

### **Interview with John Milner #3**

Conducted by Elizabeth McBroom on February 15, 1988  
at John Milner's home

MCBROOM: John, you have done so much work with foster parents starting with your first job at Ryther and through your teaching. Tell me a little about the work with foster care that you have done.

MILNER: Early in my career I had started working in Idaho in 1934. The federal government had recently established the Aid to Dependent Children program and Idaho had little or no experience in foster home care. Most of the children needed to be placed away from their own homes in one of two state orphanages or, alternatively, in a small Catholic orphanage in northern Idaho. Some of these children were actually raised in the orphanages. There were some free homes where children were placed with farmers in small towns. For the most part, however, neglected and abused children were kept with their parents. Unless the children were truly orphaned, there was little regard for placement.

MCBROOM: Do you think that some of these children found their way into homes for what we now call the developmentally disabled because there were no other facilities?

MILNER: Yes, we had two institutions in the state for so-called mentally retarded children and adults although there was not much separation in those hospitals between the children and the adults. These hospitals were not staffed with professional people – no social workers, no psychiatrists, but there was a MD heading each of the hospitals.

We discovered a number of years after I had started working, that there were several individuals, I think seven altogether, who had been misplaced in these two hospitals. The mothers of these individuals had originally been placed in these hospitals because they were unmarried and therefore would soon be giving birth to 'illegitimate' children. Some of the judges in the state felt that any unmarried mother must be mentally retarded as she was pregnant but not married; thus the judges had committed the

mothers to the hospitals. The babies were subsequently born and raised in these hospitals.

By the time we learned about the facts of their existence, these individuals were nearly adults, approximately 18 or 19 years old. These persons had never seen a movie or had been out in the general community in any way. These same persons had access to very little recreational programming in the hospitals and had received no formal education, so they literally grew up in what can be characterized as a 'feeble-minded' environment. One of our early efforts then was to place these near-adults with foster families. Interestingly, it became apparent that our efforts were too late – they had become functionally socially retarded, even though these individuals seemed to test reasonably 'normal' on psychological tests. I think only one person ever 'made it' and eventually moved on to gain some education. An extensive follow-up really was not completed until after I had already left the state, but I maintained an interest in that set of outcomes.

There was also one institution designated for the care of the blind and deaf or hard of hearing located in Gooding, Idaho, which even then could be characterized as almost medieval in terms of its care of kids. I remember that I was called in to the state office one time because one boy had been kicked out of this institution for masturbating. There was pressure from the state to get this boy placed back into the school. The superintendent of this school, however, said he would accept him back into their institution only if the boy were to be castrated. When the superintendent was approached a second time, he reiterated his belief that castration was a small price to pay for education.

MCBROOM: They really were medieval!

MILNER: Yes, these really were medieval institutions. In addition, we also had some children we had to place in foster homes who were psychotic, although at that time there was little recognition that a child could be psychotic.

A lot of my early learning about foster care started in Idaho. I was not fully trained as a social worker at that time and I had to make the best of these early experiences without benefit of the formal knowledge that I really needed. In retrospect I know that I made one or two very poor placements at that time, which I have since regretted.

MCBROOM: What would you consider a poor placement?

MILNER: I will give you one example, of a mother who was psychotic and living in a cave with her two sons. There were reports from neighbors in the area who thought the mother was mentally ill. An investigation was launched and it was found that she was indeed quite seriously mentally ill. The children, one boy who was eight and the other who was ten, however, were quite attached to her and apparently were surviving in this environment. The mother was committed to a state hospital and the two boys were turned over to us to be placed into foster care.

I placed the boys into a home that on its face appeared to be highly desirable. It was a farm family, but it turned out they were religious fanatics. The foster family imposed their own beliefs upon these kids and informed them that they were sinners and that what had happened to them was God's punishment. At that time most of the placements had to go through a probate court – probate judges handled the juvenile cases. In this particular case, the judge refused to remove the boys from this home and so they continued to live there. I always felt that it must have been highly disruptive to them. It was my own naivete at that time that led me to not complete a thorough investigation, including the religious beliefs of the family. Since that time I have found that there have been any number of placements throughout the country in homes nearly like this one – homes that should not have been used.

MCBROOM: When you look at the developments in foster care overall, what do you think some of the most important changes are?

MILNER: I think we have gone through a period where foster care has developed in a very healthy way. I think foster care depends a great deal on the quality of staff who are charged with carrying it out. They need to be well educated in the kind of knowledge that they need to make studies of homes and to supervise homes.

Also, caseloads need to be small enough to ensure that supervision can be adequate or more than adequate. My experience at the Ryther Center, I think, demonstrated this. We had 120 children in placement in foster homes and small enough caseloads so that you had a chance to spend a half-day periodically in each of the homes and truly get to know the foster families. This allows you to spend time with the kids, sometimes recreationally. The foster families were considered to be part of the agency staff. Those placements I found very successful. Some public welfare programs have been awfully good in terms of foster parents. I think today, in 1988, that the caseloads are too enormous and that some of the workers doing placements are not really qualified to do them; in this way, I think that foster homes may fail. Low pay and the high cost of living today have combined to limit the number of foster homes and people that are available and willing to take children. Being a foster parent is a great responsibility and this limited availability concerns me. I see a return to group care in group homes or institutions.

MCBROOM: Do you mean that the whole field of foster care is getting more professionalized?

MILNER: Yes, I think so. I think that smaller, private programs do some wonderful things for foster care. I think, for example, that the Los Angeles Children's Bureau has done a remarkably good job. It is largely the public agencies that have such large caseloads, which I think need to have more community support for what they do.

