

-Hans Cohn
Interviewed by Elizabeth McBroom
At Rosemary Cottage, Pasadena, California
On November 7, 1990

Hans Cohn came as a child from Nazi Germany and lived with a foster family, where some of his ideas took seed about children in out-of-home care. After obtaining an MSW from USC, he worked for Jewish Big Brothers in Los Angeles, and with their Camp Max Strauss. He was recruited by the board of Rosemary Cottage, then a facility for troubled teen-age girls, the board believing that the girls would be more positively responsible to a man. At the time of this interview, he had been director of the program for twenty-five years, during which he had innovated a number of changes in ways of working with the girls, as well as developing group homes for the care of children of all ages, particularly runaways and abused children. He was instrumental in the establishment of a state association of child-care agencies, which has been important in helping agencies state wide in carrying out their goal of providing shelter and care to runaway and other children who have fallen out of the child care system.

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PREAMBLE; Dr. McBroom made written notations that electronic complications resulted in the tape not picking up on the first few minutes of the interview, which she then summarized. Mr. Cohn described his entrance into the profession of social work, which occurred because he himself grew up as a foster child. He and his brother were separated from their parents and brought to the United States as refugees from Nazi Germany. The boys were placed with a family in Iowa under the guardianship of the Jewish Child Welfare Organization in Chicago. He became interested in social work through camp experiences, and attended the University of Southern California, where he earned the MSW degree in 1956. He worked for some time with the Jewish Big Brothers in Camp Max Strauss. He was the first man to be executive at Rosemary Cottage, where he has been for twenty-five years as the Executive Director. This connection was made through Loraine Stinson, whose husband, Malcolm, was then Dean of the School, and Loraine was a member of the Rosemary Board.

Occasionally the comments on the cassette were obscured by the use by a gardener of an electric clipper on shrubbery immediately outside the window of the interview room.

MCBROOM: You did a variety of things before your social work career.

COHN: Yes. I got out of the military service, and I have been doing social work ever since then. I never thought that I would get into the placement bit. I always felt it was something that wasn't that good.

MCBROOM: Do you mean you didn't have a good experience with it?

COHN: Oh, I had a good experience, but the folklore in social work was really not a thing to be avoided. My first ten years out of graduate school were running a camping program for mixed-up kids. That was essentially a place for process. I viewed it that way, and the agency viewed it that way. I wrote a couple of papers for John Milner on camping and processing as placement.

Getting this job was a fluke. I was ready to leave Big Brothers. Rosemary Cottage needed an executive because the incumbent was leaving. Loraine Stinson was the chairman of the search

committee. The agency had never had a man on staff. After I accepted the job, they told me I was the first man to run a girl's agency this side of the Mississippi.

MCBROOM: You were a real pioneer.

COHN: I was crazy. I kept that old duffel and a bunch of stuff that was interesting this board had been looking at this assignment programmatically, but my experience was in process. Would the agency's state licensing be a problem? That worried me. But there were some interesting kinds of things about the whole idea of bringing a man into a girl's placement operation.

MCBROOM: Tell us a little about that.

COHN: I think the initial objections that came out of the licensing procedure by the State was how can a man really be free to function in a residential operation with acting out and very seductive teen-age girls who didn't have any confidence or sense of safety. That was a clear-cut problem of concern for me.

MCBROOM: Had the agency gone through a period of some sterility?

COHN: I think that many board members felt that. It was a very protected and sheltered kind of operation. The agency started in the Twenties as a shelter. In the early 1940s, during the war, population dropped down totally, there was a major concern as to whether we ought to keep the program going or not. The Welfare Planning council did a lot on this. They reviewed the program and made some recommendations in terms of what to do. At that point they shifted to a more treatable program for teenagers who no longer necessarily wanted that. The agency hired its first social worker at that point. There were a succession of social workers in the Forties. It became kind of a long-term analytical thing. They were very protected even though they had the kids in public school and it was a holding in and sheltering kind of thing, very few risks were taken. Kids were thought of as too fragile to be pushed too hard. My task, as I sensed from what

