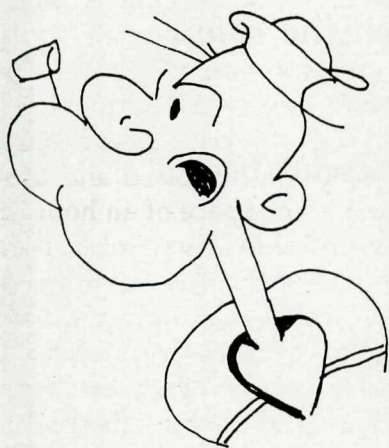


REFLECTIONS

This is a narrative of my 50 years in social work. The stories told are intended to reflect the times and the then current issues. Through this device, I have discussed my practice and academic career with a view toward finding my own coherence and offering to others a sense of hope and vision

by Carol H. Meyer

Carol H. Meyer, D.S.W....
is Ruth Harris Ottman Professor
of Family and Child Welfare,
The Columbia University School
of Social Work, New York, N.Y.



"All writing derives from, is the product of, helps to construct, lives... autobiographical writing centres the knowing subject and makes the basis of its knowledge-claims available for analytic scrutiny."ⁱ

"I yam what I yam."ⁱⁱ
WHO, ME?

Reflections on what? My critiques of the profession? My obsession with preserving practice? My impatience with pretension? My rebellious conceits? Perhaps these quibbles are all threads in the same weave, and as I reflect upon them and see how they all played out in my practice, teaching, and writing, I will learn something about myself. A few things I know already, and I learned them the hard way. One of my work evaluations included the comment that "she doesn't suffer fools gladly." I resented that criticism a lot, and it still rankles, although it was said eons ago. But it is probably true. The flip side of that idea is my impatience, always wanting to move on even before an idea has been digested. This flaw probably explains why I have always been a little "outside" of the professional mainstream. Then (and certainly not finally...) there is my tendency to make light of things, to joke when things are serious. For those who do not know me, this can create some misunderstanding.

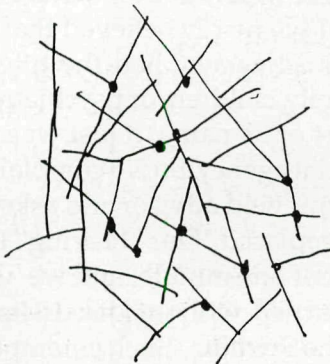
This is the context of what follows. I am glad to tell this story, because it allows me to derive some personal and professional coherence from looking backward. I also want to offer to the person who reads this the assurance that one can span 50 years in the profession of social work and come out of it only slightly scathed, not burned-out, and still hopeful. If that reader connects with some ideas, gains some of her or his own insights, and finds courage to push on, then these reflections will have been worthwhile.

Note

REFLECTIONS invited Dr. Meyer to write this "Brief Reflection."

THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

Contrary to the experience of almost everyone I know, my school and work experiences were always unplanned, and happened mostly through accident. I am not even sure that I can dignify my professional journey as one where I took advantage of opportunities. This view of the randomness in life experience has led me to pose the question "Who, me?" when I have been favored with chances... some of which I took. It was not so much luck as it was the unfolding of new discoveries; something always seemed to lead me to something else. Perhaps, as I re-trace my steps here, I will find an explanation... but I doubt it. I tend to believe in accidents and unintended consequences; there is too much uncertainty in the world for one to be able to plan very much. Also, I think it is one of the joys in life that there are always surprises around the bend, and that we cannot foretell the future. My comfort with unpredictability has allowed me to take (safe) risks, never really knowing where my choices would lead. This is definitely a non-linear way to live one's life.



SCHOOL AND BEYOND

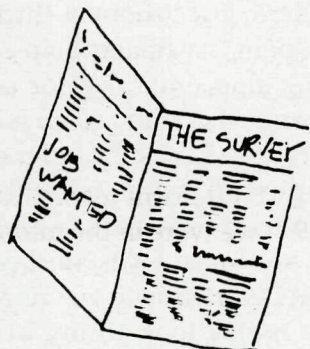
I was a college drop-out before it was common to be one. Erik Erikson spoke of the "adolescent moratorium," and that offers me a socially acceptable excuse if I were to need one. The truth is that it took me three universities before I found it possible to remain long enough to graduate. I went to New York University [NYU] (briefly) and got a job at Greenwich House (one of the earliest settlement houses), where I was a kind of gopher for the director Mary Simkovitch. Among other things, I led my first group, of 10 year old boys, helping them to make model airplanes, and I delivered milk to people living in tenements in Greenwich Village. No one told me this was social work, perhaps because Mrs. Simkovitch was not too kindly inclined toward social workers. It was at The University of Pittsburgh that I accidentally discovered professional social work. Ruth Smalley, a leading scholar of the Functional approach to social casework, then Dean of the School of Social Work, gave some lectures on Human Behavior in the Social Environment in one of my undergraduate college courses, and that did it! I became one of the student groupies of a house in which lived some of the leading social workers of the World War II era. My strongest memory of Pittsburgh is the taste of the soup Gertrude Wilson (a professor of group work) always had hot on the stove. I worked as a group worker at Soho Community House, where I thought then that

I had learned everything there was to know. Part of my job was to bring food to the steel workers who were on strike. I suppose that in the beginning, social work meant to me distributing food; come to think of it, that isn't a bad definition.

Before I was graduated, Dean Smalley invited me in for an admissions interview for The University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, where she would soon become the Dean. Ever since then I have had as an intellectual hobby the study of Functional Casework. My admissions interview was surely "an experience in form" as the Functionalists might say. It was intended to take the applicant (student, practitioner) through the "pain" of taking help so as to develop empathy for one's clients. In that admissions interview, I cried, I laughed, I perspired, I regressed and matured in the space of an hour or two, and when I was finished (or when Dean Smalley was finished with me), I took to my bed. It may have been cowardice, but I decided upon the New York School of Social Work (NYSSW). A footnote on the incomparable Ruth Smalley: Twenty years later I wrote my first book and she was asked by the publisher to review the manuscript. I received a copy of her six handwritten page response, and although her name was cut off, I recognized her tough, analytic thinking and her inimitable prose. The following year I met her at a conference and asked her if she were the one, and I had guessed right. No ambiguity there; she was a person who left

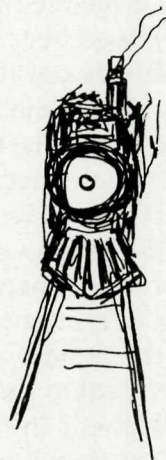
her mark!

