

Robert Winston Roberts
Interviewed by Elizabeth McBroom
In the Home of Dr. McBroom
July 25, 1993

Robert Winston Roberts obtained his doctorate at the Columbia School of Social Work, where he taught before joining the faculty of the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. It was here that he wrote his first book, comparing theories of social casework, later followed by others also well received, on comparative theories in group work and in community work. He became part of the faculty of the USC School of Social Work, first establishing an undergraduate social work program (which was terminated in five years), then teaching before becoming Associate Dean of the School. He later became Dean of the School, for a period of nine years. On leaves during and following the deanship, he taught and did research in Australia and in Hong Kong. This interview describes the circumstances that led him into social work and then into social work education. It shows clearly his feelings about, and analytic approach to, all the roles in which he served, noting the trends in social work education during those years. The administrative tasks that confronted him during his deanship are presented.

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MCBROOM: Will you tell us about your career in social work and, especially, in California?

ROBERTS: I flirted with the idea of social work throughout my undergraduate career.

MCBROOM: Which was at?

ROBERTS: San Francisco State College, from 1954 to 1957.

MCBROOM: And I think you were coming off a term of duty in Korea.

ROBERTS: I had spent four years in the Air Force, and before I went into the service, I had never really thought about a profession simply because there was no education opportunity. I grew up in Pittsburgh in 1932 (the depression) and there were social workers in and out of my life as a child, public assistance workers. I used to go to Kingsley House in East Liberty.

MCBROOM: Do you remember any social workers that were like a role model to you?

ROBERTS: I remember one was a black woman. There was a period of years when my parents' marriage terminated: my mother had four children, the youngest sister being six months old, and it was the 1930s. We were on ANC, I think it was called then, now AFDC. I started working when I was eight years old, after school. I know it was such a big idea of mine to get off relief, for even then there was a stigma attached. I was about 13 when I finally was earning enough money to kind of pay my own way. There was a black social worker--they didn't come around very often. I don't know if she was trained or untrained, but she was just a wonderfully empathetic type of person. She really understood that it was important for me. I remember her reassuring presence. Then later, I think I was about 14 or 15, I used to go to summer camp.

Two summers. There was a young woman there by the name of Sue Hare--she was a student at Smith--and this was summer employment for her; she lived in Pittsburgh. I don't know if it was partly an adolescent crush, but she really was the one who sort of educated me about the social work profession. A friend and I both were there, I was younger; my rheumatic fever had just gone by at the age of 13 or 14. This worker would come home from school for Christmas or some holiday and would invite us over to her house, and that was it.

I was always very interested in liberal politics, social movements, social action. I hadn't thought about college because it seemed unlikely for me. In military service, I always was stationed where all my superiors were officers in the field or offices. Some of them I was impressed with, and some of them I was not impressed with. I decided that the only difference between them and me was that they had a college degree and I didn't. I was in basic training when the Korean War broke out. I thought I was lucky that there would probably be another GI Bill; and that's the way it worked, of course. I started at San Francisco State University; I had decided that I really wanted to be a writer and did quite a bit of writing in the service in Okinawa for two years. A lot of the time it was going well, but in about my sophomore year, I realized that I did not have the kind of financial security that it takes to be a writer, that I would be worried about earning a living. I then switched to economics, sociology, philosophy, and I ended up with a dual major in sociology and philosophy, but I took a lot of undergraduate courses in social work, including one year in which I had an internship at Settlement House in San Francisco. When I was graduating, I had applied to both graduate schools of sociology and social work. I was offered a very generous scholarship at the University of Washington; it was a scholarship for a research assistance type of thing. It was an emotional decision, and I finally

decided that I was more interested in trying to change social conditions. I don't know how I got turned on to clinical social work because I think I started out with more of a social action orientation, except I think that the most boring course I had at San Francisco State was a course in community organization. It was taught by someone who had recently retired and had a very good reputation. I just thought there was no content there; it was too descriptive and it bored me. I kind of rationalized that I would major in casework just to get that experience and that knowledge and use it with social change. I was accepted to the University of Chicago right away and applied to the University of California at Berkeley. Those were the two schools I applied to. I don't know, but Cal seemed to be forever making up its mind. I finally called them and asked why the delay. I sometimes think my career would've been different if I had gone off to Chicago for a Master's degree because later on I taught there for three years, and I really think the students got a better education than at Berkeley, with a coherent curriculum and, I thought, more gifted teachers.

MCBROOM: Then you got your MSW at Berkeley. Will you walk us through the social work positions you've held as a professional since getting that MSW.

ROBERTS: My first job was with the City and County of San Francisco in Child Welfare Protective Services. It was an experimental program primarily in Fillmore, which is primarily black. The project was one in which a lot of agencies were donating either all or part of a worker's time and it was an aggressive reaching-out program. We would get referrals primarily from the public schools and public health nurses of children--usually latency age children--who were seen as potentially delinquent. I really liked that job. It was aggressive casework, reaching out and, I think, I was surprised and pleased to find that most families welcomed us. It

was like finding somebody somewhere about whom we are concerned, and we would like to help them. I only stayed there six months because it was a civil service position, and I had picked up a tropical disease in Okinawa; as far as I knew, I was cured, but I was turned down as an actuarial risk. I appealed it and was sent to a very high-powered specialist in tropical medicine. He examined me and did some lab work and the bacterium was still there at that time, so that ended that. I then took a job at Edgewood, which legally was the San Francisco Orphanage. A lot of orphanages were in transition from serving essentially orphaned and dependent children to residential treatment; that was a very exciting and very rewarding job, I became rather skeptical about theoretical orthodoxy.

MCBROOM: Didn't you work with someone there who became very influential with you?
Who was that?

ROBERTS: I worked with several people. Most of the staff were social workers; when I went there the director was a social worker. The Treatment Director was a clinical psychologist who was married to a social worker and that was Holly Northcott. He was a very gifted clinician but beyond that, he never made distinctions between resident staff and family and children's workers. He was an analyst at this time (had been for a long time), and I think he was really the most tolerant human being I have ever known. In a residential setting, and especially with these kids that have pretty rough lives, any conflict you have ever had would get stirred up sooner or later and some of these kids seemed to have antennas and could sense your vulnerability; when they got upset, you knew they would want to get you upset too. Workers did things and would lose control--not physical, but would do things that certainly were not considered to be very professional. The director was always very tolerant and very clear about what was not

appropriate in helping people work through their problems and grow. They did not take people (staff) into treatment there and it was the same kind of thing in Chicago although there the staff was assisted in getting treatment. The other persons there were a child analyst who was a consultant, Ed Liska, and the woman who hired me. I was there about two weeks when she left; I think they fired her and it was sick. I don't know what the problem had been, but they were very slow to hire a replacement; it was over a year. Because I was new and just out of graduate school, and new to this field, Ed Liska became my supervisor. I would have about two hours a week with him. I didn't realize then how very good he was until they finally hired a social work supervisor and I didn't know how to use her. As we talked, she was amazed how giving Ed Liska had been in terms of teaching, not just sitting there like what I call, "dynamic passivity, but really teaching technique, what you do. One of the big things I learned is that he said, "Did you ever hear of the word 'tentative'?" I was very lucky then, I had two very good people as supervisors.

MCBROOM: How long did you stay there, Bob?

ROBERTS: I stayed there two years, and I left because the agency was going through spells of mis-administration, and they also didn't pay very much, though that wasn't the real reason I left. What brought it to a head was the director, who was a nice guy, came to a staff meeting one day and the budget had been approved and all that and he said, "I'm terribly embarrassed but after this budget was passed, I realized that I forgot to put in any salary increases for anybody." I thought that was going just a little bit too far. I was in treatment then, and I'm not sure why, but anyway, I left partly for personal reasons and partly administrative reasons. Then I went to work for Jewish Family Services in San Francisco, and that was another world.

MCBROOM: How?

