

Mareaner Applebaum  
Interviewed by Maurice Ostomel  
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At Leisure World, Laguna Hills, California

OSTOMEL. Mareaner, will you begin by telling us a little of how you came into the social work profession?

APPLEBAUM. I was a senior at Gaucher College in Baltimore Maryland. I became interested in social work by what I read in the paper and what I garnered from other courses I took. So I applied to the family agency in Baltimore to see if could work there part-time at least one day a week and I was granted that privilege. I had very simple tasks to do, but it gave me the idea that this is what I wanted to do. Previously I had thought I had wanted to go to law school but I decided that after that senior year I wanted to be a social worker.

OSTOMEL. Thank you, Mrs. Applebaum. Now will you tell us a little about how you got yourself educated to become a social worker?

APPLEBAUM. I graduated from college in June of 1927. I had a scholarship to the Jewish School of Social Work in New York City, but I was taken sick while I was there with an infection, which didn't clear up, so I went home. I had gone for over six months. At the same I had taken courses at the New York School. Since the Jewish School went out of existence a few years later, I returned to the New York School and was given credit for the work I had done that first year. I finally graduated from the New York School with a certificate in 1941 and then, when it became a part of Columbia University, I had the opportunity of getting a master's degree there by taking a few extra courses. I did it by writing a thesis,

and graduated in June of 1944. It was the same day that they invaded France and it was Memorial Day. Dr. Nicholas Murray was the president of Columbia University at that time. It was an exciting day and I am very glad that I went to that graduation because I had a little boy with his father in the audience. And he said, "hi mommy" and ran up and a policeman had to catch him and keep him from interrupting. I remember that very well.

My first job was at the Charity Organization Society (COS), Harrisbourg, Pennsylvania. I worked there for the year April '28 to April '29. Then I went to New York and worked there for the Charity Organization Society for six years. My next job was for the Altro Rehabilitation Society. After that I went back to school and though I didn't quite get my degree, I did take more courses. I took some time off to work again at the Altro Rehabilitation Society, which was in a federation building on 47<sup>th</sup> Street. It has since moved.

OSTOMEL. What community was that?

APPLEBAUM. Altro Rehabilitation Service. They had a workshop in the Bronx and they were part of the Montifeore Sanitarium. I left to move to California in 1945.

OSTOMEL. You mean you left New York?

APPLEBAUM. I left New York to come to California in 1945 and in June 1947, I accepted the job at Vista Del Mar Child Care Service as a caseworker with children. I had never specifically worked with children alone. I had always done it in connection with family. I became a supervisor the following September.

Then in January of 1953, I became director of casework at Vista Del Mar, from 1973 until September 1, 1987.

OSTOMEL. You mentioned your areas of possibilities at Vista Del Mar. What do you think were the most important contributions that you made in your tenure of 39 years?

APPLEBAUM. I first got there in 1947 as the assistant director. At that time Mr. Karl Glau had tried to get the agency turned around from an organization where children are placed and stay forever, to a really upcoming psychiatric facility. I think I pushed that along. The director, whom I learned a great deal from, wanted to have a top notch agency. He would listen to me and say nothing or say that we couldn't do this or that. Then, maybe three months later, he would come back and say, you know you were right, I think we ought to it. One of the first things we did was to get more child care staff to work with the children. We were hopelessly inadequate and that was one thing I think I accomplished. I think we accomplished a great deal more over the years. I worked there for six years. When I had gone back to school full time, I left COS. I then worked for the Tuberculosis and Heart Association and became a supervisor there until I left to come to California in 1945.

OSTOMEL. I would appreciate your putting in the record your identification with Vista Del Mar Child Care Services, how you moved up in the agency and something about the history and variety of services that they eventually offered.

APPLEBAUM. When I moved to California, I didn't work for two years because my child was young. I decided to be at home with him. Later on, however,

circumstances decided otherwise for me and I looked for a job. I was interviewed by several agencies in the city and I particularly liked Vista Del Mar even though it was quite a distance from my home. It was kind of hard to get to since there were no freeways in those days. However, I liked Mr. Joseph Bonaparte and Mr. Glau who was the assistant director and I felt that they were both dedicated men who really cared about children. And, since I had never worked exclusively with children, I decided this was the agency I wanted to work for.

