



Australian Association of Social Workers Inc. (Victorian Branch) 50th Anniversary Oral History Project Transcript of Interview – Barbara Hamer

Rosie

This is the tape of an interview with **Barbara Hamer** who has followed a distinguished career in social work and related fields and is currently retired. She is a member of the University of Melbourne Council, and is also co-chair of the "Copelen Cares" Appeal, which is raising money for family welfare. Barbara will be speaking with me, Rosie Maddick, for the 50th Anniversary Oral History Project, conducted by the Australian Association of Social Workers, Victorian Branch. On behalf of the Association, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this program.

Barbara, you do understand the copyright of the interview is shared by you and the Association?

Barbara

Indeed.

Rosie

This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording?

Barbara

Yes, but I'd like to hear it before.

Rosie.

Thank you. I can arrange that for you. I can send it to you. We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the tapes, nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority. This interview is taking place today, 30th August, 1996, at South Yarra. Can we begin by asking you how you first became interested in social work?

Barbara

When I was at school all my friends were going to do medicine. So I had prepared to do that, and the very last week the Registrar from Melbourne University came to tell us about a new field which was social work and I immediately thought, "That's for me", and abandoned the whole business about doing medical studies and I set up my career at the university towards doing social work. We were there ... in social work you might call us the class of '46, but in actual fact the year that we started at University was 1944, so we had to fill in two years. I think you were not allowed to start under 20.

Rosie

That's right.

Barbara

We then did a combined Arts course and that was worked out with people like Ruth Hoban and Professor Belz who was Dean of the Arts department, and the interesting thing to me is that when I left school I really felt there's an awful lot more to know about the world. I had looked forward for years to finishing school and thinking that I would know everything, and being quite disappointed on the last day, not disappointed, but a real awakening that the whole world of knowledge lay in front of you, actually at the end of school. And I found the way that the course was structured in our time actually was much more satisfying at the end of it. One felt that the philosophy and psychology and modern history and ethics fitted very well with the kind of curriculum we were doing in social work. However, I didn't think that we were terribly well prepared to go out in to the world to practise in social work.

Rosie

Can I just get the details of your course? You did the combined Arts/Social Studies at Melbourne University from 1944 to '46?

Barbara

We finished at the end of '47.

Rosie

So it was a four-year course? You were just about to tell me about how well prepared you felt at the end of the course?

Barbara

No, I didn't feel well prepared. I felt it was satisfying intellectually. Not that things did not come together fairly well, but it wasn't really very satisfactory from the point of view of practice in social work. For example, Freud, who's written about 30 books I think, was very big in those times, but was only available in translation, and only about three copies of his works were available in translation. Jung was almost unprocurable. So there was an awful lot of that sort of foundation work that really wasn't available for people to do very much of their own research on. I don't know whether you want me to follow on that line, but I thought it might be interesting to know what the class of '46 was. It was quite the biggest class that had ever come in at that time as it was immediately post-war, so we had a lot of people who were the post-war entry. There were a number from the navy like Loris White and Ann Maudsley. People like Edith Bennett, who I think you'll be interviewing, and Lois Pitman.

Rosie

I have interviewed Edith.

Barbara

I don't know whether she talked about this side of things. That may be boring for you. Lois Pitman later moved on and became head of the women's air force. But I'm sure she found her social work training very useful. Who else was there? Then there were a number of us all from, probably what we considered the best schools in Melbourne with professional fathers, and looking for an acceptable women's career at that time. I'd been thinking of medicine because there was never any question that I was going to work. I think there was also never any question that I did not have to work. And I don't think that was true of many people. In that particular class I think our parents probably would have managed to support us until we'd found the right husband if we hadn't been fired up to do something more constructive.

Rosie

What was your first job as a social worker?

Barbara

Well. That was quite difficult to get in a way because I moved to UK and BAs were ten a penny and everybody was specialised, so that just having a Diploma of Social Work didn't offer very much. So I had to use a lot of networking really to get a job at the Children's Welfare Association at Toynbee Hall. I don't know if you know Toynbee Hall, but it was quite a famous institution in the East End set up in 1912, I think, by a lot of radical, politically motivated people to stir things up a bit in the welfare field in the East End of London. It was a beautiful place. It had an elegant Gothic hall where we dined and there were a number of welfare agencies working around it. We all came in to lunch there and they had a lot of overseas speakers. So it was quite interesting from that point of view.

