

Charlotte Langley
Interviewed by David Kuroda
7/8 and 8/10/96
In her Los Angeles home

Kuroda:

Charlotte, we'll be talking about some of your experiences, impressions and recollections in your career in social work. How about if we start out by asking you how you happened to go into social work and choose it as a profession?

Langley:

I think I came into social work through the genes, more or less. My mother was a volunteer, way back in World War I: she sold war bonds, there were always volunteers around. She and my father were always doing something in the community, so it was just natural that I would begin to do some volunteer work and social work along the way.

I got into the profession of social work by accident. At UCLA, I was a premed major and of course my sights were always on being a doctor, but at that particular time it was very difficult for a woman to get into medical school. All through my undergraduate work, I volunteered at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital when it was up on Fountain Avenue; so I was in the medical field doing something. When the time came to pick a profession other than medicine, I decided on medical social work. Now, when I graduated from college, USC was offering only a two-year course [culminating in] an Associate degree in Social Work.

Kuroda:

That was before the School of Social Work was established?

Editor's Note:

Actually USC had established its School of Social Work in 1920, offering undergraduate and master's level certificates in social work. It established its two-year MSW curriculum, however, in 1937. From 1920 until 1944, it was the only school of social work in California.

Langley:

Right.

Kuroda:

This is in 1936?

Langley:

Yes. The closest school of social work was in Berkeley, but I decided that if I was going to go away to school, that I would really go far away. So I sent applications to the New York School, which is now Columbia, and the Jewish School in New York, as well as to the University of Chicago, because a classmate of mine was going back to the University of Chicago to attend the School of Social Work there. In those days it was easy to get accepted if you had a good grade point average, I guess. I got accepted to all three schools. I picked Chicago and went back with Rhoda Sarnat, who I think you know.

Kuroda:

I am not sure if it was easy to get in, but to be accepted by all three schools was pretty good.

Langley:

It would be now; I think, more so than then. When I went to Chicago, my sequence was in medical social work. I finished the two-year course in five quarters; I just went right through; I did not take a summer break. I got my Master's degree in March of 1938. I had done my fieldwork at Billings Hospital and at Michael Reese Hospital, so when I came back here I thought it would be a breeze to get a job. When I got here, however, I found it was a little different: my age was apparently against me.

Kuroda:

You were too young?

Langley:

I was probably too young and inexperienced, but I did not think so. When I started to work, the first job I got was with the US Department of Labor. We did a survey of the people in the Bakersfield/Acton area. We went out to the farm labor camps about 6:00 in the morning because it would get hot so early, and we then interviewed the migrant workers who were living in the camps. We were mostly interested in their health needs.

When I came back into town at the end of that first summer which was 1937, I started looking for jobs. Freda Mohr, God bless her, turned me down because I was too young. She said I did not have enough experience in life to do any social work with people who had problems. Of course, I disagreed with her.

Kuroda:

You were all of what 24 or 25 at that time?

Langley:

I think I was 22 or 23; I was young.

Kuroda:

So Freda Mohr turned down a great candidate for staff member. What agency was Freda with at that time?

Langley

Los Angeles Jewish Family Services. The next thing I did was to go out to Vista Del Mar. Mr. Bonaparte seemed to feel that I could do a job and he set me to work. I worked with people like Mareaner Applebaum and Carl Glau and Reuben Panner - all people that you know. My first job was with the younger children. As I have said many times before, although I stayed at Vista Del Mar for 40 years, I had many different jobs. It was like going into different agencies, starting as a direct services social worker, and then moving up into some supervisory positions. Along the way I became the unit supervisor for the girl's unit. Then I did something very exciting; I was placed in the

Foster Home Department. I helped develop that into, I think, an excellent service. At one time we had about 150 foster homes throughout the county. I developed programs where, first, we interviewed people in groups who were interested in becoming foster parents; then we did individual interviewing; and finally, we selected people from that second round of interviews to find the right mix of foster parents and foster children. After that process was completed, we had small group meetings in the community for foster parents who were already active. We were able to develop institutes of development for that.