ROBERTS: Well, when you have twenty-four-hour a day responsibility for children, you get constant feedback on whether what you are doing works or doesn't work; so you become very pragmatic. If something doesn't work, you try something else. For instance, the longer I was there, the more time and emphasis I put on working with the staff. I was responsible for one cottage. I would say that most of the therapeutic effect was contributed through the staff, and I guess I learned that I really had to know what was going on in the personal lives of the staff. If somebody came back from two days off, it helped me sort out what was internal with a kid and what was reactive. It is very hard with those kids because usually you have no history; even then, if you could work with the staff to provide a corrective social/emotional experience and, if you could do it consistently, it had more effect, I think.

MCBROOM: And you moved from that to a kind of an office centered treatment?

ROBERTS: You were working with children; the parents were sabotaging. Of course, when you had kids away from their families, you couldn't project about the families. I really had trouble with that. Plus, they had a single theoretical orientation. It was a psycho-analytically derived theory but I think it was a variation of analytic theory that no analysts would ever practice. I was not very happy there.

MCBROOM: How long were you there?

ROBERTS: I was there about 18 to 20 months, and then Kermit Wiltsie, who had been a teacher of mine at Berkeley, called. At that point I was considering going back to graduate school because I was thinking about a doctoral program, and I had always been interested in research. I had talked to Ernest Greenwood, and I guess he mentioned it to Kermit, and Kermit

had just started a research center which was based in Richmond. He had also had a grant to do some research. He called me and he said, "Would you like to work on this project with me? It would give you a chance to test your research motivation in investing in a doctorate." So I went there for about another 18 months, and I did like the research.

MCBROOM: What did you do there?

ROBERTS: I was a research associate. The project was interested in seeing if factors could be identified--factors that were correlated with multiple out of wedlock pregnancies. The design was rough; there was no theoretical framework. It really was kind of a hunting expedition. So I came in early and did a little bit of everything: worked on the interviewing schedule, field tested after I read a couple of thousand records (public assistance), and did a lot of interviewing. There was a psychologist, Barbara Griswald, and we put these research clients through a large battery of psychological tests, and Barbara had that piece, so we were real colleagues. I did all the interviewing, and she did all the testing, but when we got to data analysis, we worked together.

MCBROOM: Did you come out with any conclusions on that project?

ROBERTS: Yes. It was a factorial design and one of the factors was race; we had white and African-American mothers; another was those who had one child out of wedlock and stopped, and another was those who had gone on to have three and four children. One of the things that we were interested in and popular then, was whether cultural poverty was on the horizon, whether there was something in ethnic culture. What we found using psychological norms was that the African-American women who had one child and stopped, tested at the norm on tests that had never been standardized for minorities--which in itself was unusual. Next were the white mothers with one child, and then, with the third group, you were looking at pathology

when the African-American women had more than one child; they did not show as highly pathological. The group that was most disturbed was the one with white women who had multiple children. In those days, in the early 1960s, women who bore children and didn't place them for adoption or get an abortion, were very dependent.

MCBROOM: Did your findings lead to any policy changes as far as you know of in public assistance?

ROBERTS: No. Actually we had a combination of variables that could be used for screening. It really was an important focus that if we could identify women with the first child and distinguish those who were not likely to have more children out of wedlock then those who were, then you could marshal your forces and go after the second group. I went on to Columbia for my doctorate, and I'm not sure exactly what happened, Barbara Griswold was supposed to cross-validate this on another sample, and I think her energies got diverted to other places.

MCBROOM: It just wasn't followed up.

ROBERTS: My experience too is that agencies are much more cooperative in letting you do research than in implementing research findings.

MCBROOM: Then the next chapter in your life was going on to the doctorate at Columbia. How did you select Columbia?

ROBERTS: I consulted with Ernest Greenwood, who had been my research mentor in the master's program. Ernest said to me, "If you are interested in research, there is only one doctorate program in the country I would recommend, and that is Columbia." It's interesting because he went to the University of Chicago. Berkeley had a doctoral program, and he didn't recommend his own program. So I applied to Columbia, and I didn't apply anywhere else. So

that is how I got to Columbia. I was there about three years, and while I was there, in the summer I worked at the Family Service Association of America as a research associate on an on-going study of treatment of clients with marital problems. It was a survey of experts, and it never saw the light of publication. When I left there, I took a job at the University of Chicago.

MCBROOM: Teaching in the School of Social Service Administration?

ROBERTS: The School of Social Service Administration, and I had also taught one year at Columbia as a career teacher. This was a program that NIMH started, and I taught half time.

MCBROOM: And you did some teaching at Berkeley?

ROBERTS: Yes. I had taught part-time at Berkeley for approximately five years.

MCBROOM: And came under the very important influence of Gertrude Wilson then?

ROBERTS: Well, Gertrude Wilson had been my teacher in the master's program, and she was an interesting task master. They ran an extension program and, unlike most extension programs, they had certificate programs, and they had a defined program. One program was designed for public assistance workers and the other was for residential child care workers. I taught primarily in the public assistance program. I would teach one course per semester and this was probably the first "satellite" program because Gertrude would send teachers out to these communities. The first semester I taught at Santa Rose, and every semester Gertrude Wilson would give me a new course to teach and a new community.

MCBROOM: On purpose?

ROBERTS: On purpose. It turned out later that for every course, she wanted a lesson plan for every class, your plans, objectives and what you were going to do in the way of preparation, and what you were going to require your students to do. Then, after the class, she wanted me to

submit process recording of the class, and review what I actually covered. This went on and on; I finally figured out that I was probably getting about 10 cents an hour. Years later I was visiting Gertrude, and I reminded her of that. This is pure Gertrude Wilson and she said, "I felt very badly that I was paying you so little, so I thought I would make it up by teaching you how to teach." She didn't tell me that at the time. It was a good experience. I reached a point where I started wondering if she read this process recording. I mailed it in every week, and I didn't have supervisory conferences unless she called me in, and I was just about to rebel and say that I was not going to do this anymore. I had a class, it was a new class, and I think it was the first session and the syllabus was quite well defined and including the major assignments. I did not like the major assignment in that course; I just did not like it. The students didn't like it either, and I had a full-scale rebellion on my hands. They didn't like it, and they weren't going to do it. So I came home and I did my process recording and mailed it off and the very next morning, I had a phone call from Gertrude and I said, "Gertrude, I know what you want to say," and she wanted me to come in. I know what I did; it was like being back in residence. I had communicated to those students my dissatisfaction with that assignment, and they were acting out from me, and I would never have had that insight if I hadn't done a process recording.

MCBROOM: Back to the University of Chicago and your teaching there, what was that experience? You stayed there three years?

ROBERTS: Yes, three years. I had concentrated in the doctorate program in research and that's what I taught at Columbia. I was hired to teach research and casework and the casework was kind of a secondary assignment. Well, when I got to Chicago, I was asked if I could teach research. I taught at least two years, and students did projects, but somehow, the focus of my

teaching got shifted there from research to casework and more and more, I was perceived as a casework teacher. I thought Chicago was a very exciting University, and I thought Chicago was a very exciting city. I had lived in the Bay area, and when I had gotten ready to leave New York, the two places where I considered jobs were Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, and Chicago. I was such a San Francisco chauvinist that I remember saying to myself that Chicago would be a better place to live than Los Angeles, and I feel that was a large part of why I went there although they pursued me very methodically at Chicago. I can see that the more ambivalent I was about going there, the more they wanted me. I'm sure if I had been enthusiastic about going there, Chicago would've hired somebody else. But Alton Linford was the dean; he was very helpful in my career. I don't know whether I was like a son to him or what, and there were some very exciting people there in casework. I think there was more excitement in the casework sequence.

MCBROOM: Who were some of these people, Bob?

