

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

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The author was inspired to write the following narrative, after visiting with colleagues who teach courses on social justice. Here she reflects back on her experiences with the topic.

Promoting social justice is very important to me, and has always been a part of my psyche. I promoted it through my behavior as a teenager in Norfolk, Virginia. My mother was also born in Norfolk. She was a quiet, laid back person, so I never knew her attitude toward minorities. But there was no question about where I stood on the subject. For example, from 1943 - 1945 when I was an undergraduate student at the Norfolk Division of the College of William and Mary. I did not have a car so I took the bus to school. In those days of "Jim Crow" segregation, black people had to sit in the backs of buses, and I used to spontaneously follow them to the back of the bus. I never discussed this behavior with anyone, I just did it. As I think back about my actions, I do not remember anyone—black or white—responding to my behavior. I just fit in. I was on automatic pilot. This narrative is the first time I've ever discussed my non-verbal promotion of social justice during that time.

From 1945-1947, I attended the Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary. I served on the Intercollegiate Council, which was composed of black and white colleges. As a representative of RPI, a white college, I attended a meeting at Hampton Institute, a black college. At one of our RPI meetings, the black poet Langston Hughes, was a guest presenter. After listening to him, I purchased his book *Shakespeare in Harlem*. He wrote: "For Miss Jeanne Levinson" (my single name) and signed it: "Sincerely,

Langston Hughes (February 12, 1947)." I would like to share a stanza from one of the poems in the book, entitled "Ku Klux:"

*They took me out
To some lonesome place
They said, "Do you believe
In the great white race?"*

When I lived in Boston, I publicly advocated for women's rights. I paraded in front of the State House in Boston protesting against the Chastity Laws of 1865, which prohibited women from getting abortions. I met with doctors willing to perform abortions and made their information available to women who needed it. I also worked with William R. Baird, the Director of the Parents' Aid Society in Long Island, on birth control and abortion issues.

While I was still a staff member at Jewish Family and Children's Service in Boston, I helped people find affordable housing, jobs, and health care insurance. From 1954-1958, while I was a student at Boston University, I was placed at a settlement house in Dorchester, Massachusetts called Hecht House, and practiced group work with eight year olds to teenagers.

One of the most significant experiences I have had is related to my association with the Girl Scouts of America, beginning in 1933 when I was a Brownie Scout, and ending in 1952, when I was an assistant camp director. During that time, I learned many interactive skills that

I used as a college student. In 1952, I represented Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware at a Girl Scout leader training camp called Camp Edith Macy, in Pleasantville, New York. I appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* with 11 other Girl Scout leaders from the United States, and 12 Girl Scout leaders from around the world.

I received a Bachelors degree in Social Science from the Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary (now known as Virginia Commonwealth University), a Master's in Social Service from Boston University, and a Ph.D. in Human Behavior with a minor in nutrition from La Jolla University. When I attended Boston University, I met with students from Boston College. One of the students from there, whom I knew, Father Samuel Carter, became the Archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica.

Currently, I am an adjunct faculty member at San Diego State University School of Social Work. I tutor undergraduate and graduate social work students and help them with their written assignments. Most of the students I see are foreign students.

In 1993 I, along with Joan Parry from California State University, San Jose, helped form the Southern California Chapter of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, Inc. (AASWG), an international professional organization. In those days we sponsored group work training/peer consultation six times a year as well as four workshops. We provided CEU's at no extra charge for the registrants at the four workshops. We sponsored the 28th International Symposium of the AASWG in 2006, in San Diego. Each year I support a presentation at the symposium as a memorial for my husband. It helps further the important justice objectives we believe in.

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