Kuroda:

That sounds like a very progressive program. In fact, you were well ahead of what the county was doing in foster care, right?

Langley:

Yes, we worked very closely with the county; however, at that time we were trying to place all of the Jewish children in Los Angeles county which I think we were successful in doing. Therefore, we could be selective with the foster parents that we took. We certified our foster parent homes, we did not license them. We certified them for our exclusive use.

Kuroda:

Why do you think there was a separate foster program in the Jewish community? What was the reason for developing separate homes rather than working with the county?

Langley:

I think that the development of parallel programs is traditional within the Jewish community; the Jewish people wish to develop their own programs. I think we were just carrying on that tradition in the same way.

I have to tell you, however, that we had a very difficult time convincing the Jewish community that we needed foster homes. I will never forget the occasions when we did

place an ad or some other type of public notice in the Jewish news or elsewhere, when we needed additional foster homes because Jewish children were having to be separated from their families because of divorce or break up of families, or death. The traditional Jewish community became quite incensed. They were very irate at Mr. Bonaparte, who really had to give them a course in '*Casework I, The Needs of Children.*' I suppose that is part of an ingrained problem.

Kuroda:

I think so. Any time there is a new program, part of what needs to be done is to persuade people that changes are needed, that there is a need for them. Were you involved at all in talking to the more established leaders to promote the foster placement program?

Langley:

Yes, I always had very close contact with both the county and state people. I think this was something that Mr. Bonaparte encouraged, Mr. Glau continued, as did Mrs. Applebaum.

Kuroda:

So gradually you gained confidence as a supervisor and received different assignments and promotions at Vista Del Mar?

Langley:

Yes. Additionally, I gave institutes throughout California as well as out of state. Ann Ostomel, who was with the California State Welfare Department at that time, took me under her wing; she encouraged me to do a lot of speaking, which I never had done before. I was encouraged by her as well as by Mr. Glau, so I spoke throughout the state of California and the western states in general on the need for foster home education. Eventually, we developed a program that became very well known throughout the community.

I also became active and involved with the Child Welfare League of America. I worked on a lot of their program committees; in fact I chaired one of the Child Welfare League programming meetings in Pasadena. That was fun.

Kuroda:

You did a lot of work and training in southern California, did you do much work at all with Mr. Norris Class?

Langley:

I know Norris Class and we worked in the same kinds of programs, but never together directly.

Kuroda:

Have you published any papers or written books about some of your work, your training efforts?

Langley:

No, but some of the notes from the institutes that I developed are on file at the Ry Saben Library. Lee Freeling asked for them and so I gave the library my notes from my institutes; I never published.

Kuroda:

You probably were too busy doing the work, rather than taking the time to sit down and write.

Langley:

Writing was not one of my strong points.

Kuroda:

Although it sounds like your presentations and training activities were very important to the foster care field at the time.

Langley:

People did use my materials. Another thing I did in the general area of teaching; I taught for about three or four years in UCLA's Extension Division. I taught some *Introduction to Social Work* courses to the general community. I guess I found teaching fun.

I also taught religious school for 17 years at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, including a sequence for children, *Introduction to the Jewish Community*. It paid off eventually, because a lot of the kids that I had in religious school came back to Vista Del Mar later as adults, wanting to volunteer or become involved with Vista. You never know where you plant your seeds.

Kuroda:

They probably went back to Vista Del Mar because they knew you were there and were interested in doing something for the community.

Langley:

I hope so.

Kuroda:

It sounds as if you have done a lot of work with volunteers; how did you happen to get involved with that?

Langley:

I guess the essence of being a foster parent comes from the desire to do something for the community, which in turn, is the nucleus of volunteerism. I suppose it just flowed naturally from that into becoming interested in working with volunteers. My last paid

position at Vista Del Mar was to direct the volunteer program, which I built up very nicely until I left. That was a positive experience too.