MCBROOM: There are some other trends too that are really intended to strengthen the family and give children a better start in life. You were also very much a leader at the

beginning of the Head Start program and that really is a part of this story. Would you talk about that?

MILNER: Yes, the Head Start program was underway nationally and just starting to develop in the western region of the US in the 1960's. The University of Southern California was asked to do the training of Head Start staff locally. The president of the University, President Topping, asked the School of Education to take on this task; however, the dean of the School of Education did not believe in the Head Start program and therefore refused to comply with his request. The president of the University, however, felt that it was an important thing to do and so he came to our School asking that we take on the responsibility of educating the Head Start staff.

I was assigned the responsibility for putting together a training program. I therefore had to contact the dean of the School of Education and get his cooperation in providing teachers to present their educational point of view to the Head Start staff. This was not an easy task but the dean finally assigned two very able women, one a black lady who was a vice-principal and another woman, a teacher. They were very good teachers in our program and they were very helpful to me. We also used some people from other disciplines including psychology. I thought we had a good staff; we trained Head Start leaders from the Los Angeles area and I believed that it was a worthwhile program. Later some of our graduates participated in the Head Start program and were very successful in what they did.

MCBROOM: Do you think that the Head Start program has had a lasting impact?

MILNER: Yes, I do. It is a continuing program and I think a very important one, because I think there has been a general failure to provide support for the education of children from underprivileged families. There is a tremendous benefit that can be realized by both the families and society as a whole by giving these kids a start before they are in regular school.

MCBROOM: So it is at least a step in the right direction?

MILNER: Yes.

MCBROOM: Related to foster care, you have also been very prominently identified with the field of adoptions. On the verge of your retirement I think you directed an adoption program in Los Angeles and Seattle?

MILNER: Yes, Carol Williams and I worked together on this project. We brought in adoption workers from the western region of the U.S. for a week of training. We used a number of other people in the first stage of the program: the education part, during which the participants shared their individual experiences and ideas. We held the training first in Los Angeles, and then in Seattle. In the second stage of the program, the participants would then go home to their own communities and apply what they had gained in the initial phase of the program and evaluate the usefulness of the knowledge they had gained. During the final stage, they were brought back for a second week of education. The participants overall were a very enthusiastic and an interested group. I felt that adoption practices had improved so greatly over the years; I know what adoption work had been. It was very heartening to see the response of this group.

The overall response of this group was quite a contrast from when I had first come to Los Angeles and found that the California Children's Home Society kept infants in their cribs in one large building over on Adams Boulevard. At that time, they often kept the babies for as long as a year - studying what they were like as persons and then trying to match them to the proper adoptive families. There were pictures all over the walls because the staff were trying to find as a key part of the adoption process, a match between children and adoptive parents on physical characteristics. They did not realize that as children grow up they usually look like the people who had raised them anyhow. As a result of this process, adoptions were delayed endlessly. In response to these sorts of practices, there was a movement then within the professional community to

hurry the adoption process, yet keep it sound. The committee here in Los Angeles was very active in bringing about change.

There also had been very great neglect of older children or of children who were handicapped in some way and efforts to get them placed. Our public program, the county program, really became a leader in finding ways to recruit adoptive parents who would take on the responsibility for minority kids, older kids or handicapped children. They were the first, I think, in the world, to make use of television as part of recruiting. They showed children who were available for adoption; at the time it was a questionable practice. People came from all over the United States to study the program here and some came from other countries to see what was being done. I think our public program has been unusually successful, just as our private ones have been, as they have changed along the way.

MCBROOM: You wrote a paper on adoptions among American Indian populations that you published in the journal, "*Social Work Papers*." What was the background for that paper?

MILNER: I was asked by the Indians in Arizona to be their keynote speaker at a conference on childcare, which was held in Phoenix. There were no other Caucasians at the conference, but there were approximately 100 Indians who were foster parents in attendance. I went to the conference on the first day of this three-day conference a little early. There was no one in the meeting hall and I began to wonder if I was in the right place. By the time the meeting was to begin however, all the Indians appeared from various directions and began to seat themselves in the auditorium. There was then an Indian religious ceremony with drums. Following the ceremony, the meeting opened. I had begun to wonder during the opening ceremonies if what I had to say would have any meaning to this particular group. I found them responsive, however; on this first day they had questions that were sent up on slips of paper. The second day there was more verbal interaction and I found that they had a great sense of humor.

One of the concerns discussed was the fact that they were not being used as adoptive parents. Most of their children had been sent away to Indian schools, some of which were so far away that the parents did not know exactly where their children were; their children were in effect completely alienated from their respective tribes. It was an effort on the part of the federal government to try to get the youngsters to become what they called 'civilized,' to really give them some experience in acculturation that would change them from their Indian ways. While this forced acculturation process was being done at the time of this conference; it was on a smaller scale than had been done in previous years.

They were also concerned that the Mormon Church was involved in a campaign to attempt to do all the adoptions of Indian children - probably to proselytize and convert the children. The Indians felt that they too should be considered as potential adoptive parents.

I remember that at the last meeting of the conference they presented me with a beautiful beaded bow tie and a few other gifts. One delightful young Indian man asked me to come to the lobby and meet his mother, who turned out to be his grandmother. She had been waiting all through the meetings in the lobby. She was a delightful lady with very parched skin like the old Indians who lived on the Plains and she also had poor teeth. Obviously this woman had lived a hard life physically. It was just delightful to meet and talk with her. He was so proud of her; this meeting had a lot of meaning to me.

MCBROOM: Do you know whether there has been any further development in the placing of Indian children for adoption with Indian families?