the board was saying, was to see that pushing was needed. My experience with disturbed kids in camping was that you could expect a lot more if you were going to push them and get them going. So we really shifted the program, turning more to community activities. I think the classic incident was a girl who was almost eighteen, a senior in high school and ready to graduate. She came into my office and asked me if somebody would take her to the store to buy a spool of white thread. I told her that the store was only two blocks away from here and that she should walk. People always used to take them. They had been extremely overprotected up to adulthood, really. That stops now. You may go yourself. Somebody give her some money. Get this kid outta here. The kids didn't mind that. I'm not sure that this was the case all over the place or that this was a way of testing. It was certainly kept. There were a number of things like that that really got changed around. The kids were getting telephone calls. Incoming calls were received only on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, I think between certain hours because staff had to take the calls, call the kid to the phone, and be around while this happened. I had to put a pay phone in so kids could call in and out without stampeding. There was a lot of this kind of stuff. This was fairly pervasive in agencies generally; it wasn't just Rosemary. Crittendon was for older women and had a maternity program, but there the protection was that incoming callers had to call for someone by first name only; if not, the call didn't go through. There was a lot of this going on.

MCBROOM: They had some idea of total protection and total divorce from the outside. Did you have any idea or any follow-up studies on what this impact had on the young women after they left Rosemary?

COHN: Nothing formally, I have anecdotal stuff because I met with some of the people who were here before and really had to struggle. A couple worked for me. My supervisor in child care worked and was a graduate in 1956-1958 who always had in mind to come back. She raised

her kids, went on to college and got a degree, and came back. She had her mind set and she did it; she came through. She is not the only one; I had several graduates working for me.

MCBROOM: What was the year you came?

COHN: 1964.

MCBROOM: So she had come and gone about eight years before the Cohn era.

COHN: Yes. The people who were running it were social workers who were near the very top. There was a flavor to this inmate treatment which we needed to modify.

MCBROOM: This was actually determined by the professional staff at that time?

COHN: It was the kind of a thing where a board member, within a couple of weeks after I came on the job, came to the door, rang the bell, and asked whether it O.K. to come in.

MCBROOM: To your office?

COHN: Yes. This was a professional, with a Ph.D. in sociology or something. You might check some of this out with Monika White who was my secretary in those days. She saw all of this happen. I'm sure she was not that tuned in on what was happening, but she saw it. She was on the job for about three months before I came and then decided to chuck social agencies and get out.

MCBROOM: She has gone on to be a social worker herself.

COHN: Yes. The initial shift was very much one towards opening things up internally, programmatically. We changed psychiatric consultants; we had a guy who came out once a week and puffed on a pipe in a red leather chair and didn't contribute much.

MCBROOM: How did he carry on in his sessions?

COHN: Jerry would arrive on a motorcycle to start with, and he wound up as the chief of consultation for County Hospital. He was teaching there and became chief of another group.

That was a very aggressive thing. He is now doing service up in Santa Cruz, which I think is a beautiful spot for him. He was much more geared towards staff, linkages, and staff development; developing a treatment climate among staff and integrating the old staff. This was to keep the focus on the kids and to focus on the kid's individual problems and trying to get to diagnostic relations. This is a different approach. We were concerned with how and where the kids were living, and so on. This was clearly a good change. His basic experience in training had been in staff development and staff training. I had never carried a case load except as a student.

Developing in that direction was what we tried to do here. At the same time the board had come to a clear decision that there would be expansion and that we would develop new homes. This meant they would be able to get some space, and we would develop this. There were three mandates, essentially, when I came in. Look at the program carefully and see if it meets the needs. Start planning to develop group homes. Start student tracking. Rosemary was the first established agency to develop group homes. There was a lot of trepidation around that because, again, my thrust was that I didn't want to employ couples. We put rotating shifts of staff into there; they would not be a glorified foster home. We put a lot of responsibility on the kids. We paid sixteen-year olds to take care of feeding themselves. Could this be done? Could they handle it? They have ever since. The expectation was set. The kids now, and then, were responsible for developing menus and going shopping.

MCBROOM: They do the marketing, they do the menus making.

COHN: The staff goes along with them, but the girls do it. There was a tremendous amount of spin off from that. They developed their survival skills. The same went for clothing shopping.

MCBROOM: It is quite a contrast to needing a companion to buy a spool of thread. What would you identify as being the most gratifying thing to you as you look back?

