Reflections on a Social Work Career

Leon Ginsberg, Carolina Distinguished Professor at the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work, finished his MSW in 1959. He has been a social work educator since 1963 and has published over one dozen social work books. For ten years, he was a state government official. This is a brief autobiography of a diverse professional social work career.

by
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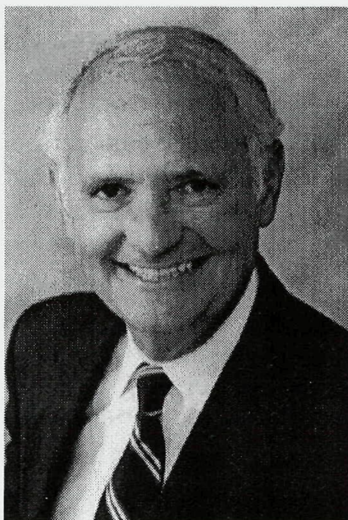

Being asked to write a professional biography is flattering and humbling. It is flattering to think anyone might read a story of a life that is, compared to younger people who head universities, states, and nations, not especially remarkable. And I am a long way from being through with a career in which there is always something new.

Much of my writing is autobiographical, although not usually intentionally. *Careers in Social Work* (1998) covers some of what I've learned in the 40 years since finishing the MSW. The rural social work articles and books (Ginsberg, 1999, for example) are at least partly about my family in small-town Texas—although I was born and grew up in San Antonio. And the books and articles on politics, social welfare policy, aging, and public welfare practice are largely about my employment.

But I'm grateful to have my turn at reflecting and analyzing what I have done as a social worker and how I have done it.

Wartime and Postwar Education

I was born in January 1936 when Europe was rumbling and about to erupt with World War II. My dad, who was born in Kansas City, Missouri, owned a series of clothing stores, first in rural Texas but later in the predominantly Mexican-American commercial neighborhood of San Antonio. Although his formal education ended in the eighth grade, he learned to speak Spanish as an adult and was something of a reader. He identified closely with his customers, fellow shopkeepers, and employees, most of whom were Mexican-American, and had a strong sense of social justice and equal opportunity. He was familiar with discrimination because it was also the lot of many Jews of his generation. His ambition was for his children to finish college. Both his sons finished Ph.D's and are professors. He died just as he reached his 61st birthday from heart disease and the effects of diabetes. His mother died when he was a teenager and several of his siblings died young. His father, who lived with us when I was young, never really learned to speak English before he died in his 70's.

Even when my father's business was going well, something always seemed to interfere— floods, lost leases, thefts, chain store competition—and, after decades in small business, he was bankrupt. Sadness about business and family always seemed part of the family environment, although there were always some good times, too. I

think economic problems and the incidences of unpreventable tragedies contributed to what I eventually learned is my natural affinity with social work. Working with people who experience disadvantage is a natural extension of much that I encountered growing up.

My mother was born and raised in Weimar, Texas, a small, agricultural town between Houston and San Antonio. She finished high school there and completed a year at the University of Texas in Austin before marrying my father in her late teens. In her infancy, she lost her own mother. Her father remarried and she grew up with him, her stepmother, and three half-brothers, who became distinguished business people and community leaders in their part of Texas. She died at 68 from the complications of surgery to remove a brain tumor.

My mother's father emigrated from the Ukraine and his second wife came from what is now Moldavia but then was Romania. Both spoke accented English only. They were active in the Weimar community, which was largely settled by Christian Eastern European immigrants and their descendants. That grandfather died in his 50's but my step-grandmother lived until her 90's.

I think there was a streak of radicalism or at least concern about social justice in my antecedents. My maternal grandfather read magazines such as *The Nation*, where I later published an article. One of my father's sisters and her husband were reputed to be Communists. When she visited us, we often talked about politics and she sent me books—books I never saw in libraries or bookstores. Our discussions about the big political issues of the 1950's were a pleasant contrast to the reminiscences and retail business discussions that occupied the rest of the family.

Looking back, I think the combination of some family tragedies and concerns for social issues were natural routes to social work—although I never heard of the profession until I was well into college.