It was very interesting to see how people reacted to volunteers. It was okay for volunteers to give money and stay in the background, but for them to move beyond that circumscribed role and do direct service with children, required moving through some kind of barrier. I think a lot of it was fear of competition on the part of the trained staff.

I have been hoping that the professional schools of social work would develop a sequence in the curriculum to help social workers know how to work with volunteers. I have talked with Miss Marsh from the University of Chicago about this [sequence], hoping that something could be developed there, or perhaps at USC. I think it is very important for social workers to realize, that they should not be threatened by volunteers; rather, they could involve them. One of the things that I stressed with all of my people during my tenure at Vista, was that you involve volunteers, you do not use them.

Kuroda:

I am curious if you would be willing to share some of your tips about what you did to allay the fears of the professionals when it came to involving volunteers? What do you think you did that made it possible for the volunteer program at Vista Del Mar to expand even though one could perceive that it could potentially threaten professionals?

Langley:

Well I would say that the first step to involve professionals is to ask what can volunteers do to help them with their respective jobs, e.g. "Can you think about the possibility of a volunteer helping you?" Once they own the support concept, it works well. In fact, people became very protective and possessive of, "my volunteer" or "the volunteers in my department." Eventually we hardly ever moved a volunteer because the professionals wanted their volunteers to stay. But it was not an easy process; it took several years of work to get that feeling going. My sense is that once you get involved in something, however, 'it' becomes yours and then it tends to work fine.

Kuroda:

That was very wise, to involve professional social workers in developing the program.

Langley:

Well, is that not that true in almost anything? That is, if you involve people it tends to work better?

Kuroda:

I think so, I think those who have been successful in developing new programs, have learned that lesson and practice it. Continuing with the volunteer area, I have another question: volunteers of course are not paid for their work and yet you were responsible for the expansion of the program and bringing in more and more volunteers. What do you think you did to promote the initial interest and continuing commitment of the volunteers?

Langley:

I think the satisfaction of knowing that they were helping. Eventually we also developed a recognition program that we took from other recognition programs that were already established in the community by directors of volunteers in other agencies. Finally, I think the crux of it was that the directors of Vista Del Mar saw the value of the volunteers; when the volunteers were recognized, they were honestly recognized for the job that they were doing. I also think that it was helpful that the volunteers did not get paid money, instead they got paid in genuine recognition and genuine appreciation. I think that was probably the crux of the situation.

Kuroda:

That recognition must have happened more than at once-a-year award presentations; there must have been a lot of ongoing ways to acknowledge the volunteers.

Langley:

Right. We hoped that everybody who was working with a volunteer would in some way recognize what they were doing even if it was just to call and say “thank you” along the way; perhaps by recognition of a birthday or some kind of an event in their life, some kind of personal involvement that would let the volunteer know just how much they were appreciated. Vista Del Mar also did a lot of publicity in our in-house ‘View,’ which was the Vista publication. We always had a column or a write-up in the newsletter highlighting a volunteer, so they got recognition along the way. It was ongoing, I think people know when they are appreciated and they in turn work harder.

The other part was to recognize the volunteers’ input. If they had some ideas that seemed worthwhile, we always discussed them. Many times the volunteers’ ideas were put into operation; they had input into what was going on with the children.

Kuroda:

I am skipping around a lot. Were there other responsibilities you had at Vista Del Mar that we have not talked about?

Langley:

Yes, quite a few. I am going to put in a plug for ‘Directors of Volunteer Services.’ I think it is a job that is evolving, I don’t think that there is a job description that covers everything that ‘Directors of Volunteer Services’ do. The job gets lost amongst many competing responsibilities. Because I was middle management, I had some responsibilities that were far away from the volunteers. As a matter of fact, I was the liaison with the food program at Vista Del Mar; that was kind of fun, too. I worked with a professional food service, it was ARA finally. We had previously had some other kinds of experiences and so we felt that contracting with an outside food vendor was better than trying to develop our own kitchen. It led to fewer personnel problems because they had to staff the kitchen, we did not. We had enough of our own staffing problems without that; it was fun because we were the ones who planned the meals.