ROBERTS: Berneice Simon, who intellectually and theoretically was just superb and, at the same time, Berneice was a very warm and empathic person. She was the kind of person who was tuned to whatever was going on and to anybody's life around her whether it was the janitor, secretary, or junior faculty. I had not prepared to teach casework, so I asked if I could sit in on Berneice's class--which I did. Her class was a second-year class and; well, I'd never taught first year in casework because they never trusted me with it. Berneice inherited a group of students who had casework in the first year with a woman who was extremely psychoanalytical, and she had kind of trained them to gather history or look at history until you saw something in the very early years which might explain what is happening today; and that's where you stopped.

Berneice confronted this class with the fact that they had not learned what they needed to know. She started to drill them and it was a case a week of psychosocial assessment group. She was very nurturing, but she had very high standards, and it was an interesting struggle to watch. I was just amazed at her skill.

The other person was Helen Perlman; she was a little different. I had heard Helen speak a couple of times, and I had no trouble with her writing because she writes very well, but sometimes I think her love of well-constructed sentences makes her conceptual orientation a little confusing, and she has a terrible habit of not liking to use the same word repetitively. It's bad enough when you have three or four authors who are referring to the same phenomena and giving different conceptual labels. Though you have someone who is using the same phenomena but keeps changing conceptual labels, it really gets very confusing. I thought Helen had a kind of exaggerated need to pull things together at the end and to have things neat and tidy in the way that life is not.

I'm an early riser, and I was working on my dissertation in my first year at Chicago, and Helen Perlman was my advisor. We both lived on the edge of campus, and we would be the first ones on campus in the morning. We just fell into the pattern of having a cup of coffee and a conversation in her office every morning. She has a very exciting, creative mind. It was fun to converse with her and see the ideas link around and fall into place. So the longer I knew Helen, the more I liked her and the more respect I gave her. These were the two big ones. There were other people: Don Patton of research; I worked with him for a year on the project; and Bob Nee.

MCBROOM: You started your real writing and publishing career there with Bob; do you want

to say a word about that?

ROBERTS: Until I got out of Berkeley, I didn't realize then you are taught, especially in first-year casework, a theoretical orientation to practice, but it was not done in a theoretical or conceptual way. Later I learned some of it really was very functional, but nobody told me this. The next year I had Lydia Rappaport, who was very diagnostic and when I got out of Berkeley, I didn't even know the labels of the opposing theories of practice. Then I went to Columbia. It was the first time Carol Meyers had taught doctoral students, and she started the class by saying, "This is Columbia and there is a Columbia way and you will learn it or you will not get a good grade"--but she never told you what it was. At one point Helen Perlman's book had come out on problem-solving, the casework problem-solving process. This was discussed in the doctoral program, and she was accused of being a functionalist. It really was like a form of anger. There are some functional elements in Perlman, but she really is not a functionalist. I was just very curious about the competition with Chicago. The crisis intervention was big then and Columbia was teaching crisis theory, and Smith was very involved with it. When I read Perlman's book, I thought her approach was much closer to crisis intervention than to functionalism. So when I got to Chicago, I learned there was a Chicago way, and it really was like problem-solving. Here I am a junior faculty member, thinking I really have to do something, and so I suddenly became very interested in comparative theory and really had trouble believing that I had gone through the doctoral program at Columbia, which was top-rated, and I was in Chicago, which certainly was also, and they just were not teaching theoretically and comparatively on the doctoral level.

I remember the incident that really sharpened my focus. It was at Columbia. One of the

things that I had to do as a career teacher was student liaisoning, and I had a second-year student who in the first year had been a very gifted, promising student, and suddenly, her work started to deteriorate. I couldn't figure out what was going on. I had a couple of sessions with this student, and I could feel her anger and finally it turned out that this agency where she was placed, was a VA Hospital in Brooklyn, and it was a functional agency. Columbia had not used it for many years and then the agency said they had redefined their theoretical base and that now they were into crisis intervention and problem-solving. I learned that the students in that agency had drawn a list of concepts with two sets of labels, and they had discussed the same phenomena. At Columbia, on campus, you called it one thing, and the agency which had a functionalist supervisor, called it something else. This student was very psychodynamic-oriented; she was from California, and she had been in rather intensive therapy with a clinical social worker in private practice. She went to Columbia wanting that, and this experience really shouldn't happen to students. I decided if I did that book, it would be in the public domain and students are resourceful; they would find it. Actually, I first thought about writing a book on comparative theory while I was still collecting data for my dissertation and trying to get that finished. Charlotte Towle had died before I got on the faculty, and she had been dead about five years. Her family (primarily) had made rather substantial contributions to SSA.

MCBROOM: That's the School of Social Service Administration.

ROBERTS: Yes, the School of Social Service Administration, and this was to be an endowment to be used really to memorialize Charlotte's contributions to social work in whatever way the School wanted to do it. Apparently the School had not spent any of that money, and the family was very upset; they thought the School was using that money for other purposes. Bob

Nee had known and worked with and admired Charlotte Towle, and we were just chatting, you know, because we were both teaching casework. I came up with the idea of doing a volume and rather than trying to paraphrase (there were different theoretical schools, and who could learn them all in-depth, anyway) it might be a better work if we could persuade certain kinds of the top people in each of those schools to write a chapter defining their theoretical orientation. Bob and I thought that we might structure this around a symposium and to do this in memory and in honor of Charlotte Towle. Now Bob knew there was a committee that had been formed to do something. Bob Nee was on that committee, and Berneice Simon, Dorothy Aikman may have been on it. Bob still had not finished his dissertation, but he had been teaching full time at Chicago, and he really was at risk of not being tenured and promoted if he didn't get something published. He did not have much interest in comparative theory; he was a member of the diagnostics world. I was surprised at the resistance we ran into. Berneice Simon was not at all enthusiastic about this, but she does listen and she thinks. After a while she said she thought about it, and she thought that such a volume would be appropriate for doctoral-level students. I had shared my frustration with Columbia rather candidly, and also my surprise that Chicago didn't teach comparative theory, either. She convinced herself that it would not be read by people of the masters' program. I didn't believe her, but I didn't argue with her either, and I really think that probably is the greatest contribution I made to the profession. It still is in print and now is about 25 years old and has never been revised. It does not sell in huge numbers, but it sells steadily, and it has sold over 50,000 copies.

MCBROOM: And how many languages has it been translated into?

ROBERTS: Japanese, Portugese, German and Dutch, and that's it. So out of that came an

interest in comparative theory.

MCBROOM: Which you followed through with two additional books.

ROBERTS: With group work, Helen Northen and then community work, Sam Taylor. I'm not as knowledgeable in those areas.

MCBROOM: Are those books also still selling?

ROBERTS: Yes. They never sold as well or had the impact. In group work I was surprised there was reluctance among group work scholars to differentiate and define theoretical orientations, and I never quite understood whether it was because they had watched the theoretical civil war in casework and did not want that to erupt. There certainly had been a lot of conflict in group work with the clinical versus the treatment versus the non-treatment groups and that had never really been completely resolved. Also I think that maybe it's their affinity for small group process in terms of process and building consensus and focusing on similarities rather than differences. I was disappointed in that book.

MCBROOM: The group work book.

ROBERTS: Yes, the group work book. It involved a lot of work to do that kind of book, and to negotiate with authors afterwards--to try to get them to participate--and it wasn't very theoretical. I said to Helen Northen, because Columbia University Press published that, and we were going

MCBROOM: They published all three of them?

ROBERTS: No, the first was the University of Chicago Press, and Columbia had wanted that, but I went with Chicago. We were going back and forth on titles, and I did not want to use the word "group work," and Helen Northen didn't want to use it, so we ended up with "Theories of

Social Work with Groups.” I said to Helen Northen that I was going to write John Moore, who was the editor of Columbia Press, and suggest that the most appropriate title of that book would be, “Small Theories from Small Groups,” and John didn’t buy my idea. Later, the community work book was a completely different phenomenon. Before I was dean, I was approached at one time by a former doctoral student, Jeff Pawson, who said to me, “Have you ever thought about doing a book on community work?” I said, “No,” and I said if I did it, I would certainly need a strong co-editor. In fact, Sam Taylor was the senior editor of that and anyway, I didn’t hear from Jeff again. I became dean and I was maybe in my second year of deaning and just about ready to go under from the demands of that job and that world. Then suddenly Jeff Pawson, out of the blue, wrote a letter that he had convinced his board that the agency should sponsor a symposium on community work theory.

