Personal history is not Truth with a capital T. It is the way the past was experienced and the way the teller sees it. I will try to share with you more than 60 years of group work history that I have been a part of and perhaps a party to. Others may tell it differently for many reasons. Bear with me while I state some conditions behind my way of seeing it and accordingly my way of telling what I know about our group work history beginning in 1940 when I first led a group as a group worker.

As a child in the 1920's I knew nothing about the emerging profession of social work. I do not know that there was a casework agency in my town, although there were community organizations in Kalamazoo. I was a member of the YWCA and I have very comfortable memories of being a Girl Reserve with much affection for Lazelle Alway, my leader. (Surprisingly as I write I remember her name.) I was not a Girl Scout. Perhaps scouting was more orderly and regulated while the Girl Reserves were a touch more spiritually inclined. Or so I remember it. Now I realize it was very early group work!

I grew up under the very proper influence of Methodism, knowing the rules for being a "good girl". One must be caring about others and help others as much as one can; one must be respectful of the adults in one's life including parents' friends: one must be proper and unpretentious. We were expected to do our homework, to behave in school, to go to college, and to live productive lives. I tell you this because as I reminisce with myself I am reminded again of the logic in the choices I made. Some of you who work in the field of addictions may be thinking, "Ah, there goes a co-dependent!" I have often thought so myself!
But listen on…

I entered college, the University of Michigan, when I was very young and after two years begged for parental approval to stay out for a year and go to Appalachia to pursue some kind of a fantasy of helping people!! The approval was definitely not available, but when I graduated I came to Columbia University to study psychology, the desire “to work with people” persisting. I ended up with a Master’s degree from Teachers College, because I happened onto a program of study that seemed to me to be more vocationally oriented, Student Personnel Administration. I was given a small practicum, meeting with a young student at Seward Park High School. It was not a social work educational program of study and needless to say I did not know anything about a “professional helping role”. However it took me to the Lower East side of Manhattan and into the tenements. What was important for me in that year in New York was seeing life in the world as it really was, at its most painful, without the protected and sifted view I had known in my childhood and youth. It was as if the pain and compassion and identification with ideas of social reform were awakened and directed. I determined to come back.

In 1940, after two years in the Dean of Women’s Office and as director of the women’s Dormitory at the Iowa State Teachers College (which is now Northern Iowa University with a School of Social Work!) I arranged to return to New York to live in Goddard Neighborhood House on the corner of First Avenue and 34th Street, working half time as a group worker in return for board and room. There in 1940 began my life with group work and social work.

GROUP WORK IN THE 1940’s: A MOVEMENT BECOMING A PROFESSION

Social group work was a method of working with people emerging through practice, the sharing of experiences, and committed to an ideology. As you all well know, and in the words of Scott Briar:

> Group work was conceived in the lively turmoil of progressive social reform that characterized the settlement house in the first decades of the twentieth century. ….The work of the settlement houses embodied many of the principles that later informed social group work practice: the emphasis on social participation and association, democratic process, learning and growth, direct interaction among persons from diverse backgrounds, and the impact of social environment on persons. (Briar, 1971, 1240).

Let us look at group work and what it had achieved as a Movement in 1940, the last years of the Great Depression and shortly before the US joined the war against Hitler’s Germany and then Japan. As well as in the Settlement Houses and Community Centers, group work had been gaining its strength in the Recreation and Adult Education Movements, in the Jewish Community Centers and in YM and YWCA’s. Some of our early social group work “greats” had already begun teaching group work courses in the Schools of Social Work – first Grace Coyle in Case Western Reserve in 1923, joined by Wilbur Newstetter in 1927, Clara Kaiser at the New York School, and Gertrude Wilson at Pittsburgh. In 1939 there were 14 group work programs in Accredited Schools of Social Work. And in 1940, when I came back to New York to experience the city and the world of social reform and discover social group work, the Headworker of Goddard Neighborhood Center where I lived and worked half time was Elizabeth Foley, a group work graduate of the New York School (as the Columbia University School was known at that time).

Just some brief notes to put us further in sync with the professional development of social group work in 1940. Five years earlier in 1935, the American Association of Social Workers (AASW) had finally included Social Group Work as a Practice Section, along with Social Casework that had dominated the Profession throughout the century, and Community Organization, and Social Administration. Prior to 1935 there had been no social group work papers in the Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work.