Perhaps I should have gone to Pennsylvania, because it was just after the War, and the NYSSW was over-stocked with returning veterans. I was turned down several times, never considering the preference given to male veterans as a contentious issue. The School was on the quarter system then, so I reapplied four times all within the same year, and was told to "go away and grow up." First I worked at the National Recreation Association as a program developer and copy editor, but it was boring. I returned to the summer camp where I had been a counselor, and placed an ad in



The Survey. (Then, the only journal of social welfare that I knew of.) It said something like... "wanted... job in a social agency; will do anything." To my surprise, Elizabeth Chichester, the director of The Bridgeport (Connecticut) Family Society answered, and through this accident, I became entrenched in the field of family and children's services. I remember my salary... \$1800. I commuted to the NYSSW for a part-time course in Public Welfare, given by Alpha Pepper (who had once been a

police woman). I was seriously hooked on social work then, and so began my torturing of the admissions committee. I was totally untrained in social work, having majored in history and sociology, and having had only peripheral jobs in settlement houses. The professional staff of the Bridgeport agency were role models, and I tried to copy them. This was a community based agency, so I generally "walked over" to my clients' houses. Why is it we remember our first clients so well? My favorite activity was the evening hours when the agency took on the Travelers' Aid Society function and we chased runaway kids (to save them) who were on the train from New York City.



After a year, the NYSSW succumbed to the regular pressure of my applications, and my real intellectual life began. In the time I attended the school (1947-49 and 54-56), among the great teachers were: Gordon Hamilton, Lucille Austin, Florence Hollis, Fern Lowry, Eveline Burns, Virginia Bellsmith, Marion Kenworthy, Clara Kaiser,

Mitchell Ginsberg, Herman Stein, Alfred Kahn... and the brilliant curmudgeon Philip Klein. I can never over-estimate their influence on me. They were so committed to developing social work theory and practice, so insistent upon standards, so demanding that students think, that there was no room in our minds for anything but applying ourselves totally to the task. But more, each of them was a philosopher of his or her subject: a humanist? a romanticist? a scholar? Each intermingled his or her interests with those of others. Their professional and intellectual boundaries were permeable; it was social work purpose and knowledge, not only methodology, that were deemed important. Later, I will comment on social work education today; here the reader should note the way it used to be, and cannot be again.

My field work experiences also were formative, changing the direction of my interests and commitments in life. First, I was placed in what was lamely called The New York Section (of the Council of Jewish Women). This was a social agency that focused on immigration problems of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust in Europe. There were three students there, and we firmly believed that unless an agency had the titles of family, children, or psychiatric as part of its name, it just wasn't a social agency. So we complained to our field advisor and asked to be replaced. Our "hearing" took about one minute, and we were returned without discussion to "The Section." Such peremptory

advisement would be unthinkable in today's student-as-consumer environment. How fortunate it was! Our clients opened up the real world for us, and we grew up.

Just as I was leaving the placement, I met a French social worker from Oeuvres de Secours des Enfants (OSE) who was accompanying boatloads of orphaned refugee children and adolescents to their American relatives. All of these substitute family arrangements did not

I was asked (who, me?) to work with them as a group... a group that kept growing as more children arrived. I happened to be taking a group work class with the director of the Bronx (NYC) YMHA, and he agreed to offer the Y's facilities for the group to meet. I had never been to the Bronx before, I could not speak half of the languages the group members spoke, my field placement was over and I had no direct supervision, and I was almost overwhelmed by the children's Holocaust narratives.

Their family adjustment and psychiatric problems were severe, and there were few resources available to them. Through some mixture of youthful naiveté and desperation, I called upon the New York Psychoanalytic Institute for help, and the first person who came to the Bronx on a Sunday morning was the famed psychoanalyst Ernst Kris. He was so moved by the experience that he induced a dozen or so other members of the Institute to join

him, and they volunteered countless hours of their time, talking with the children there at the YMHA in the Bronx on Sunday mornings in the summer.

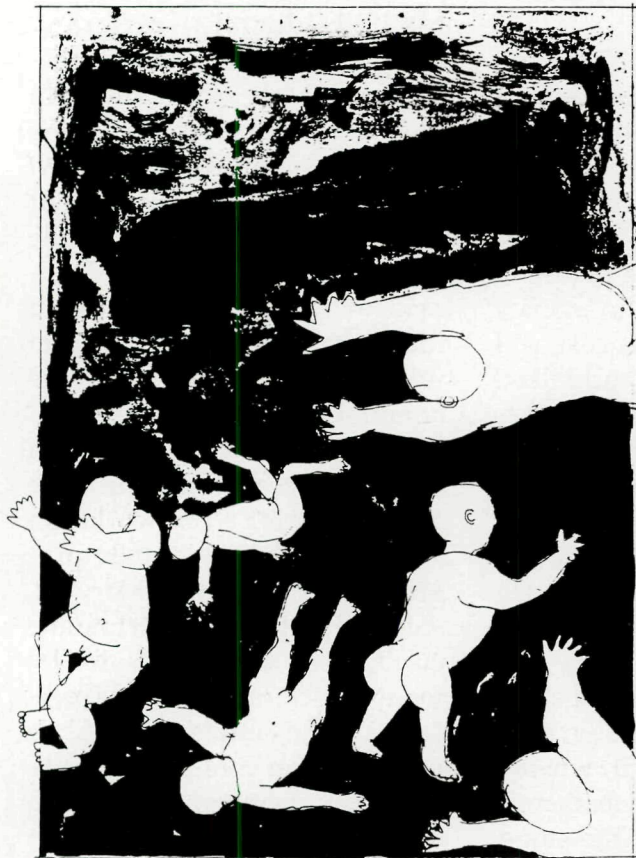
This refugee group became my masters thesis project.

I interviewed them and discovered that the United Services for New Americans (USNA), the agency that was working with their families (their aunts and uncles and cousins), had overlooked the particular needs of the children... now in their teens. The families often felt guilty and inadequate to the task of relating to the children, and the children felt alienated. The thing I am most proud of in my professional life is that I presented my masters thesis to USNA's director, and convinced him to develop an independent youth service. I was beginning to understand what it meant to be a social worker.

My second field experience was at the Neurological Institute of Presbyterian Hospital. There, I was in a student group that included, among others, a Catholic Priest, a Baptist Minister, and a Reform Jewish Rabbi. In 1949 we were in the middle of the psychiatric deluge, and my memory is more of seminars than of clients. This was a rigorous experience, and it probably served as the foundation of my clinical knowledge. Yet, I knew that hospital/clinical work was not to be my future. I missed the messier, generic world of family and children's services, with its undefined problems, its uncertainties, and its diversity. Also, I didn't like it when physicians and psychiatrists had the last word in my cases.

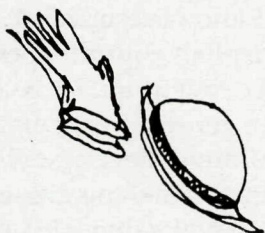
THE WORLD OF WORK

After graduating, I got a job as a beginning caseworker at the Community Service Society



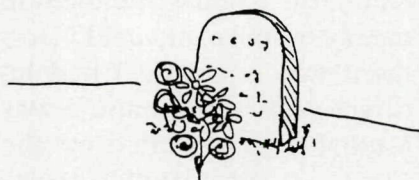
work out of course, for after their concentration camp experiences, the children were under-developed, uneducated, and almost totally lacking in social skills. It was obvious that they needed social and psychiatric services, and they wanted to stay together.