MCBROOM: He was running a kind of treatment agency?

ROBERTS: Yes, and it still is a very exciting one. Yes, and that this symposium should be held in Canada and that a fair share of the authors should be Canadian. I initially said no, but he came back. I had mentioned it earlier to Sam Taylor as a possibility, and I said to Sam that there was just no way that I could do it; it would just be the straw that would break my back. Well, Sam wanted to do it, and Sam was an associate professor and a superb teacher. He really is very scholarly, but he...Charlotte Towle once said about someone, “The person did not have ink in her blood.” Well, Sam did not have ink in his blood; there was just no compulsion to publish, and so it was partly out of my love for Sam that I agreed to do it. I said, well this will help Sam become a full professor, which he really should be--but it never happened because he never applied for it. That was a very different kind of book. Milt Chernin, who was dean at Berkeley,

wrote a very interesting review of that book--a very positive review. He had read the casework book and the group work book, and he talked about criticisms of community work or community organizations, as he called it in the 1960s, as being kind of a social movement thing with no theory to guide it. What had happened in the 1980s under Reagan and the cut-back in programs, especially any kind of community-based programs and indigenous programs, was that we now had rather a well-defined theory but no practice. I think that's a good book, and it was structured differently. We had revised the structure of our curriculum at USC where we had a generic orientation to methods, but in the second year, the application became very specific to a field of practice. I think you need that specificity in addition to that theoretical abstraction, so we structured that book that way and called it, "The Theory in Practice of Social Work." These books take literally years to do and towards the end of the process, the Council of social Work Education revised its curriculum policy statement and the structure of this book articulated very well with the mandated curriculum. I thought that would really be a very successful book with high impact--I think it is a very good book.

MCBROOM: Do you have any understanding of why it's not?

ROBERTS: It really just did not get....

MCBROOM: It really wasn't adopted as a text?

ROBERTS: In some places it didn't, and I think partly because I don't think the School had moved their curriculum there yet.

MCBROOM: It was ahead of them.

ROBERTS: It was ahead of them and a lot of faculty don't read very much. It was not lightly reviewed, it got more reviews in international journals than in American journals. The sales of

that book grow a little each year.

MCBROOM: Yes, times are catching up with it. We sort of skipped ahead to these three major books that you have co-edited and maybe you can tell a little bit about going from Chicago to USC?

ROBERTS: Well, I was in Chicago in my third year, and I was finishing my dissertation and finishing the casework book; I was stretched so thin I didn't know if I would survive and two things happened. The first was Alton Linford had resigned as Dean of the School of Social Work Administration, and the School/University selected Harold Richman as his successor. Harold and I had come on the faculty at the same time, and Harold's claim to fame was that he had been a White House fellow during his doctoral program. He was in policy, and his father was a prominent social worker, but Harold, I felt, really wasn't socialized to the profession. He joined the faculty. I think Gardner was the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare then, and he kept Harold as a consultant. Harold was still working on his dissertation, and he was commuting to Washington. I felt Harold had never really been socialized after deaning either, and did not realize the complexities and the undercurrents and the kinds of unspoken feuds that go on--I mean it lasts longer than a marriage, and it's like a family in which there are certain unresolvable conflicts brought into the open; it can be civil war. He insisted that he had a wide-base commitment to social work and a broad definition, and I didn't believe him; I think he believed it though. So I had some questions about the direction the School was going to take and especially in terms of moving away from any kind of clinical practice. The other thing was Maury Hamovitch; he was Dean at USC.

MCBROOM: Was it Maury or Malcolm Stinson?

ROBERTS: No, it was Maury; both job offers came from Maury. One of the things that happened is USC salaries were terrible and Chicago's weren't that great, but I ended up going to Chicago for \$13,500 a year and USC had offered me \$10,000.

MCBROOM: You mean that gap was really big.

ROBERTS: Well, I had decided on other bases, and then I learned from Columbia that somebody else at my class had started at \$15,000. I wrote to Alton and said, "I've accepted that job, and I'm coming anyway, but can you do better?" Anyway, Maury Hamovitch contacted me, and he had received a federal training grant for an undergraduate social work education program, and he was in a position to match my Chicago salary. Of course, I interviewed and all that; they just didn't offer me the job. When the offer came in, with all that was on my plate, I remember saying to Helen (my wife), "I don't have the time or the energy to think about changing jobs right now." Well, I had zero tolerance for the hot, humid summers in Chicago, and Helen had zero tolerance for the cold, humid winters. I remember Helen saying to me that we both hate the weather in Chicago and she said, "I remember you telling me the only school of social work you would touch in California is the University of Southern California." She said, "What is there to think about?" I said, "You are right," and the rest is history.

MCBROOM: What happened when you got to USC? I know you started out by buying Helen Wright's house.

ROBERTS: Yes, by buying Helen Wright's house. Helen Wright, the Dean of the School of Social Service Administration, had retired to Pasadena and had owned a house on the rim of Eaton Canyon.

MCBROOM: On Canyon Close Street.

ROBERTS: Canyon Close, that was the street and you, Elizabeth McBroom, told us that her house was for sale. She had willed her house to the University of Chicago and the real estate market in Pasadena right then was really in terrible shape. The Pasadena School District had been forced to integrate racially and actually, I believe, it was the first court-mandated school integration outside of the deep South and there was tremendous white flight to Orange County, Arcadia, and neighboring communities and different school districts. And the economy was in kind of a slump.

MCBROOM: That was what year?

ROBERTS: 1973, no 1970.

MCBROOM: Twenty-three years ago.

ROBERTS: I was in Chicago from 1967 to 1970, and we sold that house in 1973. So Helen and I came out for a long weekend. I didn't buy the house because there was a lot of "deferred maintenance," and it had been sitting empty for at least a year. My preoccupation for years was work, and I was a little naive and Maury was a very clever negotiator, but he had put a package together for my position. To show you how generic I am, I had a joint appointment with the School of Urban Planning, and one of my minors at Columbia was social planning, but I really was not a planner. Anyhow, I was supposed to teach half-time at Urban Planning and half-time at the School of Social Work and at the end of the interview, because I essentially committed to taking the job, Maury said to me, "How do you feel about administration?" I said, "What do you mean how do I feel about administration?" He said, "Well, are you interested in it?" And I said, "Maury, I never thought about being an administrator." In his script, this undergraduate program needed a director and it provided for three positions, and he made it sound like a

phenomenal thing. On paper, you would be called the director, but really you would not be that much involved. I agreed, and so I had two half-time positions, and I had never taught an undergraduate program; I had always taught in the masters' program, and I taught in the School of Urban Planning. When I arrived, they had funding for a year, and Maury had hired a doctoral student (man) who had done a survey/catalogs describing other undergraduate programs and written a document, but there was no curriculum. He hired three people: me, Herman Borenzweig, and he hired Ernie Dieppa. We had the money for a year, and this was the second year, and there were no students and no curriculum. I asked for them to pay my moving expenses, and Maury said, "Oh, we do not pay moving expenses, but I can put you on salary during the summer and you really won't have any responsibilities except getting ready for your classes." He said, "That is really more generous than moving expenses." Well, I had never seen a summer like that. I heard all this stuff about a continuum, but nobody had defined what a continuum was, so I defined that. I went out with the butterfly net trying to recruit students and, in addition, I ran into the ethnic diversity of Southern California. Literally my first day in the office, I got a phone call, and the caller identified himself as either an officer or being affiliated with de la Raza. He introduced himself and said, "I understand that you are the director of the new undergraduate program," and I said, "Yes." He said, "Tell me, how many Chicanos do you have on your faculty?" And I said, "One." Ernie Dieppa at that point was kind of the advocate for the Chicano movement in social work, and this fellow said, "Really, who?" I said, "Ernie Dieppa." He said, "He's not Chicano; he is Puerto Rican." (Laughter) He had been involved in the Chicano movement for 20 years and was married to a Chicana, but he wasn't a Chicano.