Between 1935 and 1940 when many group work papers began to appear, group workers were striving to organize their philosophical commitment and their extensive and growing experience with groups and their
educational efforts in order to move further as social work professionals. They had gathered together in 1937 and formed the American Association of Group Workers (AAGW) and had began the publication of *The Group*, a wonderful little twenty page journal, published five times a year from October 1939 until June 1955, at which time the several existing social work organizations, one of which was the AAGW, joined together to create the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

A significant publication, *Group Work: Roots and Branches*, (Bernstein, Coyle, Hendry & Kaiser, 1940), a set of four papers, was published in 1940 by the progressive social work journal, *Social Work Today*, revealing the state of collective thinking of social group workers when I first discovered group work in a New York settlement house. In *Group Work: Roots and Branches*, Charles Hendry was striving to define social group work; Clara Kaiser attempted to identify factors necessary for group work to be a professional activity; Grace Coyle emphasized group work’s inherent social action content; and Saul Bernstein introduced the importance of finding a way to evaluate the outcome of group work with a small group, club or natural group, an elementary call for research. (I call it elementary because it was a first, but his questionnaire by which to assess the outcome of a group work experience could well be used today.)

In the 1940 *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work*, with Grace Coyle as the NCSW President, for the first time three important group work papers were published, all three weighing what group work had produced in its collective thinking and its writing in the past five years since it had been accepted and had agreed to be a “Practice” in the emerging social work profession. These three papers were authored respectively by Charles Hendry (1940), Ray Johns (1940) and S.M. Keeny (1940). Hendry had analyzed 150 papers that had been written in those five years since 1935 and found that the content about group work could be organized into four major categories: a) group work’s relation to social needs and social work objectives, b) group work as a process in education, recreation, and social work, c) problems and practices in the selection, training and supervision of volunteers and professional leaders in group programs; and d) the interdependence and interrelationships of different fields and methods in the practice of group work. Additionally, Clara Kaiser spoke “From the point of view of a teacher of group work” on a panel discussing generic aspects of professional training. (Kaiser, 1940). Grace Coyle’s presidential address, “Social Work at the Turn of the Decade” was a beautiful statement of the profession’s commitment to democracy and participation in the “struggle for a civilized life”. (1940, 26).

("Editor’s Note #2: To read the papers referenced above go to: http://www.hti.umich.edu/n/ncosw/
Search “Browse the Collection” for the 1940 Proceedings of the NCSW. Charles Hendry’s paper begins on p. 539; Ray Johns’ paper p.552; S.M. Keeny’s paper on p. 564 and Clara Kaiser’s on p.606. Grace Coyle’s Presidential Address begins on p.3.")

The spirit of those early founders of the AAGW is beautifully described in the reminiscences of Louis Kraft, reported in *The Group*, recalling the group of fifteen or twenty group workers in the New York area beginning to meet for informal discussion.

We were a group of zealots. We wanted to get clarity and adherence to a group work philosophy. We all worked for different agencies, but we felt common elements in philosophy and method. We started with one great advantage – we were congenial. It was a fellowship which cut across agency lines. . . . One way or another the idea spread over the country pretty quickly. And almost everywhere you found the same feeling of obligation to record experience in this field – to begin developing a body of knowledge. Prof. Kilpatrick (TC Columbia) kept urging us on. He told us we really had something and we thought so too.

It was almost a “missionary spirit” which motivated this group, Kraft felt. We saw great enduring values in group work and he continued, “...we are seeing those values gain more and more recognition today”. (Robinson, 1947,
It must be noted that there were no text books in group work available until 1949 when Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland published *Social Group Work Practice* (1949). Konopka (1963, p. 12) recalled the absence of text books when she was studying group work at the New York School in 1941. I was a student at Teachers College Columbia 1937-38 but did not meet up with Kilpatrick or social group work. I did bring home a book by Ruth Strang (1941) which demonstrated that little at that time was known in the field of education about the theory of method and practice skill.

I need to state here that those of us gathered today, sixty five years later, must continue to accept this challenge to sustain and enrich those “great enduring values” that seem so frail and vulnerable in the misery of our contemporary world. Our beloved colleagues that we have so recently lost, Ruth Middleman, Jan Andrews, Roselle Kurland, expressed those values and aspirations for humankind in everything that they wrote.