I have to tell you something funny. Our doctors decided that we should cut down the salt intake of the kids had, so we took the salt shakers off the tables in the dining room. We almost had a riot, but it was not from the kids – it was the staff. Eventually we developed a healthier diet; it was kind of fun to deal with those problems too.

Also, I was the liaison with the infirmary. I guess that was because of my medical social work background. I had direct contact with the doctors and the nurses; I had to deal with some staffing problems there, as well as medical problems. I have done quite a few things.

Kuroda:

Of all the things that you have done in your career as a social worker, what were among the most gratifying? Also, which were the most difficult and challenging?

Langley:

Well, going back many years, I think the most gratifying thing to me was to see that some of the things I taught kids in religious school later bore fruit. Some of these people came back as adults wanting to volunteer, which really made me feel good. I also think that each time a child improved in their therapy, it had some connection to either a volunteer or something else I was involved in. This was also personally gratifying. Professionally, I think the growth of the agency including the development of first, the Foster Home Department and subsequently, the development of the Volunteer Services program was very exciting.

On the other hand, there were things that were not gratifying, including the fact that year after year, the same problems would crop up with different individuals in terms of their non-acceptance of the volunteers. Also, there were some problems with foster parents; however, those things needed to be worked out on an individual case basis.

I think it is important for a 'director of volunteer services' or a 'director of a foster home department' to have a professional background; I am all for the development of the profession. I also want to say that the volunteer should never take the place of a

professional person in relation to children. I think those volunteer commitments are strong, but they can also become stumbling blocks along the way when individuals are conflicted in their approach to a certain problem.

Kuroda:

It sounds as if every year, that some of the same people that you had difficulties with previously would again have difficulties with the volunteers in subsequent years.

Langley:

No, I do not think so. I think people did improve, instead if it was not one person then oftentimes it was another. The same problems tended to come up with different people. I notice that even now, if you read in the newspaper or listen to television, that some of the same problems that we dealt with then, 40 to 50 years ago, are cropping up now, but with different people in different settings. I think it is an ongoing problem, which is why social workers are here forever.

Kuroda:

That's right; the problems of people continue. Are there any insights you would share in addition to those you have already as regards working in the social work field generally or working with some of the contemporary problems that we are now seeing?

Langley:

All I can say is that I am glad that I am not working now, I think the problems have intensified. I think that if you remember 'Casework I', you have to identify the problem, and then see what strengths there are in the individuals involved. Finally, you must involve all of the people who are concerned, in resolving the problem. I think that it is pretty basic, although it sounds simple it is not. It is not a simplistic approach, rather, it is very complicated.

Kuroda:

If you were involved at the federal level as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, what would you bring to this country? Are there any other programs or ideas that you would try to implement?

Langley:

I do not know whether you should start with a program, or you if you should start with the financing of that program. I think we have to first identify the most outstanding or troublesome of the problems that are facing our children. Then we must try to see what the community has to offer, what the community has done to attempt to solve them, and then, we can go on from there. I would not like to be in that position. I would not want to be in any kind of position where the health and welfare of the children of this nation depended on me and what I could do; it is simply too enormous.

Kuroda:

The key, I suspect, involves children in some way, provides more of what children need so that when they get to be adults their problems are going to be minimized.

Langley:

Right, people tend to forget when they were children and what they needed as children. I do not know how you solve that.

Kuroda:

Looking back over the past 40 to 45 years, what do you see as some of the major changes in both the field and practice of [professional] social work?

Langley:

I see a kind of wheel effect. I think some of the things we did forty years or fifty years ago are now coming back into prominence and they are being touted as something new. I think recognizing individual needs and maybe rights, are things to be highlighted. I think some of the things I have seen such as de-emphasizing the individual psychiatric

approach and instead incorporating psychiatric insight into general social work has been a plus. What I mean is highlighting the individual and the individuals' need.