COHN: Probably the fact that kids were taught survival skills. They needed them to continue after leaving Rosemary. The number of kids who would up in the welfare system or the penal system after they left here has been pretty low. It doesn't mean that everybody makes it, but it did seem to work and has in the last few years. An effort was made to get kids ready to get out. I think that has been the provable point. That still has been one of the essential ingredients around here during the last couple of year as we shifted directions and added the independent living program. This is a new facet to the Social Security Act. We are working with youngsters who are in local foster homes which are run by the county.

MCBROOM: What is the scope of your group care home now?

COHN: We have thirty-four beds at four different sites. One of those units is an emergency shelter which houses kids from anyplace from twenty-four hours to maybe four weeks while something is developing. We give them some place to stay. They may be runaways who come in directly off the street and are talked to by other kids, or they may be kids we picked up from the emergency services of the Department of Public Social Services. Informally, we do an awful lot of that. We do an awful lot of directing of those kids as to where they ought to go and what ought to happen, and we get them organized about the system. What we know the practice ought to be and what the practice actually is are quite a way apart and we tend to pick up an awful lot of pieces.

MCBROOM: Where the foster care system breaks down. Are these homes of the Department of Children's Services?

COHN: Yes.

MCBROOM: These children have already been abused and neglected?

COHN: They are in the system because they have been abused and neglected. Then there is further system abuse because of a lack of appropriate staffing and the numbers game is being

played: inadequate staff; inadequate foster parent training; and inadequate response to disasters. In other words, we are finding that in many cases if we had the ability to provide respite care and foster parents, if we help the kid hold out for a few days while things quiet down, we can put them back in the system. The system is not geared to deal with these kids.

MCBROOM: It is too inflexible.

COHN: It is too inflexible. The children are taken out of the system and placed rather than helped back. We have done that around respite care for parents while they use the shelter. It works beautifully, and we have done it for kids in other agencies. I have had kids come for time out because we have the ability to do that and then put them back where they started from. It is the same thrust with runaways. The practice used to be, when I first got into this, that if a kid ran more than twice, she couldn't come back. She had to be replaced. I ran into some real difficulties with the assistants when I questioned them. There was this runaways-problem solving behavior. Are you going simply to allow it to happen, or do you do something differently?

There were some loud noisy sections of the Welfare Planning Council. My stance has always been "you yo yo to bring a runaway back in" because if you also bring her back, you've got to deal with it; and the intervals between will increase. At length, the runaways will decrease if you bring them back to where they started from. You don't allow them to escape. They have to deal with whomever they ran from. That works.

MCBROOM: Your shelter program must be relatively small in a county this size. What happens to kids who can't come to your shelter?

COHN: We are the only agency that has a contract with Los Angeles County Emergency Shelter. We have infant children. There are forty beds for infants at International, a children's institute. St. Harriet's has another similar number. So we have about maybe one hundred infants

under three years old.

MCBROOM: Emergency care?

COHN: Except it isn't an emergency anymore; they hold them in. We are the only ones. We used to do the same thing for the Probation Department. Those kids go to McClaren Hall. That is basically cold storage, although actually it is very warm and comfortable. The kids love it and no demands are made on them. So they all want to go back there.

MCBROOM: Like going back to a cocoon.

COHN: Exactly. We make demands. Some kids don't like us and some workers don't like us. The thrust is that unless you make the demands, you'll see some kids are going to go sour. I think that has been a long-standing part of my pushing. You can't deal with them unless you push them a little bit in that first instance; if you don't, it will allow them to push back. It gets kind of noisy and angry and confrontive at times.

MCBROOM: So you say that a lot of the child welfare programs here really have no expectations for any of the kids. Now what are some of the obstacles you have encountered in getting this program underway and changing?

COHN: Certainly the attitudinal ones and professional folklore, if you will. For instance, there was some initial resistance because there was a man around the place; and because I was dealing with runaways. These were some of the things that people could not understand. Runaways have always been with us in this business; it didn't just happen suddenly. One of the early things that I was thinking about just after you called me was that I had

a very loud and noisy set with some of my colleagues in girls' agencies around the late sixties, about the agencies that refused to place teenagers who had had children. If you had been pregnant, you were not welcome in any of the girls' centers. Because I was a stupid man, I was able to ask the question: "Why is this so?" "It has always been like this." It had to change.

MCBROOM: Is that professional folklore still operating around here, do you think?