(CSS). Rumor had it that it was a very traditional, proper, and "lady-like" place, but also that it was an agency where the "best of casework" was practiced. (It was all of these things.) Having once been the primary training agency for the NYSSW, it seemed like the logical place for me to continue my learning for a while. My first day there was representational of the next five years. I arrived at the Riverside District Office to meet my supervisor, the unrivaled Frances Scherz. I had been mildly terrorized by the restrictive atmosphere I had already detected in my "downtown" hiring interviews, and I didn't know who Frances Scherz was. (She was to become one of the first theorists of family therapy, but more importantly, she was a brilliant renegade.) She asked me how things went downtown, and I remember saying "I am not going to wear hats and gloves here. They are not going to make me into a lady." "O.K.," she said, as she put on one of her famous hats and her gloves as she went out to lunch.



At the time I went to the CSS, it was just giving up its relief function, and it was still supporting selected clients who were motivated to "use" casework. I had an aged client who had been supported in this way for several years, and it was my

task to help her turn to the Welfare Department. She was a very proud woman, a refugee from Germany, and a doctor's wife, although he had not practiced in America. When her husband died, she was terrified of his having to be buried as a pauper. I



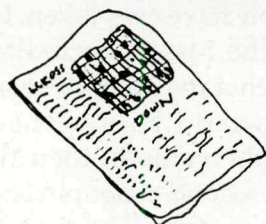
asked a family friend who owned a funeral parlor to take care of the funeral, and I found a German Landsman group to donate a cemetery plot. The agency sent flowers. A year later it was time for a stone to be placed at the grave. I knew the agency would not absorb this cost, so I called a stonemaker and talked him into making a tax deductible charitable contribution. I was impressed that he was so agreeable, but when the stone was ready he called to arrange for his picture to be taken with the client for the newspaper. I had to tell my supervisor, because confidentiality was a religion at the CSS. I was sent downtown to an administrative council, where I was all but tarred and feathered. The agency paid for the stone, and five dollars was withheld from my paycheck forever more. My salary was \$5,500.

BACK TO SCHOOL

While I was a field instructor at CSS, I talked with the School's field advisor, Dorothy

Sumner, about the profession and what I ought to be doing. She said off-handedly, "Why not take a course, it might give you some ideas." So I took an anthropology course at Columbia University, and got a C+. Perhaps a course closer to my line of work? Then, surprisingly, I received a letter from Lucille Austin telling me that I could have an National Institute of Mental Health Fellowship (NIMH) if I applied to the Columbia University School of Social Work (the erstwhile NYSSW) doctoral program. Who, me? There were no casework doctoral candidates, and I guess they wanted to use up the fellowship they received. I left CSS and took my retirement money with me. I think I left the agency with my unpaid and permanent five dollar debt. I had no idea what a doctoral program was about, nor why I would be attending one.

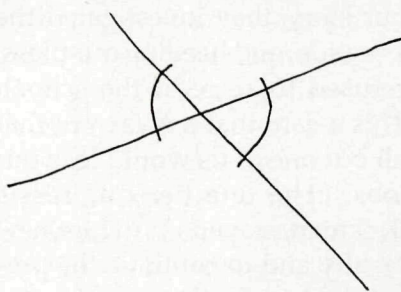
Neither the profession nor social work education were quite ready for a caseworker in a Doctor of Social Welfare program. As the first laboratory rat, so to speak, I was subject to some curious tests, when measured by today's doctoral educational processes. For example, there was a matriculation conference where 17 faculty members attended to determine if I were qualified to continue past the first term. I remember that it was the time of some important Public Welfare Amendments, the announcement of which was front page news on the morning of my matriculation conference. Eveline Burns was the Chair, and naturally, she asked my opinion of the



amendments. (I had remembered Dr. Burns from my masters seminar seven years earlier, when, as an economist, she had just joined the faculty and really didn't know the answer when she asked me, "Casework? What is that?") I had not read the newspaper that fateful morning, but I had done the crossword puzzle, and I explained that to Dr. Burns. Philip Klein, a philosopher and researcher was my advisor, and he was sitting next to me trying to help. He whispered to me, "Tell her you did the puzzle in ink." I did, and I passed the examination. I still can't imagine why. At my final oral comprehensive examination, the same 17 faculty members attended, probably two thirds of whom were still skeptical of the validity of casework in a doctoral program. I still have nightmares recalling how Florence Hollis (perhaps wanting me to demonstrate my grasp of casework theory) asked a question I have never overcome. "Name two concepts and trace them historically." What? First, I couldn't bring to mind what a concept was, so of course I couldn't answer the second part either. It was the longest silence I have ever participated in. The committee murmured things like "blocking? anxious?" The Chair later explained to me that I had

passed the examination, because they knew that if I couldn't talk about something there had to be an unusual organic reason.

My dissertation was about the development and application of the concept of "complementarity" in casework practice. This term was used by the physicist Robert Oppenheimer, and I had become interested in the idea of interactional "fit" that it conveyed. (Concrete examples of the term complementarity might be a railroad coupling, the two halves of a fountain pen, or the intertwining of the fingers of both hands.) I remember the best library experience I ever had when I did my search for literature on the terms "complementarity," "fit," "balance," or anything comparable. (Systems thinking was not yet in the mainstream literature, although von Bertalanffy had already published his General Systems Theory. I had not then discerned an association of complementarity with systems thinking.)

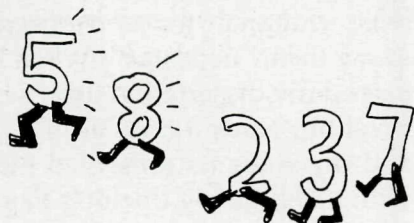


The School was then housed in the Carnegie Mansion, and the best thing about that place was Andrew Carnegie's personal library space, which

contained a most comprehensive social science, social work, and social welfare collection. Remember, this was decades before computers, and it was also long before the card catalogue listed any topics related to my idea. Thus, I spent a summer looking directly in books, any book that might harbor an idea that was even tangentially associated with complementarity. I experienced the joy of discovery, almost feeling like an archeologist turning over the earth to come upon an antiquity. When I was able to define my project, I was fortunate to have Florence Hollis as my Chair and Nathan Ackerman, then an adjunct faculty member at the school, as a consultant. He was then involved with his own definitions of family interaction, and we had a lot in common. I applied the concept of complementarity in the analysis of cases of marital conflict, and found it to be a useful tool in the assessment of why combative couples stayed together.... because their needs met each other, even when they were irrational (or as we used to say then, "neurotic.") When I passed my dissertation defense, I went to teach a class at NYU, and my students presented me with a child's toy doctor's bag. What I remember most about my graduation was that it was in the garden of the Carnegie Mansion, and that Gordon Hamilton was honored because she retired that evening.