School Days

In my preschool and early school years, I was something of an outsider. We were Jews who lived on the opposite side of San Antonio from most others. My neighborhood had few children my age. I must have also been a bit fragile after two operations before age five. I was never able to compete well in athletics, partly because of clumsiness but, I later learned, also because my left leg is an inch shorter than my right. And later yet I learned I had only four senses. I could not smell anything—and still can't. Being an outsider also contributed, I think, to my interest in social work and its activities. It often seems that many of us are outsiders or at least unlikely to be in the social and economic center of life. We identify with other outsiders whose lives are typically at the margins—the disadvantaged, people with mental and physical disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, offenders, children, and older people. I readily understand minority and international students who are frustrated by being instantly evaluated, often in demeaning ways, because of their skin color or accents.

Although I was not an immediate success in primary school, I was frequently announced as first on IQ tests at a time when confidentiality was not an issue. In the fourth grade, three classmates and I were "skipped" because our grades and standardized test scores were high. I think I determined at an early age that I would never be happy as a permanent outsider or below the top of whatever I did. I probably became competitive and desirous of power and leadership roles and pursued them regularly. Fortunately, I had some abilities that could help me pursue my ambitions.

I was early an outsider in my beliefs and values. For as long as I can remember, I told fellow students that I opposed capital punishment and the color segregation that was practiced at the movies, in schools, on buses, in employment, and everywhere else in Texas. Both were unpopular positions with many of the people I encountered. Even some teachers felt comfortable speaking out against African-Americans. Legal segregation of black and white people was the law, but there were some areas where Latinos were also subject to discrimination. I remember our Boy Scout summer camp going to a movie theatre in a town that required Mexican-Americans to sit in the balcony. We all sat in the balcony.

Junior high, Thomas Nelson Page, and high school, Thomas Jefferson, in San Antonio were different from elementary school. The student bodies were, for one thing, more "diverse," as we would say now.

There were more of San Antonio's Mexican-American majority in both. We had a Mexican-American student body president at Thomas Jefferson High School, the first, I think, in a school that was not predominantly Latino. However, African-American students were still limited to segregated schools. I graduated from high school in 1953, a year before the Brown v. Board of Education decision, which declared school segregation illegal.

The South's changes in relations between ethnic groups in my lifetime are phenomenal and could not have been predicted during the first half of the century.

Youth Organizations

One of my major influences was youth organization membership—the neighborhood Boys Club, the Boy Scouts, and especially the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO.) I was active (that's an understatement) in the boys' division, called AZA, which stands for the Hebrew words for benevolence, brotherly love, and harmony. The local unit, the regions, the districts, and the international body, all of which had frequent meetings, conclaves, and conventions, were ripe for someone who liked government and politics, travel, and new people. Before aging out, I was president of everything, including the international organization. There was much to learn and much of it is the basis for what I do now—making speeches, writing articles, chairing meetings, running conferences, and dealing with people from other nations. So my youth organization work was also a route into social work.

Journalism was always an interest, too, providing training in writing, which I continue to use. Public television news anchor, Jim Lehrer, and I were on the same high school newspaper staff. Hal Wingo, who became editor of *People,* and I wrote together. For a time, I wrote about sports for the *San Antonio Express* and later wrote news scripts and edited news film (before video tape was developed) for the local ABC television affiliate.

Higher Education and the Army

After high school, unlike many of my classmates, I stayed in San Antonio and went to San Antonio College (a community college) and Trinity University, which was not particularly well-known in the 1950's but which is now a highly rated regional liberal arts school. It was o.k. then, though, and I studied with many whose teachings stayed with me permanently.

By graduation with a political science bachelor's, I knew I wanted to be a college teacher and tried for admission and financial aid in political science at the University of Wisconsin, where my favorite political science professor was a student while working on his doctorate. But Madison didn't come through and B'nai B'rith offered me a work-study plan that would send me to Tulane's MSW program in New Orleans in return for working part time for them while I studied and to continue working after I graduated. By then I was married to a former international B'nai B'rith Girls president with a child on the way. The Tulane alternative sounded fine—although social work was not my original choice. I wanted an academic career but I didn't know social work was compatible with that goal. Studying social work was an economic compromise. I could be a graduate student, have a job, and support a family, which were not possible had I tried to pursue graduate studies in political science.

