

# And the Angels Sang

by Paul Abels



There was a great deal of rumbling in the corner of heaven reserved for social workers. The angels were surprised because this group was usually fairly calm, supportive of each other, usually thinking along the same lines, though not always as sensibly as some of the angels believed appropriate. Although they preferred staying out of squabbles, the angels had been instructed to find out what was going on and to remind the parties involved that they had earned a place in heaven, a most desired location, mainly because of its harmony and tranquillity. The turmoil they were causing did not resound like a heavenly choir.

The loudest protestations seemed to be coming from the group surrounding Jane Addams, who was involved in a rather serious bit of dialogue with Mary Richman and, in fact, was waving a finger in her face. "It's you and that charity organization society stuff again that has led to this silly business down there," she was yelling. The silly business turned out to be something called the 100th anniversary of professional social work. "Even you have to admit that social work is more than a 100 years old—the first charity organization here started in 1877." "Amen,"

chanted Reverend Gurteen, "and I started it." And don't forget Hull house opened in 1889, and three years before that the Neighborhood Guild, a settlement house, was opened in New York City by Stanton Coit. Some in the audience turned to him smiling. "Where do they come off with this 'only 100 year' idea?" asked Amos G. Warner, "some early welfare historian?" Richman, a little subdued, muttered, "Sure we are right about being older than that, but you see they added the word 'professional'; that's where they got us." "That's just like you," responded Jane, "you're not willing to organize the community; they ain't got me. Professional nonsense. I don't intend to let anyone kick me out of my profession, certainly not these youngsters who haven't ever had to fight city hall and don't have any sense of history." "NASW should know better," muttered Florence Kelly. "It's just another one of those public relations spin organizations put out to engrandise themselves." "Now you're being a little harsh on them, Florence," said Ellen Starr, "celebrations are an important way to bring people together. That's what they are trying to do. Fund raisers know that has to be done, isn't that right?" she asked turning to the crowd. DuBois, one of the



founders of the NAACP, and who was in the middle of a conversation with Brian Mullanphy, founder of Travelers Aid, acknowledged the importance of celebrations, and how it connects people to their roots.

"How did they arrive at 1898, anyway?" asked Dorothy Dix. "NASW has a picture of me on their poster as having made a contribution to social work, and I died in 1887. Seems odd to me" "Well," said Edward T. Devine, the first director of what is now Columbia University School of Social Work, "it's because our school offered the first social work class at the Charity Organization Society Offices." "Not so!" shouted Graham Taylor. Chicago had a course two years before you did. We had them at the Chicago commons in conjunction with what is now the School of Social Service Administration." Heads nodded up and down and back and forth, and there was a little side fight going on as to who was first and who was right. Dr. Brackett from Simmons College tried to make a bid for having taught some of the first courses, but was not heard above the crowd.

"Well someone ought to help them get their history straight," complained Robert Woods, a former settlement director from East End House in Boston. "One of their publications says Simon N. Patten coined the term 'social workers' in 1900. I used the term social work in an article I wrote in 1893, and others used it before that. It's a plot to keep people from knowing how important

the settlements were in the development of social work." Patten, a mentor of Devine, and active in social welfare, silently moved to the rear of the increasingly growing crowd.

"Why are you taking all this so seriously?" asked Julia Lathrop. "We know what we did. If they want to define a professional as a person with a BSW or an MSW, so be it. They might soon say it can only be a person with a license." "It makes no difference," added Lillian Wald. "After all, just remember you were the ones who taught those first courses in those first schools. We set the stage. Let's see the hands of those of you who taught those early summer courses before it became the N.Y. School of Philanthropy." Up went the hands of Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, Zilpha Smith, Graham Taylor, Mary Simkhovitch, and numerous others. "They have us down as social workers, even if we wouldn't be accepted as professionals now," affirmed the Abbot sisters, almost in unison. "Humph," groaned Jane Addams with a shrug. "Humph, humph," echoed Richman, as she and Addams hugged each other.

"Let's have our own celebration," said Grace Dodge of the YWCA, "and we can honor all of those economists and sociologists like Franklyn Fraser; religious leaders and reformers like Charles Brace; all the people who did the early poverty studies; young men and women from all those settlements; and all those friendly visitors..." "And the people from the Salva-

tion Army!" someone shouted. "Everyone who helped make social work a caring profession concerned with social justice." "Ain't I a woman," Sojourner Truth joyously shouted, "and a social worker, too?" A bright light and warm spirit enveloped the crowd.

"And let's everyone drink a toast to Columbia University for all they have done. Here's to you, Edward, first or not, and to all those other firsts. SSA and Boston, the first to call themselves a school of social work. Case Western, first in group work." Voices from the crowd began to call out. "And don't forget the people who worked to clear out the slums and build public housing, and the community centers and Y's, and the Red Cross," shouted another. "And those in the hospitals," Cannon added. "No, we won't forget anyone!" the group trumpeted.

### Happy 100 plus Anniversary to Social Workers... ALL OF US!

It made the angels very happy... and they brought the champagne. Jacob Riis took their picture. □

*(All references to who did what first, and the dates, are reported as the "truth" in some written documents. These are available to interested parties.)*

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