COHN: No.

MCBROOM: It has pretty well been turned down.

COHN: It had to be. The caseloads have changed. The nature of the game is different. It sure was one of the constraints. Supposedly they somehow provided a corrupting influence on the other, virginal, ears around me. Well, there were no virginal ears around here ever; incest was always with us; it was just never talked about.

MCBROOM: Were the staff and the kids almost running on parallel tracks, with the staff not understanding the realities of these girls' experience? Well, tell me then, how it is now.

COHN: I think we are much more open about it in the staff. We are much more understanding.

MCBROOM: Do you deal with things more appropriately?

COHN: We have been doing this for years. That was another thing that we had to break out of. We found very early, as we started expanding, that we couldn't afford to have social workers do all of the things that social workers were expected to do. We could not afford to have social workers spend hours in school running interference with the counselor. We could not afford to have social

workers sit in doctors' offices chaperoning the kids. We could not afford to have social workers spend hours in court dealing with stuff. So we would have to use "case aides," which were usually people who had been child care workers and thought this would be higher for them. I thought about this again in term of what I did in the Army. I was a social work technician; certain tasks were laid out for me; I was under the supervision of somebody else.

MCBROOM: What have you separated out as the essential professional graduate professional tasks?

COHN: The psychiatric consultation social workers have to be at their desks.

MCBROOM: They do know what goes on.

COHN: There is a daily meeting with the child care staff to find out what is happening. They interpret what is going on. Social workers are assigned a group home and meet with the child care staff. They don't bother with the mechanics of what is happening in the school. They do not need to deal with the medical complications about the kid's needing this and that. Somebody else will follow through and check.

MCBROOM: How do you find the BSW (Bachelor of Social Work) preparations for this test?

COHN: All the case aids that I have had were child care workers someplace. I think the combination of the two has worked out very nicely. They were trained as child care workers here or someplace else. It makes a great career. The undergraduate, I think, in many cases like that; they have work experience that allows them to some counseling and get to know the community. In other words, they have a good case book of resources and how to use them before they get here. I think that is where the preparation comes in handily.

MCBROOM: Do the MSWs supervise the BSWs?

COHN: A little bit. They work more independently.

MCBROOM: Have you identified any particular strategies you have used as you come toward a goal here at Rosemary?

COHN: I think there is a dual track that goes with agency administration these days: one is external; one is internal. There is one for staff and staff development and these kinds of things. At the same time we work with the agencies. The public agencies have to pay an awful lot of attention to social policy issues. It pretty much involves everything.

MCBROOM: Can you give me an example of that?

COHN: We have both, with the State Association, which is heavily staffed and we have three full-time lobbyists in the State Association in Sacramento.

MCBROOM: This is something quite new actually?

COHN: No.

MCBROOM: Well, I mean new since you came here.

COHN: Well, yes. Back in the early Sixties, before I came into residential treatment placement services, funding for programs like this were essentially dependent on County subsidies. They were treated like foster homes; you were paid \$100-\$150 a month, and that was it. In the early 1960s the local agencies in L.S. got together and decided to force the issue and started negotiating with Los Angeles County to develop a contract for the cost of care. They began to cost this out carefully with some really great standards. The agencies came to an agreement with Los Angeles County to reimburse on the basis of the last year's cost, the historical cost. That was the first standard: audits, and all the other kind of stuff. That shifted the program drastically, because we were then able to provide appropriate programs. We had to fight for this to do it, but it was done.

MCBROOM: When you were getting the cost, you could really develop a much better program.

COHN: A much more quality program: much more proportional, more accountability.

Nevertheless, it started happening. That was the first bit of it. That was really pushed by a group of board people with executives backing them up. Key players in those days were McKinley Home and Joseph Bonaparte at Vista del Mar. The old names would keep popping up in this thing. In those days there was an interesting group of executives; they were the old time superintendents. They were not social-work trained. Then you had a group of social workers, some younger and some older, in this. As we developed this program in L.A. County, we also moved it statewide. There was a similar grouping of agencies in the Bay area, and we supported them. We realized pretty quickly that we had to form a state organization with staff, and some of us had some input while others didn't. By 1969-1970 we were well on the track to having state organization with, initially, part-time staff. By 1973 we had full-time staff, and a secretary. We also hired some part-time people. We had to get the state organized in relation to the needs for these programs. The only way to do that was to pursue it with the help of our boards to familiarize them about social policy issues.