**Goddard Neighborhood Center and New York City 1940 and 1941**

I did not meet with those early social group workers in 1940, but I am certain that I was an easy recruit to that “missionary spirit”, in the year that I lived and worked in Goddard Neighborhood Center an the corner of First Avenue and 34th Street and was introduced to social group work. What did I learn about group work during my first year in a settlement house? I had not read any of this material or the exciting reporting of group work in the publications of the American Association of Group Workers. I had simply experienced the exhilaration of working with groups of youth — Italian and Irish teenagers – who were learning to talk with each other rather than fight, and my naïve excitement of working with a little group of 9 year old boys constructing bamboo flutes and making music together. I was recognizing what social group workers well knew that, in-group life, social needs and social development were being addressed, and individual achievement was becoming possible. A remarkable dramatic production for families and neighbors was created with all ages of children and youth. The leadership and skill was provided by workers assigned by the Works Progress Administration and National Youth Administration who were completing their education or managing their unemployment with the help of the New Deal’s government agencies. I learned that groups needed activity in order to engage together, that activity created neighborhood, and that a healthy neighborhood led to healthy kids.

In the fall of 1941, because settlement houses and group work agencies were trying to professionalize (as described by Ray Johns (1940) I, with my Masters Degree from Teachers College Columbia, was hired as Program Director of Colony House in Brooklyn. That year was the ending of the governmental agencies that had been born in the Depression (under President Franklin D. Roosevelt), and by spring 1942 we had no staff with which to build a program. I remember that I tried very hard to keep the children’s clubs going with teen-age volunteers who agreed to participate in my effort to train them as junior counselors.

**Workman Place House 1942 to 1946**

In the spring of 1942, with the help of the Social Work Vocational Bureau in New York I was hired to be Headworker of a small, very old and established social settlement on the waterfront of Philadelphia, the corner of Front and Fitzwater Streets, Workman Place Neighborhood House. There I lived and worked until July 1946 when my husband returned from WWII and my first child was born. And there it was my intention to create a “contemporary” group work agency in keeping with what I had learned was needed by the group work movement. (In my memory I laugh at my lack of experience).

First, there were to be personnel practices, developed with the direct involvement of the staff. Clara Kaiser (1940) had noted this urgency for the growing group work movement in her paper “Group Work as a Professional Activity,” Second, the title “Headworker” was to be changed to “Executive Director” to render it less a position of benevolence. And third, because the building was small, the program was to be developed as group work
services for children and youth with assistance for parents and neighbors in groups to build a healthy community in which their children are growing up.

These were WWII Years. We had few resources for finding male group leaders. Women led all of the groups, and we shoveled coal to keep the furnace going. Parents organized to create a Tot Lot on vacant space next to the playground. The neighborhood organized around Federal Price Controls. When the children discovered that the local candy store had raised the price of bubble gum 100%, from 1 cent to 2 cents, they wrote a petition and got it signed throughout the neighborhood. In May 1946, a delegation of five representatives from Workman Place House (ages 16 to 60), carried the petition to Washington DC. Money had been raised for the delegation to attend the Conference on Unfinished Business in Social Legislation, sponsored by the AASW, the National Federation of Settlements and other major national organizations. As the discharged soldiers returned to the neighborhood, a group of veterans were helped to secure a vacant store front for a club room, where they could hang out, trying to adjust to a society that they were discovering did not reward them with respectable jobs for which they had been trained in the Army.

When the racist trolley car operators went on strike to oppose their Union's hiring Black members as Operators, FDR sent the Army to ride on all the trolley cars with the Black Operators in order to guarantee that the transportation system in Philadelphia was kept running for the war effort. The teen-aged girls at Workman Place House had a glorious time meeting the trolleys whenever they stopped at our corner to give coffee and doughnuts to the soldiers.

Helen Phillips and the Pennsylvania School of Social Work 1943-1946

Of great importance to me in Philadelphia was the coming of Helen Phillips to the Pennsylvania School of Social Work's faculty in 1943 to develop the Group Work Sequence. There were only four group work agencies in Philadelphia for group work field work placements and my little agency became one. Not only was it vocationally a profound time for me, beginning to build knowledge of this professional field that was so 'right' for me but I also gained a mentor and friend in Helen Phillips. The working concepts of “professional helping”, “process”, and “relationship” became embedded in my growing professional self. (Phillips, 1974).