MILNER: No, I really do not; I did not follow up on this issue although I have always been interested in Indian populations. When I worked in Idaho, I used to visit the Indians there periodically. At one time I was assigned to Salmon City, where the Indians would come to 'winter'; when they did so, they lived in teepees. I decided that I

wanted to get to know them so I took some magazines over one day and knocked on the flap of a teepee. They opened it and brought me in to where they were all sitting on the ground. Some of the women were making moccasins; they were chewing on deerskin to soften it, and others were doing some bead work. There was no or little verbal conversation, so I only stayed for a few minutes and then left. I returned there several times while I lived in Salmon City, but never got much conversation from them so I learned little about them except for what I could observe. A day or two before I was transferred away from that community, several of the Indians arrived in my office bringing me beaded moccasins and gloves. Somehow they had found out that I was going and I decided that they had learned more about me than I had learned about them. This interest then really stems from my living in Idaho where we had Indians and my own efforts in trying to get to know them, but they are not easy to get to know.

MCBROOM: John, you really have been a curious student of cultures from Idaho to Fiji, Arizona, and Guam. How has this interest entered into your teaching and practice with children?

MILNER: I think it has had an influence although I do not know how to specifically say this. I have developed sensitivity to the fact that people in different cultures live differently and that our own value systems are not necessarily appropriate for them although we are living in the same dominant cultural group. I respect the individual differences of cultures and I hope that I have conveyed that personal respect for other cultures to my students.

MCBROOM: Turning to something that is a little bit different facet of your career, you have also been associated with the correctional field, I think from the early days with Carl Holton in probation and parole through to your days with the Delinquency Control Institute. Tell me about this correctional aspect of your career.

MILNER: At the time when I came on to the faculty of USC, Arlien Johnson who was the dean, felt that social work had a contribution to make to the correctional field. As a

result, there was a lot of emphasis on this area and there were a lot of students who had field placements in correctional agencies and the Probation or Parole Departments. Some of the correctional staff were also friends of Ruby Inlow, who was on our faculty. I felt that it was very important work and that it is an area today which has been neglected. I worked quite closely with the Probation Department, which was headed by Carl Holton at the time. He had great respect for social work, I think largely through his friendship with Ruby. I did a number of training programs for them here.

At one time the California Youth Authority, which was considered at that time to be a model for correctional programs throughout the country, asked me to go with a driver and car to every one of the camps that they had throughout California and do training with their staff. I found a great variance in the quality of these programs. I found some camps that I thought were very progressive which were worth being used as models. I gained a lot from learning about what the group care of delinquent kids could be – that it could be constructive and useful.

In addition to Carl Holton there was Pat Palace, who was very cooperative with the School; he was second in command of the Probation Department here in Los Angeles. His son eventually came into our School to earn his MSW. His son graduated and went on to work at the Ryther Center in Seattle. Unfortunately, Pat's son took his own life at a later time. Heman Stark, was another one of the leaders in this field; he headed the California Youth Authority for a period of time. He was well educated and respected social work a great deal. Not many of the programs employed social workers, but they were open to the kind of training that social work could give.

MCBROOM: So you really were training these probation and parole officers?

MILNER: Yes

MCBROOM: Later you were involved in training police officers that dealt with juveniles?

MILNER: Yes, this was called the Delinquency Control program at USC, which still exists today. Norris Class and Dan Pursuit who was on the faculty of DCI, not with the School of Social Work, asked me to participate during the second year of this program. The Hollywood Turf Club sponsored the DCI. I lectured for a number of years to the juvenile police who were brought to the USC campus from all over the United States and some were from other countries, including England. They were a varied group, some were very competent policemen, who I respected; there were others whose ability to be good juvenile police I questioned. The training was a valuable one; it was a three-month period for each of them. In the first series of classes, the lower-ranked police officers were sent. When the DCI participants went back to their home communities and demonstrated knowledge that their respective Chiefs of Police did not have, however, we started getting the Chiefs of Police themselves.

MCBROOM: It was kind of a trickle up effect?

MILNER: Yes. This group always questioned everything you had to offer. They had lots of doubt about the theories that you presented about human behavior, which were the courses that I was teaching. Interestingly, in the evaluations, two persons, Norris Class and I were the ones who got the highest marks on the evaluations. Only two other social workers were asked to be on the staff, but they did not 'make it' with the police. Gertrude Hengerer was one; she had worked in the corrections field but somehow she did not get acceptance.

MCBROOM: You came with a very important message to them obviously. Were you helping them to understand human development and behavior?

MILNER: Yes.

MCBROOM: You have gone on to other phases of the justice system and I think participated in the training of judges as well in Idaho?

MILNER: Yes, at one time I was asked to join with a juvenile court judge from Oakland, California to go to Idaho and be flown from town to town to train the judges who were dealing with children in various communities. In Idaho most of the juvenile work was handled by probate judges; some of the larger towns, however, had established the position of juvenile court judges. It was an experience to go back to my home state and meet with these particular persons. I thought the program was successful. I had great respect for the judge who traveled with me and shared the teaching.

MCBROOM: Was he really an outstanding juvenile judge in California?

MILNER: Yes, he was, although I cannot think of his name at present. He was considered the top judge in California and I know that social workers in northern California had great respect for him.

MCBROOM: John, I think over your career that you have been one who others have turned to quite spontaneously for help with problems – associates, friends, neighbors. Tell me a little about that facet of your career.

MILNER: Well, I think every social worker does individual work with people who come to them and want help, although I have never had a paid practice of any kind. I have had a number of people who seek out help from time to time,;often they have been board members who hesitate to go to an agency, but they want help with a specific problem - usually family problems of one kind or another. Some have been graduates who have left school and then have come back for individual help of different kinds. I have always been glad to do what I could.

MCBROOM: You told us a little anecdote at the Archives meeting about the shocked reaction of your uncle to you becoming a social worker. Can you repeat that anecdote?