MCBROOM: How is your organization funded?

COHN: By dues. The agency pays, and this supports the staff and the lobbyists. We now have three full-time staff. The group that got the demonstration going was essentially the Keeblers, Frank Grave, Ryan Kano, Jim Mann, and others. It has had a major impact on what's going on at this particular point. We could not have developed the kind of programs we felt we needed and to get the state to assume responsibility.

MCBROOM: How are you progressing towards some of these goals/

COHN: As of July 1, we developed a new rate-setting system which is based on a flat rate on the basis of child care workers provided for each group.

MCBROOM: What is the range of rates now?

COHN: The range of rates on this new scale will be from \$1,200 to \$3,600. There is no rip off. There are some tie-ins that we managed to create by having mental health and education opportunities which had not been extant. We had been pushing ever since the 'Seventies for blended funding from all the state agencies that had money for kids in placement. We have got to do that. We are still not quite where we want to be.

MCBROOM: We hear some horror stories of kids being placed outside the state and in some sort of exploitive places.

COHN: There is a very clear kind of a mandate in the state now. In order to place a kid out of state, that has to be justified. We have a couple of operations, one in Utah and some other ones that are BAD.

MCBROOM: Children are still placed there?

COHN: Hardly any. They have been pretty nearly squeezed out.

MCBROOM: That is a great achievement. Was your association active in accomplishing that?

COHN: One of the vehicles that we used for that was using a purity process in our own agencies to maintain a qualified membership. That has had a real upgrading effect. Ninety agencies in California were upgraded. They are all operations that have no effect on shifting everybody's standards. The out-of-state placements have not been cut completely or eliminated, but they have been cut drastically. There has been a really major impact on regulations of licensing, and the total overall level in group homes has gotten better.

MCBROOM: Are you satisfied with what is going on now?

COHN: I am satisfied with the process among studies, but not yet with the end result.

MCBROOM: What do you see as the tasks ahead?

COHN: I think the major elements will eventually be that funding will have to reflect the fact

that the kids who are coming into the system and being placed, need a lot more. We are finding more and more the need for--I hate to say this--the return for the orphanage. That is essentially what we are seeing. Kids have no family resource to go back to. We have to respond, even though that is not the way we meant it to be. Yet that is what we are faced with. Kids get moved out of their families at fourteen or fifteen because of abuse. It often becomes a terminal kind of a move....AB 272, which we pushed very hard, had that in mind. That was one of those things that people think has backfired. I don't think it has. That too goes to the social policy issues supported by the board. AB 262 came out of something presented by George Miller, Representative from Oakland. A guy from Van Nuys, I can't think of the name right now, and John Roussellet came in here a few times for board meetings and that kind of stuff. Lo and behold, we had these guys on the opposite end of the political spectrum take on the Boston Adoptions as an issue. It got to be an issue which was totally non partisan. It was pushed on by this funny coalition. They picked it up real smooth-like because they were cognizant of the issues. They had me carry the testimony for the (Child Welfare) League because Roussellet, who was for it, pushed it. It did drop. When Reagan came into the presidency and tried block grants for all social services, Roussellet would not allow them to have block grants in child welfare. He would say, "This one worked on my committee, and I appointed this one's kid to the Academy," and so on. I, as a social worker, had to convince board members of the righteousness of our cause and that we had a good program going and that it would be this way. We had to summerize content in terms of numbers and zoning issues. It was learned at school. We used it consciously. I did a seminar with June Brown (faculty in the School of Social Work) years ago in which this whole issue of policy came up and the process was identical.

MCBROOM: We don't admit that we had pariahs in our midst.

COHN: No, but we act like it.

MCBROOM: How do you see prevention in general now?

COHN: We don't fund it. I think it still works. I came out of an agency that did nothing in the way of prevention.

MCBROOM: What kind of service did you have for such a child?

COHN: First of all, we took them out of the regular school and put them into a classroom and worked with them. They didn't dare deface the site because the kids had respect for that. Where does it say that a program like this, at a very nominal cost, gets shut down? Well it is a question of priorities.

MCBROOM: Why hadn't this got top priority?

