Oral History Interview

With

Dorthy Martin

On 6/17/

In her home

Interviewer: Henry Talbert

Talbert: On Saturday June the 17th with Mrs. Martin, retired, not totally retired, social worker conducted in her home in Alta Dena by Henry Talbert, member of the CSWA Collections Committee.

Talbert: Thanks for agreeing to this and just at the outset, I'll indicate that you're doing a wonderful service for the archives committee as it goes about its work pulling together experiences from practitioners and others in the field of social work and social services, basically in California. May I ask, have you been the subject of other interviews of this nature?

Martin: No, not really. Certainly none in relation to social work per se. I've been interviewed by others for some volunteer work here and there, but nothing exactly like this.

Talbert: Is there anything that you have accumulated in that by way of records that you feel ought to be a part of this social archives file?

Martin: No, I don't think so. Not necessarily.

Talbert: We could move on then. How did you happen to get into this exciting field of social work?

Martin: Actually, I guess I've been exposed to social work type activities from childhood because I had parents who were very community minded although they were not social workers. My father was a teacher. But, they've always been church workers and doing type of social work. My personal interest in it came about my second year of teaching when I first graduated from college. I had some education courses and at that time in the late 1930's, mostly what African Americans would do with college education in the South where I lived in Arkansas was to teach. It was not my first choice, but I was trained for it. I had some educational courses and so I taught. The thing that really inspired me to social work was an incident that I still remember very clearly. That was of a youngster...young boy who was a seventh grader, so I guess he was around 12

years old, who used to come to school late every single day and it seemed not to bother him at all that he was late. Of course, the teachers had to send in their attendance records then. Everybody was wondering what's happening when kids are late or absent. We didn't have the kinds of support services that they do have now. But, this youngster just really got to me, and so one weekend I decided that I would go to his home, talk with his mother, and just see what was going on that he could never get there. When he did get there he just didn't seem interested. I'm sure they didn't have a telephone. I probably told him that I would be there and I'm not even sure of that but I say that because I think that I would have felt comfortable if I had just shown up as a teacher interested in this youngster. I'm sure I wouldn't have done that today, but at that time I would. When I saw the conditions under which this youngster came to school, that he got there at all made a significant difference. I realized then that I had a different attitude about this kid. He was from a single family home. Just as his mother. I mean a single parent home. She did day work and she had to get up and leave at 7 o'clock in the morning. This youngster had to get his other children there and I just felt good that he got there at all. As I changed my attitude about this kid, then I got a different response from him. I don't say that he never was there late again, but it didn't create a problem for me, rather something that I had to deal with his family. That's when I knew that I wanted to go into social work. Then I had just married and left

the employment field for a while and then when I came back into the field, I had moved out of Arkansas and it was social work that I wanted to go into, so I went into public welfare at that time.

Talbert: I see, because I was going to ask you what functions you've had in the field and it's interesting that through teaching, you were doing some work that you recognize as being a little different from the normal expectation of the teaching. That's wonderful. You mentioned one position you started out in New York.

Martin: By that time, I had three daughters. I had not worked during the first 8 years. I stopped work when I was expecting my first child and then I just stayed home until after the third daughter was born. Then we moved to New York and I was with my [somebody taped over here] mother. She had a foster child so I had that much knowledge of the welfare system there in Westchester County, New York. I applied for a social work job and I worked in public welfare in Westchester County, New York for 12 years.

Talbert: Just as an aside, I understand that's the sort of high-toned, high-income part of the country. How do you relate that to what you see DPSS here?

