

Mr. John Kulli  
Interviewed by Frances Lomas Feldman  
In her home  
on November 9, 1998

ABSTRACT:

This interview with John Kulli describes his immigrant parents and his siblings, including a schizophrenic younger sister. The parental interest in others, combined with the experience of having a psychologically disturbed sister, contributed substantially to his interest in the arena of health and welfare. From his childhood, he was involved in a variety of volunteer activities. For many years he had a high-level position in Sears-Roebuck, and during those years, he also served as a volunteer. This became a full-time activity when he retired. He has been on the boards of many agencies – often as president, practically all of the agencies focused on mental health and/or employment. He has been a volunteer on the Board of California Social Welfare Archives, serving as secretary, treasurer, president, then treasurer again. This interview identifies some of the agencies with whom he has worked.

FELDMAN: I'd like to find out, in general, how you came into social work, what led you to do that and some of the things you've done; but, first, let me begin, really, with what you did before. Tell me about your background.

KULLI: My parents were both immigrants into the United States, and they set a very good example in the way they dealt with people. It's much more important to watch what your parents do than hear them preach to you. The second thing that was very important to me, Frances, was the fact that we had a lot of personal tragedy in the family. My older brother died of the Spanish flu aboard ship (US Navy) just before his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1918. My sister, Margaret, died at the age of 40 from tuberculosis. She was a Christian Scientist and ignored symptoms. But then, there was no specific cure at that time. My younger sister, 18 month younger than I, broke down with schizophrenia at the age of 16; a very promising young girl who then had a lifetime bout with this illness. So you might say that the illnesses sharpened my interest to the needs of people that need help. Does that answer your question?

FELDMAN: Yes, it does. Tell me next, then, about your education and what you prepared to do and what you did before you began to move into the social work arena.

KULLI: Right. I'd be very pleased. I was born in Los Angeles, went to public schools here, graduated from Franklin High, went to UCLA, graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration in 1940; then I went to work for Sears Roebuck & Co., working there until I retired in 1980.

FELDMAN: What did you do there?

KULLI: General merchandising: sales, operating, personnel work. When Sears was accused of gender, age, racial discrimination, I was representing the 12 Western states. Sears was simultaneously in ten Federal District Courts at once. It was an interesting last assignment. By the way, Sears won the cases at a cost in excess of \$30,000,000.

FELDMAN: Were you living in Los Angeles, then, or some other city?

KULLI: In Los Angeles until 1949; then in Pasadena, but commuting to the headquarters in Alhambra. I also worked three years in Arizona, and that's about it. My time at Sears was interrupted twice: first in World War II, I was in the Navy for 3-1/2 years; and in Korea, I was recalled to active duty because I stayed in the Reserves and spent two more years in the Navy. I'm a retired Lieutenant Commander, USNR. I retired from Sears in 1980, and I've been doing a lot of volunteer work since. You might call me an officious intermeddler. (laughter) I like to see if I can help people who need help.

FELDMAN: Now, your total work experience, paid work experience, aside from military service was 40 years with Sears, less 5-1/2 years active duty in the US Navy. Did you do any volunteer activity while you were at Sears?

KULLI: Yes, yes. Every Sears employee was offered a chance to work for the Community

Chest (first) and then United Way – so I was always on those campaigns, calling on companies.

They would release you to go out into the community, because it was very important. I also did a number of other things. At one time, for example, I was with a Boy Scouts Troop in Pasadena as Troop Chair.

FELDMAN: Had you been a Boy Scout?

KULLI: Yes. And my son was a Boy Scout. He was a Boy Scout until he discovered girls.

At that time, scouting didn't have any tangible activities with Girl Scouts. I also served on a number of Youth Authority activities and with Girl Scouts. At three different times, I served on youth activities for the store, where we supported youth who were learning business.

FELDMAN: Was this the California Youth Authority, or were these voluntary agencies?

KULLI: These were all voluntary, non-profit agencies.

FELDMAN: Non-profit.

KULLI: They were voluntary programs: for example, Jr. Achievement, three different times: Burbank, Santa Monica and Phoenix, Arizona.

FELDMAN: And what did you do in those organizations?

KULLI: I'd just go to the weekly evening meetings and help the boys and the girls prepare their product and develop it and learn how to sell it. They would form companies and remain very active in Southern California. In Arizona, I helped organize the first unit in the state.

FELDMAN: There was a training program for youth.....

KULLI: Training children; it trained competent kids to be more competent. But those are the things I did while I worked at Sears.

FELDMAN: Then when you retired.....

KULLI: I actually did some things before I retired. Remember, I told you I retired in 1980. In

1955, I went on – my wife first, and then I went on the Board of the Hathaway Home for Children in Northeast Los Angeles. I was active until 1963, at which time I was transferred to Arizona.