MILNER: I do not know that families always approve of having a family member become a social worker. One year when I was returning from school in New York, I was driving

across the country and stopped in Iowa to see an aunt and uncle of mine. My uncle was a devout Republican and Presbyterian and he was very anti-social work. His idea of charity was to contribute a pipe organ to the Presbyterian Church. He was very unhappy with my being in this field. He said it was, “. a field for short-haired women and long-haired men.” I guess I fooled him by losing my hair early in life so that he could not criticize me.

MCBROOM: I think you also pioneered in your use of electronic aids in teaching and demonstrations. Tell me a little about that.

MILNER: I have always felt that some of the ways of learning could be enhanced by electronic equipment. One of the first pieces of portable electronic equipment to come out was the tape recorder; I think I bought one of the first ones in Los Angeles.

#### INTERRUPTION & TAPE GAP

MILNER: Each session was for a week as I remember and then they would go home for a period of months and put into effect what had been talked about in the session. Then they were brought back once again to report on the effectiveness of this and to learn more. It was a kind of continuous learning experience for them. They turned in written reports on what they had achieved as a result of their learning experience. I thought it was a valuable experience.

MCBROOM: You wrote an article for the journal, “*Social Work Papers*” on the adoption of American Indian children, did that article come out of this project?

MILNER: No, it did not. Incidentally I have lost my copy of that article. The article really came out of being invited to be the keynote speaker at a conference composed of all Indian foster parents, held in Phoenix, Arizona. I had prepared three papers for this conference, which was a three or four-day conference. The contents of that article were taken from the three papers that I presented and then rewritten specifically for this

article. That was a very interesting time for me; I had never been in a climate of all American Indians or Native Americans before.

Just to reminisce: the day that I arrived at the meeting place, I arrived, as is my standard practice, approximately 15 minutes early to make sure that the lectern and microphone were set up. Not a soul was there up until about two minutes before the meeting was to start, then suddenly they just appeared from all directions. By the time the meeting was to start, they were all seated and were very quiet and formal looking. I do not remember the number but there must have been approximately 100 Indians from all over Arizona and New Mexico there. They had an Indian ceremony before the conference started, with Indian prayers and drums beating. Then I was introduced, although I had no idea whether what I would say would be acceptable to the gathered audience or not. The question period then came and instead of asking the questions orally, the conference attendees sent up notes - this was the way they wanted it handled. I found them to be very warm, very responsive and a quite delightful group.

By the second day we had much more oral participation and quite a sense of humor came out from some of them. You knew that they had a sense of fun.

MCBROOM: Did the concept of adoption fit into the Indian culture or was it quite alien to it?

MILNER: There was a little discussion of adoption. There was unhappiness about the fact that adoptions had taken place largely through church groups, particularly the Mormon Church, which had opted to adopt all the available Indian children - probably to convert them. They were unhappy about the fact that they were not considered to be desirable adoption parents even though they were considered adequate to be foster parents. They talked about the fact that not just an individual family raises Native American children for the most part tribally. The family has the support of others: neighbors and so forth. While a lot of the Indians no longer lived in tribal groups, there

was still a lot of close association between Indians in different communities. They never really had merged much with white society – they had remained separate.

There was also quite a discussion about acculturation and education relating to this; it was fascinating. When the conference was over they presented me with a beaded bow tie and several gifts along the way.

A very touching thing was a young man who had helped organize the conference; he was a student at the University of Arizona. At the conclusion of the conference, he came and asked me if I would go out and meet his mother. All through the meetings she had apparently been out waiting in the lobby. I went out and I think it was his grandmother rather than his mother because she was well into her 80s and looked like the kind of elderly Indian you might see on the Plains. She was very wrinkled, sun-bitten and so forth, with bad teeth. This young man was very proud of her and she turned out to be simply delightful – she was very pleased to meet and talk with me. The very fact that he had asked for this meeting, I thought, had meaning to me; certainly, I really enjoyed that conference.

MILNER: Back to your question about the use of electronic equipment for teaching purposes. I want to say that I had some bad experiences early on in doing this because some social workers felt that it was unethical to tape an interview and use it for teaching purposes. As a matter of fact, one social worker stomped out of a meeting where I had demonstrated the use of audiotapes; she said that I ought to leave the profession because I had engaged in unethical behavior.

Over the years this attitude, of course, has changed greatly. I know for example that I have made a series of tapes for the Child Care Information Center, which is located in Hampton, Virginia and that these tapes have been distributed all over the world. They tape meetings where you are speaking and then distribute these speeches to various agencies. The response to this has been a very broad one, in other countries as well as agencies in the United States.

Another time I was asked to be a consultant on a film, a major motion picture called “*Outrage*” and Ida Lupino produced it. They hired me as a consultant to the scriptwriter because the male leading character was to be a social worker. However, when the script was submitted to the Hayes Office, it was deemed not acceptable because it dealt with the question of rape. It was felt at the time that social workers had no right to be an authority on the types of problems that rape might cause. As a result, they used the dialogue that I had helped them prepare for the social worker character and instead had a young minister who had served in the Navy become the leading man in the film. This was amusing in retrospect.

In 1985 a federal grant was given for me to make four films of child welfare subjects. These were made for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Welfare and are available in our library. Actually, the film productions did not live up to their general purpose and I have been disappointed in the results of this. As a matter of fact, one of the four films has never been finished. I think social work has a great responsibility to do interpretive things for the public and I think teaching can extend beyond the walls of universities to the public if we make use of film, television, and tapes.

MCBROOM: You have had media experience with foster placement and foster care through your career from the very beginning until now. Would you tell me something about foster care?