Martin: In the first place, what you say is very interesting because even in New York when I would be talking with some of my friends in New York City and say that I was working in public welfare in Westchester County, they would say, "Westchester County? They have no poor people in Westchester County." I said, "yea, there are poor families." But also to broaden their idea about public welfare, there were lots of older people who had just used all of their income and needed to be on public assistance. So, it wasn't just all the poor families, but there were all of the categories of public assistance. Now, the second part of your question in terms of how it compared here with DPSS. Let me say, one of the that advantages that I had in Westchester County was that it was one of the few counties, and maybe the only one, I'm not sure, certainly the only one in New York State, where the director of welfare was an MSW. So that even in public welfare, I learned some of the basic principles that I used and re-learned in a more thorough way when I went to USC, such as principles of non judgmental attitude, and acceptance. Those were policies of the welfare department there and at that time, they didn't call it the welfare department, it was called DSCW, Department of Family and Child Welfare, that's what it was. I had that as a background when I moved then from New York to California.

Talbert: So then, when you got here, your career really took off?

Martin: Yes, and not exactly, not immediately. What happened is that I had assumed when we moved out here that I would continue in public welfare because I really enjoyed public welfare. One of the reasons that I had wanted to continue was that I did have that background, both in my personal life in watching my parents as they went about helping in the community and then my own experience that I already shared with you. I had seen in public welfare, workers come and stay a while and go. Often welfare clients wouldn't have the same workers for few months and then they would be changing, and I just felt a commitment really for the people who were there because they had to be. They had no other source of income. So, I felt compassionate for them.

Talbert: I think you're sort of moving along at a nice pace.

Martin: Shall I go on?

Talbert: Yes.

Martin: I assumed that I was going to work in public welfare and so I took the exam at the county The civil service exam for the county was not based on your

particular interest. There was a sort of a generic exam and if you wanted to do one thing, you had to have this many points. If you wanted to so something else, that many points. So there was one long scale, but with cutoffs depending on what you wanted to do. There was absolutely nothing on that exam that reminded me of any of the social service exams that I had taken in New York, because I had gone up to the level of supervision. I was supervising for about my last four years there. Then when I got my grade, I lacked one point of being able to qualify as a case worker in public welfare. That was sort of devastating to me because you know I worked for 12 years, 4 years as a supervisor, and I missed that one point. They didn't give me any idea of what else I could do. They said I could come back when the exam was offered again. Howvever, I learned that I could qualify for an admissions worker in County SC Medical Center. At that time I don't think it was County SC Medical center, I think they just called it the County General.

Martin: So I had an interview there, and they were ready to offer me a job. But as I told them what I had done, the interviewer said, "you know, I'm not at all sure that you would be happy in what we would assign you here, but I understand that over in Unit 3 (which was the old psychiatric unit) that they are starting a position called case aid. It's in the psychiatric unit and maybe you would like that. Why don't you go and talk with them and if you like it then fine, but if you don't come back

because we can offer you a job right away. But it just sounds that in talking with you that you might want to do that." That's really what happened. I went over there and Betty Kennedy was the chief social worker at LA County. It was a pretty long gap between the time I graduated college and this point, but only about 6 or 8 months after moving to California from New York. She said that they would be getting two people who were not social workers, but who would be assigned to the psychiatric wards…units I guess they call them…and that our job would be to talk with the relatives of the patients as they were being discharged and help them to carry out the discharge recommendation. I decided that having been in public welfare all those years, if I were going to start from scratch, I I would much rather start in the psychiatric because it would be something new for me to learn, it would be challenging. That's how I moved into that area.

Talbert: So you were sort of following the trend of your social work studies?

Martin: But you see this was before… I did not have a master's at that point so it was still social work. To me, it seemed like social work more than the admissions work would have been because it was trying to help the relatives of the patients who were about to be discharged to understand what the… why they were being discharged where many of them were going on to Camarillo or Metropolitan State

Hospital in Norwalk. Then there were some that you had to help to allow the relative to be treated in Unit 3 at the psychiatric. Of course there were one or two wards that did have something like up to 6 weeks of treatment and sometimes you had to help people understand that the condition of that particular relative may not warrant a five or six weeks if they needed more long term care. So that did fall in line with what I felt was more like social work.

Talbert: So then you progressively took on more challenging assignments?