FELDMAN: What was the function of the Hathaway Home?

KULLI: Hathaway Home is for emotionally disturbed, pre-psychotic children, ages 6 to 13 years old. It's been in existence since 1919. In my time on the board, we acquired the Cecil B. DeMille Ranch up above Montrose. Hathaway is very much the equivalent of Vista del Mar on the Westside. It's just a mile or two from where we sit – the original campus. My interest in mental health was intense because of my younger sister.

The second volunteer activity I started when I was still working was when I came back from Arizona. I went on the board of Portals House. Portals is a mental health agency near the Westside. They follow the half-way house idea. They believe that everyone can improve. You've got to show the clients how to live independently; how to live in a supervised setting; teach them basic skills; and eventually, even to work. We've been very successful in Portals in that. In some years, we have placed more stabilized mentally sick people than all the rest of the California mental health agencies combined. They've used Portals as an example. Marv Weinstein, of course, has been the heartbeat there. I'm a very strong supporter of him. I think his methods are very good.

FELDMAN: You were President of that Board, were you not?

KULLI: Yes. It's actually called Chairman of that Board. I was on the Board for almost 15 years, exiting in 1995.

FELDMAN: Any other mental health agencies?

KULLI: In 1997, I affiliated with LAMP, which helps mentally sick people living on the streets of Los Angeles' "Skid row."

FELDMAN: How do you spell that?

KULLI: L A M P.

FELDMAN: Are they initials, or is that the name?

KULLI: Originally, it was “Los Angeles Men’s Program,” but we help women too.

FELDMAN: Oh, it’s an acronym.

KULLI: That’s correct. I’m still active there. We serve about 600 people of the 12,000 that are on the streets on the eastside of downtown Los Angeles. It is a greatly under-supported area. People don’t like to think of that. By the way, Jean (Mrs. Kulli) and I also support Union Station here in Pasadena, but only financially. I haven’t taken an active part like I have at LAMP.

FELDMAN: Tell me what you do at LAMP.

KULLI: I’m in Resource Development. This is my second year. My job is to get money. Without money, nothing works. We’ve been quite successful. We just raised \$100,000 at a golf tournament. We called it Skid Row Golf. The next project there is to pull together the downtown businessmen who are, or should be, more concerned with the slums right next door, and get them to help. We’re making strides. We’re taking steps and we’re gaining.

FELDMAN: Does LAMP provide shelter and food and something else?

KULLI: All three. First, the people that sleep under bridges or on the sidewalk on cardboard, don’t trust anyone. Most have no effective family support. Or if they did have, the family them out. We first offer them a cup of coffee to come into our day center. Then, after they come in and they feel confident, we say, “Would you like some fresh underwear?” We provide fresh underwear, fresh socks, and a laundry to wash them to help them get started. We have bunks there, at the day center. We can bunk probably 15, 20. If they stabilize past that point, we invite them to move over to the village, which is 3 blocks away.

FELDMAN: Where is LAMP located?

KULLI: In three locations: at the Lodge, 660 So. Stanford Avenue; the Village, 527 So. Crocker Street; and the Day Center, 627 So. San Julian Street. The Village is for people who want to live with us and want to work. We have a laundry, and we employ about 20 people. A lot of these people can learn to work, if they're given time. We give them short hours at first. I'm very interested, as in employment. The Lodge is an old hotel. We have 50 people living in it. For your information, two of the residents are Harvard men. So I want you to know misfortune occurs everywhere. It took me several years to discover that almost every family is affected sooner or later by mental illness. The third location is the Day (Reception) Center.

That's my major interest. Now, would you like to know what I do and what I've been in otherwise?

FELDMAN: I certainly would.

KULLI: At the risk of sounding like an officious intermedler, I've already told you about what I did while I worked at Sears, including Portals. After I retired, I spent a year in the domestic Peace Corps. I was assigned to the California Youth Authority. I worked with wards of the Youth Authority; they were paroled from the institutions, young men, averaging about 20 years of age. I helped them get ready for jobs. It's very discouraging work. These young -----

FELDMAN: Was this full time on your part?

KULLI: Five days a week; full time. 95% African-American; 96% male. Most of them read at about the third to fifth-grade level. Most of them have been in trouble since they were 12 years old. It's very hard to get employers to take a chance on these youngsters. First of all, they don't understand the practical factors of employment. In two years, two thirds of them are in the adult authority. We have to reach those youths a lot earlier. Twenty is too late.

I was invited to come to the Governor's Committee for the Employment of Wards while locked up in the institutions. At the Ventura School, we were able to get started with reservations for TWA. But there's a lot of resistance to employing people who are locked up. The biggest resistance comes from staff at the institutions. They don't want any competition. They want the wards to watch the tube and pump iron.

