



Dear Editor,

I thoroughly enjoyed the issue "Forgiveness." Congratulations on an in-depth examination of an issue important to the social work profession but unlikely to receive systematic coverage in other journals. Another important contribution from *Reflections* to an ongoing dialogue among social workers.

I was immediately drawn to Tropman's article on unforgiveness, having myself never been comfortable with the notion of forgiving my enemies. Try as I might to forgive in my heart, I in fact await opportunities for revenge against those who have wronged me. Fortunately, these opportunities do not arise, but contemplating the possibilities gives me comfort. I admire Tropman's courage in considering unforgiveness, because doing so lacks the moral attractiveness of the other articles, whose authors seem to have transcended the base need for revenge.

Tropman reminded me that the source of my discomfort with forgiving comes from an overly developed internal sense of 'justice'. But Tropman's description of justice is incomplete. Forgiving is what we do to our enemies. What of our friends? Surely a complete sense of justice must include rewards as well as punishments. What of the boy who risked the scorn of our peers by coming to my aid after I was pummeled by the schoolyard bully? The anonymous man who stopped by the side of the freeway to change the tire on my stranded wife's car? The senior professor who in-

sisted that I be first author because I needed it more than he did? Friends are those who go out of their way to help you when they have neither an obligation to do so, nor any expectation of reward. I remember every one of these people, and I anxiously await opportunities to repay them in kind.

Forgiveness focuses our attention toward our enemies, but this is only half of the story. Perhaps a discussion of the entire issue is incomplete without considering our behavior toward our friends. In any case, for me, doing so completes my internal sense of justice and makes my desire for revenge against my enemies seem less base.

Dale Weaver

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Dear Editor,

I find it difficult to consider forgiving people who commit heinous crimes such as murder, "gross disfigurement, and permanent psychological damage of loved ones due to acts of random violence; politically initiated or politically condoned acts of cultural/racial genocide, terrorism and the use of weapons of mass destruction" as stated in John Oliver's article in the Fall 1998 issue [*Reflections* Vol. 4, No. 4, page 4].

John E. Tropman started "I do not forgive and I do not forget." In some situations I cannot forgive; I cannot forget. However, I can live with "unfair-

ness, serious slights, large inappropriateness, and the like, to me or others" though I may not like it. I, too, hold on to things—objects, possessions, as well as feelings, as Tropman notes. The issue, in my case, is an inability and unwillingness to let go. Further, Tropman says "unforgiveness may act as an energy source and hence have positive elements." I agree.

Micheal Andes writes about a client upset over his wife's drinking. Powerless to help her, he kept his feelings inside and displaced those feelings, eventually slapping his daughter, resulting in criminal charges. Though he deserved punishment for his behavior, I think it was excessive. In any event, although he sought treatment, he was unwilling to forgive his wife.

We all bear scars from experiences we have lived through. I am glad that Paul Ephross was able to write about his experience with Norman Goroff and has done some healing from his disappointment in himself. I agree with the following: "So, I need to forgive myself for not having been able to do something which I was not able to do and perhaps no one would have been able to do at that time."

In an experience that I had, I was able to forgive the perpetrator because he did not deliberately frighten me (he had emotional problems) and was responding to an inner urge at the moment. I survived the experience without any physical harm and only temporary psychological distress.

On Labor Day 1996 there was a male client in my office, located in a building away from the main agency building. He was studying a puzzle map of the U.S. with me when he turned and asked if I was married. When I replied (in the affirmative), he stood up, faced me, unzipped his fly, and exposed himself. I was so shocked I lost my balance and fell to the floor. I picked myself right up and told him to zip up his pants which he did. He opened the door, walked out of the office, headed towards the Boys' lounge and went inside. At that moment the supervisor saw me and I told him what had happened. An ambulance was called and the client was taken to the hospital.

I was given the next few days off and I was interviewed soon after in my home by a police officer,

in the presence of my husband. Administrative staff asked me to press charges but I refused to because I was not injured physically and was attempting to heal emotionally by sharing my experience with family, friends, staff and other social work professional. I made reference to the incident at an American Association for Social Work for Groups meeting where the discussion was on the murder of three engineering professors at San Diego State University by a disgruntled student. Though I considered seeking professional counseling, I never did. I had such a good support system and felt that I was not harmed irreparably and the young

man was getting appropriate treatment.

As a result of this experience, the agency passed a rule that no social worker in the facility could counsel a resident alone in a private office.

Last, but not least, I wish to express my admiration and affection for Peter and Linda Biehl. They take solace from the thought that "a death in vain is much more terrible than a death that led to a community resolving its problems." May they continue to heal from the loss of their dear daughter, Amy.

Jeanne A. Gill, LCSW



### Transitional

First he said:  
It is the woman in us  
That makes us write--  
Let us acknowledge it--  
Men would be silent  
We are not men  
Therefore we can speak  
And be concious  
(of the two sides)  
Unbent by the sensual  
As befits accuracy.

I then said:  
Dare you make this  
Your propaganda?

And he answered:  
Am I not I--here?

-William Carlos Williams

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