

Interview with John Milner

This interview was conducted by Elizabeth McBroom on February 15, 1988
Subject: Ryther Child Care Center and the Children's Protective Society (1930s – 40s)

MILNER: Ryther was the name of an institution in Seattle that originally was an orphanage. It was run by a woman named "Mother Ryther", who ran this orphanage for many, many years. She often raised money by literally going out and beating a drum on the streetcorners of Seattle and getting donations from every source possible. The place was everything in addition to being an orphanage - anybody who was 'straying' around would be taken in, including babies left on the porch. The professional community in Seattle was embarrassed and longed for the day when Mother Ryther would give up and they, the professional community, could close the agency. Although the professionals believed the standards of the agency were bad, Mother Ryther was very popular in the larger community.

After Mother Ryther died, the agency was closed and the Board decided that they would make it a different kind of social agency. They had heard of a woman who was a licensing agent in Omaha, named Lillian Johnson, who had some new ideas about establishing a prototype for a residential treatment center serving emotionally disturbed children. This new agency was to be one of the first of its' kind in America. The Board convinced Lillian Johnson to come and establish a new child care center in the building, formerly the Ryther Orphanage. To honor the memory of Mother Ryther, the Board decided to retain her name. Incidentally, most of the kids who lived there always speculated that Mother Ryther's ghost was in the attic.

MCBROOM: How did you get to Ryther?

MILNER: I had come to Seattle on a FERA stipend from the Department of Public Welfare in Idaho. I was to spend a year in social work training at the University of Washington, where Arlien Johnson was the dean. After I had been at school for a short time I heard about Ryther and what an innovative program it was; I decided to visit it and see for myself what it was like.

After calling for an appointment, I went over one afternoon. When I came into the office I saw three or four other young men waiting and so I also waited to see the director, Lillian Johnson. She called me in and I found her to be an interesting, if rather eccentric woman, who was seated behind her desk with her shoes off and her feet on the lower drawer. She began by asking me very personal questions and after about three or four minutes I asked her, "Miss Johnson, is it necessary for me to answer all these questions just to visit Ryther and see what you are doing?" She said, "Don't you want a job?" I said "No, I just came to see the agency, I am a student." She replied, "We are looking for a boys' supervisor and I thought this is what you were applying for." I responded, "No, I was not." She said, "Well, you can have the position if you want it." I took the job on the spot.

MCBROOM: You mentioned that it was an innovative program; can you talk about what innovations were there at the time?

MILNER: I think the unique thing about it was that it was a small institutional program for approximately 20 children between the ages of 6 – 18, both boys and girls. In addition to the institution, there was also a foster home program for up to as many as 120 children. The idea was that children who were emotionally disturbed would stay in the center until it was possible for them to live outside of an institution. Ryther essentially moved away from the pattern, which was then common in America - where children were identified and then raised in an institution. By contrast, the Ryther Child Care Center gave them a chance for family life once they were under 'control' in a way that they could function within a family.

The therapeutic method within the institution I thought was unique - there was a great personalization of the therapeutic relationship between all staff and the youngsters. All staff participated in every aspect of the agency; for example, these youngsters did not find it unusual to see the so-called therapist doing manual things such as helping put back the toilet when some kid yanked it out of the floor. No one was in a position of relative superiority to anyone else in the agency. I rather respected this. I think the fact that it was a social service treatment agency, rather than a psychiatry-oriented agency, made it unique because, for the most part, the treatment centers that had been established were quite large and almost always headed by a psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst, or sometimes by a psychologist. This was social work's [unique] contribution to this particular field.

MCBROOM: We all know you as a man who has enormous empathy with children. Children relate to you, seek you out and confide in you. Can you say anything about how your Ryther experience contributed to this quality in you?

MILNER: If I have that quality, it comes partially from experience in the state of Idaho, but largely it comes from my experience at Ryther during the one year that I served there while I was a student. Essentially I lived with the kids, although I did not sleep there. I probably should have because I was there for very long hours while still attending school full-time. This gave me a chance to see the children around the clock: in the morning when they got up; at meals; and at bedtime. I not only saw them, but I also participated in activities with kids who were very emotionally disturbed and problematic youngsters. Basically, I felt that I learned an awful lot about human behavior generally, and childhood behavior particularly, from being there and participating in this fashion.