For Workman Place House it was exceedingly important that we could have a student who would begin to demonstrate a “professional” approach to group work. I must note also that I could begin working toward my MSW, which I earned at Pennsylvania School of Social Work of University of Pennsylvania in 1950 at the end of my first decade as a social group worker. I was also asked to set up and teach the Program Skills Laboratory and teach the Program Skills Course at Penn. That was my beginning as a social work educator, the use of activities in groups, “fun and games” as the caseworkers loved to say disparaging about Group Work Majors. Group work educators were insisting on activities as a viable and necessary part of social work education. Remember that Gladys Ryland had not published until 1949 and Ruth Middleman’s classic, *The Non-Verbal Method in Working with Groups*, was not published until 1968.

It was also expected that social action, essentially present in group work philosophy, would be relevant for any social work practice. Grace Coyle (1940) had written passionately about social action and group work and Helen Phillips had been her student. However there were other trends shaping up in the social work profession during these years. These were described as follows:

The commitment to an essentially psychiatrically oriented casework served to undermine even further the caseworker’s interest in and ability to contribute to change in the social order. The burden of the latter commitment fell to other social workers, notably the social group workers who brought to the profession a traditional dedication to social reform. (Briar, 1971, 1240).

The social reform and social action layer of social work ideology was deeply compelling to me, but I also found
myself straining to become a part of the profession I had now chosen. The range of individual change that was taking place in the people I worked with in groups, and in myself, was becoming equally compelling. Growing knowledge and personal treatment became important.

GROUP WORK IN THE 1950’s: TRANSFORMATION IN A PROFESSION

The decade of the 40’s had been a flowering of group work as an identifiable method and a legitimate – if not thoroughly accepted — part of the profession of social work. As of June 1950 I was now an MSW and thoroughly a professional social group worker. We group workers took our place among the associations that created the NASW, disbanded our precious AAGW, and continued to open group work sequences in the Schools of Social Work. Returning soldiers with the GI Bill began enrolling in Social Work Masters level programs. The McCarthy debacle of the House Un-American Activities Committee, a disgraceful time in our Nation when it even took courage to sign a petition, was finally defeated (Andrews & Reisch, 1997).

Manhattanville Neighborhood Center 1948-1951

From 1948 to 51 found me again in a settlement house back in New York, Manhattanville Neighborhood Center, as Director of the School-Age Day Care Center. Though located in an agency thoroughly committed to social group work, the Day Care Center, a part of the NYC system set up during WWII, to enable parents to work, was organized on an educational model with the children grouped in classes with teachers in charge. It was my task to help the teachers, through supervision and training, to appreciate the group processes in their classes, a new experience for me in being a part of the group work movement, and an issue for a Master’s Thesis at the University of Pennsylvania in 1950.

Group workers were joined with caseworkers in recognizing the psychodynamic and psychiatric foundation in social work skill. The Council on Social Work Education, having been established in 1947, had authorized two social work curriculum studies, the Hollis-Taylor report (1951) and the Boehm study (1959). The latter refocused attention on Group Work and Community Organization, proposed theoretical frameworks from the social sciences, and introduced the concept of “enhancing of social functioning” as a way of stating the objective of social work’s professional activity. This concept took into account the full range of social work activity that had been evolving through the century. All of this legitimated group work as a vital part of the helping profession of social work.

Beulah Rothman, the Mount Vernon YM/YWHA and Hillside Hospital 1951-1957

From 1951 to 57, I added two more children to my family and worked in several part-time assignments, one of which was in the Mount Vernon YM&YWHA. 1953 brought me another beloved friend and colleague, Beulah Rothman. We were both pregnant at the time and there were bets who would deliver first. Our professional association and personal friendship continued to grow. In 1957, I was ready again for a full time job as a social worker with specialization in group work. The position was as social group worker in the Adolescent Pavilion of Hillside Psychiatric Hospital. I was delighted because it was a 9 to 5 job, an unexpected situation for a group worker who worked with children and adults after their school and work day were ended. I recall vividly how painful it was to leave that small locked building at 5 o’clock, knowing that those sixteen teen age girls had nothing to do. I tried to be creative and prepare evening and weekend activities that they could pursue if they wished.

