1. AN UNPLANNED JOURNEY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Joan S. Stark
University of Michigan

The editor, John Smart, has invited me to describe how I entered higher education as a field of study, highlighting major individuals and developments that shaped my career. In addition, he asked that I give my perspectives on how the field of higher education has evolved during my career and offer suggestions to current scholars about possible future developments. I am honored to have this opportunity and especially pleased to be the first woman to write an autobiographical essay in this series. As I collected my thoughts, I was struck first by how unplanned my career development has been; second, by how vastly different my story is from those of my esteemed male colleagues who have written articles in this series; and third, by the fact that I am the first writer in the group whose advanced degree was in higher education rather than in a traditional discipline.

BALANCING GENDER, AMBITION, AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE 1950S

I certainly never aimed to be a higher education professor or researcher. Looking back, however, I suppose there were some predictors, such as my involvement in student government at Syracuse University. In fact, the positive interactions of Syracuse administrators with student leaders in the 1950s strongly influenced me. Over the years, I have observed that many individuals study higher education because of such influences during their undergraduate years. Other than this exposure to the roles of campus administrators, my career development was for the most part accidental. In the 1950s, what a young woman should not aspire to was much more important than what she should aspire to. Reflecting on what brought me to the field of higher education has
caused me to realize how important gender used to be and how the context for women's career development has changed over the years. My male colleagues' careers were often influenced by issues related to military service but, apparently, seldom by gender or family demands; my story is quite different from that.

My school teacher parents had high expectations and, in their view, high ambitions for me. My father encouraged me to study the sciences (definitely not the impractical arts or literature!) and believed that a teaching certificate was good insurance for a young woman. After spending three college summers as an analytical chemist at Eastman Kodak, a job with minimal human contact, I accepted more readily the idea that I should be a public school science teacher. My father was also convinced that I should begin teaching immediately after graduating from Syracuse, so that my master's degree study would be more meaningful. Thus, I was pleased when, in my senior year in 1956-57, the chemistry department at Syracuse invited me to be a teaching assistant in general chemistry, replacing a graduate student who left.

For a brief period that year, I wondered aloud why I was not applying to medical school like most of my classmates. Despite my father's scientific interests, he was quite certain that medical school would be wasted on me since, like most young women, I would surely marry and have children rather than practice. My mother thought nursing or dental hygiene much more fitting than medicine or dentistry. Of course, had I strongly desired to become a doctor, I could have prevailed. Or, had I been convinced that the life of a research chemist was desirable, I might have accepted a casual invitation to follow one of my professors to his laboratory at a new university. Instead, I obtained a fellowship for full-time master's study in science education at Teachers College, Columbia University. When my father became severely ill just after my college graduation, I abandoned that path and under the duress of financial uncertainty fell back on his original plan. I got a job teaching physics at a high school close enough to New York City to let me start my graduate work at Columbia, part time.

My mother felt that when I was married I would be "settled," i.e., out of moral danger, during times when increasing freedom involved "temptations" for young women. Protecting me from such hazards, she thought, would then be my husband's responsibility. I became "settled" when I met Bill Stark, a merchant marine captain who was studying mathematics education at Teachers College, and married him during the spring of my first year of teaching. I went on maternity leave in May of the second year and the first of our four children was born in July. It caused quite a stir that I was allowed to teach for eight months of my pregnancy, since the school district's rules in 1959 dictated that a pregnant teacher must leave before the condition was "visible." Because the school very much wanted students to pass the New York State Regents examinations and because substitute physics teachers were hard to find, I was allowed to continue