But before graduate school, I had to serve in the Army to fulfill my ROTC obligation. I applied to be an Army social worker, quartermaster, or transportation officer, anything other than a combatant. My short leg, I thought, would keep me out of battle assignments. When my assignment came back, I was a second lieutenant in the artillery—which the ROTC staff had apparently added to my choices—and had orders to go to El Paso and the Air Defense Artillery School.

The Army did me a favor. The best instruction I've had on teaching methods was at the School. The Army used overhead projectors, for example, years before most educators knew about them. And I learned mathematics, a subject I had avoided at Trinity. Then I served as a training company executive officer and learned a great deal about people, some of whom were absent without leave, drunk on the job, or broke from gambling on payday. It was useful preparation for graduate school, social work practice and teaching, and the many different people with whom I would work in the future.

Tulane, BBYO, and Oklahoma

Tulane University was a

good experience, although moving from the Army, with its then all-male units and emphasis on weapons, to a school of social work, with primarily women students and professors and an emphasis on nurturing and understanding, was complicated. For a couple of weeks, I wanted to drop out and return to my old TV news job. But the subject matter and the people eventually piqued my interest; there was little indoctrination and a good bit of freedom of thought, and some of the professors were original thinkers and scholars. A field placement at Kingsley House introduced me to settlement house work. Other practica with children who had disabilities and with a group of mothers of deaf children broadened my knowledge of human problems and social services. Helping people resolve problems was fascinating and rewarding. I not only learned to like it, I also realized that social work was just as interesting to me as political science and that we were well-suited for one another.

When I finished at Tulane, I worked as assistant director for BBYO's Southern District. Then the director moved away and I at age 24 became responsible for the organization in seven Southern states. I was also pursued to consider other jobs—at the Houston Jewish Community Center and with the Tulsa Jewish Community Council.

After my New Orleans commitment expired, I moved to Tulsa for a salary of $9,500, which was fantastic for a young social worker at the time. I organized a Sunday youth recreation program, helped build a senior citizen program, and ran a summer day camp, all with the support of a devoted board, many of whose members were in the oil business. Learning to construct programs from the ground up was enriching and I continued a pattern of holding part-time jobs along with the full-time. I was a group worker at a children's psychiatric facility, a trainer for a mental hospital, and a member of the Army Reserves. My first published article was about my work in Tulsa.

While in Tulsa, I wrote to the director of the University of Oklahoma School of Social Work and told him about my background and my interest in teaching. Within a few months he called me for an interview. They offered me a position—for a salary of $8,750 for the academic year—and in the summer of 1963 I began as an assistant professor in Norman, Oklahoma, with responsibility for teaching undergraduate courses and graduate group work and community organization courses.

In five years at OU, I completed a doctorate in political science, taught three or four courses each semester, and trained Peace Corps volunteers, Head Start and Job Corps staff, VISTAs, and many other government and business employees as part of the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education. I worked closely with an American Indian education program and traveled all over the state conducting seminars. When Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity was founded, I became a consultant. I also organized what we called Project Peace Pipe, a program to recruit and train American Indians for the Peace Corps.

The political science doctorate was a good choice. When I began at the Oklahoma School of Social Work, only the director had a doctorate. Most social work educators, everywhere, had only MSW's and, occasionally, the "third year" study programs that were offered at the time. There were many fewer schools of social work, and social work doctoral programs were rare. Pursuing a social work doctorate would have meant relocating and giving up my job, which would have been hard to do with three young children to support. Oklahoma allowed me to work towards a doctorate there if I would revert to the lower rank of instructor while I did so. I explored programs in education and social psychology in addition to political science, which I liked best.

I made it clear to the political science faculty that I did not plan to pursue a teaching or practice career in their field—that I wanted to use political science knowledge in social work education. I wrote a dissertation on mental health issues and took all the courses I could find that dealt with political behavior, social policy, and social research. The two fields were quite compatible and, for most of my professional life, I have taught, written about, and practiced a sort of political social work.