Martin: In a way, but what actually happened is that, that was exciting to me because it did allow me to sit in on the conferences with the psychiatrists, and with the trained social workers who were then called psychiatric social workers. Gathering the material that had come from the conference to then meet with the parents or the spouse or relatives. But again, with my education background and with my social work experience, what I really was thinking as a long term professional goal was school social work because again that's really where I started and I thought I could pull all of that together. So, what happened is that I talked with a man here in Pasadena who was the head of what was the school social work program in Pasadena. He told me that in Los Angeles, they did have school social workers, but you had to have one year of training in a school of social

work to qualify for that job. So he suggested that I take a course which was being offered by USC, John Milner was the professional. It was related to psycho social adjustments of children. It was a night course in downtown in Los Angeles, That really was my introduction to USC, but this was just one course that was being offered to the community. I was still working during the day as a case aid in Unit 3 at the hospital.

Talbert: At what point did you then get promoted or move up because you've had several intermediate steps?

Martin: As I started USC, the county changed their way of testing. They looked at their old list, and they got in touch with DPSS here in Pasadena and said, "you know there's somebody on our list who is doing something with the county in Unit 3, but I think she would be somebody that you might want to consider for a job as a case worker in public welfare." So I got a call from the director of the office here in Pasadena. By that time, I'm carrying around an application for USC School of Social Work, and just kind of putting it off. But when they called me and said, "we want to offer you a job in public welfare in the Pasadena office" and here I'm living right here in AltaDena. I knew I had to make some decisions right then. October 31st was the deadline for turning in an application to USC School of Social

Work. The job was ready for me right then. The application would have been for the following September. I said, "You know, it sounds good because that's really what I want to do." But I'm carrying around this application to USC. If I took that job and if I go on with my application and get accepted, it would be less than a year, I think it is unfair to the department as well as to the clients I had if I start and leave within a year. So, I'm going on and make this application to USC if I am accepted, then, I'll let you know and you can just take my name off the list. If I'm not accepted, then I'll get back to you and I probably will accept this job. But the position that's available now, please go on and fill. What happened is that I did go on with my application. I was accepted for September of 1963 and so I was looking forward to that and I would continue working at the hospital until September of 63. During the Christmas holidays, I got a telephone call from USC saying that they were either starting or it was their second year, an accelerated course that you could start at the beginning of the second semester of that year and by... They were offering this to people who had had experience in social work, non professional but social work. If I wanted to, I could start in February of 1963, go straight through 17 calendar months, graduate with the class of June of 1964. Where was I going to get the money, because I was planning for September. But here this opportunity was for me to start in February and that would take off a whole year, see? So, I said, "I'll take it". I spoke with my husband, and he said,

"ok." I don't think he was that happy because I had two daughters in college at that time, but he said yes, then I had to sort of scramble around to see where my money was coming from. I told Betty Kennedy again, who was in the department what I was going to do. She said, "if you go on to get your master's degree, would you come back here?" I said, "I really don't know because what I am thinking is to do one year and get into a school system." She said, "If I can get you a half time, three quarter pay, leave to go and get there, even if it's only one year, would you be willing to pay back a year for a year?" Well, that was something I couldn't resist and this was in January and it came through within a week. So I had my tuition plus my three quarters of the pay that I was getting. So I enrolled and there I was.

Talbert: So that brought you up to what position now?

Martin: That brought me up to February of 1963 and I was one of 17 in that class that had had previous social work type experience and most of them were in child welfare as DPSS.

Talbert: Then you went back with Betty Kennedy?

Martin: No.

Talbert: You didn't?

Martin: No, I didn't because it got so exciting, I thought, why should I stop with one year? So I then… by the time I was in it for three months, I knew that I wanted to get the masters. I said, "there's no point in my just doing this for one year." So then I applied for an NIMH scholarship and I got that and so I just went straight through with 2 weeks off at the end of August. It was a grueling experience, but I am glad that I did that.

Talbert: Just give me the titles of other titles you held or responsibilities following that.