FELDMAN: It means more work for them, too.

KULLI: That's correct. They want more and bigger prisons. However, it certainly told me that we've got to reach these young people. Most of them don't even know who their father was. Most of them have an ineffective mother who very often is into substance abuse. Most of them have only a grandmother as a supportive family. Okay, so much for that.

I served 12 years on the West San Gabriel Valley Mayor's Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped.

FELDMAN: West San Gabriel Valley?

KULLI: Yes, the ten cities clustered around Pasadena; as far east as El Monte. What we tried to do was to get jobs for the handicapped. The great weaknesses in formal education is that it doesn't point people with disabilities toward realizable work they can do.

The next thing I served on, back in 1984 to 1986, was the Board of Foothill Family Service, right here in Pasadena. I only served two years. I was not impressed by the leadership at that time. Then I worked with the California Social Welfare Archives, 1993 to the present. Of course, as you know, I was formerly President, and presently am still active on the Board as Treasurer.

FELDMAN: I think I can put that in.

KULLI: The next thing that I did on the California Social Welfare Archives – they got me on the

Board of Councilors for the School of Social Work in 1997. It's very important, high-level work, largely involved interpretation and fundraising. I now serve at the pleasure of Dean Marilyn Flynn. If she wants to get rid of me, I'll go gracefully. I was appointed by her predecessor. But I do enjoy meeting key people and hearing what's looming, not only in the School of Social Work, but the University as a whole. This University is a city by itself.

I might say, as a UCLA graduate, I'm very impressed with the University of Southern California.

One of the most demanding times that I had after my retirement was starting, in 1982 until 1996, working for the Management Council for Merit Employment Training and Research. I was based at the headquarters for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Larry Cooper was the President. When he became unable to continue, I took over as President -- for the last three years.

FELDMAN: Tell us how that organization started.

KULLI: That started after the first Watts Riots, when the business community ----

FELDMAN: 1965?

KULLI: That's correct ---- when the business community of Los Angeles discovered South Los Angeles. They discovered it was without hospitals, without courts, without employment offices. If you were unemployed and wanted a job, you either had to go to Long Beach or up to downtown L.A. Thanks largely to this active group, many things were put in place. Many shortages that I mentioned before, have been corrected. But they realized, quickly, that this was not enough.

FELDMAN: Was this under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce?

KULLI: No, not exactly. Many were members of the Chamber, and the Management Council first met at the Chamber, but then the School District gave us free rent, so we moved over there before I joined the activity. I didn't come until 1982. My own company helped support it:

Sears & Roebuck. But the real thing is, “Merit Employment,” meaning we don’t ask anyone to hire someone who isn’t ready, but we ask them to give them more time to get ready. The University of Southern California did a research project on what we did. The answer was that it was positive for the community. But the big thing is that for many years, we’ve been going out to the junior high schools and high schools with people from companies who tell the students what education has meant to them and the kinds of jobs they have. They explain to these young people the importance of getting ready for a job.

I’m reminded of the man from Edison – a Hispanic – talking to a Fourth Street School on the East side of Los Angeles. He opened up in Spanish. He said, “How many of you can’t understand English?” Three boys’ hands went up. These non-English speakers are arriving all the time. In Spanish, my Edison man said, “You sit next to someone in the room who can fill you in, because from now on, I’m going to talk English.” Then he switched over and said, “How many of you here speak English?” Every other hand went up. “How many here speak Spanish?” Every hand went up. I want to address that. If you’re bilingual, you have a leg up on everyone else who isn’t bilingual. Did you know that if you get the proper education, you can go a long way. If you’re a girl, you’ve got another advantage, because every company is looking for qualified women. I work for a woman manager. I’m well paid. But she’s paid a lot better than I am.” With that, the principal applauded, as did all the girl pupils.

What we need to do is to inspire our young people, and that’s been the main thrust of the Management Council these 12 years I’ve been there.

The best thing I did at Sears on my last assignment, was to set up the “Help Line.” What is the Help Line? It’s for people who have enormous problems, like substance abuse. Either the employee is performing badly, or his spouse or his children are; all this affects his job

performance. We started the “Help Line on the West Coast, and it became National. When I retired, I was told that was the best contribution anyone could have achieved.

FELDMAN: That’s like an employee assistance service?

KULLI: That’s right. We called it the Help Line. Done quietly, anonymously, we saved a lot of people. We had a vice president who told our head Plan Administrator, “Does John Kulli know my wife is an alcoholic?” She said, “He doesn’t know who we’re serving. I keep that locked in my head.” He said, “Good. It’s been a great burden off me, the help that’s been given to her.