MILNER: My interest started when I was first working in Idaho in 1942, I am sorry, it was 1934. The Aid to Dependent Children was just being introduced, particularly to the western states. Idaho had very little experience in foster care up until that time. Previously, children were placed in one or two orphanages that were privately run but were called the State Orphanages - one in Boise and one in Lewiston. Additionally, there was a small Catholic orphanage in the northern part of the state. Many of these children lived out their childhood in these institutions because they had not been adopted. The children who were neglected or abused largely were left with their own families with little work done to better their situations. When we began foster care, only

a few of us in the state had any idea of what foster care should be – at that time I was not a trained social worker. I subscribed to a course at the University of Chicago by mail and got the largest box of books that I ever saw. I read them to try and prepare myself.

I made a number of placements while I worked for the state. Unfortunately I made some poor placements and have learned by these experiences. I remember one of the poor placements that I made was that of a family where a mother and her two sons, one who eight and the other who was ten years old, were living in a cave in the walls of Snake River Canyon. Neighbors had reported that they the mother was insane. On investigation we found that she was seriously psychotic, but that she very devoted to these two boys. They had survived for a long time together in these undesirable circumstances. The mother was committed to the state mental hospital in Blackfoot; the sons were up for placement. I studied a farm family that had expressed interest in taking them and placed the boys there, but I later lived to regret it. I found that the family was religious fanatics: they severely punished the children, they felt that the need to be placed was really evidence of God's punishment for something that had happened in the boys' own family. I went to the probate court, which used to be responsible for making decisions about legally placing children. I tried to get the judge to release these children from this particular home, but the judge refused to do so. I have always lived to regret that experience. I suppose we all learn from some of our mistakes as well as from the successes we might have.

MCBROOM: How do you think the foster care field has developed from then to now?

MILNER: I think we went through a period when foster care was a very successful program in general. I think it was 1) dependent on the size of caseloads, and 2) the quality of training provided to the staff that do foster care that made it possible to do a good job. Certainly there also needs to be continuing support of the foster family as well as of the child. As regards my first and third points, I feel that my experience at Ryther Center in Seattle, Washington was very rich because we had 120 children in

placement but we had small enough caseloads so that you could spend a half-day in any given home. You could eat and play with the child and foster family, participate in some of their activities, attend some graduations or school activities – the family was really considered part of the agency staff. I thought the placements were highly successful in almost all cases.

In California there has been a variance, I think, in the quality of services provided, but many of the placements have been quite successful overall. In recent years, there has been real difficulty in finding foster homes: the high cost of living, the fact that so many women are now working instead of being foster mothers, the low pay that foster families get for the care of children, all of these factors have combined to discourage an interest in this particular field.

Caseloads, particularly in public welfare, have also been so large that it is impossible to really do the proper studies of foster homes or to provide the proper support to the foster families and children that is needed to make them succeed. Some of our private agencies, however, still do a good job. For example, the Los Angeles Children's Bureau has done an exceptionally good job with the placement of foster youngsters. It is a little discouraging to see the failures with placements as children are placed in one home after another. It indicates that perhaps we need to move back to group care, which we have pretty much abandoned over the years. Perhaps smaller institutions though, more of them and group homes to be developed throughout the state. I think we need all three sets of institutions. This remains an area that I have an interest in.

MCBROOM: In a very closely related field, I think you played a great part in adoptions. Can you speak to your work in the area of adoptions?

MILNER: When I first came to California to work right after World War II, I found the California Children's Home Society had many infants literally living in their cribs in a handsome, old mansion on Adams Boulevard. These kids would be there for as long as a year before they were actually placed in adoption. Their policy then was to make a

thorough study of the child: learn about their intelligence, their physical health and so forth and then find a family that they felt could match the child. They had pictures all over the wall trying to find families that physically resembled the child and then place them - it was a long and involved procedure. There was a lot of concern in the professional community that children were not being placed early. The bonding of the child was so important in the first year of life. A committee was eventually appointed in Los Angeles to study the situation and make recommendations that would in effect hurry the adoption process and still maintain quality service.

There was also a great deal of neglect in placing older children and the recruitment of adoptive homes for these children as well as the handicapped or minority children. Over the years, I think the system has made great strides in placing what we once thought were 'unplaceable' children. Our public welfare program, the County Adoption Bureau, has gained an international reputation for what they have done in this regard. They were the first agency, I think, to use television as a means of showing the children who needed adoption – these special children and recruiting homes in this particular way. This was criticized at first because of the breach of confidentiality, but it has been a very successful way of placing children who would otherwise always require institutional care. I think the adoption scene is quite hopeful.

The development over the last 15 years of confidentiality, the question of whether adoptive children have a right to know who their natural parents are, has developed in such a way that children can now expect to find their natural parents after they are grown if they wish to. This is a service that is handled with consideration of the natural parents if they are found, to see if they want to know their own child. This is also done with consideration of the adoptive parents. Many adoptive children have grown up and long to know their natural roots - to know the persons. In some cases it benefits them greatly to know, in others it is a disappointment. I think any human being has a right to know their own past history and not to have amnesia regarding their early childhood.

MCBROOM: Quite recently you led a project on adoptions based in Seattle and Los Angeles.

MILNER: Yes, after my retirement from regular teaching, Carol Williams and I conducted a program which brought in adoption workers from the whole Western region. This project was sponsored by eastern funds. The adoption workers were initially brought into Los Angeles and Seattle for a week's training and then they would return to their own homes and try to apply what they had learned from the group discussions and the materials presented. They would then determine how practical the information was and if it proved to be successful. The same workers would then return for a second week of training. They were an enthusiastic group of workers with good ideas. I thought that the interchange of their experiences and ideas along with presentations by several faculty we had recruited, led to it being quite a successful program.