MCBROOM: You contributed a great deal to the way people attend to some of the practical details of a child's life, such as their eating and dressing habits, as well as their holiday celebrations. Was your Ryther experience relevant to this?

MILNER: Yes, very much so. For example, some of the agency policies relate to that question of the staff eating with the children. We did not eat separately; additionally, the staff were always present when the kids were getting up for school or went to bed. Staff really lived with them as if they were parents of those children. I thought this

personalization of the therapeutic relationship was very important. These daily experiences are really the foundation for all children: the experience of being loved, being cared for, and being able to communicate with adults.

It was not a structured situation in which a child just came for an interview. What we did have were regular sessions when children had scheduled interviews, but also the offices of the social workers and the psychologists were always open to the children. This was deliberately done so that the children could come in a spontaneous way and deal with emergencies or critical things in their life rather than waiting for their particular interview hour.

MCBROOM: Your teaching has been very much concerned with children and child welfare; how did your Ryther experience enter into your teaching?

MILNER: I have a feeling that the reason for this is Arlien Johnson, who observed my work at Ryther. It was really not my intention to teach or particularly to teach about child welfare. At that time I was more interested in psychiatric social work, which I believe is part of child welfare. When I came to USC, Rose Green, who was the head of the psychiatric social work specialization, and Arlien insisted that I go into child welfare. Certainly I had this experience at Ryther to rely upon in discussing theory and using practical application and experience to the theoretical things that I was teaching.

I think the thing that I learned - when I returned to Ryther three years later to become the Associate Director - from Lillian Johnson was the ability to interpret case studies to lay people as well as to other professional people. I learned to interpret them in such a way so as to make them come alive and make theory seem practical. Lillian Johnson was a master of this and it was one of the things that made it possible for her to have the kind of moral and financial support that she got from the community. In many ways, I think I would consider her my teacher in this.

MCBROOM: You returned then to Ryther in an executive capacity?

MILNER: Yes. When I left after the first year of being a 'housefather' or whatever the title was at the time, Miss Johnson asked if I would return when I finished my obligation in Idaho. I knew that when I went back to Idaho I would be put into the child welfare program, the public program that related to some of the experience that I had at Ryther. I agreed that I might return if a paid position was open in the agency. However, I did not return within a year; instead I followed Arlien Johnson's advice to complete my master's degree at the New York School of Social Work due to my interest in psychiatric social work. At the time, New York was one of two or three universities considered to be oriented in that direction. So I went to New York and, upon graduation, Lillian Johnson offered me the job of Associate Director at Ryther - so I returned.

I had a different role in the agency, although much of what I did was not too different from what I had done as a houseparent.

MCBROOM: You had a different title, but the same job content?

MILNER: I had a different title with some of the same job content, but with a lot of additional administrative responsibilities. I learned how to conduct board meetings and how to interpret case studies to Board members in a way that kept them involved and interested.

I also learned an awful lot about community organization because the agency was dependent on support from the community. At the time, Seattle had a remarkably good plan for money raising whereby staff members within their respective agencies had to participate in the money-raising process. You were required to go out and make speeches to businesses and industries, as well as organize committee meetings; all of which was in addition to your regular job at any social agency. I felt this built respect on the part of the staff of the agencies - a respect for the way in which communities support their services. I have found this lacking in other places where I have lived and worked.

MCBROOM: Did you think the staff was also visible to the business community so that businesses in turn understood and respected the staff?

MILNER: That's right, staff really became known in the community. This process made for some very valuable relationships between staff and various people within the

community, some of whom were leaders in the community and very important people. I think these types of relationships can break down barriers that often exist between people who have position and money, and social workers in general. It provides a comfortable feeling with one another, which I think is helpful in later years.

MCBROOM: This sounds like a very advanced plan; do you think some of that has been lost in the present scene?

MILNER: I am not familiar with what is happening in Seattle at present. At the time it was a community chest program and I think there were some innovative people heading it. I think these kinds of programs vary a lot, dependent upon the type of leadership they get, but I would hope that it is continuing. Seattle was not quite a huge city, nor was it a small town; it had a unique quality about it – partly a hometown quality and partly a sophisticated city. Maybe it is possible to have a community chest in that type of city where it might not be in a large metropolitan area like Los Angeles or New York.

MCBROOM: You described such an innovative program at Ryther; do you think it has influenced the child welfare field or has some of that been lost in the intervening years?

