learning opportunities, I reinforce their questions, challenge their assumptions, provide alternative ways of perceiving, offer additional resources, clarify the sociohistorical context of aging, and sit back. If I have done my work well as parade organizer, I will have created an environment in which my students now prize their experience with elders. They see themselves as part of the community in which both students and elders often live in isolation from each other, identifying the possibilities for changes in attitudes, services,and social policies that are more equitable and just, and relish the challenges inherent in gerontology of which they are now aware. They now notice the parade of characters provided to them through both life and academic experience. Hopefully they will avail themselves of this opportunity, even joining the parade as well.

Lessons Learned and Shared

Reflecting on my journey into gerontology, I know that I recognized and joined in the parade of characters and experiences as most people join a parade—tentatively, on a surface level, lacking in confidence, out of step, and somewhat self-consciously. Aware that I was being observed by onlookers, I hesitantly began to participate as those who see parades as entertainment often do. I recognized the community building and celebratory nature of parades early on, appreciating each person who provided music, and I was grateful to be a part of their lives.

Only over time did I understand the deeper, shared, and collective cultural meaning of parades, both literal and figurative. People I met shared their lives with me, but also illustrated larger social issues. The African American man who had triumphed over discrimination taught me through life review that social justice is achieved one person and one policy at a time. The 95-year-old Alaskan Native great-grandmother who returned home to her village to die showed me the universality of mothering. The 75-year-old woman who devoted her life to her family and who passed on her understanding of precious family ties showed me the importance of carrying history forward for the sake of her grandchildren and mine. The 80-year-old woman debilitated by rheumatoid arthritis who unfailingly inquired about my well-being illustrated the ways in which suffering brings awareness of the needs of others. They all taught me what I already knew from loving parades, which is that sometimes we need to publicly, in spectacle fashion, display our lives together.

My learned lessons include the natural and desirable balance between a well-rehearsed and yet unscripted parade performance, which I recognize as the interplay between formal education and the art and spontaneity of good social work practice. Elements of parades resemble the building blocks of our shared lives. For example, I see the universality of life passing by, yet do not lose sight of the uniqueness of each individual life lived. Patriotism, central to most parades, is for me a reminder that loyalty and coming together are vital to living life well communally. Often a part of parades, diverse political movements

are necessary to gradually and sometimes dramatically shape social policy that is representative of our shared values. Onlookers sitting on the sidelines and cheering the rest of us on remind me of myself as an innocent. They motivate me to invite them, some of whom are my students, to find their place in the parade.

Currently bolstered and emboldened by a Geriatric Enrichment in Social Work grant provided by a partnership between the John A. Hartford Foundation and the Council on Social Work Education, I find myself in the midst of a faculty education and curriculum transformation project. Although I do not expect my teaching colleagues to transform themselves into gerontologists, I am encouraged and delighted by their interest in aging and intergenerational practice and by their willingness to learn and to incorporate aging content and experiences into every one of their social work courses. Now that intergenerational content is integrated, sustainable, and pervasive in the curriculum, it has become clear to me that again I can be a catalyst for the learning of others, and as a result my colleagues no longer watch me teach about gerontology from the sidelines. They too see the possibilities for teaching about life by including content on older adulthood in an authentic manner; they too utilize elders as examples of social change agents and empowered individuals; they too teach about social justice by pointing out social policies which discriminate against the elderly; and, as a result, they too add to the possible experiences that will populate the internal landscape of our students long after they have vacated our classrooms.

Moving Toward Paradox

It has long been apparent to me that older people can understand and live comfortably with paradox. They know from experience that seemingly antithetical concepts can co-exist. They know that surrender can bring victory, that pain can bring joy, that being lost can help you find your way, and that accepting the greyness of the world can bring richness and freedom rather than confusion and compromise. Watching the older masters of paradox negotiate the uncertainties of life, and then seeing them come to terms with these uncertainties as not only inevitable but precious, I learn to anticipate my own personal challenges. Would that I could communicate this to my students. I will try, but I know that their world view may still be colored and limited by a need for definition and certainty, not by an appreciation of paradox. When they reach the stage that will allow for a greater acceptance of diversity, a celebration of confusion, and a move toward genuine understanding that transcends science, they will recognize what I see and what my elder friends know. Perhaps I will be lucky enough to be told that an elder they met or an insight I shared helped them appreciate the paradoxes of life. They will see that they too are a part of the parade, that there is more to be learned from joining it than from watching it, and that their gerontologist professor cared more about their personal and professional growth than about their classroom performance, and for good reason. I hope that I will have taught them more about the meaning of life than about theories of human development. Perhaps a new gerontologist or two will play in the band, decorate a float, carry a flag, or someday serve as grand marshal.

