

A Conversation: Josephine DiPaola,
Lola Selby, and Rose Green
on
School of Social Work,
University of Southern California

Introductory Comments:

The purpose of this conversation was to note how the three subjects came to be in the field of social work. All were members of the School of Social Work faculty, Green from 1946, DiPaola from 1953, and Selby from 1955.

DiPAOLA: I'm Jo DiPaola, who had been a student twice at the USC School of Social Work and on the faculty. I went to USC for my first graduate work during the 1930s Depression years and got a one-year master's degree (MSSW) in 1939. Arlien Johnson was then the dean, and I had been a part-time student spanning a number of years. I remember vividly my field work placement, which was where the motion picture on school social work was later made. Field work was difficult to arrange in those days; there was a shortage of field instructors who could provide the learning experience. That proved to be an informal and somewhat different field experience than anything that I remember since. Then World War II came along, and I returned to the School for a full master's degree after a year and a half of study. Arlien had come, and she worked out a program that required one semester and a second year.

SELBY: I am Lola Selby. I drifted into social work during the depths of the Depression when the career that I planned for myself was not open because of the Depression. I had intended to teach English and social science in high school. I had a master's degree and a general secondary certificate, but I couldn't get a job because I had not had teaching experience. At that point in

time, I was absolutely without any employment, and in the depths of the Depression I was looking for a job in places like Woolworths and anywhere I might find something. But I couldn't find a thing because I had not had work experience. I saw an ad in the newspaper one day in Long Beach, where I was living, that offered free tuition in exchange for services in a business college. I went down to see what could be offered and, because I had a master's in English and could write a good letter, the director of the business college took me on to write her correspondence. I also took some training in business. I had about six months of this, hoping that I would end with some marketable services, when the only friend that I knew from my high school and college days, who had gone into social work, called me one day and said, "Would you like to work in the unemployment relief office--which preceded Social Security--and serve as a substitute for our secretaries who are on vacation?" I was delighted and worked in several sections for various people who went on vacation. I did dictaphone work and was a clerical person and so on. And then, because the officers in that organization noted that I had a master's degree, decided to offer me a case file, as the term was in those days. So I got into social work. As I did, I decided I really didn't know much about what social work was about, and I started taking night school courses. I was living in Long Beach and working in the Long Beach unemployment relief office. I drove up to Los Angeles to take night school courses at the USC Continuing Education Program--what is now called Extended Education Department. I had my early courses from such people as George Mangold and the two Youngs (Erle and Pauline) and Bessie MacClanahan. I decided that I needed further education, however. In the meantime, the Social Security Law passed, and I was shunted through the SRA program where I worked until 1941. When that closed, I decided to go back to school for a stint on campus. I arrived at USC in the fall of 1941. Arlien Johnson was the dean, and I also had a course from her in administration, which really was

a fascinating course. I had Harleigh Trecker for group work, and Ruby Inlow for casework; there were a few other assorted people. Those were the main ones. At the end of that semester, World War II broke out. I had no more money because I spent all my retirement pay in that one semester, but I got a one-year certificate which was given in those days, a one-year certificate in social work. I had my field work in that semester with Traveler's Aid. Mary Del Sasse as her name is now--it was then Mary Van Dusen--supervised me. It was a marvelous experience and because I had had that experience and because I didn't have any more money to go on to school and because the war effort was requiring more people, I got into USO Traveler's Aid. Later I went back for a second year.

GREEN: I am Rose Green, and I guess I have had some of the same checkered career coming into social work that Lola has just described, so I won't go into much of that. I would like to say that my undergraduate studies were at the University of Pennsylvania. I was determined to start very early in the first semester collecting extra courses and extra units in mathematics because I was going to be a teacher of mathematics in the Philadelphia high schools. By the second year of my studies there, I had my first course in sociology and everything that I had decided at that point took a second seat to sociology and the social sciences. I ended up having a double major in sociology and history: social science as it was called. It was a most interesting experience being the one female student in the Wharton School of Business in a large class of men who had a lot of fun ribbing and teasing me. Coming out of the University, I met the same problem as Lola: no jobs in teaching if you had had no experience up to that point. So I did many things. The most interesting were two that I would like to mention. One was teaching English to immigrants who