While I was in the doctoral program I was asked by a funding agency to take a position as director of a small children's residency, for the express pur-

pose of finding evidence that would close it. (Who, me?) I found that the director was a bookie (I figured that out when I saw the telephone bank in his office) and that conspiring with his board of directors, he was keeping about a dozen little girls there who might have been returned to their parents. Both the Bureau of Child Welfare and the voluntary funding agency were supporting this program, but they were suspicious of the enterprise. I worked with the girls, visited their parents, and with the help of a placement agency, finally emptied the agency. Most of the children went home, and the rest went into foster care. At my exit interview, the director naturally refused to write a reference for me, and in fact told me he would kill me if he ever saw me again. Thus, I waited 30 years before I put that position on my Curriculum Vita, although we will see that the connection to this agency later legitimized my standing as a child welfare worker.



ACADEMIC DISILLUSIONMENT

My first teaching job was at the brand new Graduate School of Social Work at NYU. One summer in this period I taught at Smith College School

of Social Work, but I found city life to be more interesting. The NYU experience was very exciting because it was new and the small faculty had a strong sense of mission. Among the faculty were Tessie Berkman, Ralph Pumphrey, Samuel Mencher, Jean Maxwell, Rose Segal, and the noble Esther Hilton. But it was a troubled school in those days, because it was then part of (and competitive with) the School of Public Administration. My three years there were exciting, but they ended in disaster. The cold war between the two schools was concretized in the shared brownstone building, where "they" (2 full-time faculty) got the air-conditioned front, and "we" (15 full-time faculty) got one big, hot room in the back. New students were told to take "their" catalogue instead of "ours," and so on. The Council on Social Work Education had its finest hour in the year that Fidele Faurie, then the Dean of The University of Chicago School of Social Administration, served as chair of the accrediting committee. When the committee heard our story, they investigated the situation, and heeding our pleas, refused to accredit the school. This meant that it was over, that all but one of us would lose our jobs. (The one person, Tessie Berkman, stayed on to hire new faculty and to continue the program through what proved to be the second of three or four later generations of new faculty.) The decision we made to expose an unethical situation and a bad educational environment, and thus to lose our jobs, was probably one of the most principled

and unselfish actions any group of people have ever taken. However, the loss of accreditation meant that the second year students would be in danger of losing the value of their diplomas. A second principled action occurred when The Columbia University School of Social Work offered the students the opportunity to attend Columbia, without admissions interviews. Columbia's Acting Dean Sidney Berengarten knew an ethical issue when he saw it, and managed the complicated transfer of the students who chose to leave NYU. The day I packed up and left NYU, I was certain that I would never again teach in a school of social work.

THE REAL WORLD OF WORK

I decided to begin my career all over again, to work in public welfare where a social worker could do real things with real people. I needed to reassure myself that social work was about something besides petty politics, competition, and personal aggrandizement. I was desperate for a social purpose in my life, so I called the personnel department of the New York City Department of Welfare to find out what was required to get a job as a social investigator. I was told that I was over-qualified for the job; too many academic degrees. I had the impression that this was not a legal requirement... to be non-educated. Irate, I put in a call to the Commissioner's office to see if I could use his influence to get an entry level job in his agency. I

had known the Commissioner, James Dumpson, as an adjunct professor at the now defunct NYU Graduate School of Social Work, and I felt that he would understand. To my surprise (Who me?) his secretary told me that Dr. Dumpson had been trying to reach me for weeks, to propose a position. It turned out that the United States Children's Bureau wanted to fund a staff development program in the Bureau of Child Welfare (BCW), and when their representatives talked with me, they said it was my "child welfare experience" (!) along with other things that qualified me. After two years at the BCW, I was promoted to Assistant Commissioner in charge of staff development for the Department of Welfare. James Dumpson may have been the most enabling "boss" I have ever had. His administrative gift was his absolute confidence in the professionals who worked for him, so that whether we made good or faulty decisions, he stayed with us and never wavered. One day I met Eveline Burns waiting to see the Commissioner, and the first thing she asked was, "Have you found out what casework is yet?"

My years at that public agency were the most interesting and fulfilling in my career. (I wrote a book about the experience.ⁱⁱⁱ) Although I lived on valium and was in serious combat with senior civil servants and the police department's "training program," I discovered how even a small intervention can have a ripple effect in a system. I think that one of the most significant things I accomplished

there was the removal of the time clock on one floor. In those days, the Children's Bureau gave full scholarships...tuition, board and travel expenses...to workers who wanted to attend graduate schools of social work. This meant that people who had never been away from New York City could attend school in California if they chose to do so. Never before or since was I able, through the distribution of these awards, to make such a marked difference in people's lives. My job there included development of all of the staff, and I was able to accomplish an extraordinary thing when I helped a receptionist at the central office to stop thumbing her nose at clients. I had found my calling again.

A NEW BEGINNING

In 1962 I attended a meeting one evening at the Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW). I was not prepared (Who, me?) when Dean Fred DelliQuadri and Associate Dean Mitchell Ginsberg took me aside, each holding one of my hands, to ask me if I would like to join their faculty. Knowing that politics usually reigned in academia, I stupidly asked if Lucille Austin and Florence Hollis knew they were asking me, (as if a hiring decision could be made without them). Earlier that year I had shared an airplane ride with Isabel Stamm, a member of the CUSSW faculty search committee, going to a social work conference. I didn't realize then that our conversation was actually an interview, but I later learned that my ap-

pointment was held up while the casework faculty considered whether or not it would be "safe" to hire someone who was "either too impulsive or too compulsive." At least I didn't have to hide the fact that I was some kind of activist, even though it wasn't clear which "ive" I was afflicted with. So began the rest of my social work career, with a decrease from my munificent Department of Welfare salary of \$11,000 to \$9,000 as an associate professor.

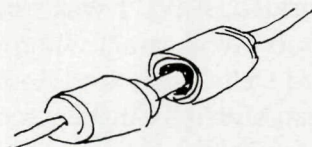
Being an academic in a professional school may be the best of all worlds, for it allows for a life of breadth and autonomy, the two features of a work life that have significance to me. Autonomy has meant the freedom to be myself, to be mobile, inventive, and when necessary, lazy. It took a while for me to realize that there was no one (but myself) to whom I was accountable. In the early years, I would telephone my secretary regularly to report on my whereabouts, probably confusing her with a supervisor or a boss. Then I discovered that I was my severest supervisor, and that I could be trusted to work on my own... an important quality for a faculty member at Columbia. In the course of my work as Chairs of the Council on Social Work Education's Commissions on Educational Planning and Commission on Specialization, I visited many schools of social work throughout the country and abroad, so I have had opportunities to compare the CUSSW with other places. Columbia is best understood as being reflective of its location in New York City.