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Connecting The Generations: Younger Faculty Mentoring Older Faculty

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More experienced, but chronologically younger, faculty can pass on gerontological academic interest to junior, but chronologically older, faculty. This narrative reflects the importance of interpersonal relationships in intellectual inquiry. The interweaving of personal life events with professional expertise can provide some insight towards understanding the development of an academic gerontological social work partnership.

Academic mentoring typically occurs when chronologically older, more experienced, faculty 'take on' younger, less experienced, faculty. The benefits are obvious. The academic journey of the older faculty member translates into advising and collaborations in scholarly activities. Both parties benefit. What can be considered atypical is the reverse: a chronologically younger faculty member mentoring a person older than herself.

The interweaving of our stories reflects the mutuality or reciprocity of relationship and brings together each of our privileged knowledges. Wilson, Pereira, and Valentine (2002) note that a mentor's main role is often viewed within the context of helping junior faculty get published in order to gain tenure. This was not true for us. Our journey together began informally (Schrodt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). I first met my mentor when she was a doctoral student and I was serving as an adjunct faculty member at the same university and in the same school. We shared the small office dedicated to both doctoral students and adjunct faculty. We talked primarily about our families. This happenstance sharing of an office has led to an extraordinary academic mentoring experience in gerontological social work.

Our story brings together the importance of personal experiences with older adults and reverse intergenerational professional mentoring of junior faculty. In this narrative, we each reflect on the ways in which our own life experiences shaped our professional lives and how those experiences led to our collaborations in gerontological social work. Further, we share our mutual journey in developing a collaborative partnership in our intellectual development and scholarly productivity.

The Mentor's Story

As a social worker, I have worked with older adults throughout most of my career. I began as a BSW student completing my practicum in an Area Agency on Aging and went on to work as an adult service worker in public welfare and as a medical social worker in a home health agency and hospital before moving into academia. As a social worker in academia, I began teaching family medical residents in geriatric rotations and am now a faculty member in a joint BSW/MSW program where I teach an aging course; study family caregiver well being, dementia and driving issues, and dementia training; and volunteer with several older adult service agencies.

I have to credit my grandmothers for unknowingly teaching me that there is much to learn from older adults. My grandmothers had little formal education and were both farm women who worked hard all their lives with minimal luxuries. Neither would say she had much to offer the world, but they taught me such valuable life skills as cooking, sewing,

needlework, and gardening. Two lessons they taught me were the most valuable and ones neither woman even knew she was teaching. In very different ways, my grandmothers showed me the importance of nurturing others, and that the older adult is an interesting, unique resource with whom a younger person can spend *enjoyable* time.

I was fortunate that these two important women lived to be elderly and that I got to know and appreciate them in my own womanhood. Because I was a social work professional working with the older adult population, I hope they were able to see that they had such a powerful impact on my life. I know neither of them would acknowledge that credit, but I know it.

Having had the positive experiences of living near all of my grandparents for much of my childhood, I always felt comfortable being with and talking to the older adults, something that I found uncommon in many of my contemporaries in my BSW/MSW programs. I was not uncomfortable being in the company of older persons.

As with all of us in the helping professions, my life experiences served to mold me into the professional that I became. Building on my strengths, knowledge, and familiarity with older persons, I have always gravitated toward working with older adults, their families, and the issues that challenge them.

In my life as an academic social worker, I have been fortunate to work with other social workers interested in gerontological social work practice. These other social workers have mentored me and served as role models for being a social worker and a researcher. From my mentors, I have learned the importance of studying our aging population and the value of using a strengths-based approach to understand caregiver well-being. From this 'older generation' of social workers, I have, again, learned important life lessons.

Like my grandmothers, I knew my role was to pass along my knowledge to another generation. I never planned to become a mentor. If I had considered mentoring, I would never have planned on mentoring a colleague with many more years of clinical and life experience. Yet, my colleague and I fell easily and naturally into a collegial relationship in which we shared, commiserated, and grew personally and professionally.

I have particularly valued our relationship as I have watched my colleague join our faculty and grow into her position as a full-time faculty member. In particular, I have enjoyed working with my colleague as she has developed an interest in gerontological social work. Social workers interested in working with older adults are a typically passionate group, and it has been exciting to observe another join this enthusiasm.

For a role I never envisioned for myself, particularly with an older. more experienced social work clinician, I have gained much. I have had the opportunity to share my passion for gerontological social work and my experiences in academia as well as learn from my colleague's significant life and social work experiences. My relationship with my protégé has become an important part of my academic life. I look forward to this mutually beneficial partnership growing even more.

The Protégé's Story

Unlike my mentor, I was raised in the city. My early female role models were my maternal grandmother and my mother. My grandmother had six children. My mother had five children. I had four children. All three of us engaged in out-of-the-house activities. My grandmother had encouraged my mother to go to college, rather unusual given the times. My mother was in college in the early 1930s and it was there that she met my father. It was understood in my nuclear family that everyone, including the females, would have

an occupation. Given my time, the early 1960s, there were two professions open to females: nursing and teaching. I chose nursing.