MCBROOM: You wrote a paper on the adoption of American Indian children for the journal, *Social Work Papers*; was that related to this project?

MILNER: No, it had nothing to do with this project. The article instead came out of a conference for American Indian foster parents in Phoenix, Arizona. The Indians came from all over that state and I was asked to be the keynote speaker at that meeting; I was the only Caucasian invited to attend the meeting. The day I arrived, I went to the auditorium a few minutes early and found no one there. I began to wonder if I was in the right place, but I remained there nevertheless. Within minutes of the meeting opening, the Indians began to arrive from all directions seating themselves in the auditorium. They then had their drum ceremony – a religious ceremony to open the conference. I then presented, wondering all the time that if what I had to say would be acceptable to this particular group; I found them very responsive. The first day, they sent up written questions from the auditorium floor. The second day, they participated much more verbally and I found that they had a great sense of humor and were most responsive. The third day, when I finished there, they presented me with a gift of a

beaded bow tie and several other things. One young man who was responsible for the organization of the conference asked if I would come out and meet his mother. I found her to be really his grandmother who had been waiting in the lobby during the whole time of the meetings. She was an elderly woman, I would guess somewhere in her 80s with a very parched face, poor teeth; she looked like she had lived a hard life in her earlier days. I found her to be just a delightful person and the meeting had a great deal of meaning to me to be introduced to her.

MCBROOM: You have taken such so much interest in comparative culture from Idaho to Fiji and back to Arizona. How has this interest been reflected in your teaching and practice?

MILNER: I hope that in some ways my students in social work have learned something about cultural differences so that they have an understanding of the fact that the ways in which children are raised in families may differ by ethnic groups. Cultural differences need to be recognized and beyond this, we also must respect cultural differences when we work with them. It simply adds to our understanding of human behavior – fortunately we have a variety of cultures in the world, which has always interested me and which I believe has a value in teaching.

MCBROOM: Another important facet of your career has been in the correctional field, starting when you first came here, with Ruby and Carl Holton and continuing with DCI. What about this experience?

MILNER: When I first came to the USC School of Social Work, Arlien Johnson had an interest in the correctional field and Ruby Inlow, who was on the faculty did also as well, as did Norris Class, who was also on the faculty. I was interested in the fact that we had students placed in the Probation Department and in one or two of the correctional institutions for their fieldwork. I was also asked to do any number of training sessions for probation officers.

At one time I was asked to do workshops throughout the state for the California Youth Authority, which was then a new program that was being recognized all over the country as kind of a model of what to do in the care and education of delinquent kids. I was given a car and a driver we went to all of the camps that belonged to the Youth Authority in the state of California and conducted training sessions. I found them irregular in their quality, from good to bad, but I was impressed by some of the good ones that I felt were truly making a contribution to the field. I regret that our school has lost its' interest in corrections, I thought that social work had an important place in this field.

MCBROOM: What of the Delinquency Control Institute?

MILNER: The Delinquency Control Institute is still a part of the University of Southern California. I think I joined the teaching faculty in its second year of operation. It was a project that was first funded by the Hollywood Park Association, in conjunction with the University of Southern California, to train juvenile police officers and some probation workers. Some trainees came from all over the United States and some came from foreign countries, especially from England. The police were brought in from these various communities to spend three months training. My part was to teach courses in human behavior and growth & development. I found the group responsive but they tended to question the theories about growth and development. I found that the staff sent to the DCI varied a great deal in their quality – some I thought would make excellent policemen, while others I had questions about.

The group as a whole were very accepting of Norris Class and me as teachers; in fact at the end of each program Norris Class and I were rated the highest as teachers. This always surprised me, because there had been so much negativism expressed during class time. This program was largely successful because Dan Pursuit, who headed the DCI for a while and has remained with it until the last year or two, was a fundraiser. He had a remarkable ability to raise the funds from industry and business to sponsor the DCI.

The first students sent from the various departments were usually those with a low ranking. When the trainees went home with new knowledge, however, it represented a challenge to their respective chiefs. Eventually we had some of the high-ranking police as our students. As a whole, I think the DCI has had a very important effect on police work with juveniles throughout the country. We also offered classes in Phoenix, Arizona for several years through the Department of Psychology. We also held classes in Honolulu, Hawaii. These were sorts of alumni groups who organized them in those communities and then asked us to come as faculty to teach. It was a very enriching experience for me and, I hope, for the students.

MCBROOM: More recently you participated in the training of judges?

MILNER: I was asked to work with a juvenile court judge who, at that time, was considered to be the best in the state: he was from Oakland, California. We were invited to come to Idaho to offer training sessions for the judges throughout that state. We were flown out to the state and then we flew from town to town conducting these training sessions. Most of the training participants were probate judges who were doing juvenile court work. In some of the larger towns there were now assigned juvenile court judges. Here again, I talked a lot about the growth and development of children, the causes of delinquency, and the responsive kind of care that the kids needed. I felt the program was quite successful; I had great respect for what the judge taught. It was interesting to go back to my home state to do this.

MCBROOM: We hear a lot these days about all the attention that is given to delinquents after the kids have suffered from some mishaps in their early childhood. I know that you had an opportunity to become involved in an important movement that undertook to reach kids at an earlier stage. What about the whole Head Start program?

MILNER: When the Head Start program was established on a national basis . . .

MCBROOM: It was part of the War on Poverty effort wasn't it?

MILNER: It was part of the War on Poverty effort and I thought it was a very sound idea. The University of Southern California was asked to conduct a training program for Head Start teachers and administrators. The School of Education was asked by Norman Topping, the president of our University to do this, but the dean of the School of Education at that time did not approve of the idea of Head Start - he had strong feelings against it and refused to do it. The President was miffed about this and so he came to our dean and asked if we would take the responsibility for the Head Start training program.