FELDMAN: How did people know that it existed?

KULLI: Word of mouth. You may have a badly performing employee who’s had 10, 15 years of service. Hopefully, the personnel manager doesn’t just call him in and fire him, but tries to find out what’s wrong. As we say, “You better decide you want to stay. Otherwise we’re going to have to let you go because your attendance is so bad;” or, “your performance is bad;” or, “you aren’t getting along with people.

FELDMAN: Do they have full-time employees working in Help Line?

KULLI: No.

FELDMAN: Just volunteers?

KULLI: No. We were referring to agencies to perform the counseling job. In other words, if I’m interviewing you, and you have a booze problem, I’ll say, “We want you to go to this agency and see if they can straighten this out.” Employee participation is voluntary.

FELDMAN: How would I know where to go to see you?

KULLI: You’ve been called into the office, and you’ve been told. “Frances, if you don’t straighten out, you won’t be here much longer. This is a final warning. We’ve had reports that you come to the job intoxicated.” “Oh, everyone drinks,” you would say. “No, not to the extent

that it interferes with your job. That's an important life function. Now, do you want us to refer you under our health plan to an agency that we've had good experience with? We want to save you. You're a bright person, and you've been around a long time. We have a lot invested in you. We don't want to have to let you go." It works many times; sometimes it doesn't work at all.

FELDMAN: If a person said yes, I want help, does the manager call you?

KULLI: No. They go directly. They work with the Medical Plan Administrator.

FELDMAN: That's what I was trying to get at.

KULLI: I kept out of the operation. I just set it up.

FELDMAN: You set it up and somebody else did the referral. Now is that woman a full-time person?

KULLI: Oh, yes.

FELDMAN: That's what I was wondering.

KULLI: Yes, full time. She headed up the health program for the 10 Western states at that time. This was a task for professionals. You can't have amateurs in this, or personnel managers in on this. They don't know what's needed in order to do it correctly.

FELDMAN: Do you recall what her qualifications were? Was she a nurse?

KULLI: Yes, and a very nice person, a very warm person, and she knew the Sears health plan very well. Oddly enough, Sears adopted it, but Allstate Insurance, which was a wholly-owned subsidiary, declined it. Okay, so much for the Help Line health plan. If we can move to the next agency.

One of the volunteer things I feel best about is the Alta Med Medical Foundation on the Eastside of Los Angeles. I joined that as a gringo in 1989 and retired as Chairman of the Board in 1997, which I accepted reluctantly, because it should be a Hispanic, not a Kulli. They were short

of volunteers and they needed a man quickly, and so they grabbed me. We served the Eastside crescent of Los Angeles, and I mean from San Fernando all the way to Long Beach. It's a very under-served area. A lot of them are immigrants, many are illegals. They don't know where to turn for help. They're afraid of being deported. We served them. The purpose is to "stay in school, get your high school diploma." We have a very active, \$3,000,000 program that's devoted to school-age mothers.

FELDMAN: Where did the \$3,000,000 come from?

KULLI: The State of California. The special program had Governor Wilson's blessing. Wilson has some good sides to him. He isn't all negative. His wife, Gail, is a very involved person. She convinced him that it was a necessary program, and it is a great success. It's now in its fourth year. Alta Med also takes care of old folks. It's much better to have old folks at home with assistance than living in a warehouse at \$3,000, \$4,000 a month price. There are four hundred and fifty employees and a total Alta Med budget of \$3,000,000. It's been a great success.

FELDMAN: It's all State money?

KULLI: No, Federal, State and some private foundations. The Ahmanson Foundation has been very generous, and other foundations, too.

FELDMAN: Who started this organization?

KULLI: It was started as the Eastside Free Clinic, 25 years ago. They worked out of a storefront. It was originally designed to help druggies. We still do that. We have the third largest AIDS program, and AIDS has been hard to sell to Hispanics because they're macho people, and they didn't believe it was their problem. They are in it up to their eyeballs.

Some very interesting things, Frances. When we first went to set up the AIDS program, we located in Boyle Heights. The captain in charge of the police station got the community up in

arms and had us thrown out before we could get started.

FELDMAN: Whose rationale was that?

KULLI: He didn't want "that type of person" next to the police station. Please understand that at the time, Pasadena Foothill Free Clinic was close to All Saints Church and was close to the main police station. Every physician who had a patient on drugs was supposed to report it to the police department. The first two years that the Foothill Free Clinic was working in Pasadena, under the sponsorship of All Saints Church, it was violating the law. Finally, sanity came around, and it was decided that physicians could treat people who were addicted to substances without reporting to the police. We live in a very crude, primitive society, Frances. It isn't as nice as the School of Social Work where you have people who have hearts, like you. In any event, what to do then for this enormous problem? We found a building, right off of Zonal Avenue, and every morning there was a line-up of people coming for their shot of methadone, so they could keep off heroin, and then could go to work. They have to take it right there: otherwise, they sell it. Some of them.