I had agreed to head that program for three years and when the three years were up, I said

I'd done my term now, let somebody else do it. Actually, the grant and the funding had been for programs . I thought it was a good program. I ran into some challenges in defining the curriculum. When you have an undergraduate program in a small college, and you don't have a graduate program, you don't have to worry too much about repetition or redundancy between your curriculum and the masters' program because, if they go for a masters' degree, they are going to go somewhere else. But when you have an undergraduate program and there's probability that at least some of your students are going to stay around and come into your masters' program, you have to confront the question of what belongs where. If you repeat the content, you are going to have some very unhappy students in the masters' program and, I think, some very unhappy teachers. So it was a real challenge to think of a curriculum that could be the BSW degree for students who wanted to go into social work jobs and a foundation for those who wanted to go into graduate study. Then, also, it had to be broad-based enough a liberal arts foundation that these people were getting a decent education if they didn't go into social work. And I struggled with that. During that year, no one told me that either, but I had to write a progress report. John Milner was acting dean because Maury was on sabbatical that semester. John read it and--I don't think he had much faith in undergraduate education--but he thought it was very well conceptualized. He said, "You should do something with that." So I submitted it to the Council on Social Work Education, and it was published as was.

MCBROOM: How long did that undergraduate program go on at USC?

ROBERTS: It went on six years, and I gave up the directorship because it was a constant battle with faculty to get them to limit instruction to that curriculum. I never wanted a segregated faculty, so my plan was for faculty to rotate through that and to combine graduate and

undergraduate teaching, but people wanted to teach only what they had been teaching. When I gave up the directorship, I'm not sure what happened. I think there was curriculum drift and people started teaching what they wanted to teach. I think the whole boundary between graduate and undergraduate got blurred. I took a year's leave of absence in 1976 and moved to Australia for a year. While I was gone, the School went through re-accreditation, and what I have just described, was identified. At that time there was a combined orientation team of undergraduate and graduate, and they raised some of these questions: what is the difference between the masters' and the bachelors'? They just didn't get very acceptable answers. Apparently the masters' program was re-accredited, and I think the undergraduate program was put on some kind of probationary status for a year. There were some people on the faculty who had never been advocates of undergraduate education, and they really thought that it should be a liberal arts base, and that professional education belonged at the graduate level. One of the critics was Helen Northen, and she was quite forthright on her position. Helen and I were good friends and colleagues, and she never quite convinced me and I never quite convinced her. Apparently, at a faculty meeting after this re-accreditation report, Helen rose to the floor and made a motion that the undergraduate program be discontinued and somebody called for the question without any debate.

MCBROOM: And that was the story of undergraduate social work at USC. Where do you come down now, and do you think there is a place for it?

ROBERTS: Yes. I mean, if you really look at the front line, you know agencies that are working with social problems and people with difficulties, you find very few trained social workers there.

MCBROOM: Very few MSW's.

ROBERTS: Very few MSW's and not many BSW's either. I don't know what happens to all these people with BSW's. I think for a lot of reactive disorders, a great deal can be done at that level. Unless you have a commitment from agencies as employers, and unless there is cooperative planning of the curriculum where you are really trying to address the needs of these agencies, it doesn't work. What happened at SC was a watered-down version of the masters' program. It is not distinct or separate in terms of objectives, and so it brings out superficially trained MSW's without a MSW. I don't think they really have in-depth training to do that kind of treatment and then, on the other hand, I think they have the conceit to believe they do have it. Essentially, they want to do the same thing as MSW's do, and I think for a long time public agencies, the most needy, most distressed clients are badly served by MSW's because I don't think they educate them to work with those people.

MCBROOM: Well, Bob, you went on to become Associate Dean and then Dean at USC; would you tell a little about that?

ROBERTS: I don't know why I always seem to have one foot in administration. Actually, it happened in Chicago, too. I was appointed there as "secretary of the faculty." I was chairing the research sequence, and I started teaching in the doctoral program. I think the first thing that happened is that I was asked to chair the doctoral program and I had not been doing that very long when Maury Hamovitch decided that he really had to have some administrative help. Maury didn't even have a secretary. It's unbelievable; he had an administrative assistant and that was it. He found funding for an Associate Dean position and it was half time. Maury and I have respect for each other, but Maury and I had disagreements. At times I was overly critical of

some of his administrative style. I don't know how Maury selected me. I don't think I was his first choice, but he approached me about being Associate Dean. He was very honest, and he didn't know if this would work or not and suggested that we do it on a trial basis. I had been in Australia, and while I was there, i was drafted into being acting director of that program. That program was in serious difficulty and at risk of losing its accreditation. The community agencies were threatening to drop the students from field work because they were not satisfied with the administration and the field education program. I took that on partly out of curiosity to see what kind of administrator I would be. My suspicion was that I might be a very autocratic administrator, but i wasn't so autocratic. There was more gratification in administration than I anticipated. I was ambitious in terms of administration. Maury said, "You know the School and what need to be done." I said all right. Part of the job was that I was to chair the curriculum committee, and I was very interested in the curriculum. We had been trying to do a kind of in-depth look to see if it needed to be changed. I think it had drifted into anarchy--that's what happened in the 1960s and the 1970s. So I was Associate Dean for three years and there was a tremendous amount of work. I remember saying to Maury one day, "I don't understand it. I am working seven days a week." He said, "So am I. There must be something wrong and that's why I got an Associate Dean." The truth is that a lot of things that needed to be done just weren't being done, and the School was just stumbling along. So Maury suddenly announced at a faculty meeting that he was giving up the deanship and going back to the faculty.

MCBROOM: When was that?

ROBERTS: That was 1979. The faculty debated about internal vs. external recruitment.

There was a search committee and Frances Feldman was chairing it. I guess the faculty voted to

begin with an internal search and, if there was not a suitable internal candidate who was interested in the job, then they would go external. There were multiple candidates, and one of them withdrew his name in short order, and the debate started. Barbara Solomon had been a nominated candidate, and she didn't want to do it. I think at the end there were two candidates; Sam and me. Sam finally decided he didn't want to do it, so I was the single internal candidate, and the search committee did its job in stages. In part they had to demonstrate to the University administration that this was a legitimate search and screening. So I became Dean in 1980.

MCBROOM: What are we talking about in terms of dean? Remember to start with the big move from the old Law Building to the old School of Library Science.

ROBERTS: That was a year or two down the road. I accepted the deanship. I had not had a sabbatical in all of my teaching career. I was scheduled for one and was going to Hong Kong. I thought it was a good time for me to be away from campus. I think it is awkward when you have a dean-elected and a dean there at the same time, and Maury was not a very open candid administrator. Maury kept his administrative cards very close to his chest, even after it was settled that I was going to be dean. I don't think Maury could bring himself to share with me anything that he wouldn't share with any faculty member--which is not very much. I had never seen a budget in my life nor prepared one, and I had a lot of questions because I was thinking about the School and what I would do, and you have to know what your resources are; he literally could not do it. I never got a word out of him on financial conditions of the School until I became dean, and he became ex-dean. I haven't been very critical of Maury, although I've heard him describe his administrative style as a benevolent dictator, and it was a very paternalistic old testament administrative style. Maury would share some of the problems. He had a pattern (I

don't think he was aware of it) of bringing you right to the brink of disaster, and you were going over the cliff, and then he would step in as the father figure and rescue the situation. Once I became dean and Maury became the ex-dean, i found him a tremendous resource.