August 10, 1996

Kuroda:

From what you said as we ended our earlier interview, it sounds like, for a while, social workers were interested in meeting the needs of people and gradually social workers became more interested in psychiatry and setting up their own private practices.

Langley:

They did and that always used to bother me. As soon as these new social workers earned their degrees, they got a placard and opened for business; I thought that was so wrong. I do not think they had the experience or the background to do in-depth psychotherapy on their own.

Kuroda:

Well, that is changing a lot now, I think there are far fewer people in private practice; more and more people are looking to agencies and government work to do social work.

Langley:

That is not good either.

Kuroda:

What changes do you think are needed in the social work field, in our profession?

Langley:

I would like to see an integrated, united educational/socialization experience. It starts with the schools giving the basic background and knowledge of social work and the development of children and adults. Upon completion of the formal education

component, I would like to see agencies pick up the responsibility for continuing education from there and help social workers further develop their professional skills so that they ultimately can provide more in-depth help to clients.

I would also like to see integrated into the respective programs of the agencies, a well-developed volunteer program, where volunteers are recognized for what they can offer and provide. Volunteers can do some things that I believe professional staff cannot or should not do. This would free the professional staff to provide more in-depth help to the client.

I would really like to see a combined agency that works with children, which includes some educational components. The children's' educational needs could be met within this type of agency, along with their emotional needs. The professional social worker would help the child and the parents together; the educational program would go along, and the volunteers would be supportive of both components.

I also think that volunteers have another very important part to play with respect to social agencies. I think they have a crucial role in being able to support the agencies financially. I think that this is another role that volunteers could have. I do believe that professional staff should not be involved in the actual solicitation of funds. I think that they can bring to a solicitation meeting, the kind of material that will tell the individual donor what their money is being used for, but they should not be the ones out there asking for money. I think that if there were some integration of these functions, it would be better for the entire community.

Kuroda:

One of the concerns about volunteerism is that it is the opposite end of professionalism. Many people will volunteer for something that is very important, for which professionals typically get paid. How did you handle this issue when you were in charge of volunteers at Vista Del Mar?

Langley:

I think that is a very crucial point. I think the professional staff very often become threatened by the presence of volunteers simply because volunteers can come if they want to and if they do not like something they can just not show up the next time, even if they already have an assignment.

The volunteers also tend to become too involved with the clients; I think this can be very threatening, particularly to new social workers. If the social workers feel that their relationship is being in any way undermined by a volunteer they get panicky and they in turn will undermine what the volunteer is doing. I found the thing that worked the very best, was to have volunteers and the professional staff define together what their respective roles were going to be. As director of the program and supervisor of Volunteer Services, I would try to support those different roles.

I think the professional schools of social work also have a responsibility here. I think that somewhere in their respective curriculums, they should have a course on volunteering. The schools should try to help new social workers realize the importance of the volunteer, so that the concept becomes part and parcel of something that you do; it is not some thing that you do only when you come to work after completing your coursework.

Kuroda:

It sounds like a great idea! Have you had much luck over the years talking to various schools of social work about incorporating this [type of course material] regarding volunteers into the curriculum?

Langley:

No, but I keep trying.

Kuroda:

Why do you think there is some reluctance or resistance to including this into the curriculum?

Langley:

I do not know whether the schools realize the importance of volunteers. Also I wonder if there is some feeling of competition, that is, if you trained volunteers too well, they will ultimately take over the social worker's job. Unfortunately, I think whenever there is any cutback of professional staff, the tendency on the part of some executive directors is to say, "A volunteer can do that." I think that pressure coming from both sides makes it very difficult for the professional staff to fully accept the volunteers. I am a firm advocate that volunteers should not become junior social workers. They can be supportive and they can do important things, but they should not become the professionals.

Kuroda:

Although many former volunteers have become professional social workers.

