

Sam Berman
Interviewed by Charlotte Langley
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LANGLEY: Sam, it is a pleasure to be able to interview you for the California Social Welfare Archives of the USC School of Social Work. Tell me something about what led you into social work, what made you become a social worker?

BERMAN: Actually, I wanted to become a history teacher because I was interested in people, in historic economics and life. Then, during my college years, it turned out there were very few opportunities in becoming a history teacher because it was in the midst of the Depression. I had been taking some sociology and psychology courses, and I think Harry Amshomen inspired more of us at City College at New York to become social workers than anybody else in that faculty. Through him I got an assignment at the Styvesant Neighborhood House as a group leader volunteer, and from there it took off. I found my niche in life and that was the beginning.

LANGLEY: What year was that?

BERMAN: That must have been in 1941.

LANGLEY: Have you been sorry about that?

BERMAN: No, I was so glad. It was really a revelation. I hadn't known about social work at all. It was an unknown field. He was a really inspiring teacher, very experienced in social welfare, and the opportunity to do direct service was very meaningful.

LANGLEY: Was that a paid job?

BERMAN: No, it was as a volunteer. Then I got a paid job in the 92nd Street YMCA as a group leader. Then, because we were in the war, I wanted to get my parents prepared

for my absence and as I went away for one summer as a camp counselor at a camp for disturbed kids. The following summer I was graduated. I had been in the enlisted reserves, so I was called up right after graduation. When I came out, thanks to the GI Bill, I was able to go to graduate school. But first I worked for the Department of Welfare for the City of New York. This was a most interesting and challenging experience. It made me want to go to graduate school, to know more about what I was doing.

LANGLEY: When you were in the Army, did you have any social work content in what you were doing?

BERMAN: Not really. I was reprimanded because I had gone on my own to a unit that trained illiterates. It was a training program in literacy and adoption, and I indicated that I thought I was qualified to work with those people and that I would like to. I was told I hadn't gone through channels, although the office had told me that I might be qualified, but I had not done it properly, and I had to go back to my regular duties. Then I had an interesting experience. I became an officer in the military police, of all things, and my style of management was such that I was known as Lieutenant Sam. But I didn't have any social service role.

LANGLEY: So they saw your management skills even then.

BERMAN: It was a facilitating role. I wasn't in a situation that required strict discipline or anything like that. It was all right; it worked out. I wanted to apply for the Officer Candidate School in hospital administration, but that was a very hard one to get into, and the major advised me to pick a school that was easy to get into. So I went into the military police.

LANGELY: I can't see you as an MP.

BERMAN: I was in charge of the Japanese mail at the Enemy Prisoner of War Information Bureau, the whole mail system.

LANGELY: Where were you stationed?

BERMAN: That was in Fort Mead, Maryland. We had the records of every Japanese prisoner of war the United States had in any of its camps, and we were responsible for maintaining the records and the transmitting of the mail and updating files. It was not a very life-threatening situation. It was the tail end of my stay. The Army taught me Italian and then sent me to the Pacific.

LANGLEY: Tell me about your experiences at the New York City Welfare Department.

BERMAN: I had a supervisor, Catherine Murphy, I'll never forget. She taught me and, I guess others, how to take a face sheet of a case record and from that alone, get a feeling of what a family was going through. One of the most dynamic teachers that I ever had, she taught me how to be objective, how to learn what the needs were, how to respond to them. She was a very sensitive, strong supervisor with whom I had wonderful discussions. She was the one who encouraged me to go to graduate school, and she was just a fine person from whom to learn what people needed and how to maintain their dignity. It was a very good experience. I had Bedford Styvesant as my case load. I still remember Marion at Schultz Street, and the people that I met were fascinating.

LANGLEY: Do you think it's tougher now?

BERMAN: Much more so, yes. It was tough in those days, neighborhoods had been condemned and before the war, the housing was supposed to be torn down because

people were living there under the most difficult circumstances. But you did the best you could under the circumstances.

LANGLEY: What year was that?

BERMAN: I worked there from 1946, when I got out of service, until 1947. I went to graduate school at night at the New York School of Social Work until I was accepted at Washington University in St. Louis full time at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work.

LANGLEY: What years were those?

BERMAN: I was there from 1947 till January of 1949. And in January, I completed my work and thesis and went to Topeka, Kansas as a psychiatric social worker.

LANGLEY: What was your assignment?

BERMAN: Psychiatric ward. Psychiatric and child welfare.

LANGLEY: And where did you work in Topeka, Kansas?

BERMAN: Winter VA Hospital which Menninger directed at the time.

LANGLEY: Winter. And how long was that?

BERMAN: That was about a year and a half. Before that I had an interesting experience at graduate school. I 'm going to digress to tell you about it. I was very active at graduate school. It was an experience where I had felt that I had had better preparation than any of my colleagues because I had been out in the field, both in the settlement house and the Department of Welfare. I had a very interesting field work placement. I was the only male social worker at the Red Cross Vocational Counseling Service. I worked at the List Psychopathic Institute, which was the name of a mental hospital in St. Louis, and I had a one-year placement at the Forest Park Children's Center.