OSTOMEL. Would you tell us something about the agency, it's legal name and the different services that it now provides, also tell us a little of how you contributed to professionalizing this agency.

APPLEBAUM. It was originally called the Jewish Orphanage Home of Southern California. They later changed the name to Vista Del Mar when they moved to their present property because in those days you had a view of the sea. When I first went there, they had a foster home department, an institutional department, and they were thinking about starting an adoption department. Mr. Bonaparte cared very much about the institution and he made great efforts to make it the best agency west of the Mississippi. I can remember in the early years that he could entertain all the other children's institutional agencies at Vista Del Mar for their June meeting. He would be very proud of his staff when they participated in some of the workshops that were held. When I had been there for several years, we increased our foster home department because we found a foster home finder. That way we had more staff to administer the children in foster

homes. We tried very hard to put children who were under seven into foster homes. We increased the foster homes again when we went into adoptions. We became an adoption agency and were licensed by the state of California in 1950.

OSTOMEL: Mrs. Applebaum, we know that you had an important influence in changing some of the ways that Vista Del Mar operated. Would you mind telling us a little about those changes?

APPLEBAUM. Well, when I first went to Vista, there were monthly meetings with the board and they either admitted or rejected children for placement. Mr. Glou and I both felt that it was not up to the special committee to admit children and that professionals should contribute to the decision. So, for a few months we sat in on the committee and let them see how we thought about the children and which children should be admitted. They later agreed to allow the professional staff to make those decisions. After that, admissions were decided in staff meetings with a total professional staff present and then discussed with child care staff.

We also changed a lot of the recording that was done and I was instrumental, I think, in that. I sat on several committees for the Child Welfare League on the subject of recording. We discussed this at various Child Welfare Institutes and the whole agency, as with other social welfare agencies, adopted different ways of recording so that our documentation would not be so unwieldy and long.

OSTOMEL. Mrs. Applebaum, I know you had a role in connection with the education of the children who were in Vista Del Mar and with the future education with those who left. Would you talk a little bit about that?

APPLEBAUM. When I first went to Vista, we had a cottage called the Health Cottage. These were children of parents who were either suspected of having tuberculosis or had tuberculosis and were living in what is now known as the City of Hope. We found that the children really were not particularly undernourished, although years before that I think they were. They were pretty healthy, normal children. We were making them over dependent by being in a special cottage in which they could not do anything for themselves. We had the children go to public school. That adjustment was difficult for some of the children but others succeeded. That was one step forward. Then we introduced a psychiatrist on our staff. They had had a consulting psychiatrist who we did not think was very good. We were able to bring in one psychologist and one psychiatrist. The psychologist was part-time and on call. We began to test children to know what their potential was. We had no idea before what kind of children we were treating. As the old staff retired or left and the new staff was hired, we hired men and women who were oriented to psycho-analytic studies so that we could become more analytic with our children as time went on.

OSTOMEL. I know that you had a relationship to the schools of social work in our area; would you tell a little bit about that relationship?

APPLEBAUM. The first year I was at Vista, USC asked if we would take students. Both Mr. Glou and Mr. Bonaparte were very anxious that we do. I was

one of the available members of the staff who had supervised students at the New York School when I was working in New York. Therefore, I was asked to supervise a student. I started with two students. One, Annette Barret, has become a very well known person in the adoption field. She is now in private practice and has written, I think three books on the subject. The other left Vista after his student days were over. I think he may also be in private practice, but I'm not sure. That's it. I forgot to mention that Sue Dvorak, who is now president of NASW and vice-president of the International Social Workers of the World, was a student at Vista. She later became a member of our staff for a number of years.

OSTOMEL. Thank you for those comments about the education of students in their fieldwork at Vista Del Mar Child Care Service. Can you continue a little about that with the schools?