I also tried to help the patient residents to create cottage self-government with a weekly meeting. Struggling, as teenagers are wont to do, with order in their meetings, the girls set a fine for anyone who failed to wait to speak when called on by the chair. To my amazement, they were certain that the fine to be effective must be 50 cents. The next morning at the cottage meeting with patients, staff and doctors, there was much dismay particularly among the doctors that the girls were “determining the treatment for each other”, or “undermining” the Doctors’ treatment planning. I remember my feeling of delight when Jane, with Tay Sacks Disease, stood up and replied...
to the Doctors indignantly, “Don’t you think we know when some one of us has lost control? We know better than you do!”

I remember vividly the unexpected phone call from Beulah a few days after my arrival at my new job at Hillside: “Katy, do you want to teach a course?” She had taken a part time faculty position to build a group work sequence at Adelphi. As were many Schools of Social Work, Adelphi was requiring one practice course in group work for all students, and was creating a Group Work Sequence for Majors. There, in 1957, began my thirty years in Social Work Education as a teacher of Practice – group work, casework and family – and a designer of the Integrative Curriculum, or Foundation Social Work Practice as it came to be known (Papell, 1969, 1973).

GROUP WORK 1957 AND ON: PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE THEORY EXTENDED AT ADELPHI SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

How can I tell you about those 30 years at Adelphi? When we started, my colleague and I did not know how to teach group work. In 1957, the continuing commitment to the values of group work as a social work method was powerful and there was extensive and exciting experience in the use of group work as a helping method in many settings. There was also a growing body of knowledge about the human group in the social sciences (Homans, 1950). However the knowledge base to prepare a professional social group worker and the conceptualization of practice principles and skill were scattered. The method of teaching social work — the integration of theory and field experience — was proudly accepted by the social work profession and struggled for in the culture of universities, but not developed in the teaching of group work to other than Group Work Majors. We decided that in teaching group work to caseworkers, we would require the student to find a group to lead, prepare a Process Record each week for 12 weeks and submit it to the instructor. We read all those records, made educational comments for the student (supervisory!!) and based our teaching on the experiences the students were having.

With the support of Adelphi’s social work administration and faculty, field work agencies were encouraged to provide group work opportunities for the students. But being supervised by field instructors who were caseworkers around group practice, then as now, was a problem for our case work students and we continued for a number of years our primitive effort to have a practice based learning experience for casework students by reading their group process recordings, commenting on them and using the material in the class sessions.

Gradually Beulah and I developed our course outlines and joined with social group workers across the country that were moving into a period of creating more formalized theory for group work practice. We developed the Group Work Sequence, I teaching the first two semesters and Beulah teaching the 3rd and 4th semesters. Beulah had been greatly influenced by Clara Kaiser with whom she had studied at the New York School and I had been deeply influenced by Helen Phillips who was my mentor at Penn. Probably Beulah stressed group structure and techniques and I stressed process and relationship and we learned from each other. We also learned from the wonderful group work literature that was being developed in the 60s.

Let me identify some conceptual, theoretical and practice highlights for me in those 30 years.

1. The Functional/Diagnostic Controversy. Personal history and happenstance placed me clearly on the functional side of the paradigm that was still blazing when I happily came upon the profession of social work. By nature I am more existential than technical and the Pennsylvania School’s approach to social work practice was congenial to me. Furthermore the dynamics of group process and its essential concept of mutual aid necessitated for group workers a bridging of the two contentious approaches to professional helping. These approaches, Pennsylvania’s “functional” approach and the New York School’s “diagnostic” approach, were spawned by the new knowledge of the psyche that had become available to the early social case workers when Sigmund Freud and his secretary, Otto Rank came to these shores. It was ego-psychology – Heinz Hartmann (1958), Erik Erikson (1958), and University of Chicago’s social work educator Helen Harris Perlman (1957) that transcended the debate and moved social work practice theory to a new
level. I was thrilled by the new knowledge and its intellectual challenge for group work and all social work.

2. **The CSWE Curriculum Study**: Werner Boehm published his curriculum Study for CSWE (1959) and described the societal task of the Profession as the “enhancement of social functioning when the need is individually or socially perceived.” I remember the excitement I felt since the concept handled the breadth of the profession to which I as a group worker was so committed. It accommodated social reform as well as individual pain and tsoures. It also allowed the group worker to be pro-active as well as responsive. Somehow it solved an intellectual dilemma for me- encompassing such a range of human reality, all elements so interrelated and each so necessary for understanding the human condition. It continues to do so for me even now.