During my student days, between semesters for one month, I was the acting director of the Forest Park Children's Center. And I was active in student affairs; I was chairman of the Social Action Committee, and then I was president of the social work club for a year. So they were very nice days for me, I enjoyed them tremendously. That was in St. Louis City. While at the VA Hospital, I was invited by the executive director of the Forest Park Center to apply to be his successor, although I had relatively little direct service experience. I moved very quickly to the Director of Administration. But in that agency, I wore all kinds of hats. I was the social worker, the supervisor, the executive director, the substitute child-care worker, whatever they needed.

LANGLEY: How large an agency is it?

BERMAN: We had 12 children. It was a pioneering residential center, one of the first dozen or so in the country. It was bought by the Junior League of St. Louis in 1945, and I came along in 1949 as director. I think I was the third or fourth director of the agency.

LANGLEY: Don't they usually start programs and withdraw?

BERMAN: they stayed with us for nine years. At any rate, I wrote an article for them, and they won the Boritz Award. I wrote an article for the CHILD WELFARE JOURNAL called "Some Lessons Learned in Developing Residential Treatment Centers." The problem we had was getting on financing. This was the only time the Junior League stayed with a project, and it was three years.

LANGLEY: Who finally took over the funding?

BERMAN: The United Way of St. Louis. When an agency applied to the United Way for funding, before they could be admitted, there had to be a survey of all the institutions in St. Louis. So they studied all 21 agencies. The result was a merger of some, and the

closing of others. When I left St. Louis in 1953, there were the original 21 agencies. Now, 16 years later, I came back to St. Louis, and they had merged the Forest Park Children's Center and Edgewood Center; and more consolidations took place after I left St. Louis. All total, we lived there 11 years. There I diversified the Edgewood program so that from the initial residential center, we had group homes, and patient treatment service, and some minimal placement; and we had a school on the grounds. During that time, I became chairman of the Council of Agencies of Executives; I think we were called superintendents in those days. I did quite a bit of outside consultation and lots of workshops and institutes, and I was teaching child care training courses at St. Louis University School of Social work.

LANGLEY: That is a lot to do.

BERMAN: That was a very good diversified experience instead of a medium size agency.

LANGLEY: How large an agency was it?

BERMAN: As I remember, we had 24 children residents and six more in the group home. I don't remember how many were patients. Not very many; it was a beginning program. But we were doing group therapy, individual, conjoint interviews, parent/child therapy; it was a very good program. It was a member of the Child Welfare League of America, naturally. And it was the lead agency in the treatment field.

LANGLEY: What was the most exciting thing in St. Louis?

BERMAN: The birth of my daughter, naturally. No, it felt like home. It was where I went to graduate school. After living in New York, it had a different pace of life; it was pleasant. Professionally, there was so much to do. An active community. I was very

involved with NSW in those days; actually, not NSW, but its predecessor. I belonged to the AAPSW—American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, and the AASW—the American Association of Social Workers. There was an interim period when they were beginning to blend, before they became NASW. I was vice-president of NASW and sometimes program chair. One I remember was being program chair, as you have been, with the Child Welfare Southwest Regional Conference. It was a good experience. I liked the inter-relationship, one with the other, as cooperative an arrangement as I ever encountered any place. It was a pretty good learning experience. Also, by then, I was very much involved nationally, and I was doing some writing. I was kind of reaching a peak at that point. Then I had other peaks.

LANGLEY: And you left St. Louis when?

BERMAN: I was there from 1957. In 1963, Joe Reid invited me to join the staff of the Child Welfare League of America and that professionally, was a great honor; he wanted me to come on as director of surveys. I declined, saying I preferred getting some more direct experience as a consultant. So I served as a child care consultant, but the next year, moved into the job as director of surveys.

LANGLEY: You had a Chicago period, too.

BERMAN: Let me reiterate for you. I was director of Forest Park Children's Center in St. Louis until 1953, then I went to the Rich Farm, which was a residential treatment center in Lake Forest, about 30 miles north of Chicago. It had been a private preventorium. There I took over a residential treatment center that was in some difficulty. Experiences there included working with Dr. Irene Josselyn and Dr. Harold Balikof as prime consultants, and a marvelous core staff. During that time, I got involved

with them. I was one of the founding members of the American Association of Children's Residential Centers, sometimes referred to as Bettelheim's Club but actually a group of executive directors of residential treatment center. That was in 1955 or 1954 and, after many years thereafter. My interest meanwhile had gone beyond residential treatment. I wanted to diversify and St. Louis gave me that opportunity. Now we are up to 1963, and I went to New York, and I stayed there for ten years.

LANGLEY: Do you want to comment on Dr. Bettelheim?

BERMAN: Bruno Bettelheim was one of the founders of that group along with Dr. Edwin Green in Kansas, Fritz Redler of Wayne University, Fritz Major, Dr. Franklin Roberts, president of Pittsburgh, and just a few others. At any rate, I was honored to be accepted in the group just as it was beginning to form. We used to meet in Chicago, across the Midway from the Orthogenic School. Bettelheim was a very gracious host: it was a delightful experience to sit in a large living room and have the seven or eight or ten of us talk amongst ourselves about clinical issues and residential treatment. To see Fritz Redler in action was worth anything I could give. Bettelheim always wanted the group to stay small and selective, and each year we had to find ways to increase the membership without upsetting him. He had an absolute cut-off of 50 members. If we went beyond that, he claimed he wouldn't be able to maintain the intimacy and the purity of our scientific discussions. But we actually went beyond that eventually. I didn't have that many interactions with Bruno Bettelheim, but in the 1980s, when I was in Los Angeles, which is a later chapter, we resumed our relationship. When I was director of Reiss Davis Child Study Center, Bruno Bettelheim had moved to California and was

approached about the possibility of becoming consultant and trainer. We were more than happy to welcome him. That was a rewarding reunion at that stage, and very cordial.