Of course, we had an enormous AIDS problem. Now it's blossomed out into one of our biggest projects because AIDS is everywhere. The homosexual and the drug user have a hard time in the Hispanic community. They're better than they were three years ago, and they're better now than they were even last year.

FELDMAN: Are they only Hispanics who use this clinic?

KULLI: No.

FELDMAN: Anybody?

KULLI: Anyone can come, but 98% of the people living in our service area are Hispanics. We now have one on Grand Avenue, right opposite the School District Headquarters.

FELDMAN: Also Alta Medical?

KULLI: Alta Medical, that's right. They're all around, like Huntington Park. Hispanics make up about 35% of the population of Los Angeles County.

FELDMAN: Yes.

KULLI: Okay, that is a program that I retired from. They still have me on their auxiliary, or whatever, similar to our (CSWA). Once in a while, I go there, and I've been good for \$1,000 a year. I enjoyed working with those bright, young Hispanic people. They're going to be leaders in our community as soon as they get a little older. So many of them are under 21 years of age. I'll tell you about that segment that we have on our Board: 30- to 40-year-olds. They're going to be State of California leaders in another 10 years. They are first-class people: accountants, lawyers, physicians, businessmen and women.

FELDMAN: Who selects them for this Board?

KULLI: The Board does, just like we try to get for the California Social Welfare Archives Board. One physician that we got from the Children's Hospital is an MD, Ph.D. He's got a nice Anglo surname. I asked, "How did you get interested in AltaMed?" He said, "My mother. My grandmother was a "wetback." This is derogatory term; they don't like to be called wetbacks. They like to be called "undocumented," and that's better. But this was many years ago.

Is there anything else you'd like to know about AltaMed? I believe that Carlos de la Rocha, the President and CEO, has been interviewed.

FELDMAN: That may be. I don't know.

KULLI: If de la Rocha hasn't been interviewed, he should be. Do you remember that it was his wife who came on our Board, briefly, and then she wasn't allowed by the administration to come to meetings anymore. That is a volunteer problem that I discovered in the African American and

Hispanic communities.

FELDMAN: When you say she wasn't allowed to come anymore.....

KULLI: There were cutbacks on the LA Unified School District, where she works. They just wouldn't give her the time to come to our meetings.

FELDMAN: I didn't realize that that was the reason. I knew she'd been transferred around several times.

KULLI: That's right. They'd say, "I'm sorry, you can't go." They had a general problem with Hispanics and Blacks: with work to be done in their own community, many don't see the value of the California Social Welfare Archives as a service to train communities, even though it ultimately affects them. That's one of our great challenges.

FELDMAN: Yes, it is.

KULLI: And it's the challenge of every other agency I've served. Okay. I've told you about the Help Line, I've told you about AltaMed. The next one I want to tell you about is another interesting one. I was only on it for about two or three years because they didn't really need me. It was a vocational education branch of the Alhambra Unified School District, where they taught youngsters--young men, mostly, but now some women automotive repair and all the repair activities that are so important and are continually needed. These jobs don't go abroad, because you can't repair a car or you can't repair a stove that's in a home in Pasadena by sending it to Tijuana and back. The work has to be done here. So, for people who are non-academically inclined, we should send them to learn a skill: plumbing, electrical, bricklaying, all of these things that have to remain for repair here at home. Automotive repair, motorcycle repair; I found this so frustrating in the Youth Authority. These are things that inside the institutions all could be trained to do. Every young man likes to repair a motorcycle. From there, he can graduate into

automobiles. The program was very good. They had annual meetings and alumni would come back and tell them what happened to them after high school.

How much more time do we have to talk?

FELDMAN: Oh, we have plenty of time.

KULLI: A rather small group I'm with is the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, a San Gabriel Valley Support Group, which meets where your nephew (Dr. Donald Lomas) works.

FELDMAN; The Pacific Clinic.

KULLI: That's correct. We meet him once a month there and discuss housing and training for the mentally sick. All the mothers there have children that are desperate to find housing; they know the time is coming when the mothers won't be around. Then where will the son or daughter live? We also have on that Board a woman from Pasadena City College. She's breaking the way to have schooling for mentally sick people who are stabilized and can learn a trade. Not an advanced trade, but, for example, working in a fast-food house. There are lots of things that stabilized people can do starting first, like Portals did, two hours a day, then four hours working in the Portals office first, then for non-pay agencies, then for the corporate cookie (a Portals House project), and then, on their own, successfully at the LA Zoo and many other places. It can be done, but there aren't a lot of taxpayers willing to go.