I was asked to head this, but I had to go the Dean of the School of Education, which was not an easy task. He did cooperate and gave me the names of two very good teachers. One was a black woman, who was a vice principal and the other was a regular teacher. They were both excellent teachers in our program, as well as, I am sure, in their own schools. In addition we had other people from different disciplines such as psychology, to participate in this training program. In later years some of our graduates went with the Head Start program and worked as social workers in those programs, largely doing the administration of those programs. Head Start still exists and still makes major contributions to children who have little support from their own families regarding education. This program, I think, gives an incentive to children to want to go to school and not feel uncomfortable in school.

MCBROOM: John, I do not think you have always been encouraged in your career especially by an uncle you told us about once who had a pronouncement about the social work profession.

MILNER: Uncle Tony?

MCBROOM: Yes, Uncle Tony.

MILNER: When I was driving back from New York following my graduation from the New York School, I stopped in a small town, Atlantic, Iowa, to visit my mother's sister

and her husband. This uncle did not approve of social work: his idea of philanthropy was to give a pipe organ to the Presbyterian Church. He was an affluent man in his community, a stolid Republican and a strong Presbyterian. He confronted me when I first got there with the fact that I had chosen social work as a career. He said that he disapproved of the profession and that social workers were just a bunch of shorthaired women and longhaired men. I think later Mother Nature proved that I did not have long hair - I lost most of my hair.

MCBROOM: You gave the lie to Uncle Tony and his pronouncement on social workers.

MILNER: I gave the lie to Uncle Tony and his pronouncement on social workers.

MCBROOM: I think you pioneered the use of electronics in social work teaching and so on locally. What about that?

MILNER: I think I purchased one of the first tape recorders in Los Angeles and used it for some interviews of cases I was carrying as a volunteer. I then used the interviews in staff training. I was highly criticized at first because some people felt that I was betraying the confidentiality of clients although I had received permission from the clients to do this and had not used actual names on the tape.

I remember once when I was giving a lecture at a Family Service meeting that one of the staff members stood up and said that I was unethical and that she could not stay in the room with someone like this. Further she added that I did not belong in the profession because I had used a tape recorder – she then marched out of the room. Since that time, tape recorders have been commonly used and I think that it is a real advantage that in this electronic world that so much information can come from auditory and visual means. It would be a missed opportunity not to use some electronic equipment. I think that in teaching they can be used to advantage as long as they are not overly used as a substitute for other ways of teaching. I think that both visual and

auditory ways of learning are very important to today's generation, which are reading less and learning more by this type of observation.

MCBROOM: What about these two tapes which were made for national distribution?

MILNER: When I have spoken in different parts of the country, there is an organization that exists, the ChildCare Information Center, (CCIC) located in Hampton, Virginia, which tapes presentations.

MCBROOM: I notice that this tape is entitled, "*Ethnic and Cultural Considerations in Child Placement.*"

MILNER: Yes, that is one of the tapes. I think I probably made 10 or 12 tapes for them. When the CCIC learns that someone is going to speak, they send one of their staff with recording equipment and they tape your speech. The tapes are then distributed all over the country and some outside the country. They only charge for the cost of the tape itself, so these really are education by long distance. I received a letter from the company saying that they had a very wide distribution network – I guess it is just one more way of teaching.

MCBROOM: Then you starred in some videocassettes: "*Working with Children,*" "*Communicating with Children*" and "*The Separation Experience,*" Los Angeles County Welfare Department made these videos at your home?

MILNER: We made four movies about 40 – 60 minutes in length, each on film. These films were eventually transferred to videotape for training purposes. They were financed by a national grant given to the Los Angeles County Welfare Department. Two of the films were completed in my home, one was filmed in one of the parks here and another was done at one of the children's institutions. I think they were done about four years ago in 1984. They were very slow in completing the post-production process and so I wonder if they have ever been used.

MCBROOM: Your filmmaking career goes back a long way. The *School Social Worker* was a milepost.

MILNER: In the 1950s, I was speaking in the auditorium of one of the Pasadena schools about school social work and in the audience were two women who I did not know at the time. They came to speak with me after my presentation and later on they became good friends of mine.

MCBROOM: Was that Louise and Peggy?

MILNER: Yes, one was Louise Clevinger, a retired social worker, and the other was her friend, Mrs. Peggy [Weyerhauser] Driscoll. Miss Clevinger had been interested in school social work and had interested her friend in school social work also. They came up to me after the presentation with the idea that if we made a movie about school social work, that it might be a good educational tool. I said that I was interested in their idea. They asked me if I would ask the School of Cinema what it might cost to make an hour-long film. I did this immediately and then called to tell them that it would be approximately \$35,000 to make such a film.

A day or two later I was invited to dinner at Mrs. Driscoll's. When I got to her home the butler brought over a tray with an envelope on it, which I then opened: inside the envelope was a check for \$35,000. I then set out to make the film and employed a professional movie writer, Melvin Wald, and a professional movie director. I then formed committees to decide what this movie might eventually turn out to be. Later I regretted having formed the committees, because there were so many differences due to the fact that they each wanted to put everything into an hour-long movie. I concluded at the end that a movie should be the idea of the one person who was producing it. We did come out however, with a movie which I thought was pretty good and it did show the variety of things that school social workers do. The movie got wide distribution as a training film throughout the country. As a result of this, Mrs. Driscoll maintained an interest in the school and provided scholarships for many years to students who wanted

to become school social workers. Even after she moved from Pasadena to New Mexico, she continued the scholarship program; she later gave \$100,000 towards the establishment of a chair in my name. It was an interesting experience to have had this contact.