As a nurse, I worked on the medical unit. At that time, the term medical unit implied that there would be a large number of older adults, with various aliments, staying in the hospital for a long time. I came to appreciate the stories I heard from my patients. While working in the hospital setting, I was asked to become a registered nurse consultant for selected nursing homes.

Working in a nursing home was a new experience for me. When I was younger, older individuals were taken care of at home. My maiden aunt had taken care of my maternal grandmother. My paternal aunt had taken care of her parents, as they experienced their physical decline. This matter-of-fact assumption of my family was to influence how my parents would be taken care of in their old age.

Working in the nursing homes reinforced for me the importance of maintaining the usual connections and environments for older adults. Working in the nursing homes made me aware of the vulnerability of older adults and their dependence on, and the importance of, family. This experience also pointed out to me that older individuals who were in nursing homes did not seem to fare as well as those who were taken care of at home. I noticed the cognitive decline as more apparent for those in nursing homes as opposed to those that I had ministered to in the hospital setting.

After I received my MSW, I went to work as a clinical social worker in a community mental health center. I noticed that a strong support system seemed to be one of the keys to helping those with mental illness. So, I began my doctoral work in marriage and family to try to discover how to facilitate my understandings and my ability to be of service to this population of clients.

The Protégé's Perspective: How the Mentor and Protégé Came Together

During the time we shared our office, my mentor also talked about her interest and research in gerontology. I listened. After my mentor's graduation, she became a faculty member at a nearby social work program. Her new university happened to be the same university where I was engaged for my doctoral work. We did not really see much of each other or even talk by phone. Periodically, she asked me to speak on my area of expertise, ethics, for some programs. I began to teach part time at her program. A full time faculty position became a possibility and my mentor suggested I apply now that I had finished my doctorate. I would never have applied had it not been for her encouragement. I did not believe that sort of position could be open to me! It was, and I did apply, and, ultimately, received an invitation to join the faculty. We were now working in the same school, though our scholarly interests were different.

Being an academic social worker on a full-time basis was a new experience for me. I had been in clinical practice for twenty years and had taught a number of courses, but I was just starting out in my full-time academic career. During the time I have known my mentor, my father died and my mother's health was failing. Curiously, my mentor was one of the very few people, outside my family, with whom I shared my concerns about my parents.

This concurrent journey with my colleague and with my parents reawakened my interest in gerontology. There were so many concerns. My four siblings, their spouses, my husband and I had to determine ways to help my

parents. We had always been involved with them, helping them, and talking with them. We devised a method of helping our parents and 'spreading out' the responsibility of care. My/our mother had taken care of my/our father. In retrospect, we probably could have been even more help to them while my father's health was failing. After dad died, and as mother became more fragile, my brothers, their wives, my husband, and I developed a plan.

We met for lunch or supper every week in our effort to help mother live comfortably in her home, the solution of her choice. Mother used to refer to these gatherings as "a meeting of the minds." Before the meetings, we would ask mother if she wanted to relay any particular information for the meeting. At the meetings, we would discuss such things as doctor visits, the current medications, who would visit mother on what day, who would pay the around-the-clock caretakers, who would shop for food, and who would pay house and medical bills. We would then offer this information to mother for her approval.

I periodically shared with my mentor what was going on concerning my mother. She listened. Over time, she indicated that how my family worked together had not yet been noted in social work gerontology literature. Would the family be willing to be part of a case study? At the next weekly meeting, the family agreed. The case study was conducted and subsequently published (Berg-Weger, Burkemper, Tebb, & Rubio, 2001).

This blending of personal life with academic research initially gave me pause. I wondered about the sharing of information. What would my family, my colleagues think of me? On the other hand, how my family worked together for our mother was a very positive approach. I was proud of my family. I trusted my mentor. I had a history with her. She had always been up-front with me. She has an intellectual curiosity that was transmitted to me. The gerontology subject matter that she was interested in was an ongoing event in my life.

However, there were other considerations. I was older than my mentor. I was a junior faculty member (a curious designation when one is older). The reverse of generation roles and academic statuses was something to consider. What could not occur was arrogance by either of us. My mentor was cultivating and transforming my life experience into an opportunity as an academic. She did not have an actual need to conduct this research. She was already involved in a number of research projects and was published.

Just talking about the concerns of the elderly has now become more interesting for me. My mentor has involved me in a second project to infuse gerontology content into the curriculum at our school, the GeroRich Project. She encouraged me to attend a Faculty Development Institute on gerontology. This Institute brought forth ideas for infusing gerontology content into our BSW and MSW curricula. We then provided opportunities for our fellow faculty to hear ideas as to how to infuse this content into their courses.