But the job! I was so fired up with enthusiasm from Melbourne University, but I found that a lot of English social workers were not even very well trained, to my astonishment. I think they had some social work training, but very few had anything like the degrees and the intellectual background that we had, and I literally was working out of a coal-hole. We had two rooms each nine feet and the window was piled up outside with coal. It was a sub-basement. The window was piled up with coal which was rather precious immediately after the war. I was set down to a typewriter in one room. There I had to type out all the forms for the children to go on holidays, not holidays exactly. They were convalescent from hospitals, but bureaucracy had suddenly gone absolutely mad after the war. There were fifteen forms that had to be filled in for every child that went to a convalescent home. I couldn't type, but I sat there and typed with one finger most of the day, being terribly frustrated, thinking this isn't what I learned to be a social worker for. I think the supervisor... I was only on probation for three months and the other thing she used me for was to take the children back and forwards too, which was interesting. I learned a lot about children and I could tell you some very funny stories, but we won't get too involved in that.

It was pretty scary when I think back on it now, because often I used to ride home from 100 miles away on the train, with two or three children. They would give me say three children under four, which was ridiculous, and some of them quite convalescent. One I was never told that he had a falling disease and he just kept falling off seats. I didn't know anything about how often little boys want to pee and then we would arrive home and the parents wouldn't be there to meet them and I would have to take them back to their family home somewhere near nine o'clock at night in the winter.

I never had any fear. Now one would think twice about doing that sort of thing. The other thing was I spent a lot of time walking around, it was still very blitzed and a lot of buildings not built up and in winter it was foggy and then I used to be a little nervous that somebody might be following me in the fog. Anyhow, I think I asked too many questions about where all the social work in this coal-hole was going, and the lady didn't take me on, for which I was not sorry.

Rosie

Well, you weren't a typist, were you?

Barbara

No, but it had its interesting side and I did write some letters, because I was working very close to Petticoat Lane and I used to have to do the banking up in Threadneedle Street. It was very Dickensian still, a lot of London, and that was all an eye-opener to a girl from Australia.

Rosie

Where did you go from there?

Barbara

From there I went to Cirencester. One of the contacts at Toynbee Hall said, "Oh there is a job available as a relieving House Master in the boys' reformatory". So I said, "Well, I will do it". It seemed a bit strange to me to be taking on a House Master's job, but that's what I did. It was very adventurous to do that. I didn't have trouble with the boys because they were mostly sentenced by the court, but in those days it was not the child's fault. Frequently when they got there they were mostly sent there for neglect, some of them were for thieving and things. The place was run almost like a public school, but there were no other women on the staff. I was the one and only woman, and I had more trouble with the masters than I had with the boys.

Rosie

When was that?

Barbara

When did I put the date down? It must have been in February, 1949. It was way down in the country.

Rosie

And how long did you stay there for? Roughly.

Barbara

Not very long, about three months, I think. After that I decided that it was absolutely essential to get a specialist qualification. I thought I'll never get anywhere in England.

Rosie

So what did you do?

Barbara

Well, I applied to the Home Office to do the probationer's course, which was a three year course, I think, in Liverpool. And actually I got into that but the acceptance missed me and I thought I hadn't, so I enrolled in the Almoners' course at Tavistock Square. There were marvelous people there in those days, the days of Dr Bowlby - does that mean anything to you?

Rosie

He did that stuff on maternal loss and deprivation.

Barbara

You were in a way on the cutting edge of that whole school of thought.

Rosie

So you did the Almoners' course and where did you work after that?

Barbara

Part of the Almoners' course was at the London Hospital, where I went back and had a baby about ten years later actually. I worked with a woman called Andre Griffin there who later came to Australia. She may turn up in some of your records, I don't know. Then my father died.