In addition to my regular duties at the Oklahoma School, I traveled by air or auto to teach extension courses all over the state, created correspondence courses, and taught in the Bachelor of Liberal Studies, which was an off-campus degree program. I discovered that I usually say yes

when asked to speak or consult or prepare grant proposals. There is always something to learn. If I carefully weighed invitations and judiciously protected my free time, I would miss a great deal—especially the many and diverse experiences that have punctuated my social work career. Although I have held only a few full-time jobs since 1959, I always do a number of additional pieces of work. They expand my horizons, dilute the full-time job's stresses, and, I think, make me more effective in general.

In the 1960's, Oklahoma was in the midst of Council on Social Work Education accreditation. When the site visit came, the chair was Dean Richard Lodge of Virginia Commonwealth University, who became a dear friend. I told him my ambition to be dean or director of a school and that my letters to those who were searching for school CEO's were not well received. I was 31, had a new doctorate, and was affiliated with one of the less well-known schools. Of course, the ambition wasn't totally irrational. In the 1960's, as mentioned earlier, there were few social work educators with doctorates of any kind and those few were often deans or directors.

West Virginia

When Dick Lodge was employed to help West Virginia University find a new director for its Division of Social Work, he remembered my interest and recommended me, among others, to the College's Dean, Stanley O. Ikenberry. Ikenberry, who is now head of the American Council on Education and former president of the University of Illinois, was even younger than I was. And the new president of West Virginia, James Harlow, was the former dean of education at Oklahoma and a close friend of some of my friends. I was interviewed, offered the job, and took it—in early 1968. I also considered two other faculty positions, one at the University of Utah and another, interestingly, at the University of South Carolina which was opening a new MSW program. But I wanted to be a director and West Virginia was the choice for that.

I began to understand that career development is only partly affected by one's qualifications and experiences. Much depends on personal contacts, luck, and coincidences. Career opportunities often require staying alert to the profession's larger environment and making as many friends and friendly contacts as possible. They are often pivotal. I also determined that one often has many choices and most can be desirable. Worry over making the wrong choice or passing up the right opportunity is seldom worth the trouble because any one of the choices is likely to have both advantages and disadvantages.

WVU was recovering from a denial of its accreditation reaffirmation. With the experiences from Oklahoma and extensive consultation with anyone I could find, we prepared a self-study and were positively evaluated by our site visit team and the Commission on Accreditation.

We also began a focus on rural social work because West Virginia is a largely rural state. Through Dick Lodge's help, once again, I was invited to present papers on rural social work at CSWE Annual Program Meetings and at meetings of the now out-of existence National Conference on Social Welfare. My colleagues and I found hundreds of others who were interested in the subject but who had not been organized in the past. All that led to the development of a grant-supported project on rural social work for CSWE which included some training projects and the first edition of *Social Work in Rural Communities*, a collection of articles on the subject. It is now in its third edition (Ginsberg,1999) and is one of the Council's all-time best sellers. Rural social work continues to be a small but viable part of the profession.

I was young and brash enough to initiate activities that were innovations in social work education. We used some of our block field placements for experiences in Africa, Colombia, and Wales. We had one of the first undergraduate grant projects from the federal government as well as grants from the National Institutes of Mental Health, the Veterans Administration, and the Department of Labor. West Virginia University developed a reputation for preparing effective proposals and for doing what we promised to do. Eventually, I offered proposal-writing seminars for others as a way of showing people how to succeed in the pursuit of external projects and dollars. Our School also offered some of the first courses on sexuality and conducted some of the first frank discussions and workshops on gay and lesbian as well as women's issues.

Child Development and the Governor

One of the more interesting WVU projects was the development of a comprehensive child development training plan for the state, which I was asked to develop for the Appalachian Regional Commission. The staff specialist, Irving Lazar, who later founded the College of Human Ecology at Cornell, told me Governor Arch A. Moore, Jr., was interested in the effort. I went to the state capitol in Charleston and was astonished when we were ushered into the governor's office and began working directly with Moore on what became a large and effective project for early childhood education and many other services. Moore, an ex-U.S. Congressman, was flamboyant and charismatic. He was frequently charged in the press with illegal activities but was found not guilty in a federal trial during his second term. He was an object of fascination and sometimes admiration for many of us.