MILNER: I think it certainly has influenced residential treatment programs in America. Many more have since opened up and some have tried to follow the Ryther plan. Interestingly, shortly after Ryther was established that book from Vienna came out. The book was August Aichhorn's, *Wayward Youth: A Psychoanalytic Study of Delinquent*

Children, regarding an institution that he had established that really was in many ways similar to Ryther. However, the kids had rioted in that institution and tore down the buildings so it was closed, but some of the philosophy was quite similar to Ryther's. I think between that book and Ryther's experience, others started to adapt some of the practices.

Interestingly, a number of leaders in the child welfare field in this country came out of Ryther. Joseph Reed became the director of the Child Welfare League of America; he had been a houseparent at the time I was the Associate Director of Ryther. Ryther staff have also headed three of California's children's institutions. James Lamb after leaving Ryther went on to become the Director of Corrections for the state of Oregon and made a unique contribution. A number of other leaders, including two or three in Florida, also came out of Ryther.

Additionally, Ryther was written up nationally. There was a long article in Life magazine with pictures, which brought an awful lot of interest. As a result, people came from all over the country to observe the Center. Some even came from abroad to see what was happening in the agency. The United State Children's Bureau maintained a special interest; they used to frequently send their representatives. The agency was also active in the Child Welfare League of America.

Lillian Johnson believed very much in standard setting and often some of the things she did, did not fit the standards and she would try to justify this. She did, however, believe in standard setting and respected it.

MCBROOM: John, what do you think have been the major developments in the children's treatment field since your Ryther days?

MILNER: I think the primary development is respect for the family of a child that has been placed. The first part of this respect is the work with the family to see if placement can be avoided and, instead, have something worked out within the family unit itself. If the child is placed, however, then keeping the family active in the life of the child while s/he is in placement. I think Ryther neglected to do these things at the time while I was there. I understand that since then they have done much more to work with the parents, but then it was kind of universally true.

It was even true in child guidance clinics, where quite often the primary patient was considered to be the child, and work with the family was considered incidental. For example, most child guidance clinics of the time, and even later, would not allow a child to be seen by a social worker, instead they were seen by a psychiatrist. If any work was to be done with the family, then a social worker might be called upon to do it. I think this is probably the major contribution.

The unfortunate thing is that agencies have tended to become large. Economically it has apparently paid off, particularly in the public programs which have become so large that it is almost useless to attempt to do quality work with the children. However, there are some very good small institutions for children including some that have combined foster home care in relation to the institution. This is one of the contributions that Ryther made, that is, not to see the institution as a dead-end stop.

As to the center itself, Ryther became a place where the child could come back if he did not make it in a foster home. This was done so that the child was not put off and handed from one type of program to another and one worker to another. Also, the same workers would follow through with a child after completing their placement at Ryther's. While at the Center, the child would come to know one of the staff members at Ryther, then that same staff member would see them through their foster home care or visit them after they returned to their biological homes if this were possible. I think this is something very neglected in the field, the lack of follow-up with children and somebody staying with them consistently through their whole growing experience.

MCBROOM: Did this program attract particularly skilled and committed people who stayed at Ryther for quite long periods of time?

MILNER: Yes, I thought so. In a way, there was a kind of a cult-like aspect about the place. When I was there everybody was so committed to the uniqueness of the place and the contribution they felt that it was making. It developed into a loyal family of

professional and non-professionals, many of whom wanted to stay but the opportunities were limited because it was a small program. As a result they would not opt to stay for a long time. Usually they remained for an experience of two or three years and then the staff would move on.

Interestingly, Lillian Johnson was always angry whenever anyone left; it was as though she was being abandoned. For a long time you were not her friend when you left the agency and then it took a little time to make up with her afterward. She really wanted to develop a following that was loyal to her.

Incidentally, I feel that this personal aspect of leadership is probably necessary in any creative program; it cannot be a committee starting a program. There has to be somebody who has an ideal and is creative about operationalizing it. This is true of Bettelheim's program; it was certainly true of Aichhorn's program or any of the outstanding treatment programs for children: they have been a one-person ideal. Not that other programs do not build on an original ideal or use their staff to enhance what they believe or test what they believe; rather, I think it is this type of leadership that really succeeds. Unfortunately, however, committees run many institutions.