COHN: We picked up a lot of the concepts that worked for us.

MCBROOM: Yes, let's get back to that. That is very interesting, and I wish you would talk about that.

COHN: It goes to the whole concept that we have been working with ever since we opened up a group home: emancipating kids from day one. The average age in the foster care system is between six and eighteen. Who would be able to have access to funding that supplied additional counseling and training for job development, uniforms, the kinds of expenses that go with learning? Federal money was to go on a per capital basis to the states, who would fund the county; and the county was mandated to contract out the services. The thought was that if there was no mandate to the counties to contract, the program wouldn't go anyplace. What we were doing with that whole program was that we've got about forty youngsters in addition to others who are in local foster homes. It is a one on one service.

MCBROOM: One junior leaguer to one kid?

COHN: These are professionals. They are role models, all super achievers. They help kids get around and tell them how to find an apartment. That is the best way I can describe it. We duplicate the whole of what a family should provide around such matters. We ask what is missing, and how do we provide that, and we do it that way. There is not nearly enough of the money or services. I am troubled by the fact that only half of the kids are in the county program who should be because the number is so great. Our kids are different; they have special needs. They lack things. Just to teach them computer skills or salesmanship skills is not the issue. The skill training anybody can do. The value training, the skill training about how do I emancipate; that is what foster care is about.

MCBROOM: You have a good channel with this one on one with bright young achieving women. Give an example of how this has worked out in some cases.

COHN; First of all, in many cases they maintain the relationship after the kids leave. The good thing about it is that the volunteers are colorblind. The black volunteers work with Caucasian kids and Caucasian volunteers work with black kids and there is no problem. What happens again and again is the volunteer is credible because he or she does not get paid for this work. There is a big difference. It is the same thing we saw when I worked at Big Brothers. They care and that is clear. So it is a very different kind of a thing. We have our graduates coming tn to teach the classes.

MCBROOM: There are some wonderful people out there, and when they get connected with some of these kids, they just work miracles.

COHN: We have your volunteers and your ex-clients in your system.

MCBROOM: The foster care system is bankrupt, you could almost say. Is insurance running out a big problem? Would you talk a little bit about that.

COHN: I get a couple of calls a week, probably, from various hospitals saying, “Can you take this one? We are out of money.” We say yes. Then we pick up a kid who needs out-of-home treatment.

MCBROOM: Is there a lot of exploitation going on? Can you talk a little bit about that?

COHN: Yes. You get it in the sense of kids who have been in psychiatric hospitals.

Sometimes, we really question that. Was it a way to get the kid off of their parent’s back? I don’t know if it is easier for the parents to deal with the guilt of the psychiatric evaluation or to simply say that the kid was a runaway.

MCBROOM: Do they have a choice?

COHN: It seems to happen. It used to be that if you could diagnose the kid as hyperactive and Ritalin would take care of it and relax them, you’d do it. Whether or not it was needed didn’t make that much difference. What they do is the same thing that we do. We know our education. They may dope them up a bit more, we don’t use drugs.

MCBROOM: You don’t medicate your kids?

COHN: Very, very rarely.

MCBROOM: I heard you tell once about getting a kid underway who was sick and just going to stay in bed all day and just didn’t want to get going.

COHN: Right. If you are sick, you either are sick enough to stay in bed or else you have to be in school. There was no in-between about this. In that matter I had a tougher time in one situation. Last year we had a young student who would constantly find that she could avoid her job and school by dislocating her shoulder. Of course everybody would get exercises about them. They would run to the emergency room and do all the other related stuff. We finally sat her down and said, “Look, this kind of thing is getting so serious that you are going to need a medical setting.

You can't function in a community with all these kinds of goodies that we have here for you, so pack and prepare to leave. We will find you a hospital." Never again did she do it.

MCBROOM: It was a permanent cure.

COHN: Then she found out other things. She graduated high school, moved out, and did her own thing. She got a job and moved out. Sometimes you have to take chances. I think one important element for doing this is that it is a voluntary agency.

MCBROOM: You can be flexible.

COHN: That, I think, is why I have enjoyed staying with this program. Basically this is small enough still so that I am involved clinically.

MCBROOM: You can use all of your skills.

COHN: I can do everything around the place. By the book, this is supposedly not good.

MCBROOM: What about staff continuity and staff turnover here?