Martin: Following that, when I graduated from USC, I went back to the county as a psychiatric social worker. Then I started supervising and so I was a supervising psychiatric social workers were the two jobs at county SC. Then I worked for 10 years there, and then I retired from there. But after a few months, I realized that I didn't really want to retire. I then applied and worked at Pasadena Child Guidance

Clinic as social worker there then chief social worker and field instructor for USC School.

Talbert: So, now in retirement, you are still related to the school?

Martin: Yes.

Talbert: As?

Martin: I am a consultant. When I retired from the child guidance clinic, I did that at a time when my husband was ill, and I really needed to be at home. I remember the field coordinator once saying that if you need to get in touch with me, you can probably reach me at home. Then it suddenly dawned on me that maybe that wasn't a full time job and so I applied for as a field coordinator at USC school of social work, they took me on, part time. I worked for that only for a year. He passed a year later. So what I'm doing right now is consultation work with staffs of nursing and convalescent at homes, I'm doing that out of Huntington Hospital's Senior Care Network.

Talbert: Let's take just a few minutes and talk about the gratification or the frustrations that accompanied your rise in the area of social work.

Martin: There were a whole lot more gratifications than there were frustrations. I really truly enjoyed it. Even public welfare at that time and place, people were not quite the way they sometimes can be now. Coming from New York to California, when I would think of slums in New York, coming to California, I couldn't even find the slums. It was just a whole other thing. Even in the work…I guess the work at the hospital, it was challenging. One interesting experience was I felt very good working with a psychiatrist. Well, these were psychiatric residents. I remember this first time, I was saying something and one of the psychiatrists gave me some pointers. I can remember saying to my supervisor at the time how much help this doctor had given me. I noticed a kind of strange look on her face and a sort of a smile and she didn't say anymore nor did I. But then I realized that this was early August and this guy had just started his residency July 1st. As years went by, I realized how much more social workers knew about what was going on than they did. Then I could understand the look that my supervisor gave and the kind of smile she gave when I was boasting sort of about what help I had got from this psychiatric resident.

Talbert: Just to summarize that segment of it with your work there and apparently, it moved right along and so, you don't mention any major obstacles, so obviously, you were doing something right. What were the things you were doing that alleviated those obstacles?

Martin: I've enjoyed working with the families, helping them to understand the program, helping them to follow up the treatment and trying to understand what obstacles they faced when they didn't follow up. I was fortunate in being able to work directly not only with the families but I worked directly with some of the young people who were on inpatient service. It really was very gratifying. Sometimes the roles were reversed that I was working with adolescent patient, and sometimes the psychiatrists were working with the family. Then we'd worked collaboratively together and there was a group… I had a group of adolescent boys in treatment with a psychiatrist as my co- therapist and those were very exciting times. By USC being… when the county became a part of USC, we really got the advantage of nationally known people coming to speak to the residents, we would be a part of that. It was a wonderful place for learning at the time.

Talbert: Was Dr. Edward StainBrook the reigning psychiatrist.

Martin: Yes. Yes. He was. There was sometimes we would say even when you don't know what Dr. StainBrook is talking about, just sitting there was an experience of its own. He could blend literature...because he had a PhD in literature before he went into medicine.

Talbert: Now we're going to move into your broader impact on social work, social welfare.

Martin: I don't want to delay getting to that, but since this is for archives, I would just like to identify some of the people at USC school of social work.

Talbert: I'm reasonably sure that they will find no fault in hearing their names.

Martin: One of my... The first person who has been a mentor to me as I've gone through my community work is Joey Elder and I can hardly talk USC without talking about Joey Elder.

Very recently, a volunteer service organization that I belong to, the Links, a national organization, and the Pasadena, AltaDena chapter decided that in one of the committees, called the National Trends and Services Committee had to work

with some program of national interest. We decided, after having gone to a seminar on African American Senior Citizens, to do a project on the empowerment of African American seniors. Part of that… Through that, we got a grant from the Human Services Department of the city of Pasadena and part of the grant had a component of valuation and consultation. I called Joey Elder and asked her if she would be our consultant for that program and then that was one of a series of things which in the 30 years since I graduated from USC intermittently, I had cause to go to her for some advice. We'd really become good friends.