APPLEBAUM. Yes, I can. After we took the first two students we found that USC liked us as an institution and foster home agency. They continued to send students to us. And did until almost the present time. I believe they stopped a year ago because of some difference of opinion with the administrator. UCLA also asked if they could have a student unit there and have four students supervised by their worker who was in our agency full-time. We did allow this for several years but then UCLA wanted to place first-year students. We felt that our agency was too complicated with the problems of the children we had in placement. They were becoming disturbed children. We felt we needed second

year students if we were going to have students. We disconnected with UCLA at that time.

When I first went to Vista we had one house mother in each cottage and one house mother that came in two days a week or a day and a half a week to relieve. We felt that the children who were becoming more disturbed needed more mothering or more help with their problems within the cottage. We talked to Mr. Bonaparte about it and he immediately said, no we could not afford it. About three months later Mr. Bonaparte said that he wanted to bring up to the board the fact that we needed more in the cottage and asked me to go with him, which I very gladly did. Mr. Bonaparte liked ideas to be his, and neither the staff nor I cared as long as the ideas went across. We later increased to two staff per worker, per cottage and still brought in weekend relief.

Mr. Bonaparte cared very much about the children at Vista. He used to see that they had proper rain clothes when they went to school. He would stand at the bus stop when they were going to school and would be there when they came home. Every night at dinner he would go to each cottage and put his arms around the children and pat their shoulders. He became a real father figure to these children. I think he did give us a feeling that we were there for the children, and that this is what we cared about and had to improve. When I first went there many of the children were there who should not have been there. Many were there solely because a parent worked or a parent was a widower and felt that he could not take care of his children. We felt sometimes that these children were capable of taking care of themselves if their father worked and I

think that was one of the reasons why Mr. Bonaparte insisted at first that the children help the child care staff prepare the meals. Mr. Bonaparte cared so much about the children that he realized that they had to have an education. He raised money for scholarship funds and any child who wanted to go to college could obtain these funds for his entire four years if he got suitable grades and worked part-time while he was going attending school. Many leaders in the community in the field of medicine and law and in other walks of life obtained their education through Vista Del Mar.

As children became more disturbed we felt that some of the public schools could not tolerate our students and Mr. Bonaparte developed a school on the grounds for the most disturbed of our adolescent boys. And that we called Meyer-Simon School and there was a special name for the cottage, which was the Cooper Cottage. Mr. Cooper contributed a great deal of money so that we could have the cottage built and Meyer-Simon also contributed money so that we could establish this school. This school was solely for boys. We felt that many of the girls were just as disturbed and needed a school too. Some years later we were able to develop a school for girls as well as for boys and they became places where other institutions wanted to visit to see what methods we were using for the children. We still have these special schools on the grounds. The board of education became interested and all children admitted to Vista have for the past few years attended school on the grounds and work up to going to public school as they improve. This gives them an incentive to work

harder and do their work. We have special tutors from the City Board of Education. They pay the tutors to work with our children after hours.

OSTOMEL. Mrs. Applebaum, I know you have mentioned that you had increasingly more and more disturbed children at the institution. I know that you had psychiatric and psychological consultation for the care of these children. Can you tell us a little bit about the funding for the care of children? We know that the cost must go up, as they become more disturbed.

APPLEBAUM. It is very expensive to have psychiatric care, particularly because we now have a psychiatrist attached to each cottage and one or two psychologists available to us.

OSTOMEL. How many children are there in each cottage?

APPLEBAUM. We have about 11 or 12 in a cottage. We think that is a better number of children to work with when they are so disturbed.

OSTOMEL. What about the public funds, how much does it cost? What do the county or other public authorities contribute to the care of some of these children? Are they referred by the public agency?

APPLEBAUM. Yes, they are. Many of our children come from either the Probation Department or the Department of Public Social Services. I would say more come from the Department of Social Services than probation. It is very costly treatment for disturbed children. It costs some 25, 26 thousands--no it costs about \$2,600 or \$2,700 a month per child. We get a good deal of this from the county, about \$2,200 per month. I really don't know the up-to-date figures or the cost of care. Somewhere around that figure.

OSTOMEL. Thank you, Mrs. Applebaum. I would like to spend a little time discussing your contributions outside of the agency. I know that for eight years you were a member of the Kushland Committee. Would you tell us what the Kushland Committee is and what is its purpose?