Personally, it was a time of difficult decisions for me. I was approached about deanships at several other social work schools and was offered several of them, all at salaries larger than West Virginia's. Ultimately, however, I never chose to relocate. Building a school's program, raising new funds, and preparing for reaccreditations was wonderful once, but I didn't want to do it again. So I stayed with West Virginia until 1977. In 1971, however, my title was changed from Director to Dean and the Division was changed to the School of Social Work.

During my tenure as Dean, I served on the board and as treasurer of the Council on Social Work Education, began participating in and eventually chairing CSWE accreditation site visit teams, and worked with the graduate deans' association.

I was awarded a sabbatical to teach and write in Medellin, Colombia, where I improved my Spanish, finished the first rural book (1974) and *Lifespan Developmental Psychology*, (Datan & Ginsberg,1975) which I wrote and edited with Nancy Datan, and began developing material for a book on management, parts of which eventually became the co-edited and written *New Management in Human Services* (Ginsberg & Keys 1987, 1995). I also learned the rudiments of guitar-playing, which remains a hobby.

Among the many ways my life changed while I was Dean was a commitment to physical exercise such as handball, racquetball, and distance running. I initially used running to prepare psychologically for faculty meetings and other stressful times, but after reading Kenneth Cooper's (1969) *Aerobics*, I also recognized the physical benefits of regular, sustained activity. So, for the past 30 years, running or some other aerobic exercise is part of almost every day.

Commissioner and Government

In 1976, John D. (Jay) Rockefeller, IV, was elected West Virginia Governor. He had been a legislator, Secretary of State, and president of West Virginia Wesleyan College between the 1972 and 1976 elections after losing to Moore in 1972. Friends recommended me for Commissioner of Welfare, a position I had followed for years since many of our students came from and returned to that Department and for which we provided extensive consultation and training.

After Rockefeller appointed me and the Senate confirmed me in 1977, I learned to apply my academic preparation in political science. Actually, everything I had ever studied and done came into play in that position. Much of the work was press relations, for which my newspaper and television experience was relevant. Social work, social policy, and social research were all central to the Department's functions. Working with the legislature, keeping the Governor and his staff informed, dealing with the medical community, negotiating policies and laws, and managing a multi-million-dollar budget were all parts of the job. Interest groups of all kinds, hospital directors, nursing home owners, and dozens of lawyers were the daily complement of visitors. I had an able staff to help with any task we undertook, to advise on policies and directions, and to implement the agency programs.

While serving as Commissioner, I also served on the state's Women's Commission, chaired the Commission on Aging, and was involved with more task forces, committees, and councils than I can remember. It was an enormous job—larger and more complex than I initially imagined.

We had many successes and some crises. Because of shortfalls in the declining West Virginia economy and over-bud-

geting by my predecessors, we had to reduce the staff size substantially and could not give salary increases for some years. At one point, staff around the state staged a "sickout," and did not come to work for a few days. But, on the positive side, we had one of the first "workfare" or community work experience programs in the nation, which gave us international publicity. We overcame some negative evaluations by federal agencies and became experts on dealing with "quality control," which plagued many states at the time. I was elected president of the American Public Welfare Association (now the American Public Human Services Association) and became a member of the board of the Child Welfare League of America as well as the chair of its Public Policy Committee. I was heavily involved with the Southern Regional Education Board and often represented Governor Rockefeller with that group. I testified before Congress, did an hour show on C-Span, and was interviewed by national news people such as Robert Hager, Lisa Myers, and many others. So many groups around the country invited me to speak or conduct seminars that I was called before a legislative committee that wanted to know what I did with the honoraria and how I had time to do my job and work as a consultant, too.

A few years earlier, I was impressed with simply being in a governor's office. Now I met all sorts of celebrities—President Jimmy Carter, vice-president Walter Mondale, senators of both parties, many governors, cabinet members—and a few famous artists—like poet Allen Ginsberg, playwright Edward Albee, Ted Turner, and Bob Hope—through my board role with a local school, the University of Charleston. It was difficult to feel an outsider in such company.