MCBROOM: He stayed on as Chair of the Doctoral Committee?

ROBERTS: I asked him to chair the doctoral program, and the University gave him some very prestigious assignments. I thought he had a nice decade. He chaired at least one very prestigious commission on social work education nationally. Maury was never critical of my administration. There were times when he bit his tongue because I am a very different kind of administrator, and I had very different objectives for the School in some ways. Maury was someone I could turn to and ventilate with him and sometimes it was reassuring to know that some of the problems (e.g., personnel) that I just couldn't solve, he couldn't solve either. It was good having someone who knew where the skeletons were buried, and he was very supportive. If you have to have an ex-dean around, I don't think you can do better. I tried to give him assignments that carried prestige status, and he made a good contribution to the School, and it worked very well. However, the world changed dramatically; the University got a new president (James Zumberge) and he and I took office on the same day. I did not know, like everybody else except the administration, that the University had developed some serious financial problems. It was written into the University's bylaws that it must have a balanced budget with no deficit financing and apparently, at least for three years, the University had been running substantial deficits and had met those deficits by dipping into capital. So the new president came in and the crisis was revealed.

MCBROOM: Hubbard had been the president during Maury's term?

ROBERTS: I believe so. What happened on July 1, if not July 2, at the beginning of the fiscal year, the new president sent a memo out that all budgets were being cut by two percent. What had happened in the past was that usually by February or March, the University would realize it was in the hole and then would put a freeze on hiring and do those kinds of things to try to stem the losses. They had never cut the budget in the beginning of the year. Well, the School of Social Work was always underfunded and had very heavy workloads, so that would've been problematic on its own. The other thing that happened is the School, like all schools, over-admitted. This had been very predictable year after year that the same percentage of people would end up not enrolling. Well, July went on with no dropping out, and then August, and Maury and Jeanette (Larson, Admissions Director) kept reassuring me. Don't worry; they will drop out." At the last minute they didn't, and we had a substantial increase in enrollment and at the same time, we had a decrease in the budget, and I didn't have enough faculty. I was running around trying to find qualified part-time faculty to teach a course here and there. I was pleading with the administration to try to get an increase in my budget, and this went on for six months. Z. Kapreilian was the Academic Vice President then. Finally, after about six months, I realized that I wasn't going to get any change in my budget. In the old system the budget would be balanced by assuming that one school would be over-enrolled and another under-enrolled, and that it would be a wash. But it wasn't washing any more. There was never any contingency; they had never shifted resources around that way, and the next year they would make corrections. So, at Thanksgiving, Zumberge came back from the holiday and announced he was firing all of the senior vice presidents. It was Kapreilian, who was Academic Vice President, Senior Vice President for Budgeting, and one for Fund Raising. These people were at war with each other

and had been for years; it was an old political game at SC. Zumberge had decided that his job as President of the University was not to arbitrate their feuding.

He started a search, and he hired his own crew; he brought in John Strauss from the University of Pennsylvania, who was a computer scientist and had a similar position at Penn and had developed an academic revenue center of management. He brought in Cornelius Pings from Cal Tech as the Administrator for Academic Affairs, who then became Provost. They also hired a fundraiser from Michigan who was very successful in Michigan but was a flop here because of the different audience. Well, they weren't here very long when we were notified that this system that Strauss had developed at the University of Pennsylvania, was going to be introduced at SC. Essentially, this administrative model was borrowed from corporations where each unit/subcorporation is a profit center and whether it makes or loses money, does not contaminate the performance of the others because there is no central budget and every unit is judged on its own performance. Of course, if you are having a wing of this organization that's losing money, you are not going to be there very long, and if replacing the CEO doesn't work, they get rid of that wing of the corporation and sell it off. This was to be humanized, we were told, and there were going to be subventions for some schools, and some schools would pay indirect costs. You pay all kinds of indirects, you had indirect directs, directive directs, and you paid a certain portion of your directs into the University, and you were left with some. Those were fixed, and some of them could be traced to you directly, like telephones, utilities and some things. In other things, like support of the central library, roads and security--all these things they just divided up on a pro-rated basis. The problem is that after some schools paid in these indirect costs, there

wasn't enough left to run the ship, so those schools would get a subvention, and other schools would have more money than they really needed. The School became an "academic revenue center," and one of the things was that you had a budget, and it was your budget. If you had a short fall of enrollment, and you didn't bring in the revenue you had projected, you were expected to do everything you could to cut your expenses so that you did not end up in the red at the end of the year. If it was mildly off, the University would just cut some of your operating budget, but still there was big flexibility. But if you ended up in the red, there was a "University Bank." The University Bank would loan you money to cover that deficit, and the following year, you were charged interest on that indebtedness, and the interest was based on the interest rate on twelve-month CD's on July 1, whenever the government was having to pay for money for a year. So you were expected to repay ten percent of the debt plus the interest of next year.

MCBROOM: How did all of this affect social work?

ROBERTS: Well, let me give you another half of that. On the other hand, if you ended in the black and you had money that was not spent, then you had credit with the bank, and they paid you interest--except there was no money in the bank. Social Work was hit very hard because this was the internal environment and externally, other things happened. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan was elected president, and welfare programs and social programs became the clipping point. There had been a great deal of federal and state money available for social work education: scholarships, training grants to establish or subsidize programs. The undergraduate program and the continuing education program were funded that way, and that money started to dry up very, very fast. I once said to Maury, "You knew this was coming and that's why you resigned." He got very upset and said, "That's not true, I had no idea." So we were losing

external resources, and the problem before the old budget existed, is that it was not rationally based--it was completely politically determined, and social work is not a large or powerful player in the University's politics--partly because we don't have the powerful and rich alumni, but it's also not a very large unit. I think it was suffered a low in some prestige, social and political respectability in an extremely conservative University. In fact, I suspect the University probably was making money with all those grants coming in. Well, they disappeared very quickly, and the University administration carried forth the old budgets as the baseline. In other words, they did not go to a zero base and begin all over. In the School of Social Work we are expected to teach six courses a year, and if you carried a lot of other responsibility, you might get it reduced to five. In many of the units in the University, it was four courses a year, so those kinds of inequities, plus the community responsibilities and field liaison and advising students and all, that was badly affected, including faculty productivity in terms of writing and research. But the other thing is that the University decided to upgrade itself academically, and the big push was for research. So it was a double bind for social work; we not only had the old baseline, which was inadequate funding, but to make things worse, we had an artificial increase in enrollment the year before with no compensatory budget. The other baseline was what you bring in, in terms of tuition and revenue.

The new administration had no memory--and the old vice presidents were gone--and they'd say, "Well, you brought in this much in tuition last year, and you are expected to bring them in this year, and expenses are supposed to be the same." Then you start negotiating. So it was very hard. However, the implicit purpose in this University Bank is that if you start doing creative and resourceful things and start bringing money in through gift income, increased

enrollment, and overhead recovery from research projects, etcetera, then your income is going to go up. It reminds me a little bit of when I was a kid, and I wanted to get off welfare: I had to save carefully with money as tight as it was, and it became part of my nature to never run a deficit. A lot of schools, like Public Administration, ended up with two and a half million deficit and with having to pay that debt back and at the same time, try to build; it was very difficult. So we did not have huge deficits, but we did not spend what we didn't have, and I started working on other things. Research was slower; the School had never done much in the way of fundraising, and I started putting more effort in that direction.

MCBROOM: You got the first development officer, I believe--Madeleine Stoner.

ROBERTS: Development became a priority and, of course, it was an expectation that it became a priority too. I did some other things, too. It wasn't completely driven by profit motives, but we started a new part-time program on campus. It was designed in large part to allow those people who were primarily in public agencies and for whom there had been government scholarships that disappeared, to give them opportunity to go through the masters' program on a part-time basis.

MCBROOM: You started some satellite programs?