APPLEBAUM. Mr. Kushland, when he was alive, was very much interested in professional social work. He felt that they never got enough recognition for what they did. And he established what was known as the Kushland Fund. Monies were given each year to a person who was considered tops in the casework field or as an administrator by the Committee. Sometimes I went out even to the education field. When he died his son, Daniel Kushland Jr. continued the role that his father played. I don't think he personally was quite as interested as his father was, but he still contributes the money. Each year \$1,000 is given to the person who is selected as the outstanding social worker in California. Not that that person has done more than his duty, but has done something very creative. Not just a run-of-the-mill job. I had served on that committee when it became an NASW committee. Prior to that time it had been a lay committee under the Welfare Planning Council for San Francisco. Most people were from San Francisco. More people were selected from that area than the state as a whole. It changed when we, NASW, became successful in administering that award. We still have lay people on it. We did when I was there, and I have just gone off the committee; we have some people who have been on the committee since the very beginning. I should mention Mr. Shatz, who was on the board of the Children's Home Society in California, although he lived in the north. And Mrs.

Bennihaven who was on the committee because she was a personal friend of the Koshlin's family.

OSTOMEL. Mrs. Applebaum, looking at your curriculum vita, I noticed that you were a discussant at many different conferences. The National Conference of Social Welfare, the Child Welfare League of America and so on. Also you attended many institutes and shared your experience and knowledge with others. I noticed that you were an instructor outside of the agency. I would like for you to share this for the record.

APPLEBAUM. I was asked to teach at the UCLA Extension in the School of Welfare, and I did. I became interested in the education house support because I felt they played a very important role with the children. They lived with the children 24 hours a day and the case workers saw the child maybe one to three times a week. Of course they were seen in connection with going in or out of the cottage at times when they were there. However, that really did not have more than the couple of hours with them a week. The house parents did, and since the house parents of the child care staff were the disciplinarians in their lives, it was very important that they understood how to help children. So I taught this program at UCLA with another colleague at Vista Del Mar. I taught for nine years, I believe, and then left because of my other responsibilities. I also gave institutes on house parent staff for the State Department of Social Welfare and to the local city government. I gave two or three institutes for two years. I did that and I taught whenever I could about child care staff because I really was interested in that subject.

OSTOMEL. Mrs. Applebaum, I know that in our community you are still well known in the social work community, although you are fully retired. I would like you to put into the record some of the different agencies and professional organizations with which you have been identified.

APPLEBAUM. As you know, I have been a member ever since I became a social worker, of the National Association of Social Workers and have held various positions during that period of time. That was even before coming to Los Angeles from New York City back in the 30s and 40s. I have also cared a lot about my profession and I care about improving myself, so I took as many classes as I could over the years to keep myself up to date. I went to New York one summer and went back to the New York School and took specialized courses with Lucile Austin and several other professors. I have taken as many workshops as I could in order to keep up with the newest trends in the field. And I have enjoyed these extra-occupational opportunities and tried using them in practice.

OSTOMEL. Would you tell a little about your identification with the Boys Club?

APPLEBAUM. Yes. The year I was to retire, I knew a man who was a psychologist with the Board of Education and he came to Vista Del Mar to supervise our tutoring program. He was interested in a community in Watts and asked me to become a board member. I went to several meetings with him and decided that when I retired in 1973, I would become interested in this community agency. I found that working with black children in a community that had the highest delinquency rate in the city was totally different than working with mostly

middle class and some upper and lower class Jewish children in Vista Del Mar. When I first worked there, it was totally Jewish but now, under the state law and federal law, we have become really non-sectarian. We take children that are referred to us by public agencies and do not turn them down on the basis of their color or religion, but rather on the basis of whether we treat and help this child. Otherwise we have rejected some Jewish children because we felt we could not help these children within our capabilities.