3. **The Community Mental Health Centers Act**: In 1963, President Kennedy’s Community Mental Health Centers Act was signed into law providing a new possible arena for group work services. The goal of mental health services was being conceptualized as personal health and well being rather than solely the diagnosis and treatment of pathology. The importance of community resources was stressed. Clearly group work practice could be a significant source for such a focus.

4. **The Civil Rights Movement**: The students organized to raise money to send a member of their class, a group worker, to Selma, Alabama in 1963. The Dean approved it as a part of the student’s fieldwork practicum.

5. **President Johnson’s Great Society**: Office of Economic Opportunity and the War on Poverty. 1964-1968 were marvelous years for Social Work. The Profession was finding further verification, with Federal support, of social work’s continuing recognition of environmental reality as a profound influence on people’s behavior. The Experimental Programs to create “communities with opportunities for all” included (a) Mobilization for Youth in New York and other similar efforts throughout the country; (b) Headstart; (c) training programs for workers’ upward mobility in the human services, moving into the BSW program; (d) Offices of Economic Opportunity, and on and on.

6. **Group work in the Tenement Social System**: I wrote a proposal, which was funded by NIMH, 1967-1971, “Group work in the Tenement Social System “. The collaborating agency, the Educational Alliance, identified tenements wherein lived several children whose behavior in the group programs was problematic. Group work students were assigned to reach out to the parents and residents in those building with the goal of helping them to do collective problem solving of living conditions. It was a difficult assignment but the spirit of the times supported the students in their efforts and the learning was powerful. As an aside, in New York it was upsetting to note that the group work method was by-passed by the Mobilization for Youth planning group, acknowledged years later in their published report. (Weissman, 1969).

7. **General Systems Theory**: In 1966 I came upon a reference in the Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic to Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s work on General Systems Theory. I searched the material and gave the first lecture on this subject at Adelphi. Adelphi shared with the profession and all human services the intellectual excitement of systems thinking. Von Bertalanffy’s (1969) work provided for us philosophical validation for our commitment to an interactional and dialectical focus on assessing the human condition –to viewing always the interrelatedness of communities, families, groups and individuals. For group workers particularly it provided a philosophical base for the skill of viewing the group as the unit of practice.

8. **The Models Paper**: In 1966, Beulah and I wrote our well received paper on “Social Group Work Models: Possession and Heritage” (Papell & Rothman, 1966). We were struggling to find a way to accommodate the breadth and diversity of the theoretical writing about group work practice that was being produced by social workers. We wanted to hold together the several emerging individual psychologies being recognized by group work theorists and group work’s deep commitment to social reform, as well as the increasing knowledge of how groups grow and function as their members seek to bring them into existence – group process as a very human process. In 1997, I had an opportunity to reflect again on how we had viewed group work early on and how I now saw its theoretical development (Papell, 1997).

9. **The Generic Movement**: The generic movement at Adelphi from 1969-1972 had enthusiastic group work
leadership (Papell, 1969, 1973). I taught an experimental first semester practice course – five students from each sequence – Case Work, Group Work, Community Organization. There followed a second experimental year with the first semester practice course being taught by pairs of Practice Instructors. Thereafter the Foundation Practice Course was taught throughout the first year to all students. Our first year outline and title -Foundation Practice – was and still appears to be used extensively throughout Social Work’s professional education.

10. **Introduction of Family Therapy**: Family therapy was introduced and taught at both Masters and Doctoral levels in 1969 by another colleague, Gerda Schulman. Several faculty members in the Practice Division, myself included, attended Gerda’s Doctoral classes, in preparation for teaching and practicing family work. In 1970, two members of the Practice Faculty, again myself included, undertook a year of study with Salvatore Minuchin.

11. **Yeshiva University for Doctoral Study**: I pursued my doctoral study at Yeshiva University from 1971–1977. My frustration because I did not quite finish before my 60th birthday! The Practice Division Faculty and all the First Semester Masters level students participated in the research: “Styles of Learning for Social Work Practice” (1977). I later reported on this research at the Annual Program Meeting of CSWE (1980). The measurement tool continues to be utilized in preparing social workers to supervise students in their fieldwork. (Hendricks, 2006).