LANGLEY: Interesting how we all turn up some place else.

BERMAN: It was interesting because he was very controversial. He was always fascinating when he analyzed material presented to us. He was a great teacher, very opinionated, as everybody knows, and some of us were very much in opposition to some of his views—particularly his exclusion of parents from the treatment process. Many of felt, in contrast, that you have to involve parents. Also, he clung to the psychoanalytical model, and the rest of us felt that we had to get much more reality in it. He did know how to establish a climate, and he did give us that in spades. He really helped us understand what his process was and it was a good learning experience.

LANGLEY: So he was a highly-liked man developing careers.

BERMAN: He was wonderful. The one in that group who was much more my model and mentor was Fritz Major of Bellfaire. Fritz was always one of the people I looked up to as the most sincere, knowledgeable, kind, strong, gentle—whatever you can think of—scholarly, humorous, sweet person. And I worked often over the years in various projects, and he was a special friend. Many of us felt that way about him; he was a great guy.

LANGLEY: Now let's go to New York.

BERMAN: And he almost convinced me to go to Bellfaire instead of here. In 1963, when I went to the League, it was sort of a crowning glory on a career; it was an opportunity to work with some of the most accomplished people in the field of child welfare. One of my role models in social work was Helen Hagen, who had been the

assistant executive director of the Child Welfare League of America, and with whom I worked off and on in various ways over the years. I was awed when I was offered the position of Assistant Director to the Child Welfare League. Here I was following her footsteps and that was as rewarding an offer as I ever had. That was like being welcomed to a select club. And I earned it in that I had been Director of Surveys in a department that grew and was successful. Joe Reid had asked me to head up a national project; a manpowered development project in the Poverty Program for the training of unemployed persons as child care workers, day care workers. I had to write the project proposal, submit it, negotiate it with Washington, and then administer it. Originally it was for a year and a half, and then I got a second grant and that was unusual. I got a second year and a half. So for three years, I was director of that project which ran in ten different cities across the country.

LANGLEY: Was Los Angeles one?

BERMAN: Yes, as I recall it. I remember that we had to get one city from almost each of the federal regions, for a variety of reasons. From that I was invited to be executive assistant director: that was to be my New York activity.

LANGLEY: Do you think your project could have any usefulness today with the homeless?

BERMAN: Yes. We found some startling things: the number of people who couldn't hold jobs because they couldn't read, where schooling had been very inadequate; people who would become extremely dependent on governmental help and who had lost their sense of ability to strive on their own. They got an uplift just on the possibility of employment but that had to be coupled with actual job placement, so things just fell

apart. There were terrible problems with health, housing, and child care. We tried to run the project so that each community designed its own locality-oriented program. In some cities we had a good success rate, and in others, marginal. But I think it could apply today. It was a demonstration project and it is difficult to talk about it because I don't know how heavily invested the government really was in following through. It was during the Lyndon Johnson efforts, and if there had been some more continuity, it would have been much more meaningful. Much as we wanted it followed to see what happened with those who worked in the program, there was a limited amount of research, and then funds were gone without possibility of doing it on their own. The model was an interesting administrative challenge: to run something on that diversified basis.

LANGLEY: It is intriguing that it could possibly be updated.

BERMAN: It served the interesting purpose of getting people who needed jobs, and needed day care, to become day care workers and have their children taken care of by graduates of the program.

LANGLEY: How long were you assistant director of the Child Welfare League?

BERMAN: Six years.

LANGLEY: From 1963?

BERMAN: I left there at the end of 1967 to 1972--something like that.

LANGLEY: And you left there to come here (Vista del Mar)?

BERMAN: I had to make a career choice. The League had gone through a very difficult period of examining the possibility of merger with Family Service Association of America. It temporarily debilitated the league; quite a few staff left because they weren't sure about their job security. A number of agencies were disenchanted with both

nationals because nothing was happening. It ended up not being do-able, and we were then beginning to rebuild. By that time I was age 50, and I had to make a career decision. Since I always wanted to go back to direct service, I thought, “Well, this is the time to become director of a local agency.” And so I started to look and made the decision to come out to sunny California, to an agency that needed reconstruction.

LANGLEY: That was the year after you did the study.

BERMAN: No, I had four years before that. I had been called in as a consultant because of some difficulties in the agency and some consideration of a long-range plan. I had gotten to know the agency somewhat, and was called on periodically after that for some telephone advice. I made two field visits to the agency and did not intend to get involved with it any further. Now I got the invitation.

LANGLEY: What was the most exciting experience you had with the Child Welfare League?