I'm nearly at the end of describing the things that I've been interested in these last 18 years. I also serve on the Los Angeles School District Superintendent Committee for Special Education Students. This group is to insure a barrier-free school so that youngsters can get to the classroom and go to the bathroom, go to the library, go to the counselor's office, and can have an enlarged, first-aid room where a nurse is when the students have a seizure or an emergency. We're spending \$2 to 3,000,000 a year to modify the structures. At the rate we're going, it will be 2090

before we're done at all 800 school locations.

FELDMAN: And the source of those funds?

KULLI: Mostly Federal, but also State. State is the big one. But the budget comes down, and they've been so tight the last five years that they haven't been able to give us enough money to make real progress. We're under court order now to straighten out, and we're getting more money as a result; plus the fact there's more money coming from the State. But there are two things--and this brings me to my conclusion. The School District has no more responsibility for these youngsters after 22 years of age. Most of them then sit at home. Up to 3,000 finish every year at L.A. Unified at age 22. At least half of them can be trained to do work. When I first came, I found out L.A. Unified wasn't hiring any of them. L.A. Unified, the second largest employer in the County, was hiring no special ed students. None. N o n e. They hide behind their Civil Service rules. You know, under Civil Service, if they can't fill out their application, we can't take them. If they can't answer the test questions, we can't take them without exceptions being made or making a lot of trouble from the school unions. They don't like it. But we had to break their knuckles, too. Now we have such students working in the school cafeterias and other places. We now have many youngsters -- 700 or 800 of them who are developmentally disadvantaged -- working at the fast-food houses.

FELDMAN: Are they paid at the same rate as other people, other workers?

KULLI: Yes. Minimum wage.

FELDMAN: Has the Union objected?

KULLI: The Union doesn't want anyone who isn't fully qualified, and the department heads don't want anyone that isn't fully qualified. They don't want someone to come in and do only one task, or maybe a second. They like to switch them around. It's so inconvenient.

But now I want to come back to my interest in social work. It's two-fold. One is housing. Housing isn't efficient for street people, especially. In Los Angeles, many people who use AltaMed services are living in garages. Sometimes families of eight live in a garage without any plumbing. They have a garden hose that goes into the garage. The bathroom is in the yard or in the main house. It's a desperate situation. The housing rules are enforced, but everyone's looking the other way. You have to be humane. These people are here: they're human beings. They're as good as you and I, Frances. You and I are good people, aren't we?

FELDMAN: I hope so.

KULLI: We all came from immigrants fairly recently, didn't we? Very few of us came over on the Mayflower.

FELDMAN: It couldn't have held all the people who claim to have been on it.

KULLI: Well, people have to accept their ancestors. The next thing is jobs. I have had men with cerebral palsy come in to see me. They have a bachelor's degree from one of the state universities. No counselors ever told them what kind of work they can do. They think because they have a degree in accounting, they can go to work anywhere. Well, maybe they can, but if they can't write, if they can't communicate, even a back-office job is difficult. So, when we look at someone and our caseworkers go to help out; we can't make everyone a college graduate. Wherever they are, we can train them. I believe the most important thing for felons, for the disabled, and that includes the mentally stabilized, is to get them ready for employment within the limits of their ability to handle a job. With training, and, as Larry Cooper\* often said, employers should be told to take a little more time, because these people are able to do the work. They

\*Footnote: Former vice president for personnel at Pacific Telephone Company, who was an active

volunteer in social agencies. His oral history interview is on file with CSWA  
won't just leave. It is the first job they've ever had in their lives; they'll put those hamburgers out  
forever, uncomplaining. They'll mop the floors, uncomplaining. Their parents are delighted,  
because they can see that there will be a life for their children after the parents are gone.

I'm going to close with a story. I was at a retirement dinner for the Superintendent of  
Schools, Walter Dingus, of the San Marino School District. This was 10 or 15 years ago. I  
turned to him and said, "You must be pretty proud: 25 years as Superintendent, sending more  
children to college and getting the highest test scores." He said, "I feel terrible. 30% of our  
children are going to be branded failures. They're not college material. They aren't interested in  
academics. Their parents are. They're pushing them, because they're all professional people,  
multi-degreed." He said, "in the San Marino High School District, we have not a single  
vocational school."

FELDMAN: That's very, very sad.

KULLI: But it's reality. I'm all through, unless you have some questions. You now know  
what an officious intermedler is. I got down to the end.....

FELDMAN: The thing that runs through everything is attention to work, work opportunities and  
preparing people for work and along with that, is the mental health strain: meeting people's mental  
health needs so again, they can work. Is that right?