Thereby, it suffers some of the same criticisms as does the City. Too fast, too noisy, too big, too pushy. If these things are so, then it requires a certain kind of toughness to be a part of it. More than anything, it demands of faculty members that they know who they are, what they believe in, what they want to accomplish...it is not an easy place in which to feel insecure. Once on the faculty though, it is a place where academic freedom is taken very seriously, and this covers one's pursuit of possibilities, the freedom to take a wrong turn, the institutional support of one's work, and a healthy collegiality. The price one might pay for this open system of thought and action is that it can be professionally lonesome at times (if everyone enjoys autonomy). Here, as I try to sort out the threads in my professional life, I realize that it is because I was left alone that I could branch out into so many interesting activities.

ROAMING IN THE PROFESSION

In almost four decades I have lectured; conferred; given workshops; and trained at approximately 150 social agencies, universities and conferences. Reflecting on these occasions, it is interesting that while I don't remember all of the subject matter I covered, I can recall special things about many of the visits. For example, I remember some of the people who have driven me to and from airports, tours in Utah, Arizona, and New Orleans; campuses like Tuskegee,

Sherbrooke in Canada, and Sussex in England. I remember a bomb scare on the plane on my way to University of Southern California, and I still mourn for the school that was dismantled between the times of my invitation and my (forgotten) arrival. Mostly, I remember the New York State Welfare Conference in Buffalo, when we learned after lunch that President Kennedy was killed. Traveling to other places for professional reasons is something like being a field work advisor... you make connections with new people, and you have experiences that teach you new things and enrich your life. Also, it gives reassurance that you are indeed part of a unique and definable profession, when social workers talk the same language and consider exactly the same issues everywhere you go.



I took my turn on the Board and chaired several Commissions of the Council on Social Work Education during the years just before the expansion of BSW programs. Generally speaking (as this narrative has already shown), I am not a joiner. I am not patient enough with organizational politics, nor do I do well when committees detour from their assigned tasks, or when members have hidden agendas.

These may be structural features of committee life, so it is just as well that I have come to terms with the fact that there are just some things I shouldn't do.

On the other hand, when Ann Minahan and Bea Saunders spoke to me about becoming the Book Review Editor of *Social Work* (Who, me?) I reveled in that opportunity. When it came time to select books for review, the staff would place them all on a huge table, spines up, in double rows. I had mixed feelings... one of power, where I could actually decide which books were to be chosen, and another of guilt, where I complained of feeling like a murderer when I didn't choose a book. The entire process was wonderful... skimming the books, corresponding with reviewers, seeing the completed reviews. Perhaps it had something to do with the beginning, middle, and end idea and the fact that there was a finished product, and of course, that it all had to do with books.

The invitation by the NASW to be the Editor-in-Chief of *Social Work* (Who, me?) was another wonderful surprise, and although it was hard and tedious work, it engaged me with authors' new ideas (and delicate egos), and the spectacular NASW publishing staff. My strongest impression of those years is of Linda Beebe, in the editorial department then, and her ubiquitous coca colas. I soon discovered that writing editorials was a serious risk-taking affair, and that any editorial decision could appear to be a life or death matter. Nothing in life is without its politics, and edit-

ing a professional journal is no more sanguine a job than is committee work or teaching. The scariest thing about participating in putting out a professional journal is that once it is published, there is no way to erase anything.

AFFILIA

Soon after leaving that post I was asked by the Editorial Board of *AFFILIA: The Journal of Women and Social Work* to join them, and a few years later to be the Editor-in-Chief. (Of course, who, me?) I had no idea then that I was a feminist, and in fact I had been reprimanded by some members of the first NASW Women's Conference for a paper I had written that was deemed to be critical of the women's movement.^{iv} (It wasn't true.) Members of *AFFILIA*, particularly Naomi Gottlieb and Diane Bernard, convinced me that I had feminist leanings, and in fact I immediately realized that it was only through a feminist lens that I could make sense of my personal life history. The *AFFILIA* adventure has been unique for me. The Board is the only committee I know where people fight to remain on it, and where I, the non-joiner, have had the most enlightening, educative, and life-affirming experiences of my career. I am not entirely sure even now how I would define feminism, because I think it has many

different meanings depending upon context/standpoint/situation. But my association with the *AFFILIA* Board has convinced me that there is such a "universal" as being a feminist, if it can be likened to equality, fairness, and consideration. When the editorship becomes taxing in caring for the details, inevitably, some member of the Board will offer help or carry out the task. When mistakes are made, the members sympathize rather than criticize. This feminist thread, although a fairly new addition to the tapestry I am weaving here, has provided a certain kind of platform, where standing on tiptoes and leaning over, I can peer down on the career I am trying to describe, and begin to find some explanations for things that went right and wrong. That feminist analysis of my professional career will have to wait for me to re-think my professional trajectory... a story always left unfinished. As I mentioned earlier, the feminist lens has helped me to re-interpret my personal history, but that is not exactly the topic here.

POLITICS

Politics governs everything we do and to not consider them is to travel on a deceptive high road. Things are not looking too encouraging for social work in today's political atmosphere, and as always, the consequences are being felt within and without the profession. The attacks on the poor, on racial minorities, and on women are outrageous, and before this country returns to its senses and

to a more humane politic, many people are going to be badly hurt by the cuts in social welfare, health, and education. It is hard to know what any professional group can do in this reactionary environment, where the Congress knows right from wrong, and is deliberately choosing the wrong. This Congress doesn't need education; it needs to be voted out.

I was fortunate to have entered social work after World War II, when the reactionary political forces were ineffective in overthrowing The New Deal. Racism, classism, sexism, and ageism were certainly rampant, but there was, after the War, always a sense of hope and possibility. Social work was more valued as a profession, perhaps because it flourished in the shadow of Roosevelt and Truman, and because veterans (men) entered it on the GI Bill of Rights. Social workers like Bertha Reynolds were active in the labor movement, and as a student at the NYSSW I was part of a vocal political majority (even though I was CO-editor of the student newspaper called "The Id"). We once invited Bertha Reynolds to speak at school, expecting an imposing and aggressive figure to match her activist reputation. I was shocked to see a diminutive figure, wearing a tiny straw hat with a flower in front that bobbed when she spoke in a New England whisper. When the Community Service Society, then one of the most powerful social agencies in New York City, had its 75th anniversary, there was some labor strife, and students and faculty marched on a picket

line around the Roosevelt Hotel in the mornings, and in the afternoons we all attended the professional meetings. Everything we did made sense to us at the time.