Now, to get back to the Boys Club, when I first went there, I think they put me on the board because they thought I had money. But they soon learned that I did not, but I knew people that had money and when they were about to close the doors, I came to their rescue by getting some of my friends to make contributions. They have made them for many years, which really saved the club. However, we had to get a new executive director who was there and really did not do anything on his own. I was very disappointed with him. We finally accepted his resignation and we were able to hire a young man who had known boys' work. He had won a scholarship to London to study institutions and worked with boys clubs in the slums of London and nearby communities. He is still there and I think has done a magnificent job.

OSTOMEL. Thank you, Mrs. Applebaum. Now I would like to turn to another aspect of the profession. I remember a long time ago, when I was on the Board of Social Work Examiners where we registered social workers, that you once went to court and the judge questioned you as to your professional competence. You said that you were a registered social worker and the judge said that you

were then professionally competent to testify. Now I remember that they have in this state clinical social workers who were registered. What is your conception about the importance of the state saying something about the profession of social work and how does that relate to private practice?

APPLEBAUM. Well I feel that it is very important that we be licensed by the state. You do have to qualify and you do not only have to take a written examination, but you have to have an oral examination, which is very important. I think it shows that you have reached a certain standard. Whether you fulfill this standard when you are practicing is a different matter. I think people should practice at least five years with supervision and in an agency before going in private practice. If you go out on your own, I still think you should have some kind of supervision. I think that should be required of a social worker--to be supervised what he does in private practice.

OSTOMEL. Did you yourself do any private practice?

APPLEBAUM. Yes, I did. Not too much, but I did. I would say that for four or five years, I did some private practice.

OSTOMEL. I want to turn to another aspect and that is your view: in all these years of experience, where you think the social work profession is now?

APPLEBAUM. Unfortunately, I think we have lost. I feel that we have become too technical in many aspects and we have lost heart. I heard a speaker last year that was brought there by the University of Southern California and she gave a talk that really inspired me because she showed how you could still be professionally sound and still have a heart. And when she felt that it was

necessary to make a home visit she made it. She did not stand on ceremony so that the client had to come and see her. I feel that it will take 40 years more, maybe a life-time, to bring back social work the way it was before the last eight years of federal government.

OSTOMEL. Mrs. Applebaum, what do you mean the last eight years of federal government? What has the federal government done or not done that they should have been doing in your estimation?

APPLEBAUM. They cut welfare services to such a core that they made this country have the thousands of homeless we now have; the children who are malnourished by being denied state money for clinics.

OSTOMEL. Thank you, Mrs. Applebaum. Before I summarize this interview, I would like to ask you one final thing. Is there anything else that you would like to say about yourself, the social work profession, or the social welfare scene?

APPLEBAUM. Well anything that I did I felt I did with co-workers. I didn't do anything alone. In the years at Vista I had to have Mr. Bonaparte's backing for everything. Then I must say that Carl Glou contributed to me by backing me up in many things that I wanted to do. Also the staff at Vista was a fine staff and they cared about the children as I did.

OSTOMEL. Thank you very much, Mearner Applebaum. As I said some time during the interview, your name is still well known in the social work community even though you are now fully retired. And that is because you played such a vital role in many ways in the development of the up-to-date child care welfare practice program, helping social work students develop their own capabilities,

helping develop house parents, and sharing your insights with your colleagues and the community, and giving of your time and efforts to the Child Welfare League, National Association of Social Workers and other organizations such as the Boys Club. We want to thank you for sharing your history and your ideas and for your contribution to the California Social Welfare Archives.

APPLEBAUM. Thank you, Mr. Ostomel, very much.

ABSTRACT:

Mareaner Applebaum, who died in 1995, was employed for 39 years at Vista Del Mar Child Care Service, where she professionalized the child welfare services operation, collaborated in many agency activities with her colleagues, and was active professionally in many ways in the larger community. When she retired as assistant director of Vista Del Mar, the agency established the Mareaner Applebaum Institute. Each year invited leaders in the field share their knowledge with the agency and social work community. This interview describes her entry into the field of social work, various facets of her career at Vista Del Mar, and her professional activities subsequent to her retirement. Details of her professional positions and roles on boards and committees of the larger community are incorporated in the curriculum vitae on file with the California Social Welfare Archives.