12. **Alcoholism and Addictions**: In 1975, a group of Adelphi alumni, in a presentation of their work at the Nassau County Commission on Drug and Alcohol Addiction, said to us, “You did not teach us anything about this subject and it is present in every social worker’s practice experience.” As the Director of the Practice Division, I was greatly troubled, and humbly said, “Tell us what to teach!” There followed a remarkable collaborative effort between the University, Nassau County Commission on Drug and Alcohol Addiction, and The Long Island Council on Alcoholism, which resulted in an introductory day to educate the Faculty, then a first and annual Conference on Alcohol and Substance Abuse for Long Island, and finally a course in the Doctoral Program and Post MSW Addiction Specialist Certificate Program. When I was retired in 1986 from Adelphi at the age of 70 I was able to continue my relationship with the Commission where I worked (half time) as Family Consultant and therapist until September 2000.

13. **Adelphi’s Doctoral Program**: From 1975-1987 I was a member of the committee that designed the doctoral program, taught the Doctoral Seminar on Social Work Practice Theory, and served as dissertation advisor, which was always intellectually stimulating. I remember warmly many doctoral students who have played critical professional roles following their doctoral study at Adelphi.

14. **Social Work with Groups**: *A Journal of Clinical and Community Practice*. This journal was published in 1978 by Haworth Press with Beulah Rothman and myself as Co-Editors. We continued this assignment until 1991 when Beulah passed away (Papell, 1992). Before she died we resigned our co-editorships and recommended Roselle Kurland and Andrew Malekoff who carried the journal magnificently to 2005. Andy continues as sole editor today. (Again I remember Roselle and thank Andy for continuing with such commitment and creativity.)

15. **Restoring group work’s identity**: By 1979, group work seemed to have given up its identity with the profession’s move in the 60’s and 70’s toward what had become the Foundation Method. Group work educators, including myself, began to recognize what were some unintended consequences of the generic movement and what was happening to Social Group Work in the professional curriculum (Tropp, 1978). We, and I include myself, had carried leadership in the conceptual development of what had become the Foundation Curriculum. For you who do not know the story, at the CSWE Annual Meeting in Boston, three group workers, Beulah Rothman in the lead, with Ruth Middleman and myself, put up a sign inviting all interested in Group work to join us at a small meeting. So many came that it was necessary to open another room. In October 1979 was held the first annual Group Work Symposium. The first was held at Case Western Reserve University where Grace Coyle had first taught Group Work as a part of the MSW curriculum.

16. **The Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups**: In the 80’s, and ever since, social
group workers have been striving to regain identity, building the remarkable AASWG with Chapters and Affiliates, and the Journal. Many hundreds of papers have been written reporting the work of groups in creating empowerment for social change, for members helping members, and for individual gaining of strength and experience in reaching with others for the fulfillment of ones own needs. My beloved friend, Beulah, and I wrote several papers and many comments about group work in our ten years of preparing Editorials for the Journal. She and I, and I alone, wrote many papers, and traveled to Vienna and Budapest, Israel, London, Ireland, Canada and many Schools of Social Work throughout the US, to share our knowledge and commitment to the meaning of group work in the helping profession of Social Work.

GROUP WORK AND THE FUTURE: NOW AND ONWARD
Social workers, who are committed to being skilled in forming groups when human situations suggest the professional value of doing so, continue to be concerned about the excessive individualism of our society and the continuing contemporary enchantment with absolute predictability, and its impact on our profession (Papell, 1996). All too often, social workers who are leading groups know more technically about the human problem that has brought members of a group together than about the dynamic interactive processes created by those members in the life of the group. It is in the processes of group life that humans struggle for their essential humanity and health. It is my view that therein lays our helping mission, now and into the future.