ROBERTS: We started an off-campus program in Orange County. It was not like the old satellite program that moved around from community to community; that was kind of a permanent off-campus program. It was the only one that Cornelius Pings approved during his tenure; he did not believe in them. He told me, "If you had argued with us in terms of how much it would bring in, I would've said no," but I argued on the basis of academic reasons and community need. Later there was a one-time cohort in Riverside County in the Children

Services there. Gradually it started bringing in a little more money and finally--I think about the fourth year--there was some extra money, and so I thought now I can tend to some of our needs, and I got my budget. Actually they had been chipping away at my subvention; if you bring in an extra one hundred dollars, then they cut your subsidy by one hundred dollars. So I figured, well, at least when I get to the point where I am self sufficient that there will be extra money I can use for quality enhancement. The problem was that we had no capital and no way to capitalize any of these new ventures. Then I got my budget, and they had not only cut my subvention, but they had increased my participation in the University so that I was paying in more money than I was getting back. I had a big confrontation, first at the budget hearing. In retrospect, John Curry (the Budget Director), became very nostalgic about it because I referred to the School of Social Work as a cast-off. He was really opposed to the system, and he had these formulas, etcetera. So I went to Cornelius on the budget. He said that it cannot be changed, etcetera. I said to Neil that it is very hard to raise money for social work education. I could go to a social work contributor with pride and say that social work is self-supporting, but if one of these people learn that the School was contributing to the support of some other program, I don't think I can get any money out of them. I thought the School really had a responsibility toward its profession. Neil finally came though and agreed, and he established a formula whereby we would always get a little more back than what we paid in. It wasn't much; it was about half of one percent, something like that. He told Curry, who said it was too late this year. Our deficit was \$35,000. I thought that was my biggest victory with that administration, and I told my successor--I don't know if he appreciated it--but I could not get Neil to put it in writing. When I resigned, he promised to continue, and I think now it is gone because they are bringing in a lot of research

overhead, and other units of the University which were so affluent are not having such hard times. My impression is the School is now contributing to the maintenance of other departments, which infuriates me because when times were hard for us, we didn't get it from anybody else.

MCBROOM: During the term of your deanship, did you design any important trends in social work education?

ROBERTS: I think they were already present in the School. The first thing that happened in social work education, and there are a lot of factors contributing in that, is the curriculum. I think social work education had drifted into a state of curriculum anarchy. There were several things going on here: first there was the social activism of the 1960s. It wasn't just in social work; it was all university education, and you kind of spent most of an academic year addressing the demands of the current students and revising the curriculum for implementing into next fall and next year's cohort. The rejection you got in response, and I remember in that period at one time you had a very eloquent phrase for that--you called "irreverent relevance," and it just started wearing down the curriculum development reworking. The other thing is that faculty started responding to students directly, especially at SC, on the planning and coordination functioning of curriculum committees. One of the things that surprised me when I came to USC was that there was no curriculum committee. There was a major self study, and it was the first School to move away from methods specializations in casework and group work to a generic curriculum. When they did that, my understanding was that the faculty invested a tremendous amount of time learning the curriculum components and the various methods. SC was the leader in the generic approach, and I think for a long time, they led in a field of one. That system worked as long as

those people who had planned it and had re-trained themselves were there and, also, as long as they continued to hire their own graduates on to the faculty. I suspect it reached a point where SC had hired so many of its own doctoral graduates that the University challenged it--you can get in-bred that way, although Chicago and Columbia had always done it and they still do.

MCBROOM: Although we had a policy for a while that we didn't hire our own doctoral graduates.

ROBERTS: Basically out of necessity, because salaries were so bad and they couldn't compete. That started changing in the 1970s. When I came, Ernie Dieppa's appointment was temporary; it was a one-year appointment, but Herman Borenzweig was from Berkeley, and I came from Columbia and Chicago and the appointments were longer. Partly because we didn't have the administrative structure of most other schools of social work, there was no structure to socialize and educate these new faculty about SC's curriculum; at the same time, the expectations of research and publications started increasing and junior faculty were more reluctant to learn a new curriculum and started drifting into faculty teaching what they wanted to teach and sometimes giving lip service to the School's curriculum but not really following it. I don't think Maury had a great interest in the curriculum, and the School just didn't. I got increasingly concerned about it.

MCBROOM: Did you bring a stronger interest?

ROBERTS: This started when I was Associate Dean because I was Chair of the Curriculum Committee, and we did a lot of things. I really made the proposal to move to this generic-specific change and it was controversial. Then I became Dean at the same time it was going on, so I really got to operationalize it. Helen Northen was one of the people really

opposed to it. I know Helen very well, and I have great respect for her, and I thought arguing with her was pointless, but I asked Helen to chair the Health Concentration and Helen got involved in putting that curriculum together and planning it with the faculty; and she got converted. Not only were we spreading our students too thin; I thought education was becoming very superficial, and we were spreading our faculty too thin. There was a tendency to homogenize the faculty and to think that someone with a doctorate could teach anything in the curriculum, which I think is not quite true. This new curriculum allowed faculty opportunity to develop more depth in their teaching which I think is very hard to do.

SC still had an excellent reputation and graduates certainly dominated and continued to dominate the profession in southern California and nationally. The truth is if you look at what was going on internally in the School, the School was drifting on its reputation, and many of the accomplished players were retiring. The programs were often very narrowly focused and before long, Maury was not at all sold on the generic approach idea, but it passed by faculty vote. Then he got involved in a national commission which was called the “Structural Quality of Social Work Education,” and the original objective was to articulate the similarities and differences between undergraduate and graduate education opportunities because there was a demand from undergraduate educators that their graduates automatically be given advanced standing--which got us into trouble with accreditation commissions. So Maury was chairing that, or maybe he was on it, and then that grew into “Commission on Quality in Social Work Education,” and they came up with a blueprint for redefining the curriculum standards. Maury, who had been critical of this, developed the blueprint nationally. You cannot depend, when you hire a social worker, that the social worker has a core body of knowledge or skill that every social worker should have.

MCBROOM: This is still not achieved you say?

ROBERTS: No, but I think the curriculum policy--and I don't know where it is now because this policy has been there for a while--and those curriculum standards are enforced, certainly the first year is core content that everybody is supposed to teach, but it wasn't then. If you wanted to hire someone, you had to find out where they went to school and know something about that school's curriculum, and who they studied with there because there were so many variations from faculty member to faculty member. That was a national trend. The other thing that was going on with the loss of money was a very substantial decrease in enrollment. It hit the private schools hardest, but it also hit many of the public schools and especially the larger, more prestigious ones. The very small regional schools just seemed to have an audience of their own; they had their own market, but the funding for minority students started drying up very quickly and at times I felt like a salmon swimming upstream. We were a University that was financially troubled in an environment that was hostile to social work and social work education and no track record in fundraising, and we were trying to get a foothold at a time when there was more competition for the dollars out there because agencies were going through the same thing. So everybody was plummeting and yet we did not experience a decline in enrollment. Part of developing new programs and a lot of attention to curriculum enhancement, the reputation to the school, fundraising and trying to raise some money for student aid, and our minority student enrollment did not drop. In fact I remember the Associate Director of the Council on Social Work Education was a black man; he came out to visit us and wanted to know what we were doing that was different. NIMH had given money for minority doctoral students and that was administered through the Council on Social Work Education rather than schools. He was

eminently aware of what was happening in the schools and came out to find out what was going on here and see if they could transport it. The truth, I think, was that many schools and deans had increased their minority enrollment only when they were forced to, and they did not have a continuing commitment once the money started disappearing. That was a rationale for thinking about it. I don't know the history of SC. Most of its career, you know, was primarily a white school although not exclusively. You look around at the pioneers in social work in this community. There are blacks and Latinos; there are not many, but they are SC folks, and they have been very reliable alumni and USC had a real commitment there. I think Maury Hamovitch had it, and I had it, and I also think organizations and cultures are enriched by diversity.