"The 60's" (and 70's) were different. Nothing made sense...the assassinations of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and Medgar Evers, for example. The protests for Civil Rights and against the Vietnam War...these were clear issues in which we could actively join, but the students' struggle against "the establishment" was a problem for me. I was a professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work then, and I was part of the establishment! Again, who, me? Students threw themselves in front of my classrooms and wouldn't let others in. We held classes in our homes, and students accused me of bribing them into submission when I passed around cookies. Sometimes on picket lines, other times peeking out through windows at the mayhem on the campus, I felt that I flunked "The 60's and 70's," perhaps because I could not identify with the students' assaults upon me (!) who was on their side.

Then came the 80's and the 90's, and I found my voice again, and have complained because students haven't reacted strongly enough against "the establishment." Did I learn from

the 60's test through which I had suffered? Was my academic perch so comfortable that I could afford to be radical? Were the lines drawn between progressive and reactionary more clearly defined? Were the issues more local and manageable? Perhaps this time around, the attacks on health, welfare, and education resonated so sharply with the time I began in social work, when it was certain that government had a necessary role in enhancing the social and economic fabric. I think this idea is built into my character. When I was 20 years old, I told my father that I wanted to be a social worker, and he said "I always knew you would become a socialist." I am not sure I knew what it meant then.

The politics of feminism were concealed from me in the beginning of my career. I didn't know until as late as the 1980's that there were alternate (sexist) explanations for my own construction of my personal and professional worlds. Upon reflection, I now recognize that men controlled the terms of debates, and that it was a given that men would be in charge of most things. It is hard to believe now, that early on we never questioned that. Further, in the beginning, before Brown vs. The Board of Education and the Civil Rights movement, racism was not defined as something to be addressed, although we all recognized its presence. McCarthyism and the activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee radicalized me, and my first public political protest was to join thousands of others at

Union Square in New York City at a vigil when the Rosenbergs were put to death. Thereafter, there have been many (Civil Rights, Women's Rights, the Vietnam War) vigils in Washington, and I now realize that although these actions do not have an immediate effect, they always leave an impression... to resonate later

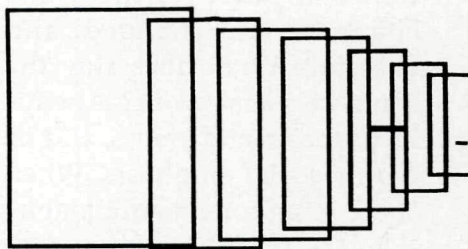
TEACHING

So much has been written about teaching that I am not sure that there is much that I can add to be helpful to anyone. I remember that before my first class at NYU, I was having coffee at Nedicks, and someone I knew sat next to me and asked about my thoughts on teaching. Distance from the occasion allows me to repeat what I said then... "My vision is of students as little birds with their beaks open, waiting for me to drop in worms of knowledge, but I don't know what to tell them." I don't know where such an idea could have come from, because I had had wonderful teachers, and I had never had such a patronizing teacher. Since then, after Would student doctors dare to complain because their professors didn't make their anatomy class exciting enough? I wouldn't go to a physician who had learned about disease through role play. (You be the germ and I'll be the tummy.) Often, when I look out at a classroom of students, I think of their clients who need them to be competent, and then I get serious. I don't know if it works for all students, but I generally

"teach to the top" so as to induce students to reach, and reach more. There is no universal way of learning, and we don't always know which approach is best for a single student or a classroom. That's why teaching is fun; after every class when I think that if only I had done it this or that way... there is always the next class to try it differently.

Education in social work has changed radically since I was a student, and although it isn't relevant to make comparisons, it does sharpen the focus of analysis. Earlier I mentioned the holistic orientation of my teachers at the NYSSW. For example, it was Gordon Hamilton, a major casework theorist, who analyzed and supported the idea of entitlements in public assistance in her editorials in *Social Work*. Philip Klein made research so integral to practice, that one could hardly distinguish between them. Lucille Austin, known as a casework theorist/practitioner, introduced social sciences along with Freud into her classes. In the decades since, social workers have necessarily become more specialized, because areas of practice have proliferated, knowledge has increased, funding for research is sectorized, and research methodology in particular has taken off on a trajectory of its own. It is no longer easy, if it is at all possible, for either academics or practitioners to have generic competence, or broad interests. Perhaps it is true that we are coming to know more and more about less and less, but this is inevitable when there is so much to know, and

when we are paying so little attention to the purposes and meanings of it all. Dinosaur-like, I continue to press for those purposes and meanings in the books and articles that I write, and I am well aware that I may be among the last of those who still seek the messiness of real-world practice, and who revel in the idea of the unknowable. As my story, told thus far, should make clear, I am not a strong believer



in predictability; I care more about processes than outcomes; I am perhaps over-cautious about social workers being authorities about the "objective" world; I don't think that there are "truths" out there that can be found if we were only to polish the lenses on our microscopes. Also, I am not convinced that acquiring knowledge (endlessly and a-contextually) is the best way to engage social workers in effective and meaningful practice.

A final thought on social work education is a sad one for me. I foresee (in an all too near future) the "down-sizing" if not the elimination of masters level programs. Ph.D.'s will be emphasizing research, and BSWs are already outnumbering MSW programs. Entry to practice will

be at the BSW level, and (as in psychology) the next level will be the Ph.D. How the Profession itself has created this pending scenario is a topic for another article. I am continuing to struggle with the origins and meanings of this shift in educational focus, but I fear that the outcome is inevitable, no matter the causes. I once took a doctoral course in administration and chose as the topic for my term paper the story of an administrator I knew who had behaved badly in her job, which itself was probably set up for her to fail, and was subsequently fired. I entitled the paper "Was She Jumped or Did She Push?" Perhaps that will be the title for my epitaph on masters level social work education.

WRITING

All social workers do not write, although I wish they would, because it is the only way to spread the word about what practitioners do. Academics call this disseminating knowledge, and now that scholarship is so closely tied to numbers of reading references cited and to statistical sophistication, it has become intimidating to those who have something to say, but do not have the academic skills. I regret that we do not hear the practitioner's voice, because I have always used writing and publishing as an outlet for my ideas and convictions. It is as if I cannot help myself; writing is a way of sorting things out, of talking to colleagues, of framing debates, of arguing issues.

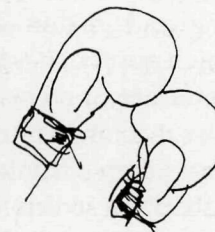
Practitioners' experiences, ideas, and convictions must be equally pressing, but they are inhibited by "official" writers, who may have less vital or interesting things to say. Writing often seems to me like playing the piano; when one has mastered the score, the music just goes through one's fingers onto the keys. It is almost an unconscious process (not mastering the ideas, or the piano score) that the words come because they insist upon it. So, since 1959, when I wrote my first article,^v I used publishing as one might use a log to write about what was important to me in social work.