I just want to tell you about Lyra Taylor. She was in England in August '49 and she asked to see me. How she found out where I was or anything else I don't know, but it was Lyra all over, and asked me if I would go to a special conference that was on in Belgium. It was called The World Assembly of Youth and she wanted to make an assessment as to whether Australia should join it or not. There was another youth organisation that was very left wing and Australia was standing a bit apart from that, and this one was actually a bit driven by the Catholic Church and turned out to be a pretty conservative organisation. I didn't actually recommend that we join it. I can't remember what happened in the end, but it was a fascinating experience. I did another couple of short courses, then my father died and I returned to Australia and finished the last three months of practical work for the Almoners' course with Alison Player at the Alfred Hospital. Subsequently I read somebody's thesis

which has been published, as "The Hospital South of the Yarra" - I've forgotten her name now - but it gives a description of how difficult it was from the social worker's point of view to get established at the Alfred. Alison was there, and really having a lot of trouble, so I was always very grateful to her. Retrospectively, I was even more grateful to her for making it possible for me to come back and still get the London Almoners' Certificate, because I think she was under considerable pressure at the time.

Rosie

Alison Player?

Barbara

Yes. She's very famous. She was an enormous contributor to social work and to the development of the AASW. She never had any doubt, I think, about where social work was going. She was great to work with and a great teacher, and I was very, very fortunate. I was offered a position to go on at the Alfred. So I worked at the Alfred with her for another couple of years, and then I went back to the UK in 1953, which was Coronation year, and I did some locums there at St. Mary's Hospital in Paddington, and for a short time when I came back at the end of that year in Melbourne I worked at the Women's Hospital relieving Isobel Strahan. She's dead now.

Rosie

Yes. She died about seven years ago.

Barbara

At Prince Henry's I was relieving the senior social worker there whose name I can't remember. The question was what to do after that and there was a job open to go on at Prince Henry's as a senior social worker there. But Alison Player when I consulted her said she thought it might be interesting to go on to open a new department at the Austin Hospital. It was just at the point where they were trying to change its role really. It had been a hospital for... I suppose you might almost call it a hospice these days. It was for people who they didn't expect would ever get out into the community again, and because of the war there'd been an enormous lot of new knowledge about how to deal with back injuries, and they were setting up a paraplegic unit there, so I went there.

Rosie

In about '54?

Barbara

Yes, it would've been '54. Again it was to me a very disillusioning experience because I ... well, there was a great deal of lip service to being a team ... teamwork with the medical staff. I felt that they saw my role as clearing the beds of all these people who'd been there for years so that they could bring in their paraplegic people. I did a lot of work trying to place people. I became very interested in sheltered

workshops and I thought it was amazing really that it was so difficult to convince the unions that these people weren't a threat. The unions had a very hard line on paying anybody less than the ... it wasn't the basic wage, the award rate really. I think it would have worked. Anyway, that was my chief interest there. I just wish it had been easier. It was a very difficult job. Social work was never easy anywhere.

Rosie

Did you also set up a department there, in effect, were you were the chief or the senior?

Barbara

Yes, I was the senior social worker. What they call the social worker in charge. I took students from Melbourne University.

Rosie

How many staff would you have had?

Barbara

A shared secretary. I wouldn't have called myself a senior social worker because I had no social workers under me, but I did have students.

Rosie

You stayed there how long?

Barbara

I got married in 1955 so I wasn't there all that long. I suppose by some people's terms it was long. Quite a long time it seemed to me at the time.

Rosie

So you were only there about eighteen months? And what happened when you got married in 1955? Did you keep working?

Barbara

Well, we went to Sydney and I worked at the Paddington Women's Hospital. I don't know if you know that at all.

Rosie

I know Paddington but I don't know the Women's.