MCBROOM: The idea that children have access to enough continuing staff so that they maintain a pretty strong, continuous relationship with the Center is crucial to the child's eventual success.

MILNER: Yes, I think this was true; however, some of the staff did stay a very long time. For example, Lillian Burns, a psychologist on staff who was very talented in working with adolescent girls, lived out her whole professional life at Ryther Center and I am sure she made a major contribution to the Center. Tommy Gallagher, who was a houseparent at the time I was Associate Director, eventually took over my position and also fell in love with Lillian Johnson, which created some problems within the agency. He lived out his career at Ryther, so there was always a nucleus of staff who were constant.

MCBROOM: You cared for some really seriously disturbed children; would you talk about some of those kids?

MILNER: At the time I thought they were uniquely disturbed; however, by today's standards in 1988 I am not so sure. There has been quite a change between 1936 and 1988 as regards the general behavior of youngsters, although we really did have some extremely disturbed children.

I know of one case of a young adolescent - I believe he was 14 or 15 at the time we took him in. His mother had been a prostitute in Alaska and his father had been a businessman who had been in Alaska for a period of time. The child was conceived and the father simply disappeared from the scene. The mother had the boy and raised him in a house of prostitution in Alaska. The boy had become seriously delinquent; he was half-Irish, half-Chinese, and he had grown up to become a master burglar. At the

time he was referred to us he had a set of keys that apparently could get him into any building, house, or automobile in the country. He had run away from Alaska and come to Seattle and was picked up by the police and subsequently referred to us. He was very difficult to relate to in the beginning. He was suspicious of any adult approach to him; however, little by little, when we accepted some of his misbehaviors and recognized some of his strengths and good behavior, he started to relate to some of the staff. The story is that we located his father which was one of the conditions the boy said was necessary for him to 'reform' himself. The father was a very successful businessman in Tacoma, Washington; who had married and was raising a family. We approached the father with due consideration for his present status and told him that Joel was with us. The father was a responsible man who admitted to having lived with the boy's mother for a while, but he did not know that he had conceived Joel. He said that he would take financial responsibility for Joel, but he did not want his present wife or his children to know about him. He would see Joel on a regular basis, which he started to do.

This really changed the relationship with this kid tremendously; he came to respect staff for following through on something that was important to him. Little by little, he came to be the kid who belonged to Ryther: we became more his family than anyone else did. He would return to Ryther for Christmas parties and became helpful in many ways. The last report I had on Joel was that he was in a business of some kind in Seattle.

MCBROOM: The story of Joel suggests that there were some kids at Ryther that in another context would be labeled as 'hopeless' and in essence discarded, thus preventing them from going on to have a good life.

MILNER: Yes. For example, we had an adolescent girl who had been prostituted by her mother to a policeman ever since the girl was six years old. This was the way the mother had been able to finance the raising of her children – what the policeman had paid her for the relationship with this daughter. There were four other children in the family; all of them were 'upset' kids, but this girl had become quite suicidal. We brought in three of the kids to Ryther; the other one was over age. I thought Lillian Burns did a great job with this girl; she seemed to gain a lot of self-respect while at Ryther. She attended school and began to see some new opportunities in her life that she could not visualize before her entry into the program.

There were a whole variety of abused and neglected children in the Ryther Center at any given time.

MCBROOM: Ryther also established a summer camp up on the Sound; can you talk about that?

MILNER: Yes, but it was not on the Sound; that was a separate program. We did have a summer camp that was near Toulon Falls. It was simply a rustic cabin - if a child was too disturbed, then the child would go off with two staff members – a man and wife - and

spend some time there. It was used largely to get the kids away from the larger group, to give them enough time and space to get control of their own emotions and then bring them back into the group.

Incidentally, it was largely young volunteers who built the camp; they were young businessmen who would use their Sundays to clear brush and build the cabin. It was a very useful location for us because it was within reasonable distance of Seattle and yet you felt like you were a long ways away.

I had one sad experience while I worked at Ryther that relates to the camp. I had taken my vacation and come to southern California; I went to La Jolla. I found that one of the boys with whom I was working, a young teenager, had followed me to California. He was a psychotic youngster from a wealthy family in Tacoma. He had run away from Ryther, gone to his home, taken his father's gun, and held it on his adoptive mother. He then took the family car, drove to a nearby town and deserted the car there. He subsequently hitchhiked to California to look for me.