Langley:

Yes. I think I told you that I did teach a course, it was "Introduction to Social Work" through UCLA Extension. It was a program that was established by Marge . . . although I forgot her last name, she later [went on to] become the dean of the school at Chapel Hill. I taught for about five years. I had quite a few people who took the course, many of them became social workers later. They enrolled and completed their MSW later. I guess I made social work attractive.

Int:

That's great to do those things and provide an experience that lead people to want to get into social work as their career or profession later.

Langley:

As I reflect and look back on the most satisfaction I received in any role, it was in teaching. If I could inspire people to use their potential in the best way, that made me very happy, I guess part of social work is teaching. I think I told you that I was a religious instructor for about seventeen years and the course that I taught was Jewish community organization. I also think I mentioned that a lot of those kids I had in religion school came back later as adults to volunteer or even to work in the agency as professionals. That was a good feeling.

Kuroda:

I recall the days when USC used to be a generic program, meaning the school taught its graduates all aspects of social work. More often now, however, we see concentrations and specialization so that people who do clinical work often do not get the community organization skills.

Langley:

That is too bad.

Kuroda:

What are your thoughts about how that is limiting what social workers are being taught and how that limits the scope of their professional work?

Langley:

Well, I do not really understand how you can help a person to live in the community without knowing about the community: how it was set up, how it was established, how it works, and how well it works together. I think it is part of the whole, I am all for a generic approach to teaching social work; the specialization can come later. I guess I am thinking about the example of medicine: they do not start teaching people to become surgeons, they teach them general medicine first, and then the specialty. So I

think that there is something in that for social work. I think they should have a generic approach. They the new social workers really have to be aware of what's going on.

Kuroda:

Were the concentrations developed because of the job market, were there demands in the marketplace for specialized training? Is that why the schools began to have concentrations?

Langley:

I really did not realize that the schools had concentrations like that in the beginning, I thought concentrations came later. When I look back at my own social work education, the specialties did not come until much later. We had a generic approach to all of the different specialties first and then we were exposed to the different specialties, I think that was good. I guess maybe I do not like change.

Kuroda:

Well there is something very nice about traditional measures that have worked. If something is working there is little reason to change it.

Langley:

Well if it is changed, it is going to come back because the wheel does keep turning and it does come back eventually. I am wondering if some of the push comes from the students themselves who are in such a hurry to become specialists that they do not want to be bothered with learning generalities, or the basics. However, if you do not have a foundation, I do not know how you can build a structure properly.

Kuroda:

I have not kept track much of the job markets, but how are the social work graduates doing these days? Are they getting jobs in the public sector?

Langley:

Up until five years ago, I think a lot of them were getting jobs in the public sector but then I understand that the public sector is cutting back now too. I think social workers are doing lots of other different things; not that their skills are being wasted, because I think they can be used in all areas including business, teaching or whatever. I think the whole job market has changed.

Kuroda:

Some one may be listening to this tape, Charlotte, twenty years from now, probably in the next century; they may be very interested in knowing what social work was like in 1996 and what your views are about the field and what you feel are the needs that social work should fill in the next five to ten years. Do you have any thoughts there?

Langley:

I must confess that I do not know what the field of social work is in 1996. Five years can make a lot of difference. I know what it was like when I was in social work. I know that some of the schools of social work have cut back - that I have heard. My school, the University of Chicago, has not. The school was the School of Social Service Administration, which covered lots of the specialties. It was almost a generic education from the beginning, not that you could not have your specialties, because there were medical social workers and psychiatric social workers, and children's workers. However, those were specialties that came later in our education. I guess it is supply and demand: if you have something to offer to students they are going to find you and I think that is what has happened with some of the professional schools of social work; they were not meeting the demands of the students. I do not know exactly what is happening in agencies at this point, I know that some agencies have closed, some of the ones that I used to work with intensely, like the Family Service Association, has closed. Many of the agencies that I used to be working with collaboratively have gone out of business.

Kuroda:

Let me ask you about that because I think we can learn much, not so much from our failures, but perhaps in our field if there are services that are actually closing their doors, I am wondering what lessons we can learn from that? Do you know why family service agencies have not continued to operate?