BERMAN: It’s hard to say. It was the most for me—the most charged atmosphere, intellectually, in terms of the kind of interactions that we had as a staff, the ideas, the level of experiences and knowledge from working with agencies all over the country and Canada, interacting and learning wherever I could. It just broadened my vision. Coming in (to the Child Welfare League) basically as a group care person, I very soon had to learn about foster care and adoption and maternity and home care, protective service—you name it; we were doing it. We got very involved with research, publication conferences, and I became sort of the inside administrator. Joe Reid, for whom I had all the admiration in the world, is a remarkable man; he was mostly the outside executive, remarkably talented, and I was doing much of the inside work. I worked closely with

Zelma Felten, who is the director of field services, so it was just a marvelous experience. But the time had come to move on.

LANGLEY: What was the most frustrating part of the Child Welfare League?

BERMAN: I think the years that we spent looking at the possibility of a merger that really stopped us from doing work. At first it was a large self-study requiring a great deal of energy and effort. I had been invited and involved in merger studies as a consultant, and I had run a merged agency, but this was a time when things were just frustrating.

LANGLEY: Why did they think the merger originally was a good idea?

BERMAN: Family Service Association had some serious questions about where it was going as an agency. Their lease was expiring on the building, which we co-occupied on 23rd Street in New York. Their executive was fairly close to retirement, so they decided they ought to look at where they were going, and they had to study that. One part of the study was an almost innocent reference to, and they ought to look at the possibility of, merger with other nationals. So they came to the Child Welfare League and said, "You are another national. Can we merge with you?" We looked at it closely and to his credit, Joe Reid, at the very beginning, said the first question we ought to answer is if it is fiscally feasible to do this (We went through four years of study of one kind or another, and at the very end, came down to the questions if we were to do this, could we finance it?) The answer was no, we can't. That was the end of that.

LANGLEY: It is interesting that this is applicable to some of the things going on in business now.

BERMAN: Right. They had some idea that by combining, it would be more economical, that we'd avoid duplication of effort, and so on. We very quickly found

some major differences in philosophy, differences in style and organization, and although it could have been done, it really would not have advanced the fields. So it was abandoned after a while. That was frustrating.

LANGLEY: In line of what has happened in social work since, do you see it as a possibility in the future?

BERMAN: Not now, no. After a while, Family Service Association reorganized, made some major internal changes, and is probably stronger now than it ever had been. So they don't need the merger with Child Welfare League.

LANGLEY: Does child Welfare League?

BERMAN: Child Welfare League did the same thing, and after a difficult time. The merger was a new approach with a new executive and it would seem to be rolling high gear. In the meantime, both agencies gave up a critically important function, that of accreditation, to the Council on Accreditation of the Services for Children with Families. And so they both gave up a key part of their operation and now they do other things. They are much more involved in advocacy, and they changed the nature of their consultation in different fields.

LANGLEY: Do you want to comment on that; do you think that the Council of Accreditation is a valid change from the other two?

BERMAN: After I left the League, I was on—and had been for a while—the Council of Agency Executives and Advisory Counsel to the League. Then I was put on the board of directors of the League, and one of my associates was to serve on the original board of the Council of the Agency Executive's Counsel of Accreditation. The intent was excellent: to qualify the agencies as holding the high standards to get third-party

payments. Well, it hasn't worked out that way for many agencies. Even now, agencies such as the one I was connected with, have looked toward the Counsel of Accreditation in hospitals instead, because that's where the third-party payments go. It's regrettable it had to be that way: the problem in getting insurance, third-party payers to come through. I thought that the accreditation process of the League was an important one. It unfortunately could not lead to financial help for the agencies, but the League, through its legislative efforts, certainly has brought a lot of funding for other agencies. The other thing I have been concerned about; the Council does its accreditation through peer reviews, whereas the League accreditation and that of Family Service have been through staff consultants. There is always the feeling accreditation is checking off whether agencies meet the standards or could it be a consultation service combination. There are relative values of the two approaches.

LANGLEY: The hospital accreditation, they use their reviewers instead of the staff; would you recommend they have staff do it, or do you like the peer reviewers?

BERMAN: I prefer the staff. From an economic standpoint, it's more feasible to use peer reviewers; it is not as expensive a process; it gets more people involved in looking at the standards being met. There is something about being a trained consultant that involves a great deal of skill in acquisition of experiences, transmitting of knowledge, and continuities that if you work with an agency for years, you develop a relationship and knowledge of it so that you can help toward some future goals. The other way is more of a check list kind of things.

LANGLEY: You have a standard, too.

BERMAN: That there are arguments on both sides, that if you over-identify with the agency you are consulting with, you lose your objective. That kind of thing could happen.

LANGLEY: All that responsibility, but not necessarily consulting with the assigned agency.

BERMAN: Yes: the system in working well, apparently, and part of my feeling, may be resistant to change.

LANGLEY: Okay, Sam, now we have to bring you into California.