Barbara

It is just opposite the barracks there and I was doing adoptions. The social worker I worked with was

Elizabeth Parer, who was the mother of Damian Parer, who was a very famous war photographer. He was killed towards the end of the war but his photographs are still ... a very famous collection of photographs. Anyway, she was a lovely person and we gave one the impression that one was doing a lot more because one managed to place children for adoption at a much greater rate than I was able to place people in the workforce. Anyway, then we went to England, back to the UK. At that time my husband was in Sydney I think with the HMAS Sydney, and they were away a bit before we went to England, and he started to talk to me about all the problems that sailors had when they're posted away from home, and he drew a picture for me of the intake of sailors who were frequently boys from institutions who had no family to back them up, who married girls who had no families, or if they did then took them to Sydney where their families certainly were not. So there were these young people in Sydney with no families. The man would go to sea. The girl would be left having a baby. The man would ask for leave, compassionate leave, to go home. This was disruptive for the Navy and I said, "Who do you get to report and see how things are going or put some supports in the home?" and he said, "We ask the Chaplain". I said, "What you really need are social workers" and we started to talk to people in the Navy about it and it didn't take very long. I think they got social workers in less than twelve months, and a very good friend of mine, Jean Anderson, who had been my supervisor at the Crippled Children's Society in Melbourne, one of the placements I did as a student, became the senior social worker there, and she was in residence in Canberra. After we came back and lived in Canberra, she was working there. She had a lot of trouble really because social workers were known (I think, in those days, and I don't know whether they still suffer from this) for talking too much, being good talkers and wanting to discuss things with people. The Navy didn't want that. They wanted a recommendation. They would call her in and the man who she was working with, whom we knew very well, would say, "If she had just simply said "I recommend sailor so-and-so comes home at once", I would have just signed the chits and he would have come home, and it would have been five minutes in the office." She wanted to explain why he needed to come home. That's what I meant when I said social workers have had an awful lot of justifying of their position to do with people, but the Navy was a strange case, they didn't want people to justify.

My husband used to ring me up before we were married and he would say, "Oh it's David. Come to dinner tonight. Six o'clock at the Australia." I said to him one day "Other people talk to their girlfriends on the phone". "That isn't the way we do it." I can understand what he meant there.

Anyway, that was ... you know, as I said some of that is things that I'm still interested in. Then we went back to England and had a baby at the London Hospital, my old stamping ground, and then we lived in a village where it was vital to be part of that organisation ... they don't call it the Country Women's Association and I forget what its name is, but it was something very similar to the Country Women's Association and they used to meet all together in London about once a year, have an enormous conference. I remember going to this little school hall. It was through a muddy field, and they always opened the meeting by singing "Jerusalem" - the piano was terribly out of tune - and that was a difficult hymn anyway. The lady of the manor got up and she said, "Now we have to send some

delegates ..., the only one that I know is Hatty Hepshut." I don't know what the name is, but I thought it was so funny it always stayed in my mind. She said, "She's my cousin, so we'll elect her." Everybody dutifully put up their hand and said, "Hatty Hepshut". The biggest item on the agenda was corporal punishment and whether they should go back to flogging offenders, and she said, "We're all in favour of that, aren't we?" and everybody then put up their hand to my amazement. There was absolutely no discussion about it at all. I was there in the capacity of a visitor that night and I didn't feel it behoved me to say very much, but I went away simply staggered. Apart from that ... the village life ... I used to drive the older members of the community to get their feet done. It was a very closely knit little community. Everybody knew everybody and there was a lot of support and help for each other. In fact, I had a miscarriage and was very ill there and they were simply marvellous. I never cooked a meal while I was sick.

Rosie

So you were involved in that as a person in the local community.

Barbara

Yes, that was just a person of the local community, but not as a social worker. We came back to Canberra at the beginning of 1959 and Jean Anderson persuaded me to join the social workers' group there which was not big enough to be a proper branch of the AASW at that time, because I think we only had ten members and we had to get fifteen. We never did achieve that in my day. But there were old friends there like Lois Pitman and Ethel McGuire and some of the others whose names I can't remember, but the first thing we did was to do a survey. We were very concerned about teenage activities in Canberra and we did a survey about the sort of facilities there were for them. I ran that but I didn't feel terribly happy. I had to run it within the guidelines that were given to me and I felt there were things that were quite outside the facility that should have been taken into account, like the bus services that were in Canberra, and other difficulties. Anyway, that was an interesting thing. Then when Jean Anderson left she rather sneakily put me in as Vice-president of this group, and then went off and got married. So I was left as President of the group and we involved ourselves in a number of things then, but I can't remember very much about that.