Langley:

I suppose the easiest thing to say is that the financial support is not there and I think that is bad. I think the community should recognize that it needs private agencies because the government agencies cannot, will not, or should not pick up the load. I think that some of the specialization should rest with the community, but it also means that the community has to support it. I feel in many respects sorry for the community, too, because there are so many agencies and so many activities requesting the financial assistance of the community that it is hard for them to pick which agencies and/or activities to support.

Kuroda:

How about some of the problems with the United Way leadership? You may remember some of the controversy surrounding the head of the United Way and the misuse of public funds and public trust. Do you think that had an effect on the ability of the United Way and other agencies to raise funds for their programs?

Langley:

Absolutely; you know I think it is really terrible that people in the field of social work would be greedy enough and dishonest enough to steal money. I may be naive when I think that social workers should be above that. Something is the matter with the basic morality, when people who are in a position of trust steal money from an agency and thereby erode its public support. I guess I could get very cynical and say that this is the way of the world and that some of the best of us who are in the field of trying to help people, have to counteract that by teaching an 'old morality,' along with ways in which to deal with the problems.

Kuroda:

That is a very complex issue. Whose responsibility is it to teach ethics and moral behavior and where as a country have we let that down I wonder?

Langley:

I think we have let it down. I think that it is hard to know exactly where to start; if you point the finger to parents for instance, to have them assume responsibility for teaching morality, morals and ethics to their children, they have to look at their own ethics and morality and if they do not have any, how can they in turn teach their children? So that leaves the teaching of children to the schools, maybe even to religious principals in churches and synagogues . . . I do not know.

I really feel that the basic responsibility is with the parents; but the parents do not see it as their problem, they see it as the children's problem - at least that is what I found when I was in the field. So then they come to your agency when they are in crisis, ready to break up, and you see the pieces. We are all together in this, but you know when you have the government too, who is in some respects is not honest, we begin to wonder who you can rely upon.

Kuroda:

It becomes a morale issue: one or two are abusing the system and doing dishonest things for personal gain, then everybody else begins to question, "If those few people are doing that, then why can't I?"

Langley:

It is hard to know where to start. I think it is a very difficult field to be in these days because when you get into a situation you can go in several different directions to deal with a solution, and they are all part of a whole. But is there one right one?

Kuroda:

Now we are probably on the edge of social work and very near religion, ethics, and morality. I was talking with a social worker the other day, who works at UCLA in medical social work, and we talked about a family conference with the positions of social workers, nursing staff, and someone he called an ethicist represented. I had never heard that phrase and I said, "Excuse me, what is an ethicist?" Apparently there is a new development in the field; I am not sure if they are physicians or psychiatrists, but they have a specialty in ethics and it has to do with issues regarding transplants, when one pulls the plug on a respirator, or when a patient can give direction to their family about recussitation. It is a fascinating area.

Langley:

Where is this, at UCLA?

Kuroda:

At UCLA Medical Center.

Langley:

I think that is fascinating, I think that social work should have that responsibility. I do not care what you call them, an 'ombudsman' or an 'ethicist', social workers could do that or be that. It would be another specialty, it is fascinating; I like that.

Kuroda:

You know, some things never change: the notion of self-termination, was developed decades ago; it is still as important today as it was then.

Langley:

I wonder what has happened to family breakdown if you need somebody outside of the family to tell you how to behave ethically; that was a role that parents used to take. I do not know the solution to that either, I do not know that pouring more money in and giving them money for AFDC or things like that is not the answer either. If the parents

do not have that ingrained ethical feeling, they cannot pass that on either; so maybe someone else on the outside has to do it.

Kuroda:

I wonder sometimes about looking to some of our newer, younger, more progressive social workers to see what the field ought to be doing in the next 5 to 10 years? A part of me, like you, is very unhappy with changes in public funding, loss of scholarships, and with how affirmative action programs have been dismantled. It seems more and more now that schools and programs are being left only for those that are the most qualified and are the wealthiest. I wonder at what point we began to adapt to changing realities and move beyond the criticisms of things that have happened in our government?