BERMAN: In January of '73, I came to Vista del Mar Child Care Services, which proved to be a very exciting agency. I had known about the agency over the years, actually through the Child Welfare League case record exhibits and the reputation of Joseph Bonaparte as the dean of Los Angeles area child welfare executives; of Marianne Applebaum, with whom I had been on a program at the national Conference of Social Welfare some years before, and Reuben Panner. And before I met Charlotte Langley, I'd been a consultant to the agency, and I knew some of the quality of service of the agency and some of the problems it had been experiencing. I knowingly entered the highs because I liked to involve myself in reparative work. For some reason I always liked to go into a situation that had troubles so that I could help do some problem-solving. It was the challenge that I liked. After a while, I wasn't sure that I could meet the challenge, but I persisted and it worked quite well. What was exciting about it was that it was an opportunity, when things worked well, to be creative, to take a core of the staff with many years of experience and some newcomers, and a Board that was eager to make some changes and to build something. I would come in with a goal to intensify and

diversity. Circumstances worked out quite well. We were able to intensify the residential treatment component and build up the other services. It became a truly multi-service agency with lots of potential. I encountered problems I had never experienced before. For me it was a particularly crucial kind of situation. I had been out of direct service for ten years, and had wondered whether I could do the job. It was a very meaningful struggle for a while. After the original break in trust, things were really rolling, nearly grinding to a halt situation through a union problem that had to be resolved at forty agencies. I also had to deal with some unusual delicate role clarification issues.

Where is this information going?

LANGLEY: It is going to the archives.

BERMAN: Let me for the future reference deal with it openly. Right at the end of my first year, I was feeling at a crossroad. I was quite sure I could manage the agency part. I wasn't sure I could manage the Board part because of the unusual strength of—at that point a friendly antagonist, but awful man who had definite ideas of how things should go, which meant only his way. Without telling the staff of my dilemma, but ensuring with my wife that my integrity as a professional is more important than my job, I knew I had to clarify the situation even though it would be a great risk to myself, because I didn't know where I would go, I thought I had to have a confrontation with the Board president. I dealt with the matter in a very honest, open fashion, without detracting from his dignity. I developed a way of making it appear that perhaps I had disappointed him and his expectations as an executive, because otherwise there was no reason for him to immerse himself in what should have been my administrative function rather than his. It ended up with his apologizing for something he hadn't realized, and we worked out at that point a

much clearer definition of who was responsible. Over the years, he violated that periodically, but each time, I would assert my responsibility. I was reflecting today, for example, on how about two years or so before my retirement, he once again involved himself in a way that would have been a long-run disaster for agency relations. In my absence, he hired a key person on the staff, naming the salary and position. On my return from my vacation, I fired the individual and faced the president with the inappropriateness of his actions. We worked out an understanding that lasted to and beyond my stay at the agency as executive. I thought that was something valuable to learn as an administrator at the end of that first year. If I had not done that, I don't know what would have happened subsequently. But instead, we worked out a very harmonious relationship, which involved a great deal of affection, mutual respect, admiration, and a lot of shouting—but maintained throughout a sense of purpose and direction. All in all it was rather a very happy experience. Had I not confronted him, it would have been a disaster.

LANGLEY: Have you ever thought of writing something on executive director and board president relations?

BERMAN: Yes, it was funny. When I was in St. Louis, I had the luxury of being at the top of my job, of doing workshops and institutes and writing papers. I could not recapture that later, when I was at the League: the pace was too hectic. When I was director of Vista, there was just not the drive. I don't know what had changed. I thought about it. I had written many things as I went along, but I never wrote papers again unless I had an assignment like a workshop where I had to deliver a paper. But I didn't do that kind of thing. I thought a great deal about some of the experiences I have had, and I used

them when I did workshops, but I never formulized them into a paper. The other thing is that I don't think it is teachable. I think much of what I did was idiosyncratic—my style, which at times would be kind of soft and at times very assertive and at times very accommodating. I don't know that it applies to others. I don't know, for example, that anybody could have worked with my Board president as I did. I don't know if I did it as well as possible, but I know that it worked, that it was effective. I think it is how you develop relationships, your concepts. There are some things I know I didn't do well that I reflected on, but I couldn't do them differently if I tried; maybe I could, but I wouldn't try. Part of that was from learning from others. For example, I used to love to read doctoral dissertations—a strange thing to admit—but I remember when I was in the Child Welfare League of America, the director of publications was a Dr. Elizabeth Glover. And Eliza told me when I asked what her dissertation was about, that it had to do with executive board crisis. I read it—about 1964—and I remember the nub of it which was unless there was role clarity and the executive fought for what he believed in, he or she would lose their job; that in a crisis, probably they would lose it anyway, but that there was a possibility of retaining it if you went to bat for yourself. I took that to heart and as a consultant, I used that kind of approach with the executives I was trying to help. For myself, it was really an issue about what I believed in, and I was brought up not to take a lot of guff. Also, I had experiences with board members. I learned that this was the most difficult of relationships for a variety of reasons, but it was also the most productive. I think I gained, and the agency gained, more form the manner I worked with the president than would have been possible had I been and worked any other way. I still feel that way was difficult, but it was successful.

LANGLEY: It sounds as if this particular issue could have been the most difficult part of your career here as well as the most gratifying in the way it worked out.