At the same time I was working with Naval wives to raise money to set up the Barnardo Homes in Canberra, and Naval wives always had a certain amount of work with their ships' companies I suppose, but in Canberra one was not as involved in that as you are if you are on a Naval base.

My husband then became Captain of the Destroyer Squadron and he went to sea with a ship's company that was one third boys of sixteen, which was amazing, and he was very proud of himself - and I should be proud of myself - they had only one compassionate leave case. They were away for nine months which was the longest time any ship's been away in peacetime, and although it was actually during the Malaysian confrontation, and he'd written to all the parents of all those boys before he went, on my advice, and told them that he would look after them in the strange ports and things,

and we got a great stack of letters back from parents and it probably was a record that was unequalled. So social work has strange spin-offs.

I didn't actually work in paid employment over quite a number of years, and during those years, we were partly in Canberra, then my husband was elected member for Isaacs and later became a senator, and so I did a number of works to do with philanthropy. Because of my social work background I was asked to go on the committee of Southern Family Life and later became the Chairman and I found this a very interesting organisation because it was to me a new concept of using volunteers to bolster the professional work, but it had many stresses and it was not easy, as I discovered. There was a good deal of feeling between one branch and the other. So much so that in the end I wondered if I knew what social workers were talking about and I went back to Melbourne University and said I thought I would upgrade my old diploma to a BSW.

Rosie

When did you do that, Barbara?

Barbara

That was, I think, 1979. I did forget to mention that I had had paid employment but not in the social work field. From about '75 to '78 I worked with the Australian Society of Music Education, but that's a different story altogether.

Rosie

Another string to your bow?

Barbara

Well, my musical activities are another life.

Rosie

Can I just go back to Southern Family Life? What was the work of Southern Family Life? What were they doing?

Barbara

They were offering counselling services and the full range of activities one might expect in a welfare agency to people who lived in slightly more affluent suburbs, Sandringham and Beaumaris. A lot of people wondered why they needed help there, but there were still people, especially isolated women, that needed somewhere they could go and talk to people about it, and this is why the volunteers felt so strongly about it that they could help each other.

Rosie

So back to Melbourne Uni in 1979. You did your BSW. It must be one of the first of those ones actually, at that time. Did you do any paid work?

Barbara

I fell in with my old friend, Len Tierney, who of course had been a member of the class of '46 and he thought I probably didn't actually need to do this but was supportive, and I think it was due to him that I was sent to St. Anthony's in Footscray, because he was very interested in their project there to try and break recidivism in the needy families

Rosie

By that you mean...?

Barbara

Well, I think that if people aren't well-mothered and they're pregnant by the time they're fourteen that's their pattern and they tend to...

Rosie

It goes on repeating itself.

Barbara

Yes. It keeps repeating itself, and the idea that St Anthony's was working with, as explained to me at that time, was to try to break that cycle by putting other things into the children's lives. Maybe they couldn't change the parents totally, but they could support the children. They provided a place, a nursery where mothers could take their children if they felt that they couldn't stand them any longer or were going to beat them. The nuns were prepared to go at any time of the night or day. People could call in to where they lived and ask them for help even if it was midnight.

Rosie

And was Sister Joan Healy there?

Barbara

And Sister Joan Healy was in charge, who was a very special person, and I'm always grateful for the opportunity of working with her. I learnt a lot, although she gave me great respect for being an older person who already had a body of knowledge, but I still think I learnt.

Rosie

And what was your role there, Barbara? What did you do at St. Anthony's?

Barbara

Well, I was just one of the team, I suppose you might say. There was a great deal of emphasis there on teamwork, and unlike the Austin Hospital where they talked about teamwork, but it wasn't really, we all did have the opportunity to contribute and we knew, discussed almost every week, what we were doing, how we were doing it, and where we were going with it, and very difficult families they

were. But it was, I thought, marvellous what they were able to achieve. But of course they had such a very small number of families at that time. There were something like only 25 families on the books but about 150 children were involved in that. And they also had group homes, so I got some experience in running group homes.

Rosie

How long did you stay there for?