KULLI: That's right. People coming out of Portals and out of LAMP, too, with their really  
different viewpoints, will never be able to be economically independent. They have to learn to  
live independently, learn how to take a bus, how to cook breakfast, how to go to a social club and  
dance and talk to fellow people who are in a similar situation. That's important, too, because it's  
a continuum, Frances. You start out by taking someone off the street, you teach them how to keep

clean, you put them into supervised housing and then they learn a job. But many of them will never go beyond that, will never hold the independent jobs. We build sheltered workshops: Goodwill, for example. All of these have a function that we need. I didn't tell you about the time I was also on the Goodwill Board.

FELDMAN: You didn't tell me about that.

KULLI: No. I just forgot. Will you forgive me?

FELDMAN: Absolutely. Now there are really two questions I want to ask you. One is if you have seen a lot of changes in the years that you've been working as a volunteer in the community at large, and in attitudes towards people who are in trouble. Is that right?

KULLI: I've seen changes. I don't know if they're all for the better.

FELDMAN: Well, tell me a little about that. What do you think?

KULLI: I think that with the pressures at the employment level today, with downsizing and extensions, there's no time to go out into the community. If you don't do volunteer work at 33, you won't do it when you retire. Most retired men that I know, from Sears, and it's true elsewhere, don't help in the community. I used to ask Larry, "You're retired from the phone company. How about getting some of them in?" He said, "They're retired."

FELDMAN: You're advocating that volunteers should begin their volunteer activities early.

KULLI: That's correct. They should first select parents that set a good example. You know, we don't have much choice when it comes to selecting parents. You and I were lucky. Many people, were not as lucky as we were. The second thing is we must encourage companies to let people volunteer. For example, it may be true to this day, but L.A. Unified wouldn't let its teachers go on jury duty. Well, that's shocking to me. Sears and all the private industries had to do it, but public agencies should do it, too. Now, we've been trying to get some of your people on

the faculty to do some time with us in CSWA, but they're all very busy. Do you notice that?

FELDMAN: Yes.

KULLI: They run away from what they're trying to do. This used to irritate me at Sears. A lot of decisions were made by people in Chicago, about Alhambra. They didn't know what the customer was asking for. How can you do good, if you don't see the problem? If anyone wants to know about street people, I'll take them down to LAMP and show them three functioning programs on about a \$1,500,000 budget, serving 600 of 10,000 who sleep on the streets and under bridges between Alameda and Main Street and between First to Olympic Street--square blocks with the dregs of humanity.

FELDMAN: Do you get people who want to see that?

KULLI: No, most avoid it.

FELDMAN: That's one of the problems, isn't it?

KULLI: They drive through the area with their doors locked. Have you ever heard of Jack Shakely?

FELDMAN: Sure.

KULLI: Jack caught me at a meeting. He said, .....

FELDMAN: Let's identify him for the reader. He's an executive of the Community.....

KULLI: .....California Community Foundation, and a very, very fine person. Jack said, "I need you on the LAMP Board." So I went down and met Mollie Lowery.

FELDMAN: She's the executive director?

KULLI: That's correct. She is Los Angeles' Skid Row Mother Teresa. That's a separate issue. I walked around the facility, the main facility, which is the Village: the Day Center on one side and the Lodge on the other. I saw these people lying asleep on the morning at 10:30 A.M. on the

sidewalk. I saw the poor, black woman with her breast hanging out; I saw latrines, piles of trash, the result of people defecating on the sidewalks right beside the latrines, because some are afraid to go to the latrines. Open the door, and someone could come in behind you. It's a desperate situation. We used to lock those people up in Camarillo Hills Hospital and so forth, but Governor Ronald Reagan let them all out. He said we'd support them in the community. But there's no real support in the community. Too bleak a picture?

FELDMAN: No, that's a realistic picture.

KULLI: I'm trying to help down there. We're trying to get the store started so we can get some job experiences. Some of those people can adjust. There are a lot of gifted people there that have been thrown out, neglected. When we bring them in--we take AIDS people in there, too--they have to behave. If they get violent, we can't keep them, because we're not a locked facility.

FELDMAN: Back over your years in volunteer activities, even before you left Sears in retirement, is there something that stands out, that you especially feel identified with - believe that you did something special?

KULLI: Well, I already told you about the Help Line. That was the first. For a person that doesn't like to step forward, I'd rather see a thing, I'd rather be a king maker than a king. I think every agency I served on, all of them through the end, may have been — I saw a Hathaway Home for children. I couldn't help my sister, but maybe I've helped other children. By the way, my sister stabilized with her third husband when the wonder drugs came along about 25 years ago. Today, it's much better, and I see that when I'm at the clinic in Pasadena where your nephew is. Medications now are very effective and with much less side effects. The first ones caused too much nausea.