BERMAN: I developed a friendship in working relations, one of mutual respect. I have to add, because it was significant, that the president was the most productive fundraiser I have ever encountered. He was also one of the brightest people I have ever met; his intuitive understanding of the situation was remarkable. He really had a grasp for things beyond the scope of many people around—except when he was terribly wrong or obstinate. We dealt with one another on a cooperative basis, but he was a domineering man: that's how he made his way in life; he was a self-made man. When he was berating people, he would do it publicly without regard to their feelings, very demeaning—though he was really one of the kindest people I know. One day he was lashing at one of my colleagues mercilessly, a man who allowed himself to be abused, because he got rewarding benefits for taking beatings, the worst example of a masochistic cycle I have ever seen in practice or in ages. In his anger, the Board president turned on me and began to shout at me. I gently reached over and tapped him on the forearm and said, "We don't talk to each other in that way." And he never raised his voice to me again. That was a way of saying we are really peers, colleagues, friends, and this doesn't go. There are a lot of reasons why the relationship worked. And they had to do with a funny combination and is hard to explain. The president relied on me; he knew, as others did, that he could confide in me and it wouldn't go any farther. It maintained a professional, confidential way, so I had access to some of his deepest feelings. I have gone with him through some painful experiences and some doubts about certain things he could express with me. And he knew it was safe to do that, and I never utilized it. He

encouraged me to be his personal friend, but I didn't do that. I was always aware that we were in a working relationship where I was the worker and he was the employer. When it came to program issues, I was the boss; and when it came to agency integrity, I was there to protect it. I don't know how you teach that. The other thing is that not everybody had my parents; that went into what made me what I am.

LANGLEY: You had a wealth of experiences prior to coming here and being in the League.

BERMAN: I had been director of other agencies before getting here. I had experience about which I felt very confident, and I had the function of age. That was really a problem for me, by the way. Here I was in an age when maybe I was not marketable anymore, I had been a big shot, and here I was in my mid-fifties, early-fifties. If I put up a fight, if I walked away from the agency, where would I go? I was still, in a sense, in demand. But I was aware of my limitations by then, feeling I don't have anything to lose, and yet, I had a lot to lose. I didn't want to jeopardize what I built up. I loved the program and the people; it was a hot romance going on for a long time, and yet it took a lot of "hanging-in there" and facing the music. But I felt I had to do what's right regardless of what would happen. I held to that, and it worked. I know without openly admitting it where I didn't do as well as I should have, and it bothered me. But if I had to do it over again, I probably would have made the same mistake, because it is my nature to work that way.

When I came to visit, we had the most interesting pre-employment interviews that I ever had. I had to do two of them, because it turned out that there was a lot of competition for the job that I wasn't aware of. In the second interview, someone very

much on the ball asked me the best question of the whole bunch, which was: of all the things you do, what do you least do well? It was done very nicely. What you see is your greatest weakness, and I knew what it was, and I know what it is. I said, because my training has been largely as a therapist and because of my upbringing, I am a firm believer in the capability of people to change, to grow and develop. I always tend to expect that people will improve in time. And, I said, that is a problem for me in regard to working with the staff, because I find it difficult to give up when I realize they have reached the limits of their capabilities. I keep thinking maybe, with some training, with some supervision, they will grow more. I tend, if anything, to stay with some longer than I should. When I realize it's too long, I try to stop, I try to put it to an end. So I was then asked, how I felt about firing people. I've done it; I know I will do it. That's contrary to my training again, because I was trained to be objective, not assign blame or shame to people. So I try to do it in as appropriate and gentle a way as possible.

I violated that here in Vista when I got close to people, when I went beyond a business relationship to a personal one. And the problem was, I was so impressed when I came to Vista: it was more like an intimate family than any place I had ever worked. It had a quality of closeness that was so valuable. I so admired the staff who could share and participate and care about each other. And as director, I wanted to be part of that, yet I knew I could not. If I did that, I could not administer. That was, in a way, painful. As an administrator, I always held myself apart. I didn't want to, but that was the nature of the job. When I did get close to people, sometimes it warped my judgment. And in some instances, it went beyond what I should have done for the good of the agency. In looking back, I know I might do it again. It didn't hurt anybody; in the long run, it sometimes

was a burden for me because I had to compensate, made sure there were not gaps in the program. If ever there was a time when anybody was detrimental to the program, I would have taken more assertive action. In one case, I almost did, but it was at the point of anger. And I don't like doing things when angry. By the time I cooled off, it was too late.

That business of self-exploring, by the way: I do have to go back to that. When I was a young executive, I worked at the Forest Park Children Center. I was very close with the psychiatric consultant, Dr. Conrad Summer. At the end of my stay, he asked me what I had learned on the job, what I had gotten from the experience. And I said, "For one, I got a reasonably inexpensive analysis." He asked me what I meant by that. Part of it was very serious. As therapist for the children, I really went through a very intensive self-examination as though I were in analysis myself. I think I was a pretty fair therapist. I was very immersed in all the analytical material in those years. So I'd gotten that. I did that professionally. I looked at the same analytical way. When I was at Edward Children Center, I was faculty supervisor for casework students, and I was the first administrator who was an administrative supervisor for an administration student, who was in a group work sequence, would examine any group experience—staff, board, parents, community leaders, or whatever it was that involved people; we would go back and analyze what took place in that group. I have been doing it for years, a lot of self-examination and self-criticism. I don't know how you teach that. I loved discussing it with other executives and among the executives, I was known as the happy warrior. I enjoyed being an administrator.

LANGLEY: Doesn't this go back really into something fundamental in casework, in terms of self?