Barbara

Well, I stayed on ... I did a locum there while Joan was away, after I finished my training. And then I used to go back every year, there were a number of families that I continued to see and support, mainly because I was interested. I felt a little bit sad about the whole thing because I had actually got the impression from Len that it was going to be a really big research project. Setting up these sorts of research projects where the people involved also have their own agendas and things can be very difficult, I think, and there didn't seem to be enough time to write up what was really happening to every family. I think it's really ... I probably got a bit disillusioned about the ability of social workers to bring about change in the situation. I really felt that you could throw a lot of resources in and you didn't change the parents. You could make things slightly better for the children, who might then bring up their children better, and it was really crucial to understand how this happens, so that you could teach other people the techniques. But to actually change the damaged people seemed to me not possible, and that was really very disillusioning as an older person. You spend a lot of time thinking that you could produce results, and then deciding that perhaps you couldn't produce those sort of results. It's not to say that I don't think a lot of work was valuable and that we had really to understand and be able to sell what social work really is. It's about the interface of people with their social environment, and because we haven't been, I think, clear enough about that, and what we ... the term social worker is not a good one for the general public, I don't think. A great deal of ground has been stolen from under our feet by people doing psychology, psychiatrists, welfare workers, and we're ... unlike St. Anthony's because it actually got out there and helped people. It was doing practical things and I've heard Cath James say that sometimes social work is not about change, it's about supporting people to be able to operate really, and a lot of the work of St. Anthony's, I think, was that sort of work that helped a generation to be able to operate, and the next generation might operate better. And you could put more into that, bring about more change if you wanted to, but generally social work gave up helping people, I think, for a whole lot of theoretical reasons which didn't really underpin the practice properly.

This I think is the reason why other organisations, other bodies of workers have grown up like the welfare workers, because social workers didn't want to get their hands dirty anymore. I don't know whether you would agree with me on that but we used to really get out there and do what Joan Healy often referred to. She said "it isn't called social work for nothing". It's hard work out at the social interface and I think social workers do understand that and can work at it very well, but for a while we

seemed to ... and I don't know that we've unconfused ourselves yet... about exactly what we want to do, but it's no good ... we left the actual "helping-people-to-do-things" undone, so welfare officers were frequently responsible for finding the money for prostheses of one kind or another, and this was considered rather infra dig. We thought that we should be doing more to understand the patient, and sometimes doctors would say to me, "Who do you think you are? A psychiatrist?" One had some difficulty in trying to explain to people that where your work really fitted in between those two things, and I think that social workers are really ... well, when I went back to do that BSW because I thought it might help me to understand our position and I could see what had happened, especially as I'd been close to the political world, that social workers felt that to bring about change you had to change the system and that's fine, but they left other forms of help wide open, and I also found that now I have some difficulty understanding what they send me (the Journal), and I try to find articles that I relate to and I'm interested in, but most of them I don't find any connection with.

Rosie

There's been a lot of specialisation.

Barbara

Perhaps that's what a lot of the trouble is. I can blame myself that I don't keep up with things enough. I was interested in the AASW because originally social workers badly needed a body to help to define their role and who they were. They needed to define it themselves. They needed to have a voice to speak for them, i.e. what they were paid, which was very poorly at the time. It's been enormously helpful, I think, to define the code of ethics. They were all things that at some point I've been involved with with social workers either in the group in Canberra where I was an early member and used to go to meetings, especially with Alison Player, and I was aware of those early concerns of social workers.

Rosie

Could I comment here myself? Could I say that in the years between when you did your training and while you were not actually in paid employment, but as we've heard from you, you were very much involved in social issues, there was an enormous growth in social work. All the universities, three other universities came on line, lots more social workers came out. There were the Whitlam years. There was an enormous growth in welfare, and lots of specialisation.

Barbara

That's true. I was following that with interest but intellectually it didn't seem to connect with my sympathies in social work or where ... I think you could almost say that philanthropy in the sense that we were talking about it earlier, was cast out the window.

Rosie

Well, you said before that you had a very strong wish to serve people.