Writing these "reflections" has caused me to look at what I have written in over four decades. It is not easy to do such a review. Times and ideas have changed, and it isn't possible to take anything back. Could I have been that concerned about so much in social work? Are there contradictions? Did my articles get better or worse? The list seems long when compared to its impact on the profession. Six books, 46 articles and chapters, uncounted editorials, and about a dozen monographs, in addition to the drawer full of speeches and articles that didn't get published. So why didn't social work always do what I wrote about? I conclude that writing... even publishing... is a private matter. It has everything to do with self-expression, and that is why it is gratifying. Beware of the illusion that anyone listens!

Reflecting upon what I have chosen to write about, I am not sure of the impetus. Some-

times it had to do with what I was doing or thinking at the time, or with my response to another's work. Once in a while someone would ask for something. So, there are the staff development articles, vi and the work in child welfare,^{vii} and a variety of subjects that were "hot" at the time, but that I did not pursue further. My field of practice interest was always family and children's service, and as in all the other social work fields of practice, the arena changed, and changed, and changed. What does stay the same in social work? Always its purposes and values, and its psychosocial emphasis. When these components are stable, then the profession can adapt to changes in society, family structure, life-styles, diverse populations, and problem definitions. My preoccupations have been more with the application of those stable components to a range of substantive matters. In other words, I have argued on behalf of some aspects of practice theory in many different contexts.^{viii} The invention of the eco-systems perspective was a way of extending my interest in the "psychosocial" focus of practice.^{ix} It took a very long time for the idea to take hold, partly because it framed a way to look at cases and it didn't tell practitioners what to do, and partly because it was at first viewed as "anti-clinical." (This caused me to respond with a book that would challenge that criticism.^x) It has often seemed to me that going public through writing is, like a crisis, as much

a hazard as an opportunity.



PICKING FIGHTS

Each of us muses about the way we would like things to be. Some of us are more patient than others about the direction and pace of change, and whether or not we should enter public debates. Perhaps because I have always been "hooked" on social work and have wanted it to be "right," I have been one of the impatient musers and have entered debates perhaps too often. The first one I remember was about the once popular idea that poor people should be called "muti-problem families." I have always been impatient with undocumented, over-generalized labeling of people. Euphemisms so often serve as escape hatches and distort reality, and I prefer to confront things as they are.^{xi}

Of another order, a long-standing debate has been about private practice. This has been sort of a "fools walk in..." effort, and the debates in the journals^{xiii} were often carried over into personal exchanges. My concerns about private practice in social work are of two kinds... ideological and practical. As for the ideological issues, they are not provable, and my values can

only share space with the values of private practitioners. I believe that social work's historical mission has been to ameliorate the condition of the poor, those who have been discriminated against, and those who need supports so as to cope with social and economic failures in society. Private practice in social work, by definition, means that fees are charged and this has to exclude many of the very people social workers are supposed to serve. Also, in order to be a viable for-profit enterprise, private practice must "cream" the help-seeking population for clients who are healthier, are more motivated, have more self-defined problems, and so on... leaving out many of the very people social workers are supposed to be serving. Finally, as a consequence of for-profit practice and the "creaming" I mentioned, social work private practice inevitably comes to resemble psychotherapy. (If one leaves out clientele who have environmental difficulties, then what is left are cases often defined as having "only" psychological problems.) This process narrows the focus of intervention, and redefines the purposes of social work. Given the proliferation of private practitioners, it is obvious that perhaps most of my professional colleagues do not share my beliefs.

This leads to my view of the practical implications of private practice in social work. When comparisons are made to medicine, which offers the model of private practice, we should look more closely at what the profession of medicine does. I

am not referring to individual physicians, but to their profession, which is accountable for the health care of the public. In over hundreds of years physicians have carved out their domain, which today covers a broad range of health care services from public health to brain surgery. Whether the medical profession does this well or not is not at issue here; what is important is that the public expects it to, and the profession claims its universal domain. Turning to social work, let us assume that the profession is accountable for providing social services to the public, and that (would it were so) the public expects this and turns to social workers to address the psycho-social needs of people in a range of areas. Does the profession meet this obligation? Does the public turn to skilled social workers to deal effectively with problems in these fields? When social work is visible, as in public child welfare, are there any professional social workers left there? My practical point is that social workers in private practice have skipped the necessary step in the process of "maturing" into private practice (if that is how it is perceived) and that until the profession assumes responsibility for social services that are delivered, recognizable, and valued by the public, then there will be no core professional identity to which private practitioners can be attached. In this political era when social work services are being cut it has been difficult to convince the public that social workers are necessary. Can we imagine the public questioning the value of physicians?

The invisibility of highly trained professional practitioners in the central public and voluntary service institutions in this country will not promote the future of professional social work. There will always be a need for social services, but we are already noting that non-professional practitioners are functioning with lowered educational standards and with titles such as human service workers. Will the profession of social work ever take back its function? And will there be any professionally educated practitioners left?

Any social worker who has worked in organizations knows how hard it is to practice well in a bureaucracy, and it is probably this more than any other reason that has driven practitioners into private practice. But this is an organizational world (ask any physician in a hospital or teacher in a school) and agencies will remain a fact of life. So social workers will have to learn how to manage them just as have physicians. My practical concerns are based upon data, not ideology, and ironically, it is toward the goal of their self-preservation that I have been nagging at practitioners to think hard about the erosion of professional social work. It has been a career-long struggle to make the case for the profession, but I now feel great sadness when I view the down-grading of organizational social services, the trend toward using non-MSW practitioners, and the parallel up-grading of individual private practice of psychotherapy. There may not be a direct causal connection between

these phenomena, but there does seem to be a reciprocal contributory effect.

CHANGE WAS COMING

"The 60's" introduced radical changes in society, and social work needed to find new ways to adapt to those changes. The professional literature addressed many aspects of the impending changes, and naturally, I worried a lot about the future of practice.^{xiii} Social workers were still focusing narrowly on intra-psychic change, and in my view, many did not notice that the client population was becoming culturally diverse, that once-overlooked poor people were becoming articulate about wanting social services, and that the emerging public and academic interest in social phenomena was having an impact on all professions. In 1970 I wrote a book about broadening the scope of casework practice and its methodology of study, diagnosis and treatment. I proposed changing the terminology and substance, to call it social work practice and exploration, assessment, and intervention. My intention was to encourage practitioners to be more inclusive of client problems, and less medicalized in their thinking. This book^{xiv} did not interest many people at first, and in fact, a close colleague complained to me that "You don't tell practitioners what to do." (That has always been true of my writing... and my teaching. I am a strong believer in framing the topic, identifying choices, and relying on people to be guided by their

own judgment, values, and experience. That is the only way I have ever learned to do anything.)