Langley:

That used to be the role of the private agencies, but if they do not have the funding I do not know how they can do that. I guess we can get very pessimistic about the future of social work or the future of the whole country, when you look at it broadly. I think in small ways, if you can influence a few people and help them get their own direction to use their potential, I think maybe we have a future. If we have the funding to do that, I think social work has a chance.

Kuroda:

Maybe that is a very important concept, rather than worry about the entire country; maybe we should just work with the people that we have in our caseloads and work with the families that we have before us.

Langley:

If you try to get too broad a picture you will do nothing; you will just be overwhelmed. I do think that nationally and community-wise, however, we have a responsibility to do our part in supporting those people in government who are trying to do some of the things that we believe in ethically. I think that our contribution really has to be more

individual. I think that the responsibility of agency executives, however, is broader and I think that they have to develop the mission of their agencies and help their staff to follow that and broaden it. This is community organization.

Kuroda:

Well, I think one of the biggest problems that we have in this country and in organizations is that we have a crisis of leadership. Leaders, set goals on a national scale, goals that govern our state, goals that lead our counties and cities. There are fewer and fewer people, however, that we can point to, that we can look to, as people that we can really respect and trust to guide us into the next decade.

Langley:

You know these are some very important weeks that we are heading into as the national Democratic and Republican conventions come up. What gets me very angry is when I hear that they are wasting time, money, and exposure on the airwaves by tearing down the other side, rather than giving us a fair idea about what they think they are going to do. You know saying, "I am going to cut taxes" does not mean anything. I think the Republicans and the Democrats have to say how they are going to cut taxes and how they are going to run the federal government with decreased income. But you do not hear that, you just hear that the 'other guy' is doing it wrong, that is not helpful.

Kuroda:

I agree, other than making CNN or one of the other channels available to the public, do you have any other ideas about how we can convey to the public a greater appreciation for the depth of the issues?

Langley:

Well I do wish people would read more. It goes back to something basic, I think that people have to depend upon the schools and education to do part of it and, hopefully, to support families so that families will do their part. Maybe then people will begin to think globally, rather than just individually.

Kuroda:

What else did I not ask about that you think is important in understanding social welfare policy in the field?

Langley:

I am glad you asked that because we got really far afield. I really have enjoyed being a social worker, it has been a great experience for me. I hope that I have made some kind of impact in the lives of the clients that I have dealt with and the social workers that I have helped train. I really have to give credit to my education; I think that the education that I received from the University of Chicago was a wonderful foundation. I think the help that I received from my supervisors along the way helped turn me into the kind of person I am. The thing I like most about my supervisors was that most of them encouraged me to do what I like to do best, which is to be as helpful to people as I can.

Also that if I have something to offer, to be able to teach. That I have enjoyed. I think it is a great profession, I am glad that I had outside income, however, because it does not fully support a family. Not everyone wants to be an administrator, although I enjoyed that part of my career as well. I have enjoyed the opportunity of being part of a life experience where I can meet and interact with people. I thank you, David, it has been a pleasure to be interviewed by you.

Kuroda:

I especially appreciate your last comments about liking the field of social work. About six months ago there was a survey conducted of attorneys. A surprisingly high percentage of attorneys, well over 60%, said they would not have chosen law if they had to do it all over again. As we both know, lawyers are paid much more than social workers, but it has been my experience that you, like many others in the field, clearly like the work. The work itself has significance that goes far beyond what can be measured in dollars and cents. What a wonderful thing to say after devoting your life to the field of social work, to now say that you really like social work. One of the things I like about social work is the opportunity to meet people like you. One of the attractive

things about the oral history project with the Social Welfare Archives, has been to have these kinds of conversations with people who have seen a lot. I appreciate very much your sharing your thoughts about the field and your life.