FELDMAN: So you've seen a lot of changes in the way people are dealt with. Resources are

available in dealing with them.

KULLI: Yes. Yes, you've extracted that out of me. That's true. The attitude of people in general ---- I've never forgotten when Larry was talking to one group of businessmen. They said, "Larry, you are wasting your time with these people. They are no good." Too many important people have this attitude.

FELDMAN: Do you think we're going to change it? Are we ever going to?

KULLI: Oh, yes. We're getting a little better all the time, as medicines get better, not because humans are getting better in relationships. We have cleared Tuberculosis, except for the immigrants who are bringing it in again. Health is better. The new drugs, better physicians, we've gotten off the Freud band wagon. After all, we now know that ulcers are caused by infection. It took a long time.

FELDMAN: That was a surprise, wasn't it?

KULLI: Yes. Think of all the money that was wasted, going the wrong way.

FELDMAN: You have how many children?

KULLI: Three children. They're all outstanding, in my view (ha).

FELDMAN: Tell me.....

KULLI: My oldest son went to medical school. When he finished, there was a surplus of doctors. He couldn't get a job except in Capetown, South Africa for \$14,000 a year. So they took their child there.

FELDMAN: Where is he now?

KULLI: Rochester, New York: the University of Rochester. The second child, the daughter, a graduate of Wellesley, with a Master's in Communication from Boston University, heads up an office that advises small companies in the six New England states on matters of public relations,

stockholder relations. When they're too small to have their own, they'll come to her company, which is headquartered in New York. She handles the Boston operation. Her husband is a Senior Vice President with NERA, a national economic think tank.

The next one graduated from college, from Swarthmore, and is now with Prudential Securities and getting married next year. The other got her Ph.D. in molecular biology and she's with a high-tech company near San Diego. Her daughter, the one that was a school teacher, got up to \$14,000 a year at the end of her sixth year, 20 years ago she went into real estate. She has her own firm now. She has developers, her customers are developers. She has three in Las Vegas, alone. They call her in for marketing and price. She's very good. She's married; does not have any children. My son has four children. His oldest graduated from Cornell last June. She's now learning to fly. She wants to be a commercial airline pilot. The world is open for women in a way that it wasn't when you were a graduate of 'SC.

FELDMAN: Your wife also has been a volunteer.

KULLI: She was a volunteer first at Hathaway Home. She's done all sorts of volunteer things. After 33 years of marriage, she decided to sell real estate. She's had 20 years of real estate. She's not as successful as my daughter, who has a lot more energy, but she's pretty good.

FELDMAN: You spoke at the very outset about the contribution your parents made to you which broadened your point of view about people and really inspired you in the whole field of volunteerism. Do you do the same thing for your children and grandchildren?

KULLI: What do you think?

FELDMAN: Well, I would think so.

KULLI: They know about all of these things.

FELDMAN: So that what you learned; now the next generation is also learning.

KULLI: That's correct. I hope so.

FELDMAN: They'll be among those who will start to be volunteers before they retire.

KULLI: It has to start early, or it will never be there. That means, within the University as well.

FELDMAN: I gather they have done that.

KULLI: Yes. My daughter has been in various things already. My son, yes. You know, medical men do a lot of free work. The University of Southern California Medical School should be very proud of my son.

FELDMAN: You should be too.

KULLI: I am.

FELDMAN: I see that you are. I think maybe it's a good note on which to end; we're into a third generation of Kullis helping other people.

KULLI: I remember one incident with my father I'll share with you. The year was 1936. My sister had just diagnosed with schizophrenia. My father had a man who owed him \$2,000 that was past due on a cottage in Eagle Rock. His wife had just died. He had three small children. He could have been evicted. My father, without consulting my mother, forgave the debt and the man owned his place free and clear. I remember my mother saying, "You've got a sick daughter. You're giving away property." If Dad had taken it back, he could have sold it for \$5,000 or \$6,000. But she calmed down..

FELDMAN: She was empathizing with this man and his problems.

KULLI: That's correct. I observed the whole thing. Those things make a big difference.

FELDMAN: The Kulli tradition is going on.

KULLI: I think so.

FELDMAN: Well, that's a good note to end on, and I thank you very much.

KULLI: Well, let me say one final thing. Jean and I give away \$20,000 every year to various charities.

FELDMAN: That's very good.

KULLI: Our tax people say, "You give away too much." But we get by. Our children are grown and all very prosperous.

FELDMAN: The people think too much in terms of taxes, not in terms of your own satisfaction.

KULLI: That's correct. Well they say they don't have any other clients that give away this percentage of income.

FELDMAN: That's good. Keep on doing it.

KULLI: As long as I can.