The response to the book that had the greatest effect upon me came in an experience that reflected the very reasons that I had written the book in the first place. Florence Hollis and I went to lunch one day (in 1970) so that she could find out why I had written the book, which she thought would be damaging to practice...while I, in my missionary's zeal, believed that I was trying to save practice. As we were returning to school across Broadway (a six lane avenue with an island in the middle), I noted that on the south island there was a large group of Columbia students, some of whom were carrying placards, while others were throwing tomatoes. Their target was what seemed to be a small battalion of New York City policemen on horses, lined up on the north island. Florence Hollis and I were deep in conversation about the book....she asking, "What social changes?," and my saying hesitantly, "Everything..." (Professor Hollis had been my mentor and was a senior colleague, so this was not a comfortable conversation for me.) As we crossed the street, we dodged tomatoes, but kept on talking. I don't believe that she noticed the students' demonstration, and I remain convinced that she did not understand my reasons for writing the book.

Six years later I wrote a second book about practice, this time introducing systems theory and eco maps, in hopes that

theory would help to support my point about the necessity for practice to become more adaptive to the real world.^{xv} This time the response was slightly better, and it laid the foundation for later writing on the eco-systems perspective. I am certain that many colleagues still believe that I have been "anti-clinical" in my writing, and I have argued that my attention to individualizing practice is clinical, and all that I have done has been to broaden the definition of clinical to include individuals' environments. I also remain a Freudian, in my belief in the unconscious and in the structure and functions of the ego. Perhaps the criticism of my clinical treachery has more to do with my nettling about private practice. In my recent book on assessment^{xvi} I hope I have laid to rest some of the criticisms, for we all want to be liked. After these years of writing, wherein one puts one's ideas out for public review, analysis, and criticism, I am pretty much convinced that the academic's motto should be "Publish and perish!"

CODA

There are always new frontiers in which professionals can find issues ripe for debate. Currently, shifting epistemologies as they affect feminism and research are among the most interesting. As for feminism, it is encouraging that feminists, since 1973, have recognized that feminism is not only about white middle class women, that poor women's bread and butter issues are deserving of attention, and

that there must be common cause with the plight of women throughout the world. The directions to be taken in social work research are less certain^{xvii} Will there ever be more attention paid to discovery than to proof? Will research move toward more holistic and denser models and become less fragmented and narrow in its focus? Will the language of research become more comprehensible? Will statistics become the servant rather than the mistress of projects? Will practice become the mistress rather than the servant of research? Will we ever give up the search for absolute validity? As one who has always insisted upon viewing events and processes in context, I cannot imagine what universal, objective "truths" would look like if they were not situated.

And that applies to this narrative. The "truth" of my story is not universal; it can only be recognized as a reflection of my life and the times in which I lived. When I entered social work, I thought that it was about settlement houses and concrete services, but when I went to graduate school, I discovered that practice theory, heavily influenced by Freudian thought, was more influential than the ideology of social activism. All was not lost, however; Gordon Hamilton taught and lived out her commitment to psychosocial practice, and as she was undoubtedly the greatest intellectual

influence upon me, this idea probably kept me centered. I have never found it necessary (or even possible) to think separately about clients' motives and feelings and the provision of services. Because of my grounding in social casework (albeit narrowly defined in the 1940's), its approach to problems... study/explore, diagnose/assess, treat/intervene... has served me in each professional situation, even when it was not a clinical one. I used it to figure out all of my experiences with the OSE children, the bookie's agency, the NYU debacle, the glorious clutter of the Department of Welfare, the organizational work I did, editorial problems, and even daily life at Columbia. Social work values cannot be overlooked, either, for the role they have played in my life. Although we have not always used it as a governing principle, the Golden Rule... do unto others as you would have others do unto you... has always guided me. Its observance could account for my impatience with those who disrespectfully remove children from their parents, who tell people how to lead their lives, or who relate to others as if they were objects.

I have learned something from writing these reflections. I have recognized a kind of coherence in my social work career. Often I think that I have both practiced and written the same things over and over again, al-

though at different times, about different topics, in different places. I have also been pretty much the same person no matter when or where. Does this depict stubbornness or commitment? Perhaps both. I have lived through a lot of change in the world and in the profession, and I am often surprised at how easy it was to adapt. Happily, I have kept most of my friends and I have never, ever been bored or have felt that I chose the wrong path in becoming a social worker. For this I have to thank the entire cast of characters in this play. □

August 1995

REFERENCES

- i Stanley, Liz (1994) The knowing because experiencing subject: narratives, lives and autobiography in *Knowing the Difference: Feminist perspectives in epistemology*. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (eds.) New York: Routledge p. 146.

Following are selected articles and chapters that I list in the event that the reader might choose to look more closely at what I have referred to in the narrative.

do unto others as you would have others do unto you

REFERENCES

- ii Popeye
- iii Meyer, Carol H. (1966) *Staff Development in Public Welfare Agencies*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- iv (1982) Issues for women in a woman's profession in *Women power and change*. New York: NASW 1982.
- v (1959) Quest for a broader base for family diagnosis *Social Casework*, July
- vi (1961) A development program for child welfare staff. *Children*. July/August
- (1962) Staff development: a social work process, *Public Welfare*, April.
- vii (1968) Child welfare and licensing practices. *Social Service Review*, Sept.
- (1983) Staffing issues in child welfare. *Child Welfare: Current Dilemmas, Future Directions*. Itasca, Ill.: Peacock Press
- (1985) A feminist perspective on foster care: a redefinition of the categories. *Child Welfare*, May/June.
- (1985) The institutional context of child welfare. *The Handbook of Child Welfare*. A. Hartman and J. Laird (eds.) N.Y.: Free Press.
- viii (1968) Casework below the poverty line. *Social Work Practice: Proceedings of the Social Welfare Forum*.
- (1968) Integrating practice demands in social work education. *Social Casework*, October.
- (1973) Direct service in new and old contexts *Shaping the New Social Work*. A.J. Kahn, ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1973) Purpose and boundaries: social casework fifty years later. *Social Casework*, May.
- (1978) Practice and policy: a family focus. *Social Casework*, May.
- ix (1988) The eco-systems perspective. *Paradigms of Clinical Social Work*. R. Dorfman, ed. NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- x (ed.) (1983) *Clinical Social Work in an Eco-Systems Perspective*. NY: Columbia University Press.
- xi (1963) Individualizing the multi-problem family. *Social Casework*, May.
- xii (1977) Response to position paper of education for clinical social work. *Clinical Social Work, Journal*, Winter.
- xiii (1966) Casework in a changing society. *Social Work Practice Proceedings of The Social Welfare Forum*.
- (1967) The impact of urbanization on child welfare. *Child Welfare*, October.
- (1970) The changing concept of individualized services. *Social Casework*, May.
- (1979) What directions for direct practice? *Social Work*, June.
- xiv (1970) *Social Work Practice: A Response to the Urban Crisis*. NY: Free Press.
- xv (1976) *Social Work Practice: The Changing Landscape*. NY: Free Press.
- xvi (1993) *Assessment in Social Work Practice*. NY: Columbia University Press.
- xvii (1992) Social work assessment: is there an empirical base? *Research in Social Work*, (Special issue), July.

Copyright of Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping is the property of Cleveland State University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.