I was notified that the police in Los Angeles had picked up the boy and [that] he was being cared for at the Catholic Boys Club where Joe Thiessen was director at that time. I went to see the youngster in preparation for driving him back to Seattle. I found that he was very sick mentally. He was wearing an old coat that a janitor had given him at Ryther; he was fond of the janitor. Many of the kids at Ryther could relate to someone who had a lesser position in the agency than they did. The janitor had given him this

coat and he wore it with a safety pin, pinned up around his chin. He also refused to take a bath although he was not disoriented or paranoid; rather, he was just withdrawn. I drove him back to Seattle, which was not a pleasant trip to take with that youngster in his current state. He seemed not to respond in the agency, so we sent him up to camp with a very capable, young couple who later became quite prominent in child welfare in Washington D.C. While he was at camp he drowned, and I was called to help find his body. We found it at the bottom of a river and I had to stay with the body while the couple went for the coroner. We always felt that it was a suicide. I must say that it is a serious blow for anyone who works with children to have this happen to them; they feel a sense of responsibility [for the suicide], which I did.

I also had to deal with the adoptive parents who seemed indifferent to his death; they did not seem to care. I called them and they said that they could not come that day because the boy who committed suicide had a sister whose birthday it was and for whom they were having a party; therefore they could not come. I saw them about two days later; they seemed very cold and indifferent to the experience. These are the kinds of things you deal with because this is real life in institutions.

MCBROOM: You have bittersweet memories of the camp then?

MILNER: Yes.

MCBROOM: It sounds as if this agency was the type that the whole community got involved with and made a contribution to.

MILNER: Yes, what we found was that there was a group of young men who were not yet earning the kind of money to make large donations to an agency, but they would give their time. They were kind of the junior businessmen in the community. They loved the outings that they took; they drank Washington beer while they worked – it was a lark to them. Interestingly, some of them got interested in our kids; some became foster parents, some just visited the agency and made special efforts to help. It was a way of recruiting lay interest in the agency.

MCBROOM: You also are known for your contributions to training volunteers. Would you say you got your start at Ryther?

MILNER: I think it started in my Idaho years, but I certainly followed through at Ryther. We used the Junior League as volunteers, training some of them to be the initial 'finders' of foster homes; I must say they were excellent. We used other volunteers to do special things for the agency, like the ones who built the camp or women who did such mundane things as darning socks, sewing clothes or decorating – that type of thing. We always had an ample number of volunteers to participate in our Christmas programs or to help us with getting ready for Christmas, which was a big event at Ryther, so I used to meet with volunteer groups quite often. The Board of Directors, of course, were volunteers; this was also a valuable experience.

MCBROOM: Tell me a little about Christmas at Ryther. How did you celebrate the holidays?

MILNER: Christmas at Ryther was a unique program; I have been asked to describe it in detail in California and in many other states. We had a philosophy that it was as important for a child to learn to give as well as to receive. We believed that the real satisfaction at Christmas was to learn from this kind of reciprocal experience.

We set up a store in the agency and gave out scrip to the youngsters which could be redeemed there, and the volunteers would provide many gifts for the store. It was a well-stocked store for which we also provided considerable ribbons and wrappings. We would open the store a week before Christmas and every night there was a period when the store was open when the kids would come and 'buy'. What we found was that the experience was not only a satisfying one, but that it was also important diagnostically. We discovered the patterns of ambivalence of the children towards giving to various people; their parents, their siblings, staff, or other kids. What would happen is that one night they would buy a gift for a person; then they would get angry and the next night they would return the gift, tear the wrapping, or sometimes destroy the gift. Some of them we found were highly sensitive to the person for whom they bought the gift; they were really thoughtful and caring. It gave us clues often to the families that we felt would be most ready to accept children back in their own homes because we saw

something in this experience that maybe did not come out in other experiences that we were having with the children.

On Christmas Eve there was a general Christmas tree under which all children had gifts; the Junior League volunteers purchased these gifts. We felt that it was important that all kids get exactly the gift that they wanted, so we would request from any kind of 'giver', a special gift for each child. These gifts would come in beautifully wrapped. Lillian Johnson was always kind of uneasy about gifts that came in which were already wrapped because she did not quite trust others who might somehow hurt our children.