Prior to these experiences, I had generally used examples in lecture and given assignments that were geared toward the nuclear family constellation, omitting the fact that grandparents could, in fact, be living with the nuclear family, or that grandparents were serving as 'parents.' I had not included readings specific to older adults. I did not select texts specific to discussions of the concerns of older persons. My teaching perspective has changed. All in all, my mentor has had a comprehensive effect on my academic career in my education, publishing, and teaching.

Chronologically older and academically more experienced social work gerontologists mentored my mentor. She took the opportunity to mentor me and thereby impact

my professional development in research, education, and teaching. This mentoring experience could not have happened without both of us taking hold of the opportunity. The richness of the experience could possibly lay in the differences within our generational perspectives. With the reciprocal sharing of views, each of our 'wisdoms' came together for our professional, personal, and interpersonal growth.

Lessons Learned

As we have reflected on the evolution of our mentoring relationship, we would like to share the lessons that we have learned about the development of mentoring relationships:

• Do not assume you have to be older to be a mentor. Instead concentrate on the resources that each person brings to the conversation. Arrogance could have distracted us from the opportunities we experienced. For instance, the protégé's possible assumption that someone younger 'would not understand' her family situation could have inhibited the interaction surrounding the research project.

• Our experience was unique, but one from which others can learn. The mentor's sense of compassion and empathy for the protégé's lived experience, coupled with her research experience, helped to ease the protégé's personal situation and, at the same time, provided an opportunity for professional growth. Each of us used the strengths of our life experiences to move forward in understanding and translating our experiences to each other and to others.

• A mentor is a close and trusted guide. This trust is often associated with the shared development of experiences, identified areas of interest, and a building of interpersonal history. While our society generally views the older individual as having more wisdom, in the mentoring experience it is trust, as well, that is important.

• Both of us were open to new experiences. Sometimes, we view older individuals as 'set in their ways.' This openness allowed each of us to move forward in our understanding of older individuals and their families. Now, we are translating those experiences into other avenues through our teaching social work students.

• The mentor's interest, time, and effort would appear to center toward the passing on of gerontological understandings to the junior faculty member. It, though, was much more than that. The literature indicates that junior faculty experience role expectations that may appear ambiguous, or at least unclear (Schrodt et al., 2003). The experienced process of being mentored brings home the importance of this relationship in academia. The concurrent benefits of having a mentor are that the junior faculty member gains assistance in sorting through institution expectations and socialization processes, and leads to a stronger sense of ownership in departments (Schrodt et al., 2003.)

• Social work practitioners could possibly benefit from our story. This experience of mentoring/being mentored and of writing our reflections begs the question, "Who else have we mentored, or who else has mentored us?"

Conclusion

As noted, the mentor in this narrative took a traditional path in her academic experience. The protégé, on the other hand, was a twenty-year social work practitioner who was late in coming to academia. These paths converged specifically around gerontological social work. This was a building process that relied on the strengths and expertise of each of the participants.

Our interpersonal, personal, and academic relationship has lasted for over a decade. Passing on knowledge is a process, not an event. This reflection illustrates how two academic generations of gerontologists helped to open possibilities for a junior, yet chronologically older, colleague. The "making of a gerontologist" can involve past and present life events intersecting with academic interests. This relayed experience illustrates the importance of avoiding the assumption that one has to be chronologically older to mentor.

This narrative reflects the fact that we were involved in each other's learning (Wilson et al., 2002). The co-construction of our partnership (Mullen, 2000) allowed us to move forward in our understanding of gerontology, interweaving the clinical and personal with scholarly experience. The mentoring endeavor is often viewed within the context of chronologically older faculty mentoring junior and younger faculty. Our case example is isomorphic to the whole point of gerontology, that of learning from and building on the strengths of older individuals. Respecting the specialized knowledges of each individual is what makes partnerships successful. We each contributed to the other's learning (Mullen, 2000).

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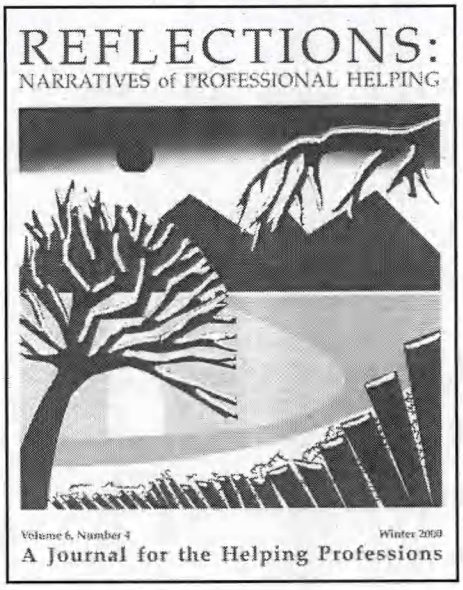

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