wanted to become citizens of the USA. I found this one of the most rewarding teaching experiences and the first experience in teaching that I found very, very rewarding. The other one--and you might not dream of making this connection--was teaching dancing to children, which I did every Saturday and enjoyed just as much. After these varied experiences I did get a job teaching in the elementary schools. By now I wanted to use my social sciences/social studies and to do this, one had to do something that would be in the sphere of social relationships and social problems. I was told that I really should have experience in teaching of elementary school children; this is the best spot for an entree to problematic matters with children and their families, their studies and school. After a couple of years of that, I went to Smith College for what was their full social work training at that time, and I ended up with a master's of social science degree, which was what was awarded in those days. This was in 1929. At that point I did go into social work practice in a child guidance clinic in Philadelphia. I stayed a good many years and many of my colleagues would say when we met at national conferences, "Are you still at that same place?" and I would have to say yes. I would often get inquiries from others, flattering letters inviting my thinking about jobs in other places, and I came out of each one thinking that despite being offered more in these new places when I inquired of them, I did learn a great deal in this child guidance clinic. Lola has just reminded me that the experience represented many differences from the basic teaching and learning in Smith in the preceding years, in 1928 and 1929. In my thirteen years of experience at the clinic, I did a number of things. One I want to stress really added a great deal to my horizons or, rather, the quest of contribution to solutions to social problems; it had to do with my being what was then called a cooperative worker in that area. For six or seven years, I was in charge of all admissions to the clinic for treatment of children who came from the social agencies in the Philadelphia community but not from their own parents. So I had lots to do with

all the social agencies. These included homes for children, placement agencies for children, hospitals for children, and various health organizations for children. I had a lot to do with the workers in those agencies and became very interested in the whole network of relationships that both contributed to problems and had much to do in helping a child in an adjustment out of problems. It was from that experience that I wanted to do some teaching, and my first teaching was with public health nurses at the University of Pennsylvania in the master's program in a course that was titled "Casework Principles as Applied to Public Health Nursing." I don't know what they would think of that today, but I'm sure there are many similar courses on the studies of relationship within a family that public health nurses, and nurses in hospitals, get in their nurse's training today.

This gave me quite a yen to do some teaching with social workers. I wanted to try my hand with that task and the first opening that came to me was at the University of Minnesota. I was so full of ideas--just out of practice and so eager to teach. I now see that my joining the faculty of just a group of five or six is not as easy a thing as I imagined, even though the director and the associate director talked to me about how much they wanted new blood in the school and wanted young people just out of practice to, as they said, "give us a shot in the arm on what's going on in practice today." I joined the staff at the University of Minnesota in September, 1942. Evidently this shot in the arm was a bit stronger than I ever realized at the time because the school was much stirred up about some of the differences between teaching by other social casework teachers and myself. More particularly, I think was the interest and the response of people in the community to some things they felt the students were getting that were more attuned to practice of the day. This was not an easy situation for a group of teachers who had been teaching in the same school from about 1926 to really take in and adjust to. It ended in my leaving the University of

Minnesota without the offer of tenure because of some of the difficulties, you may imagine, within this situation. Much that was stirred up in the community, I think now--and taught then--was more related to teaching practice rather than to personalities and points of view or psychologies. And this would be rather difficult for people who were nearing the time of their retirement from the school. Anyway, as the young blood or the young turk, I was getting some prompting from my friends. I was very troubled by what had happened there and left the school rather downcast and certainly pessimistic about the chance of ever teaching in a school of social work. This little rift evidently had made its mark with other places in the country and there was really lots of discussion, most of which was about the point of view which I would bring to teaching and was more related to practice.

In this low point Arlien Johnson wrote to me while I was still at Minnesota, in the early fall of that fourth year, asking if I would be interested in becoming a teacher in the University of Southern California. We had some correspondence over the year, and we met at a national conference of schools of social work, meeting at, I think, Pittsburgh or Buffalo. We met and talked about my interest in the teaching idea and my interest in California. I felt a great need to tell her my view of what had happened in Minnesota, and I can remember starting on this, and said to Arlien--I think I called her Dean Johnson--"I would like you to know what I think happened in Minnesota." She leaned across and patted me on the knee and said, "I have one question to ask you; do you have a car?" I gulped and said yes I have a car. She said, "That is all I need to know.:

So in September of 1946, I joined the staff of the University of Southern California. If any of you recall that time, it was when the Second World War was over. Many of the men and

women in the service who had had a taste of California were coming back to California to live, and getting a place to live was extremely difficult. I stayed in motels to begin with. I had come in early August to find a place to live and get settled, and I stayed in motels which I had to leave after five days and pack up all my things, go to another one, and then stay there for five days, and come back to the first one. Finally, I met a very good-hearted man who said he could keep a place for me if I would just go to some other place for two days. I would come back there for another five days and started to teach with all the heaviness that I had in starting in a new place anyway. I found the first year very difficult. It was not until May of that year that I found an apartment for myself. I remember talking rather loosely to some friends in the community that if I didn't find a place to live before the summer vacation, I just could not come back to Southern California. Much as I wanted to teach, I just couldn't teach living the way I had for that year. It was really very traumatic. I would like to tell you what the tale was that helped me get this apartment. I will never forget it. I got the apartment through the help of one of my second year students in class, in my own class in USC, who was using the GI funds to go to school and get her social work training. In order to get an apartment--all of them were being reserved for men and women out of the service--one needed to present whatever your number was in the service. I have forgotten what they call that mustering number; perhaps it was the discharge number. I do know it was a number that I had to present. Since I had no number, I couldn't get a place to live. She came up one day after class. I told a supervisor in the community that I just couldn't come back if I didn't have a place to live. She came up and offered me her number. I said I couldn't take that number because she was getting her degree and would be finding a job and would need that number herself to get a place to live. She had her job already worked out in the VA here in Los Angeles. She was staying right where she was living, and with all these very pressing arguments on her side, I

did finally accept her number. It was through that serial number that I was able to get the apartment. I felt so uneasy about using this number that I insisted on putting her name up on the mail box along with mine and that she could have use of this apartment or any part of it as long as she was in the city. She laughed at that and never did use it. In the second year, of course, I could settle down; my furniture, which I had sent out from Minnesota, had been in storage all this year, I finally got and was able to set it around--and that in itself made me feel more settled and at home.

Teaching at USC I found a delight in the beginning. One of the things that Dean Johnson had talked to me about in which I did have valid experience was setting up a psychiatric social work sequence: the field work placements and any particular course work that was necessary. I felt pretty good about this or, at least, it felt that I had some good experience in it. That's what I had been asked to do in Minnesota and had been able to complete. In the years that I was there, the school was accredited for what was then the specialized sequence in psychiatric social work. Another thing which added to my assurance was that I was on the Accrediting Committee of the American Psychiatric Association of Psychiatric Social Workers. So I had some strengths of this sort and strength within the faculty. I cannot leave that first and second year without talking about the strength of Ruby Inlow and her support for my coming and my being there, what I was doing, and how I was doing that was so different from my experience with the other school that I still treasure it as an unusual experience that happened to me.

Another thing in the first year that was very interesting was that Dean Johnson turned me over to John Milner for a tour around the campus and some talk about the School. John Milner and Sue Wagner had arrived the preceding February, and when I arrived in September of '46, the faculty numbered eight. They had five before then and there were three of us new ones, making

eight. John took me over to the Rose Garden in Exposition Park, and it really is a beautiful spot, and I enjoyed it very much. He looked at me askance; I looked at him a bit askance since I was now a little leery about other teachers in social work in relation to my starting out new. You see I am starting off back to that very first week in 1946. I did hear things about it in the community that I didn't want to say in the history of the School. Anyway, what I remember with much pleasure was John lifted me up to sit on the stone wall that surrounded the Park, and it was there that he told me about the School and the community and many things that were nice to know and important to know. I'm sure he was taking a measure of me in the same way that I was of him. And he was specifically teaching students in first year casework practice, and I was teaching groups of them in the second year. My being uneasy about him was due to the fact that this was the very same situation that I had been in in Minnesota. Well, needless to say, we got the School accredited for the psychiatric social work sequence, met with great interest in developing placements in the community and talking with people and getting to know them, being very particular about supervisors. I can remember the very first week that the School was in session in 1946. With one-day's notice, Dean Johnson asked me to lead a meeting of the School's field teachers who were coming in for a half day, and would I please take charge of that and talk to them about supervision in the field. And it was pretty hard to start, but in the end, I would say it was pretty good for me to begin that way.