Barbara

Well, I come from that sort of family background. My family was Scottish and Independent Church people. My grandfather was a Premier of the State and he gave money for community hospitals like the Jessie McPherson Hospital, and he thought women should have technical skills like men did and that's why he founded the Emily McPherson College so that they had a technical place to go to. It isn't the concept we have of women now, but it was not one that shut the door on them at all. So I came with all that baggage and it's obvious that lots of other people at that stage of life did have that sort of thing. But I used to feel sometimes I wish I'd done medicine and then I could have strode about the Austin Hospital and people would have listened to me instead of... There were young doctors there the same age as I was and everybody said, "Yes sir, no sir", whereas the social worker had a real job to put their point of view.

Rosie

Barbara, I'd like to talk to you now about your involvement in the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Barbara

Well, that's been rather patchy, I suppose you could say, because my life hasn't been one of being employed as a social worker over a long period, and I'm sure some of the other people that you've mentioned, like Frances Donovan and Edith Bennett, have been in the social work field much more intensively than I have. I have lived several different lives - as a musician, and a mother and a politician's wife and Navy Captain's wife, and made contributions wherever I could. I have been trying to make some sense since you asked me all these questions, the fact that I had social work training in the beginning, how that has altered my life. So I have really been thinking deeply about my own life - the outcome of all this. But I feel in some ways that my involvement in the AASW wasn't as great as it could have been, and perhaps that is my mistake.

I have made a few notes here - just on life, which leads into the AASW thing -saying that the fact that social work has always had a great influence on the course of my life and I tried to make it work for other people too. Over the last twelve years I've been involved in the governance of Melbourne University, University of Melbourne I should say, and I had this through Len Tierney and the time I spent in the social work department in the late 70's. I've been on the old Board of Social Studies, and more recently on their advisory committee, and I have at times attended social work conferences and meetings and at times been quite close to corridors of power where sometimes one can make things happen. It's not easy, however, to present a coherent social worker point of view. Politicians usually want easy fixes and social workers know that there aren't any, and we need more precise knowledge of what will work. I started work in the era of the legacy of the Great Depression and the World War at times when it seemed a bit more money would really help. I've also lived through an enormous explosion in affluence and the amount of money available for fixing things expanded greatly, but I don't think it has brought about all the results that we hoped.

So then I was thinking again about my involvement with the AASW. I was first involved with the AASW as a student and for a short while in 1952, I think, I was on the committee of the Victorian Branch. The benefit was largely, I think, in belonging to those organisations, that you became known on the network. It could be that you were just considered a willing force, but there was an element of excitement in being involved with the leaders of the profession and feeling that you were where the change could be brought about. In the 1960's, I would have been some years out of practice, but I took on the social workers' group. I was actually pushed into it by Jean Anderson - that was the social work group in Canberra I think I mentioned before - and I tried very hard to get it large enough to become a branch of the AASW. I think we were about eleven members and we needed something like fifteen. But the explosion in numbers of social workers was not yet. This had to wait for the Whitlam years and so we worked in with the AASW and attended conferences and things like that, but we couldn't actually count as a branch in our own right.

It was about this time that I began to part company with the position of the AASW, and perhaps it was just some vocal social workers who spoke out loudly for changing the system rather than helping people fit the system. I find this attitude in myself very hard to justify. It should have been a good thing to embrace, but perhaps I was too embedded in the more conservative side of politics and it created strains and stresses which were not easy for me. I was too long out of the AASW to find it helpful here, although I attended some meetings at this time. To be honest, social workers now seemed almost like another race. It was my experiences with them at Southern Family Life that made me feel I should brush up my qualifications, and certainly that helped me to meet and understand many of the younger social workers and their ideals and aspirations. It also made me realise that a great many of them were even more confused than I was.

Rosie

Barbara, do you have any views on the future role of the Association?

Barbara

Well, I'm sure that it will perhaps come into calmer waters now that it's got things like ethics sorted out, but when I read the list of special interest groups and look at, say, the health workers and having to deal with these competencies, there are still enormous areas that its got to play a role in there to give leadership, I think, an understanding to social workers of where they fit into their profession. I think that it's well positioned now. I think that in order to go ahead and do that sort of thing there's been a lot more people trained. You've got a lot of brain power. To me, the quality which I know is there in leadership hasn't been able to come through as much as I think it should have. Perhaps because the issues have been too confusing and too large, too complicated, and that a lot of the detailed work just had to be done first of all, and I think the AASW has chipped away at that over a period of 30 years and has put itself into a position where it should really be able to be of great professional use now to people who are involved, but what we want to see is some real leadership come through - people like Lyra Taylor and the Alison Players who can keep the vision there in front

of them and inspire people, I suppose. Not just get bogged down in whether you get paid or not. That's not in my opinion what it's all about.