Talbert: That's wonderful. That program, of the Links has really impacted social services for seniors in the foothill area?

Martin: It has in Pasadena in that, several of the things that happened. One was we had a talent show of seniors. Everyone in it had to be over 60 years old and the first person… and mind you we are talking about empowerment…the first person who was on program at the Jackie Robinson Center, said, "I was surprised that they called on me to do a reading. I'm a has-been." Then she did this reading of the creation and brought the house down. Just that was empowering to that particular person. The most recent one we did was with a group from the Scripps Home. All of whom were in wheel chairs. Each one had on a white top hat and

they had a rhythm band. So, they were entertainers as well as when they were in their facilities sometimes being entertained by outside people. So, I think all of that of being a social worker just happened to fall in line with the kinds of programs that enlisted the community organization friendship and service. Not necessarily related to social work, but much of what I have done even as a volunteer in the community have had components of social service connected with it. Some of my instructors was Frances Feldman. I've seen John Milner through the years, and of course the year that I worked at USC as a field coordinator, June Brown was head of the family and child welfare section of the School of Social Work. So I have kept in pretty close contact with not only social work as a profession but with some of the leaders in social work in these years.

Talbert: I'm going to mention... We've read and heard about you from mutual associates about your volunteer activities. I'm just going to mention probably three of your connections and say just a word about each. What impact you felt you were able to make by working with those agencies. Let's talk about the YWCA first.

Martin: YWCA is an organization that I had my first contact with as a child in Arkansas when they had the girl reserves and there was no... the races were

separated. They were segregated. There were white YWCA's and black YWCA's. So, when I came to... and I had not been active in YWCA for any of my adult years until the early 1970's when the YWCA was one of the first if not the first national organization that has an its imperative the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary. I had just come on the YWCA board at that time when they asked me to chair the committee on the elimination of racism for the YWCA in Pasadena. That was a real challenge, but it was really very, very exciting because it was at a time when there seemed to have been a national commitment to doing something about it. Even though I learned only last year from one of my... the YWCA people who knew someone at Parsons who said in a meeting that this man had said, that's a nice little lady, why doesn't she go home and take care of her children? Now, in recent years, one of my friends who is African American was the first African American president of the Pasadena Junior League. At that time, see 25 years ago, it would have been unheard of. But, because I represented the YWCA, I was invited to a meeting of the Junior League to talk about the imperative. I had developed a questionnaire that pinpointed, that triggered the thinking without being hostile and that sort of thing, but such things as, "If you were in an elevator alone and a black person came in there, would you tighten your grip on your purse?" That kind of thing. Which was very exciting to me and the response was good.

Talbert: The Challenge Glen Hope.

Martin: That's a current challenge. First of all, let me tell you what Glen's Hope is in a word, it is a residential program for women recovering from substance abuse. What is unique about it, to Pasadena at least, is that the women who have… if they have preschool age children, they can have their children with them. I got involved with that because it started with a coalition of interested community people and different organizations were asked to send representatives just to discuss it. This was maybe 5 years ago. I represented my organization on this coalition. This is a board that is made up of people who work with recovering people on a community program, but not a residential program. Getting those people who know a lot about some of the things that recovering women face, but who know less about boardsmanship and just try to get the board to work together has been a great challenge, and we're still in process. We were so anxious to get the program going that we didn't have as much money as we should. So, we have challenges on all levels with that program. But, it is exciting, nevertheless. It is needed as well.

Talbert: Great. Thank you. Now finally, on this topic, Pacific Oaks. Didn't that take you back to your educational roots in a sense?