It was an exciting job, probably the most exciting I ever had. Perhaps most important, a department head can make decisions that count. Before becoming Commissioner, my budget at WVU began to approach a million dollars. In the state government job a million dollars was considered a small amount. We were able to establish an "affirmative action" plan for social workers and minorities. In retrospect, we probably started some early managed care by establishing a "prescription formulary" and helped find other means to hold medical cost increases in check. We investigated and punished corruption through state and federal courts. We improved and extended social services in many ways and helped pass legislation that changed the archaic Welfare name to Department of Human Services.

But, fortunately, because such appointments are almost always short term, I didn't want to be Commissioner forever. I had divorced and remarried. My new wife had two daughters and I wanted more time with the three of them. The addictive political life didn't suit me for a lifelong involvement although it's fine for many people, a subject I wrote about in a *Social Work* article (Ginsberg, 1988). I wanted to be back in higher education, my primary career. Even while serving in government, I completed a book on aging with Anita Harbert, director of the School of Social Work at San Diego State University and another on public welfare, as well as articles and book chapters. I also lectured often at colleges and universities.

The perfect new job opened up—President of Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. A college presidency was now my goal and Marshall was attractive to me. Many Huntington community leaders and Marshall faculty supported my candidacy. But it was not to be. The search committee chose a list of candidates without my name.

Within a few months, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents, which governed public higher education in West Virginia, resigned. I was invited to apply for the position and was chosen enthusiastically by the Board in June 1984. At the time, I was also recruited to serve as dean at a top quality school of social work and to be executive director of NASW, when the very able Chauncey Alexander retired from that job. But my ambition was a college presidency and a higher education chancellor post seemed a fine alternative. The Board of Regents was frequently criticized by the legislature, the press, and, among those who knew it existed, the general public. But, I thought, after a lifetime of professional success, I could turn the Board around. For several months, I think I performed well—although not always popularly. I reassigned presidents of colleges whose performances were poor. The Board chose the system's first women presidents, on my recommendation. We pressed for employment of minorities on faculties and we

insisted on fair treatment of staff and students. I was, at the outset, personally popular with the Board for being devoted to action, with my friend and colleague, Governor Rockefeller, with the state's delegation to Congress, and with much of the legislative leadership.

But I was not popular with all of the Board staff, some of whom wanted my job when I was chosen, and some of whom, especially at more senior levels, seemed overpaid and unnecessary—a conclusion I expressed too openly. Some presidents would have been pleased to see me go away. But all of that was irrelevant until Arch Moore became governor once again in 1985 when Rockefeller's term ended and he went to the United States Senate. Moore and I had conflicts, although there were times when I thought we could get along, as we had during his earlier terms. I suppose he felt pressured to get rid of a high-profile Rockefeller man. And his priorities were quite different from mine. They had a great deal to do with constructing new buildings for higher education. He also withheld money from higher education that the legislature appropriated. I confronted that action directly, with the support of the Board, based on state higher education law. When the state Supreme Court examined the case, we prevailed against the Governor. I was also faced with requests from Moore allies to pursue actions similar to those that finally, in other areas of government, led to Moore's guilty plea, conviction, and imprisonment for federal felonies.

In his State of the State message in January 1986, Moore proposed abolishing the Board of Regents. During the legislative session, my priority was maintaining the Board, a position that prevailed although some presidents worked to abolish the Board. They accused me of trying to stifle their freedom to speak out. By then the Governor had appointed enough new members to the Board to control it, so one day in February 1986, I was forced to resign from a professional job for the first time. In retrospect, my handling of the job looks professionally suicidal. All at one time, I managed to disagree with the Governor, the senior staff of the Board, a major foundation, and some of the college and university presidents. On the other hand, the Board was in danger of being dissolved—which, after I left, it was—and I thought one of my primary roles was to defend its existence.

Being off the job wasn't all bad. I agreed with the interim Chancellor and the Board to continue on the payroll through July. My assignment was to write a report on the Board and changes I might propose. I probably needed write no report. But I did, 161 pages long, and I discovered that it was suppressed by the Board for another year. By then I was living in South Carolina and didn't realize there was any interest in the report. A newspaper Freedom of Information suit—perhaps designed to see if I had actually done something for my salary—broke it loose and suddenly there were telephone calls and letters from all over about what I wrote. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Jaschik, 1987) published a two-page story, picturing me relaxing near our swimming pool. The reporter told me I said many things about higher education they all knew but that no one had written before. The *Charleston Gazette* published an eleven part serialized version of the report.

