IN MEMORIAM:
Mary Gottesfeld 1931–1984

In the fall of 1982, Clinical Social Work Journal (Vol. 10 No. 3) published “Conversations with Mary Gottesfeld”. Mary had just completed ten years as founding editor of Clinical Social Work Journal and Jean Sanville, the new editor, thought it appropriate to publish something about her.

It is ironic to note that the conversation ended with Mary’s reply to questions about her future plans. Asked if there was any new, big thing, she said, “No. No trouble brewing on the horizon. But I might surprise you. I don’t like things to get too dull.”

In the Fall of 1982, Mary became seriously ill because something was brewing. For one year she fought cancer, rallied, but only to have to fight again. It was a difficult time: pain, rage, helplessness, hope, despair, and a learning time, for the one who was ill and for those who loved her. With all the pain, Mary would apologize about being fretful, demanding or not just her same old self.

Mary was a woman of great vitality, charm and involvement. Professionally her work spanned a multitude of areas: foster care, delinquent children, child guidance, supervision, consultant, teacher and psychotherapist. She had developed and administered a post-masters program in clinical social work at Hunter College School of Social Work. She was a prolific author and editor. Earlier in her career she was the President of the Community and Social Agency Employees Union, contributing to social work by improving salaries and working conditions in many settings.

But, it was as a person who loved life, change and challenge, that she is also remembered and loved. She enjoyed a wide range of literature from philosophy to mystery stories, loved music and was an avid opera goer. She travelled extensively and made friends in many countries. She grew flowers, made wonderful pasta, canned vegetables, enjoyed cooking, eating and playing bridge.

In all activities she was a student. In the year before her illness she began to study philosophy, planning to work towards a second master’s degree. She was a life student. In conversation with Mary Gottesfeld she had said: “. . . of all the things I’ve done, my direct practice has really always been the most meaningful to me and the primary part of my work. I am never bored with it because it is so complex it can never be mastered—one must always continue to learn in it.”
In November, 1982, Mary had been asked to deliver a paper at the NASW Symposium on Clinical Social Work. Because she was too ill, the paper was read by one old friend and discussed by another. Entitled, The Mystical Aspects of Psychotherapeutic Efficacy, it was existential in nature and aroused deep feelings in all the listeners who became participants. One after another walked to the microphone, each contributing in a personal and meaningful way. This paper will be published in Psychoanalytic Review in 1986.

Mary's funeral was June 12, 1984. It was attended by those who cared, family, friends, colleagues, clients and housekeeper. Again, people talked spontaneously, each in a personal and meaningful way telling of how Mary had touched their lives. Ann, the housekeeper who had worked for her for many years, put it well: "She was a fine lady; a real lady!"

Florence Lieberman

In Memory Of a Beloved Analyst:
Mary L. Gottesfeld

It is, and will continue to be the case, that important people will say substantial things about the talents and productivity of Mary Gottesfeld. Her achievements and contributions to social work generally, and to clinical practice, in particular, have been significant and far reaching. As one of her patients, and one who benefited directly from that talent, I would like to add my tribute to her useful life.

The depth of Mary's analytic ability was evident. Had she wished, she could have presented herself as a facile diagnostician or an adroit scholar. She chose, instead, to express this ability in human terms, with straightforward communication, and in plain language flavored with experiential learning. She demonstrated strength and vulnerability. She never pretended to a knowledge she did not possess. These traits, in combination with keen analytic insight, allowed her to respond creatively, and with precision, to the sometimes obscure, often difficult content of therapy.

Mary possessed a capacity for wit, and loved laughter. Sensitive to the humor in life, she responded to it heartily, creating the perfect antidote for those of us who, on occasion, took ourselves too seriously. She encouraged struggle, and, well understanding the dangers of intensity, she encouraged rest from struggle. She discouraged waste (of time and energy), manipulation and dependence for its own sake. I am fortunate to have known her and so very proud of our work together.

Individual psychotherapies, of course, vary from individual to individual. But I suspect that certain basic beliefs ran like musical phrases