BERMAN: This was part; it also goes beyond that. When I was a kid, my parents taught me values, just little sayings that they would throw out. I remember one difficult time when a friend of mine derided one of the people in my neighborhood, and my parents said that unless you are in that person's shoes, you don't know what that person is going through. You mustn't ever look badly on them, whatever it was. My brother used that term, know thyself, and gave me the whole speech; he was very good at that. I was just thinking the other day about one of the times my father would get very annoyed with my mother. It was when people would come to the house anywhere from the neighborhood, or a distance, my father would always insist that my mother offer them something to eat and to drink. My mother was very thoughtful about the other person; she, like my father, would always use an expression, a sick person you ask and a health person you give. And I didn't know what he meant. Later on, my father's belief that you never put anybody in the position of having to ask for something; you always supply it, take care of their need before they let you know what they need. And that worked when I worked for the department of welfare, it worked on staff members. It was a good lesson. If I learned from anybody, it was Herb Rosenbosser. This one guy in our unit had eight workers to supervise. Herb Rosenbosser was an ordinary guy—I don't know what his background was, but the two of us in the unit were going to night school to become social workers. He already had a family. Every day Herb would come to work and somehow or another, he communicated with everybody he saw before he sat down at his desk. He had talked to everybody there and in some way, made a better day for them. And I

thought that guy knows how to communicate. When I went to Gunieverre Hospital, Dr. Carl Menninger would parade down the long halls, smiling at everybody, and that was his message. When you see anybody, you smile. That was a way of dealing with people in a positive way. I was preoccupied, so I didn't always do it. But those were some of the impacts on me. And how do you teach them to anybody? It is something that becomes part of you that ties in with the different style of executives; there are no two alike. We are all whatever we are made into.

LANGLEY: What do you see as being the kinds of things that you brought to California that affected the welfare of your community?

BERMAN: I had a thought process that went something like this: every kid ought to be home in a secure, happy family . removing kids was not the way to go, that if you get to them early enough—get to the family early enough—and work out whatever is troubling the family, you could maintain some kind of growth experience for all involved, unhappiness was not a necessary way of life. I thought, given an agency that would let me do it, I can try to bring that about.

I had been director of a merged agency where the former director couldn't make the merger function. It was like two agencies running simultaneously, and I made it into one. I thought, "Well, I can consolidate and get the benefit of the synergic values, but to this mass together, there would have to be some benefit from it." Through the State Association, I got them more interested in the standards of the Child Welfare League kind and there was reduction of animosity from public and private agencies. I got mileage with the board, and I got new programs developed by telling them what we were

not doing and how we were failing, without blaming anybody. I think that led to some program development that might not have taken place.

LANGLEY: what do you think about using some of these ideas and concepts in the general community of child welfare or agency direction in the community?

BERMAN: I noticed in the advocacy approach, the constructive use of guilt. You pick up report after report where there is a rub-in on how many children are unserved, have been abused, neglected—breakdowns in service, being short-changed. On the financing of services, there is some movement, but not enough; they still pay for—I call it “mattress money”—for day-care facilities rather than for preventive stuff. You know the governor has spoken of new preventive measures, while cutting the budget for service.

LANGLEY: Yes; this I don't understand.

BERMAN: Yes, and he makes regrettable remarks about mothers of dependent children, etcetera. After retirement, I continued to do some consultation if they called me. I do volunteer consultation for the Executive Career Service. I feel good about taking my administrative experience and putting it to work as a volunteer in agencies that are in need of some help. But that is pleasing; that's a way of keeping my hand in, doing what I know how to do.

LANGLEY: Would you get into policy-making or politics?

BERMAN: No, not politics. Years ago, the closest I came was when I was being approached where we lived in Illinois, by somebody who proposed my name to the board of education. It was an area where there is a certain amount of xenophobia, the fear of strangers. I had been in the area for a couple of years, and the committee that was screening, raised questions about my newness and how a social worker has a tendency to

move in and out. It turned out they were right. Within a few years of that, I was off to St. Louis again. That question was, if you are doing so much with children, how would you want to do more of the same? It wouldn't be the same. That I was interested in doing that because it had an affect on kids and that would have worked out. My newness, the fact that I wasn't a permanent person, others were clamoring for and campaigning; I didn't make it. That would have been interesting. I was on the board of a public treatment facility in St. Louis Country, Run Treatment Center. It wasn't political. It was very heavily involved in politics. I was on the advisory board, then a board member was running for office. I worked on committees.

LANGLEY: Why did you decide to retire?

BERMAN: I had set a goal of what I wanted to accomplish with the agency. I'd always said that there was a point when you had to recognize it is time to move over and let somebody else come in with energy and ideas and visions. I was hoping that I could do whatever I had on my plate to accomplish. Also, I had a highly personal one. I had a pretty good year, and then my brother passed away. He was sort of a second father to me. He was ten years older than I. His birthday was yesterday, as a matter of fact, and his loss depleted me. I must have been quite depressed; I don't know how much it showed around the place, but I lacked the drive. I didn't have the fire engines anymore, there weren't any great exciting challenges. The other issue was that I was satiated; there wasn't anything especially new or exciting for me to do. I had suggested to the board of directors one possible new thing to do that would have been exciting, a very different liberal thing to do administratively that I wanted to do. It was not feasible: it involved another agency that I thought should be part of the umbrella of services here, and when