Really, Rosie, I think I've probably told you all I can now. It's a long life and I can't remember everything in it, but there are a few things just to round things off. I did serve on the Moreland Hall Board for a number of years, which brought me into the field of alcohol and drug abuse, and it also gave me the opportunity to be on quite a lot of the management conferences that they had that the Health Department put on. You're probably aware of those. It was quite interesting that Southern Family Life was in actual fact a health centre which came about because my husband was then the member for the area and the government of the day, which was a Liberal Government. They kept giving money for health centres, and so he was able to steer some money towards the setting up of Southern Family Life. But we were the only health centre that didn't have any medical staff, it was only staffed by social workers, but it did mean that we were invited frequently to go to these conferences on the management of hospitals and health centres, and that was the beginning of a long history which is now culminating in some different things. I don't know actually whether it's the culmination but obviously hospital management has been a big issue for state governments over a long period and that now with the amalgamations and different sort of networks they've made. This is another attempt at making solutions, all of them, making tremendous demands, I think, on the people who are involved in the systems, and quite confusing at times for the social workers because that wasn't really our first responsibility. But now that competencies and things have come in I think social workers are even more involved in that sort of thing so it probably was good practice.

Again, with Moreland Hall I became involved again in all that management stuff of hospitals, so that was one thing that's been going on in my life. There were other ones I was going to talk about.

Southern Family Life also involved me in being a delegate to the regional councils. I don't know whether you remember those, but they were brought in at the time of the Hamer government to try to rationalise the way in which money was dispersed to charitable organisations. Way back in time ministers used to have slush funds for things like the arts and to some extent charitable things, and it was just if you got the minister's ear. In order to try to get away from that, Dick Hamer made area alignments of the people involved in welfare work of one kind or another and they then had to decide between themselves who got the money. They would be given say \$200,000 at that time - It doesn't sound a big sum now but it was a reasonable sum - to each region and you had to send your own delegates to the meeting and discuss the matter. I can remember being amazed that the first time they had been through this process there was about \$400,000 worth of claims for something like \$200,000 to disburse, so a marvellous nun was sailing down the corridors of the building saying, "Let's have a revolution. We can't possibly do this. Let's all sit down and say we're not going to do it". So they all went down to the main room again and I must say I spoke up out of my experience with the arts because I had something of the same sort of situation of dispensing money, and I knew that first of all you had to check through and see whether their people's arithmetic is right. Then you have

to look and see how much they've allowed because they think that you're a bit silly and then you really have to have a look and see whether a certain service would be functional, would be able to function if it only got 90 per cent of the money or 75 per cent of the money. Some things, unless they get the whole amount, are really not worth doing. The thing I thought was rather interesting, I got them all back to working on this thing again and it came out exactly, so I thought that was rather good. I suppose it was a triumph in one way, but it was also quite amusing.

So I've had a lot of different sorts of experiences and I don't know what it all adds up to at the moment. I feel I'm interested ... the areas I'm really interested in at the moment are where social work is going at Melbourne University, and because of that with some other universities too. What welfare work is compared with social work and a number of other things like that really deeply concern me as to ... so we still haven't got all our definitions straight. We still don't know exactly.

We're still probably too concerned with looking for our identity and I often feel despairing about how a lot of social psychiatry and social psychology have picked up things that I think we could have done, and that we shouldn't perhaps have allowed the ball to be kicked away out of our quarter quite so much. I think we have to stop navel gazing, get on giving powers for real leaders to come through, people who still care about people even if they are going to grandstand, which they'll have to do in the political arena, and really convince people that social workers still have something really worth saying and worth giving to the world, which I still think they have. But I'm not quite sure whether they can see their way through to how to present it. And that I think is all I've got to say about it.

Rosie

Thank you very much for that Barbara, and thank you in particular for all the thought you've put into what you've said.