CONVERSATION WITH HERBERT S. STREAN
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ABSTRACT: Dr. Herbert Strean has been a most influential practitioner and educator in the advancement of clinical social work. Not only has he made an outstanding contribution to our professional literature, but has also been a major critic of our profession's movement away from its therapeutic obligation to clients. Since its inception, he has been on the editorial board of this journal and a regular contributor. After a distinguished career as a professor at Rutgers University Graduate School of Social Work he has retired to direct the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training. We are fortunate to have the first interview with him after his retirement from Rutgers.

Dr. A.: Let's begin with what led you to choose a career in social work.
Dr. S. When I was at New York University as an undergraduate, I didn't know what I wanted to be. I had some notion that I would like to work with people but that was so vague. I remember taking a twenty-four hour series of examinations to determine my preferences and skills. When I was through, the psychologist who examined me told me that from my skills and abilities alone, I should be an accountant. But it was the last thing that I wanted to be because I had no interest in mathematics. He then told me about social work, and I started taking courses in sociology and psychology. They had a pre-professional social work program at N.Y.U. and as part of it, I became a Big Brother at the Jewish Board of Guardians and led a group of children in Harlem. All of these experiences were very stimulating, especially working with children. I found myself identifying very strongly with children and it was this work, along with being a camp counselor with disturbed youngsters, that gave me the strong conviction that I wanted to work with children, and social work seemed the best route.

Dr. A.: Where did you get your M.S.W.?
Dr. S.: I got my M.S.W. from Boston University. As I already said, I had gone to N.Y.U. as an undergraduate. I had lived at home and wanted an experience away from home. I was all of twenty years old at the time and Boston seemed like the right place. Also, it was the easiest application to fill out. They didn't ask for a long autobiography and so I went there. Boston proved to be a wonderful experience. In those days there was only one theory which governed all of social work practice and that was orthodox psychoanalysis. And a lot of my teachers there were from the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute—Arthur Valenstein and many other big names from the psychoanalytic institute in Boston were there. As a result of my being at B.U., I was introduced to a psychoanalytic orientation toward social work practice very early in my development.

Dr. A.: What year did you graduate from Boston?
Dr. S.: 1953.
Dr. A.: What did you do after receiving your M.S.W.?
Dr. S.: I went to work for the Jewish Board of Guardians, and after being there for three or four years, I became part of an intensive training program in child development and child therapy. After completing that program, I then went for my psychoanalytic training at the National Association for Psychoanalysis. N.P.A.P. gave me credit for a lot of my work at the Child Development Center so my analytic training was a rather quick one. It only took four years which is much less than most. They gave me credit for about ten courses, so it was kind of easy to go through that program.

Dr. A.: Who were some of the people you studied with at J.B.G. and N.P.A.P.?
Dr. S.: Peter Neubauer was a very important person in my life at the Child Development Center. Augusta Albert was also a supervisor of mine there. At N.P.A.P., Reuben Fine was a teacher of mine and he ultimately became my analyst. He was very, very influential to me in many ways, personally and professionally. The people I've mentioned are probably some of the most important ones who had the most impact on me and have influenced my thinking and attitude toward practice. Oh, yes, also Oscar Sternbach, a social worker and analyst at J.B.G., had a very powerful impact on me in my early days. As a matter of fact, as my supervisor in the Child Guidance Clinic at J.B.G., he recommended me to the child training program and also to N.P.A.P., so he was also a very important person.

Dr. A.: So you were a practicing analyst and then you went to Columbia University for your D.S.W.?