

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

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The following narrative discusses how social justice manifests itself through three generations of a social work family.

The subject of social justice was not offered in our graduate school curriculum. Now it is being offered in many departments all over the world. Our grandchild identified universities like Medill in Montreal and St. Andrews University in Scotland, and said that many American universities have it in their curriculum.

So how or when did we learn about social justice? Did it come to us while we were becoming social workers?

An answer may be found during the years after my husband, Milton Hyman, left Brooklyn at age nineteen. Before graduate school, he worked in the Navy Yard as a welder and started the Navy Yard union. When he started at Chicago's School of Social Service Administration (SSA), with his Union background he became president of the first student Social Workers' Union. It joined with the Chicago Social Workers' Union to achieve a first: a 40 hour week for social workers. What an accomplishment for student social workers! An injustice corrected.

Milton and I both happened to sit next to one another in the first Social Group Work class mandated by the Council on Social Work Education at the University of Chicago. We started our first jobs in Chicago, and moved to Hyde Park when the children began school.

One day, our seven year old daughter Amie excitedly announced she was going to a sleepover at a friend's house across the alley. I inquired as to where she would sleep. She replied rather indignantly, "Mommy, some people are poor; not everybody has their own bed! I don't know where I'll sleep but isn't it great she wants to be my friend?" How did she learn this?

We moved from the north side of Chicago to Hyde Park, near the University of Chicago.

Not an easy decision. My mother—who lived near us and had recently been widowed—was appalled. "What's the matter with the north side? Why Hyde Park?" she asked. How could we explain why we would leave her alone on the north side and move so far away? We wanted our children grow up in a more integrated neighborhood. "What's wrong with the schools on the north side?" She wondered what was so bad about living in our north side middle class apartment. "Such a nice apartment," she said. "Mom, our social work buddies would be our neighbors." This she *did* understand.

Though we prospered some, how could we forget the depression years? We remembered growing up when my father did not have work and we did not have an income. How could we ever forget the feelings and the fears about my father's unemployment or how to make ends meet?

Mother finally found work in a dress factory. I recall us looking on with concern as she returned from work each day and counted her daily total of piecework coupons, which were an indication of how much money she had made. The faster she sewed, the more coupons she would accumulate. I remember Dad returning from job hunting without good news. Could we ever forget? We felt it again and again for each and every one of our friends and neighbors who'd been laid off or unemployed.

Each day we hoped that the mail would include some news about my father's family, who were still stranded in Europe where religious hatred was annihilating those left behind. How could we hold on to basic values while awaiting word from my father's family? All we heard was that Jews in Europe were being killed. At a very early age we learned

about injustice, with few opportunities to learn about social justice.

Later, life changed. With our similar interests, my husband and I united to create our future work life in group and community endeavors.

Years later, our daughter Amie proclaimed, "I'm not choosing Social Work as my graduate school coursework just because you and Dad did!" She stressed that it was her own choice. When our son Bill decided to forego social work training and major in business, did we feel we were failures? Our son didn't. He says he trains and provides jobs for people all over the world. Our third and youngest offspring, Karmit, chose a law school that specialized in Public Interest Law. They call her "The Bag Lady's Lawyer."

Milton remained in community service throughout his career, in state and national projects. His time in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was memorable. While there he was paired with what they call "Double Dippers," who are retired generals and colonels working for a federal agency once again. They tease Milton asking, "Milt, why are you the only division director who meets with your staff in a group seeking their opinions?" So why do people turn out the way they do?

Years ago when I was traveling and teaching Group Work and Family Therapy in Israel, I would stop in London to visit my son, Bill. I mentioned to him my interest (and reluctance) in buying some land near Chicago to build a community like those of the students I was teaching in Israel. We were just returning to the U.S. after two years of working in Israel; we didn't have jobs or enough savings to consider buying land. He loaned us the down payment for some land in Wisconsin, and we were able to open the Kopp Center for Continuing Education, offering workshops, training, and cooperative living to thousands of people for twenty-seven years.

Upon returning from another teaching trip to Israel, we received positive letters from soldiers and their parents about the groups we had started for them at the end of the war. We were the first to offer groups to discuss

the soldiers and the parents' feelings. It was new for all of them.

There are so many other memories. I think back to when Bill was three years old and refused to go with us on a Peace Walk to protest the war. He said, "Boys like to fight. I believe in war." Yet later, when we moved to Israel and it was being attacked, he was appalled that the Israelis had so many arms readily available. He had eventually learned to believe in peace and the need to achieve justice.

We had not been exposed to the term "social justice" and did not think consciously about it as we reared our children during our education and working years. So how did we turn out the way we did? We learned as we experienced injustice around us. Social justice action occurs when we *feel* the injustices experienced by others.

And we are delighted that our first grandchild, Elana, is enrolling in a University with a major in social justice. Of course! How fortunate! social justice continues!

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