While I was on the Regents' payroll but not working daily, I explored other jobs and communicated with many of my contacts in social welfare and higher education. By 1986, I was less interested in administration than in a faculty position. Ideally, I would teach social research and social policy, which had been my interests as a state official. A fine school of social work wanted me to consider its deanship; a couple of states interviewed me for higher education system jobs and presidencies; and several schools of social work approached me about faculty positions. Ultimately, my favorite offer was from the University of South Carolina, where I had consulted with the administration several years earlier. I highly respected the then-Provost, Frank Borkowski (now president of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina), and Dean, Frank B. Raymond, III, and liked the position I was offered—a tenured, full professorship with a title, primarily teaching research and social welfare policy and services.

And that is where I have been since 1986—teaching, writing, and developing new programs. I organize and lead social worker and student overseas trips (to England, France, Greece, Israel, Mexico, Russia, Scotland,

and Sweden) almost every year; chair and serve on College of Social Work and University committees; teach students from all three educational levels—bachelor's through doctorate, in the classroom and by distance education; teach correspondence courses; obtain and administer occasional grants; direct conferences on subjects such as diversity, social policy, and technology; help with the offering of the College's MSW in Korea; consult, conduct accreditation visits, give workshops, and write.

Over the years, I served as an editor of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, was NASW National Secretary, chaired the National Policy and Practice Center, co-chaired the NASW Development Committee, served as a member and interim staff member for the Council on Social Work Education Commission on Accreditation, edited and wrote several books and articles, and generally do what a social work professor is supposed to do. I've won awards, been appointed to a gubernatorial commission, and maintained my titled professorship, Carolina Distinguished Professor.

On occasion, I've been approached about other positions in other universities and in South Carolina state government, all of which looked attractive but when I had to choose between leaving and staying, I stayed. There is nothing quite so emotionally rewarding, for me at least, as a professorship under a capable administrator. Why change?

Some Lessons

For some time, fellow social workers and others who know me have asked how I do a number of things, many simultaneously. Some of the suggestions that follow help explain myself. Some of my tools are, perhaps, not adult learnable. For example, I write and type fast, which are skills I began developing in junior high school. I was blessed with demanding English teachers and my mother was something of a grammarian. Therefore, I use language confidently. I also read—constantly. At one point, I took books to college basketball games to read during time-outs. Reading enhances writing, I think. Many of my ideas for articles and books come from my reading as well as professional and personal experiences.

I also like doing several things at once: dictating while driving; reading and watching TV while on exercise machines; composing lectures or articles in my mind while running and listening to radio.

Generally, I do everything right away. Many people wait until deadlines to complete proposals, grade examinations, or prepare reports. I am usually finished well ahead of any deadline. If I have the necessary information, I go on with the task. Those on the receiving end usually appreciate the speed. I think the social work term for that quality is "compulsive" but colleagues in Colombia called it "*cumplido*," or complete, which is much more complimentary.

I try to be efficient in what I do. Many years ago, I mastered some elements of "speed reading," which was a preoccupation of many people in the 1960's. When I read, I attempt to capture the major elements of the file or document and sometimes pass over some of the details. Usually, that makes it possible for me to prepare a faculty evaluation or manuscript review in less time than I might otherwise spend. If I read every line and all the attachments, I would not be able to do as much.

I also find that "just showing up" is helpful. I try to respond positively to invitations: to attend a meeting; to attend someone's session at a conference; to evaluate a candidate for promotion; to read and comment on a manuscript draft. As all social workers know, people respond positively to those who show an interest in them. When one is too busy for others, they often find they are too busy for us, as well.

Despite a less than ideal family health history, I have been blessed with generally good health. During my social work career, I probably have missed less than five or six days of work because of illness. That also makes me a reliable participant in the profession.