Martin: In a sense, it did because you were dealing with educational setting. You were dealing with students. Pacific Oaks is an upper division college. My role there was on the board of trustees and I happened to have chaired the educational policy committee, which really focused on the Pacific Oaks anti-biased curriculum for which they are known nationally and internationally. Part of what we did as a committee, was to help implement by philosophy at least the anti-biased curriculum which focused on the fact that all human beings have basically the same needs, the basic needs. With their school, not the college, but the school where they have day care and preschool training for kids from one year on up, training to help the children themselves get along with all the differences and different backgrounds from which they come. So we saw the anti-biased curriculum in actually practice when you saw those teachers dealing with the youngsters. The board of course had the responsibility of seeing that the basic philosophy of the school was carried out in practice. Not only as they taught the teachers, many of whom were public school teachers and would go back, but demonstrated by the teachers in the children's school of Pacific Oaks.

Talbert: As you think back over your career and look at the various things with which you have been associated with in the public and private sectors, what stands out as the unique contribution of social workers?

Martin: I think that the basic principles of social work are so important that they… those principles should be a part of every profession that deals with human beings. I don't pretend to be unbiased about social work because when you see people in terms of where they came from, principles of the nonjudgmental attitude, acceptance of people, those kinds of basic principles hold good any time you work with human beings. I will just give you two very, very brief examples. When I was at County USC Medical Center, there was a psychiatrist who developed some lung problem in his last year of residence. It was not cancer but he did have to go have some medical attention for about three months. When he came back, he said, "the doctors told me what my problem was, but it was the medical social worker who came to my bed and helped me deal with what I had to face. I will never be… That will influence my practice the rest of my life." I guess that's the most graphic thing I could say. A friend of mine who was ill recently said that it was the social workers' approach, seeing him as a unique human being, recognizing how he must have felt, but giving him the opportunity to say it that made the difference in his acceptance of his illness. I have been on a Soap Box that I think that in almost any

of the health professions, the first year social worker, yup the first year of social work is a good background for any of that.

Talbert: So a summary statement is, is California better or worse for what social work has done?

Martin: I don't know… I'm not really… I haven't followed, really, social work in California as far as the legislature is concerned. I think wherever there are social workers, there is something… good social workers, there is something better happening in terms of human relationships.

Talbert: That's good. Have you any documents that you care to entrust to the archives at SC?

Martin: I don't really have any documents. I did have a number of journals of social work that I did take over to the school of social work library and I gave them to Ruth Britton.

Talbert: Thank you so much. I think this is going to enrich the archival shelves over at SC, and I hope you would take the time to go over sometime and look and

see what your peers and others have been able to do. And in behalf of the collections committee, I certainly express our sincere thanks to you for the contributions you have made just on this tape which reflect more significant contributions in the field. Thank you so much Mrs. Martin.

Martin: Thank you very much Mr. Talbert. I've enjoyed talking to you and it's given me an opportunity to sort of reflect on my years in social work. One final thought in terms of social work and the legislature. I have not been politically active in California, but I am aware of the issues that social work has taken on such things years ago as that Prop 13 the Jarvis Bill, and more recently acting against the Prop 187 and any propositions which seem to denigrate the human person, the social workers have enacted in trying to defeat. We have not always been successful, but I think that we'll see we cannot give up. In terms of what I am doing right now with the nursing homes, one of the reasons I am doing that consultation is that I remember as a pre-MSW social worker, having a nursing home case load. At that time, there was no such thought of having a social worker coming in and working with the psycho-social aspects of aiding illness and disability and now under the federal guidelines, under Overa, the Omneris Bill, they have to have someone doing social services. My concern is that a person does not have to have social work training. That of course is why I am going as a

consultant because the consultants do have to have an MSW of LCSW. If I were on a Soap Box now with what I'm doing in the nursing homes, the political action I would see would be to force the nursing and convalescent hospitals to have trained social workers working every day with the residents instead of just on a consulting basis.

Talbert: Thank you again.

Martin: You asked me about social work, I can go on and on.

Talbert: You did.