While preparing this paper I came across a paragraph in the new journal, Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, that I find relevant now:

The knowledge we gain, therefore, is not information that simply passes through the central processors of our brains. It also arises from our hearts and often our deeply held emotions. Understandings gained through an engagement of heart and minds have an immediacy that potentially connects to the hearts and minds of audiences. (Gilgan & Abrams, 2002,3)

We social workers are not alone in our professional commitment to the human group. Other professions too are concerned about human relationship as it is experienced and played out in the human group. New knowledge of the human brain provides new understanding of the human condition. In the most recent issue of The Networker, the author of an article exploring the fundamentals of neurofeedback ended with these words:

As the 21st century advances and neurotherapeutic tools become more powerful and efficient, we’ll depend more than ever on the great wisdom traditions (my emphasis) to keep us away from the crossroads, where we may be tempted to bargain our souls away, and to remind us of where we all came from—hanging around the fire, telling stories. (Butler, 2005, 65)

As I have sat for these many hours reminiscing about 65 years of my life as a social worker dedicated to helping people, I am moved all over again by the words, insights, knowledge and skills, values, human beliefs, caring of our colleagues throughout the 20th Century as social group work collectively emerged. Is this “a great wisdom tradition”? I would say so.

I have tried to show you a pathway that our social group work has taken through these sixty some years as I have personally experienced it and have participated in it professional growth. This is only one view of social group work history and there is much history for future scholars to claim and keep vibrant for the future. Some aspects of that history are suggested for future exploration:

• Group work’s struggle to affirm its purpose of social reform and community and human development as professional social work skill;
• Group work’s history in recognizing and accepting the psychological interests of social case workers and the clinical potential of groups;
• Social group work’s choosing Social Work as its professional home base from its very early associates
within education and recreation and the theoretical routes of group work in other professions including psychiatry and psychology;

• Group work’s finding a revitalization of its social reform commitment in the societal environmental movement of the 60’s and its relationship with case work;

• Group work’s finding its integrative role in a foundation method representing the whole of social work and unintentionally minimizing its own identity:

• Group work’s striving to restore its own identity as a social work helping method with what I like to call the “breadth of our depth” and to develop our methodology within the context of “mutual aid” and people helping people.

These are only a few suggestions for valid research that are warranted by the history of social group work in the 20th century.

Recently, I prepared the following comments for the close of a conference, representing my deep feelings about social group work (Papell, 2002).

A group represents human togetherness. It is not that the group creates the togetherness for the members. Rather it is the other way around – its members must create the group, and if they are unable to do this there is nothing but a collection of individuals striving helplessly for the unknown.

Humane human relationship is group membership successfully created. When people – even just two – try to create a group and fail, the search for relationship – for togetherness – becomes tension, frustration, unfulfillment, anger, conflict, failure and even violence.

Fulfillment in relationship does not come automatically to us humans. We each bring our very selves to the process, each of us with the complexity of our ever emerging needs. The human process of “grouping” constantly calls upon us to participate in meeting the needs of others in their yearning for connectedness. Of course grouping is difficult, and always will be, as it will always be a fundamental human process that can be misused or fail.

…The skills of leadership of…humans in their groups is not technique alone; there is much knowledge but it is not technology. It requires our own eternal efforts at togetherness…our own engagement with humanity.

This is how I have experienced group work in our social work profession and have perceived it and taught it. I have been a modest part of its splendid professional development in our helping history since 1940. I leave to you who are gathered here the struggle with the profound human forces that are our very essence and are so needful to our tormented social world. And I leave to you also the task of boldly carrying the priceless professional knowledge, values and skills of social work with groups on in the 21st Century and into the future.

References


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One Reply to “More Than Sixty Years With Social Group Work”

September News for Protagonists, Antagonists, and Just Plain Agonists « The Fruition Coalition says:

September 30, 2011 at 10:37 pm

[…]. More than Sixty Years with Social Group Work: A Personal and Professional History – The Social Welfare History Project […]

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Working with the inhabitants of these neighborhoods, settlement workers became caught up in searching for ways to ease their neighbor’s adjustment and integration into a new society. Settlement house residents often acted as advocates on behalf of immigrants and their neighborhoods; and, in various areas, they organized English classes and immigrant protective associations, established “penny banks” and sponsored festivals and pageants designed to value and preserve the heritage of immigrants. 1) Read the entry under SOCIAL WORK titled: “More Than Sixty Years with Social Group
Work" by Katy Papell who died just recently. 2) Another entry to read is listed with the tab for Settlements. It is “The Position of United Neighborhood Houses on Issues.” Social Group Agents. Social groups often provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, poor families usually emphasize obedience and conformity when raising their children, while wealthy families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may occur because working-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which it is helpful to be able to follow rules and conform.