MCBROOM: You later went on to become a consultant to commercial films as well?

MILNER: Yes, I came to know Melvin Wald in the making of the training film and so he called on me several times as a consultant on movies he was writing - one in particular was a film that Ida Lupino was producing. I was asked to write the dialogue for the leading man who was to be a social worker. The film dealt with a subject, which at that time was very questionable. The Hayes Office really worried about films of this kind. It was about a young woman, an office worker who works in the factory district and is raped; the movie deals with the psychological and social problems that then ensue. The character eventually leaves the community and seeks out the help of a social worker. When the producers asked for final approval of the script, it was found out that the Hayes Office disapproved of the script. They felt that a social worker should not be playing this role; they did not feel that a social worker should be dealing with rape or the consequences of rape; instead it should be a minister or religious person. As a result they had to compromise, so the producers found a former naval officer who was an ordained minister and gave him the leading role.

MCBROOM: Did his character use your words?

MILNER: He used my words for the most part. He never wore a clerical collar in the movie, supposedly he was just discharged out of the Navy. He was an attractive young man with whom the girls fell in love. I mention this because it gives us some idea of the attitudes held about social workers in the 1950s. These were really not believed to be acceptable problems for social work to deal with - at least in the minds of the Hayes Office.

MCBROOM: No wonder they were called czars.

MILNER: Yes, it was no wonder they were called czars.

MCBROOM: You have done a great many program studies and evaluations. What about what you did for the Jewish Big Brothers?

MILNER: Just after I was out of the Army and teaching at USC, I was asked to do a study of the Jewish Big Brothers organization. The program was headed by Milton Goldberg for many years – I believe he was the administrator of an agency longer than anyone else I ever knew, in fact he just retired just a year or two ago. At that time he was not a trained social worker; he had been with the Boy Scouts at one time. The Board of Directors thought that their program should be extended to offer other kinds of services; this study then was to discover what those other services might be. What they had been doing was largely the classic Big Brother work of matching boys to big brothers. They also operated a camp at the edge of Los Angeles where they took non-Jewish youngsters, many of whom were handicapped. It was a very well run camp. Mr. Goldberg was very competent at running that camp.

The program that I suggested after the study was made was that they employ social workers and do family work and direct work with children. They immediately put this into effect and employed a social worker to direct the program. It ultimately became one of our better child welfare programs in California.

MCBROOM: Wasn't Milton kind of scared of you in the beginning?

MILNER: Yes, Mr. Goldberg was very nervous in the beginning that I might not approve of what had been done; actually I respected a lot of what they had done. Nevertheless, he stayed hovering over my shoulder, wanting to read the report all along the way.

MCBROOM: You also did a great deal of agency consultation in Hawaii, I think?

MILNER: I was invited to come over during the Christmas holidays to do a research study on what was termed a citizenship training program over on the Big Island. A businessman and a judge to deal with delinquent youngsters or those who they thought might become juvenile delinquents had conceived this program. The target group consisted of poor Hawaiian kids who were not getting along in school; instead they were getting into troubles of different kinds. The program was headed by a man named Elroy Rosario who later became a state senator for Hawaii. It was quite an innovative and I thought, a creative program in which these kids were given some educational courses; but largely it was an activity program through which they did many things. As an example, they would take these kids to dinner in the better restaurants in the area introducing them to a side of society that the kids had never known. Mr. Rosario was able to establish strong and healthy relationships with these kids. I thought that it was a worthwhile program.

The purpose of the study then was to evaluate the program because the group who sponsored it hoped it would become a statewide program. Unfortunately the program was never accepted due to opposition from the public welfare staff who saw this private program as competitive with their own in some ways. I felt, however, that it was a program which other communities could have modeled their own initiatives after. Although the program employed no social workers, per se, it employed people whom cared about the kids and that was the most important thing.

MCBROOM: You learned a great deal about the Hawaiian culture as well didn't you?

MILNER: Yes, because in the process of completing the study I was taken back to some of the more remote parts of the island where life was still relatively primitive as compared to the more superficial level which the tourists typically see – it was so different. I would interview Hawaiian families, the parents and relatives of the delinquent kids and found that I generally received a very warm reception. Often when I would leave after the interviews, a member of the family would come running in with a whole sack of pineapples or bananas or something to eat – they were just overly

generous. These were essentially families living at poverty level, but you sensed a very warm feeling. At that time delinquency was not a serious problem in Hawaii, since then it has become very serious.

MCBROOM: Why?

MILNER: I think the affluence that has occurred in those islands - the rich tourist trade has been a factor.

MCBROOM: There are no primitive places left on the islands anymore.

MILNER: There are very few certainly, I understand there are still small pockets on the Big Island and some of the outlying islands. Society has changed and delinquency has grown along with these changes.

MCBROOM: What about your consultations in Phoenix?

MILNER: In the 1950s I was asked to participate in a study of social services in the city of Phoenix. The study was to be headed by Dr. Wayne Macmillen from the University of Chicago; prior to the study I had not met him. We spent a number of days gathered together in Arizona, including one or two others also from Los Angeles: a public health doctor and a staff member from Family Services. My part of the study was to examine the child welfare programs and to make recommendations for change. Upon completion, the study was written up and eventually put into effect in the city of Phoenix.

I had some interesting experiences while completing my portion of the study. For example, one place I had to go was a correctional program for adolescent girls. It was a Catholic institution located several miles outside of Phoenix.

MCBROOM: This was the House of the Good Shepherd?

MILNER: Yes, this was the Convent of the Good Shepherd. I went out by taxi, and I was dropped off in front of the large front gates. I then proceeded to ring the bell and a nun eventually came out, whereupon she looked at me through a little door within the main door.