A now legendary and late social work educator, Paul Deutschberger, who taught at the University of Tennessee and the University of Georgia, told me, when I was a teenager, that I had some special skill in dealing with people—that I was able to establish comfortable relationships with others. Although it requires effort, I attempt to meet and talk with new people at national and regional conferences. The numbers of people who spend their time at such events with the same people they see every day sur-

prises me. Personal contacts are often the sources for invitations to workshops and other activities. All of us like to be recognized and remembered, and we think well of those who acknowledge us. It's something of a political skill. Every successful politician knows that shaking hands, making small talk, and calling on people in their own homes are often more significant to voters than the issues of policy and power. I occasionally encounter people whose reaction to such relationship building is negative. But they are a minority and are unlikely to become my allies or collaborators anyway.

What else have I learned that is worth passing along? That depends on one's goals, strengths, and shortcomings. I have operated, during these 40 years, under a set of principles and lessons that work satisfactorily for me but may not for everyone:

1. Always do more than one thing. Just practicing social work in one agency or teaching only in a specific area are insufficiently challenging—at least for me. And there are so many possible disappointments and frustrations, especially in higher education, that devoting all one's energy to only one thing can be disastrous. Besides, higher education rewards diverse activity.

2. Write. There is nothing quite so important in higher education and even in practice than putting one's ideas on paper and publishing them. So few people write, even when they have important ideas, that those who do inevitably have professional advantages. Writing spreads to many places and people—and it lasts. Strangers who have seen and read one's work often feel an instant rapport and develop relationships quickly with the author. I attribute many of my social work opportunities to my publications. Although social work book royalties are not lucrative, writing pays off in other ways, both economically and non-economically. Contracts to consult and to conduct workshops, as well as salary increases, often result from publishing.

3. Don't assume social work or education careers are easy. All work is difficult and social work is no different. Academic work is especially trying. There are few compliments, and rejections (of articles, book proposals, conference presentations) are a regular part of the experience. Being prepared for frustrations as well as successes is realistic.

4. Use help. Office assistants and support staff are often willing to help with manuscripts, classes, letters, and many other tasks they can handle as well as the social worker. Effective and talented people can extend one's own capabilities and available time.

5. Don't worry about money, so long as the basic salary is all right. I do all sorts of things for no compensation and all sorts of other things for generous fees. I always ask what others are being paid for the same work and seek to match it. But I don't turn down interesting assignments for monetary reasons alone. Besides, the most prestigious social work is often voluntary.

6. Stick to the job. Unless another position is much more attractive or one's current work is unattractive, it is best, after the first few years in a social work career, to stay on the job. Years are required to learn most jobs well and the payoffs are often many years away. The costs of relocating and learning new employment are great—often greater than the rewards.

7. Be involved—in NASW, local government, agency governance—as much as possible. Volunteer involvement often leads to greater professional rewards than anything else one might do with spare time.

But each life and each career are different and each of us needs to develop our own lessons. I am not sure that I am an appropriate model for everyone—or even for large numbers of contemporary social workers. We have to find our own way in complicated environments. And that is perhaps the greatest part of the adventure.

□

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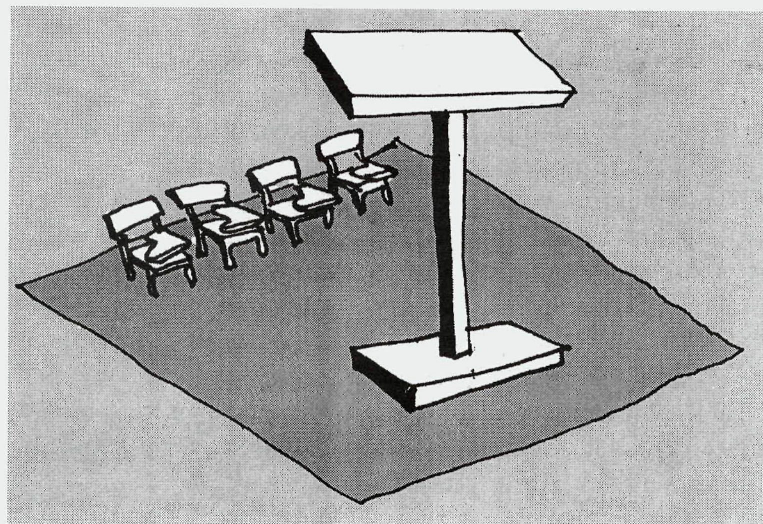

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