I remember one Christmas we had an unusually large number of beautifully wrapped gifts brought in. She decided that this year we would not unwrap them to check them out and wrap them up again. However, she got worried in the night that there might be something in there: she always seemed to have hunches about these things. She called me in the night and one other staff member. We went over to Ryther and unwrapped every package and then re-wrapped them in the poor way that I could. When we were about halfway through we opened a package for one of our teenage girls; as a matter of fact this was the girl who had been prostituted. Inside the package were dirty underclothes - worn out underwear that had been beautifully wrapped. This girl had requested lingerie that was popular with her age group at the time.

Now here we were in the middle of the night; what were we to do to get lingerie for a teenage girl in Seattle? The only thing to do was to call one of our board members who

was also the head of a big department store and get him out of bed; he said he would be down early in the morning. We met him and got the gift so it was wrapped in time for this girl to have it on Christmas morning.

We felt that sentimentality had an important place in the lives of children; many of them had very little experience with any kind of happy sentiment. I must say that Christmas often was a sad time. We saw some children completely ignored by any one who was related to them at Christmas time. It was a sad time for many, but it was also an important experience.

MCBROOM: The children took some happy Christmas experiences away from Ryther Center?

MILNER: I am sure of it, I think the staff also took happy experiences away, I never forgot Christmas; each year it renewed the holiday spirit in me.

MCBROOM: How many Christmas' were you at Ryther Child Care Center?

MILNER: Probably it was a total of three.

MCBROOM: What years were you actually at Ryther?

MILNER: When I came as a houseparent; it was 1936 and I came back in 1938. I stayed at Ryther until I came to San Francisco.

MCBROOM: What tempted you away from Ryther?

MILNER: There were a number of things. One thing was I never liked the weather in Seattle. I dislike the rain and the darkness of winter there. Another thing was that I felt that I had gained from the experience most of what I had wanted to have. Thirdly, Lillian Johnson was not easy to work with, although I always respected her knowledge about children and the way she shared it. I just felt that it was time for me to move on.

MCBROOM: What attracted you then to San Francisco?

MILNER: I really liked the city of San Francisco and I had the feeling that I would be drafted into World War II. The war was underway at the time that I left Seattle and I felt that if I was going to be drafted eventually; I wanted to enjoy my life in the interim period for a while.

MCBROOM: How long did you live and work in San Francisco?

MILNER: I believe it was 9 months. I took the job as Casework Director at the Children's Protective Society there, with the understanding that I might be drafted any day. A wonderful woman named Sophia Hardy was the executive director of the

Children's Protective Society of San Francisco. She told me that I could be employed, whether for a week or 20 years; she had previously experienced great difficulty with the casework director. She reported that this woman had almost destroyed a part of the program. She wanted to give me authority to make any changes within the agency that I could recommend to her. Specifically, she wanted me to observe what was going on and see where some changes could be brought about.

MCBROOM: What were some of the changes that you brought about in the agency?

MILNER: I observed the agency for a few days and, interestingly, what I found almost immediately was that the most damaging person there was the secretary who was doing the intake. She was a woman who had worked a long time in the agency and although no one credited her with doing good work, there was a kind of loyalty to her because she had been there for so long. This woman really turned people off when they came to the agency; additionally, she was really never well liked by most of the staff within the agency. My first recommendation was to dismiss this secretary.

Although Sophia said that it would be difficult to do, she went ahead and did it.

Subsequently, we noticed a tremendous change for the better in the agency.

There was also a supervisor who wanted to control everything. She wanted everything reported to her and then she would grant either her approval or disapproval.

What I also discovered were some unique talents among the staff, in that some were ideally suited for working with particular ages of children or with specific problems of children. Thus, they might do better if they specialized, rather than work generally with neglected and abused children. We started to see some of the staff just bloom with these kinds of opportunities.

All the time I was there, I anticipated leaving because of the draft, although I was 29 years old. I was not sure if I would be drafted because of my older age – I should not have been, but I knew it was coming because I was in good health. I kept in my mind the names of persons who might replace me when I left so that there might be some continuity. One person I had in mind was Bill Wilson, whose wife had worked with me previously at Ryther. At the time, he was working in Arizona but he wanted to live in San Francisco. When I was drafted, he was hired on my recommendation; he was to remain the director of the agency until it was closed right after World War II.

MCBROOM: What led to the agency closing?