COHN: People usually stay here for a while. They get variety and keep their interest alive.

MCBROOM: Do you have any clear idea of what social workers can do better than volunteers and vice versa?

COHN: Yes. They are great at counseling. The continuity of the therapeutic process is great. The volunteers do a much better job as case aides. They have the physical energy. They go shopping with the kids. These kids love shopping for clothes with a maternal figure.

MCBROOM: Who doesn't?

COHN: Volunteers give a lot of care. They help the young people look for jobs. They intervene with many things. They are people without the academic degrees, but are certainly qualified. They would intervene with school also. We have had some good luck with many of our people.

MCBROOM: Do you have any personal papers or pamphlets or items that can be made available to researchers or other scholars that you can contribute to the Social Welfare Archives Project?

COHN: You need to contact my secretary. I have a box here of stuff that goes back to the 1920s--old minutes and pictures and licenses and items like that.

MCBROOM: Incidentally, did you know Norris Class is in the hospital?

COHN: No.

MCBROOM: He is in the hospital in Topeka. He has cancer, and he has had a hip replacement and is in rehabilitation now. I got a letter from him the other day, and he sounds kind of upbeat, considering the circumstances, and so on.

COHN: That guy has always been upbeat.

MCBROOM: He keeps very active considering his condition. He was on your board and really made the connection to you.

COHN: He stayed in touch pretty often before he got sick.

MCBROOM: You have been really fortunate to have quite a progressive, productive board through the years.

COHN: This has been a matter of survival. It is interesting that boards do have cycles. Every once in a while you get a kind of slowing down and nothing much happening, but it is pretty good on the whole.

MCBROOM: You are carrying on here. Are you officially retired?

COHN: I am not of retirement age, technically. I have a couple of years to go.

MCBROOM: Your recent illness was touch and go.

COHN: Yes, it was a decision point. The doctor said to go back to work, so I did, and I was

fine.

MCBROOM: So you are full steam ahead for the next couple of years?

COHN: My surgery was a few months ago, and I was right back.

MCBROOM: You had bypass surgery at Huntington.

COHN: No, it was in Community Hospital.

MCBROOM: You mentioned some things that you think had some impact on the whole state and nationally: the state association and your lobbying and the bill that really withstood Reagan and so forth. Are there other things that have had that wide-ranging effect as well?

COHN: All these things were with funding and had continuity.

MCBROOM: It was the mother's milk of child care. Like politics.

COHN: Yes, if you don't have it, you can't do much.

MCBROOM: That is a clear message.

COHN: The other things that I think had happened is that over the years, professional groups had given up certain attitudes to change.

MCBROOM: Can you explain that?

COHN: Rosemary is one of the few agencies that decided not to settle for its own school and to go for the high quotas. We decided on the new scheme of upgrade homes. Over the last six years, our rate of placements has decreased because we chose to. We have seen that foster home kids and kids in foster homes who go to these special programs, avoid reality.

MCBROOM: Living in a separate world?

COHN: They are living in an institution.

MCBROOM: Do you see this whole thing kind of going around in circles? Are we coming back? What point of the cycle are we on now in child welfare?

COHN: I think we are going to open it up again. This is the kind of sense that I get from them. They are going around the way we used to.

MCBROOM: It has been a frustrating time. What signs of hope do you see?

COHN: It looks as if we can't touch the public.

MCBROOM: That is protected.

COHN: It is simple. Locally we are looking at some things in terms of how to plan. I see a need for the public sectors to take on the responsibility for last resort programs for some of these kids. This is to provide a secure situation. We have to terminate the placement if we can't deal with the actuality. We know damn well that a few days time out would do it. That would be quite a program.

MCBROOM: That is the most frustrating of all. It is totally irrational.

COHN: I'm reminded of a study that I worked on back in 1983 and 1984 on hard-to-place children. We can deal with a lot more than we are doing now. The thing is that you have to keep on prying away at it.

MCBROOM: You have to have infinite patience.

COHN: Somebody said to me yesterday, "Would you go through this again?" It is the same old stuff, but I possibly would.

MCBROOM: Hans, I want to thank you, and I am glad I had a chance to interview you because I found out lots of things that I didn't know. I think it is going to make a very interesting contribution to the archives. Thank you very much.