the word came in that it was not do-able, I thought that's the last big thing for me. And then the job became boring, it was more administration, basically doing the same things over and over again every year unless there is something new to take care of. So I suggested a course of action; a long-term study that would yield some short-term goals or activities and would point the agency in new directions, and I would step aside. I felt that they had been over-dependent on me and on the president of the board. I was willing to step aside; I don't know if he was. That was a way, also, of saying nobody is indispensable and this agency has to keep on going, and I didn't know that I could do that much more here. I was tempted to stay another year. I thought about it; I was finding it hard to leave. My ambivalence was heightened and then, in the process of getting ready, the commitment to leave was irreversible. I had to get the agency and myself emotionally ready. While I had given the board three years' notice, it didn't work that way, because they chose to ignore it. It was a very logical wrapping up of things. The sense of closeness and family was so meaningful, it was just a beautiful and timely way for me to go. I felt the depression lift, after a while. It still isn't entirely gone.

I left the Child Welfare League; my decision was made not terribly long after my father died, but there wasn't the same link. I left administration to become a consultant; to be a good consultant, I had to go back to administration so I could keep up with what was new.

LANGLEY: The goals that you had in mind, were they all for the agencies or were they for child welfare in California?

BERMAN: Oh, general. I wasn't agency-driven, as then I cared more about the overall scene. I want the agency to be the best possible; in some ways it was. But I was thinking

more of a general picture. When we developed the aftercare program, which I saw as a major deficiency, I had Judy Bernstein do as much as she could in terms of hospital contacts to sell the idea of aftercare service, that our programs are very large. I was thinking about what could make the system better. I never was immersed in some of the board advocacy issues other than as a participant, but not a leader. I think I still am basically a caseworker. I went to one small group or another. But when I was working, I was painfully aware of whether I was depriving my own kids and family of my time and energy, because I was a workaholic for much of my career. I was very overly invested, and I remember when I was away so much of the time, when I was in the League, I was on the road a great deal of time. I defended myself by saying to my kids, you know where I was and what I was doing. And I'd explain to them that I was helping a lot of children. Every time I went away, it means that I helped hundreds and hundreds of kids.

LANGLEY: But did they ever complain?

BERMAN: No, they turned out terrific kids. This is a quality time, but I was lucky. We had a good close family and still do. But that was it, a sense of mission, that you have a responsibility to others.

LANGLEY: Is that something that you feel proud of looking back on your career, that the sense of mission was accomplished?

BERMAN: I don't know. I'm realistic enough to say whatever my efforts were that they are transitory; they don't last forever. Whatever effectiveness I may have had is over when I am through with it. It doesn't last beyond a certain period of time. The field has worse problems than it did before. The problems are more severe. The help that we gave to individual families hopefully will last, but I have no way of knowing for sure that

the training I gave to staff and the growth they may have experienced is a good one that should go on. But I don't have any big illusions that I did any monumentally large stuff. I was always pleased when I did workshops. I would go visiting when I was on consultation. People would approach me who had been in a workshop at Chapel Hill or at St. Louis U, wherever. One administrator once told me if you don't toot your horn, you remain untooted, which was in conflict with what my mother used to say, "Don't praise yourself too much. If you are supposed to do it, you're supposed to do it."

LANGLEY: What do you think the profession should be doing now?

BERMAN: I have to be careful how I say this to you. I have been very involved with organizations and NASA in particular when I was involved in the treatment end. Now in many ways, the organizations are advocates on benefits. The American Association of Children's Residential Centers changed from a clinical discussion group to an advocacy group, although they have excellent clinical meetings. But they are pretty much pre-occupied with legislation financing. NASW over the years became very involved with private practice which is counter to my feeling about agency responsibility and accountability. I have no brief against it; that is just the way they are. Much of the work is in the area of advocacy, and I am very pleased with that. And indirectly, that is an outlet for me, that's a way of saying if I want to participate in advocacy, those are the places. That's terribly important if we are to get good legislation and good financing of service.

I like the broadening of the base. I can remember when social work, child welfare, dealt with agency practice only and didn't get involved with issues of housing, jobs, and civil rights. That, I think, is the direction it should take; it should alert the

conscience of the community, and I applaud that. On the private practice part, I see it as asserting social work as an equal partner in the triumphant psychology and psychiatry. That does not perturb me, but I really don't know; I think there are areas that have been neglected. I have just finished two consultations in the field of AIDS. I don't know if social work has made as much impact there, but I was very pleased I have just gotten my copy of the *Journal*, and it's all devoted to AIDS. That's good. I don't really know, Charlotte. My, when I was here, I tried so hard to get our staff to think beyond the agency, to think in terms of Styrian interest or community interest. That may have been the mix of people and that was one of the touching areas that I don't know why that was. You went through the same thing. Some of us—I think it has been said of you, and I think it's true of the field—there was a quality to the old line social worker that involved not a sense of private practice and money, but of social services to the community and striving for excellence. It was a dedication that didn't know power in roles: you did the job because your conscience told you to do it. Thank you, I enjoyed it so much. Maybe it's an age difference; I can't see it in some of the peers, colleagues. It could be that it is going on, but I'm not party to it. One of the staff people with whom I had difficulties early on, had left. I said we may have agreed about the goals, but not by the methods to reach them. And although I didn't agree with her tactics, I always admired her.