MILNER: A woman named Irene Liggett was brought in from the East Coast to study children's services in San Francisco. It was her recommendation that the Children's Protective Society be closed and that its' functions be taken over by some other agencies. It was probably an unfortunate move because eventually almost all protective work with children would disappear in California until about the 1960s, when there was

a new interest developed in it - although public welfare [continued to] put an emphasis on protective work.

This general trend was true even in Los Angeles. At one time the only protective agency for children was the Los Angeles Children's Bureau and it had dropped its protective function. There was no community caring except by the police and some public officials.

The Children's Protective Society was essentially psychoanalytically oriented and Irene Liggett did not support the philosophy of the agency. Sophia, for her part, did not like Irene Liggett - so the politics closed it. I heard many regrets expressed from the community afterwards, particularly from Board members, that [the agency] was closed.

MCBROOM: That was a personal explanation for the closure, do you have any other kind of explanation for the cycle of people dropping out of sight?

MILNER: I suppose that it is similar to what clothing styles one chooses to wear in the 1920s or the 1930s - there is a new focal point of interest. It does not mean that there is an abandonment of [the ideals associated with] protective work, it just means the emphasis shifts . . .

MCBROOM: . . . and the money goes.

MILNER: Right. Now we are experiencing new heights of interest in 1988, in work with children and their families where there is abuse and neglect. We are seeing more abuse and/or neglect than has ever been known or at least ever been reported. But, this current interest will go too; there will be a new shift and focus of work eventually. When I first came to Los Angeles, the major emphasis of any social work conference was the unmarried mother. I got so sick of hearing about unmarried mothers and the new philosophy of sexual proclivity that had changed with freedom from past sexual standards. It seemed to me that almost every paper that was written and presented was about unmarried mothers; some [social] workers became fanatical about it.

MCBROOM: Regarding this prediction then, the drop off in interest regarding protective services: do you think that was because the problem of abuse was solved?

MILNER: I think these problems are so large and so extensive that they do not get solved: instead they get helped. There are solutions for some people who have the problem but social problems are enormous and I think the focus of interest jumps from one area to another. It would be interesting to study the literature and determine where the focus has been at different points in time.

For example, when I first came into social work, the emphasis was on working with people who had tuberculosis (TB). However, there was really a 'solution' because the doctors managed to solve the problem of TB; now there has been a reoccurrence of TB,

so there might be a new interest for social workers focusing here. Life seems to run in cycles.

MCBROOM: In retrospect it looks to you like big cycles of interest and attention, which then drop out of sight and something else resurfaces.

MILNER: Yes, that 's right.

MCBROOM: Do you think in these cycles that there are improvements in social work expertise?

MILNER: Yes, I think we build on our knowledge and I think we develop our art of working with some of these situations. On the other hand, I think sometimes our way of organizing to solve these situations is not very helpful. We have become too scientific in our approach, which is not as effective as some practical work.

MCBROOM: Do you think we are into that now, a kind of 'over-science'?

MILNER: I think so; I never felt that social work could be a pure science of any kind. I always thought of it essentially as an art. Not that we should not have intellectual knowledge and theories developed, and concepts for working and so forth, but I see a struggle with what some workers feel are very scientific ways of approaching and working. Some methods have met with success and some have not.

MCBROOM: Do you think that there has been some losing sight of the client in all of this?

MILNER: Yes, I think right now we are in a somewhat selfish period as we have generally moved more into private practice. It would appear that we almost want to follow union rules and working as timewise and so forth. I think that there has been some loss of what I feel is the spirit of social work. Perhaps we have tended to overeducate for social work: I have never felt that a Master's degree should be two years. It should have been a one-year program of study. Also, I think the doctoral program is far too long. I could go on.

MCBROOM: Speaking of private practice, I know that you have seen some of your good and gifted students go into private practice and be very successful at it. Do you have any feelings about that?

MILNER: In many ways I have been glad to see social work extend to serve the whole range of people in our country, our society. However, I hate to see it done at the price of abandoning what was fundamentally our job: working with the poor and the disinherited people. I think many of our graduates would not think of working in a public welfare agency any more or working in an agency that does not serve many of the middle or upper class groups of people because their own status is important. The graduates appear to feel abused if they are not serving people whom they respect.

MCBROOM: They feel as if they derive their status from the status of the people whom they serve?

MILNER: That is right.