I enjoy diversity, and I enjoy it in the student body and on the faculty; it is not a matter of quotas that we have ever had anything ideal. I think the other thing is that students are attracted to and have an affinity for an institution that has some of its members in it. It's like what happened with Carol Mosley-Brown in the Senate. Now that there is a black woman there, a different point of view is expressed. Even if she doesn't express it vocally but by her presence. I remember when Betty Hartford came on the faculty at SC. SC had been a pioneer in gerontology, and Maury got very involved with deaning. We had had a more collaborative relationship with the School of Gerontology and that got ruptured, and Barbara Solomon kind of drifted away so that gerontology began to disappear from our curriculum. Then we hired Betty Hartford, who was retrofitted into gerontology but was not a gerontologist, but that was a joint appointment. She came here on a sabbatical and stayed as director of the School of Gerontology. I could tell the difference in faculty meetings when we were discussing the

curriculum and with a gerontologist on the faculty, people suddenly remember that human development does not stop with adolescence.

The other thing that was very difficult is that there was a drastic shrinkage, almost disappearance of federal funding for social work research, and I'm not sure if it is much better now. I don't know what's happening now, but to some extent in the 1980s, doctoral programs in social work took as their model, I believe, the academic department running the professional school--partly because many of the movers and shakers in most schools of social work were non social workers. They hired sociologists, economists, political scientists, what have you, and because they had better training in research and statistics, they would be teaching in the doctoral program. The profession started looking for this esteem from the academic community rather than from the professional community, and SC always fought this; it didn't start with me. We had a formal policy that we would not hire anyone on the faculty who did not have a social work degree and social work experience; we rarely hired somebody who didn't have two degrees in social work, and I think partly because of this, for a long time USC was the only School of Social Work, first in California and then in southern California. It is ironic that the private university has carried more sense of community responsibility and obligation than the public university. In fact it is because SC was doing this in the professions that when UCLA became a University, they didn't have to worry about that, and they still don't feel much community responsibility; and so they are going to be the researchers and the scholars--except, in my opinion, the public school has not been a strong school in that way. I think if you don't have that professional foundation, your research becomes rather sterile and has very little utility for the profession. I've argued with the administration that I believe the primary goal of the University is education; research,

although it is important, is secondary. There are researchers in this job and a lot of good ones, and I think that becomes even more pronounced in a private university where tuition is very expensive and where the student, the student's family, or some donor is paying that tuition, it is still a lot of money, and I think they deserve a quality experience. That was another trend in social work, I think a de-emphasis on the profession and a de-emphasis on teaching.

MCBROOM: To your regret. During your deanship you had a couple of terms overseas. Maybe you could say a couple of words about Western Australian Institute of Technology and the University of Hong Kong.

ROBERTS: Well, I was eligible for sabbatical after I came to USC. I also had three years in Chicago, and I was getting a little tired and, again, you know at that point and time, faculty sabbaticals were not funded by the University; now that's one of the improvements. Faculty on sabbatical have their sabbatical salary paid by the University, and you have salary for a replacement. Before that, if someone went on sabbatical, their colleagues had to carry their workload, which limited the number of people who could go, and you didn't get one every seven years. Alton Linford, who had been dean while I taught in Australia, got drafted actually, into what was social work and psychology combined, and Alton convinced them that to solve some of their curriculum problems, they were going to have to separate social work from psychology. He became the first director of the Department of Social Work, and out of the blue, I got a letter from Alton asking if I would be interested in coming to Perth and teaching research for a year. I asked for an unpaid leave of absence, and Maury was happy to see me go because he could use my salary to hire a lot of part-time people for less money; so I went off to Australia. I worked

very hard and invested a lot in that department. I even considered staying there for a while, but I decided against it. It was interesting that I had been invited to go there, and when I got there, I had never run into such anti-Americanism in my life. Before I got there, Australia had elected a labor government which was doing a lot of very liberal things, including expanding the educational system, new universities, new institutes of technology, and WAIT was one of them. Australia still had this archaic system where some type of governor of Australia was appointed by the Queen of England, and he was always in Australia but he never did anything; it was just one of those honorary kinds of things. Suddenly this governor of Australia fired the prime minister and Australia was shocked; apparently, legally it could be done, and just before I got there, it came out that the CIA had been involved. There was concern that Australia was going to become socialistic and so at least some Australians were furious and especially academics and especially those in the behavioral sciences and human professions. I was surprised that Marxism is much more evident in Australian universities than here, though some of them are Marxist. I literally was called anti-American names to my face. I seriously thought about resigning and just leaving, but I didn't. I went through a lot of testing and passed the test and ended up....Hong Kong was a different experience, and again, I was naive.

MCBROOM: What year did you go to Hong Kong?

ROBERTS: I went to Hong Kong in 1980 (spring) right before I became dean. There is a social work training fund in Hong Kong which is department funded and they send students to get social work training. In other ways they subsidize the social work occasionally and invite an overseas scholar to come there for a semester, and they pay transportation, and they provide a per diem with no salary attached. One of my former students, who was on the faculty there, went to

the University of Hong Kong and the other, the Chinese University of Hong Kong which was separate. I had to divide my time between these two universities. I had no idea how far apart they were geographically, ideologically, and culturally: one was in the New Territories, and one was in mid-town or mid-level Hong Kong, and I did a lot of commuting. It took a couple of hours to go from one to the other on trains, ferries and buses. They expected me to do considerable teaching. As I was about to go, and I had already initiated a contract, there was a new dean of the USC Graduate School and academic winds were starting to blow. The University had decided that people who were going on sabbaticals should do research on their sabbaticals and suddenly, my application was challenged. Especially since I was going to be dean, I should set an example that in addition to these teaching responsibilities, they wanted me to do research that would lead to publications. So I hurried and put something together and ended up doing some research there that I think really made more of a contribution than the teaching, but it was a very heavy semester. Hong Kong is a fascinating place and anyone who enters community work should live there for half a year because of the cultural, political, and economic complexities of it. I found the Chinese unbelievably hospitable. The University of Hong Kong is more of an English University; the faculty is mixed, and there is a lot of English faculty in the Social Work Department. I found in them what I found with the Australians. They are friendly, but they are not hospitable, and at the very end, I suddenly realized that there was a tremendous amount of blatant racism at the University of Hong Kong among these English colleagues who were friendly, very civil, and had very interesting conversations. Then I realized that not one of them had ever invited me to have lunch, not only as a guest, but I had seen them at the faculty club, and none of them had entertained us, and the exception at the end was James

Jones; he was head of the Social Work Department at Chinese University. Mr. Hodge was on sabbatical, so he was not at the University of Hong Kong when I was there, and he is not that way. In their faculty club dining room, Chinese eat lunch together, and the British eat lunch together.

MCBROOM: They are self-segregated.

ROBERTS: Self-segregated. I knew Ken Chau, who was acting head; he had been my supervisor; we were friends and I had arranged for him and Lee to meet me at the airport. It is kind of like the service when they were trying to integrate the Air Force. If you socialized with the blacks, you were ostracized.

MCBROOM: Now, Bob, you are a Professor Emeritus, and can you give any words about the retirement experience?

ROBERTS: I had a very typical plan. The University had an option for early retirements, and I was 56 at the time and at 55, you are entitled to go on the half-time program, and I opted to do that. The University prefers that you teach one semester a year. I did that and simultaneously moved to Washington State, so the plan was that I would come down for one semester of the year. When you are exiting as a dean, the University likes to give you a sabbatical leave so you can get out of the way and let the next guy take hold, and you get a semester. Instead of a semester, I took the whole year on half pay and then taught in the second year in the spring semester. It was partly to stay out of the way of the new dean but also, in terms of teaching, was the fact that I was only there one semester a year. I thought it was the most appropriate place to put me. So I was gone for 18 months, and when I came back, in 18 months the system had kind of closed down. It really didn't work very well for me. I had trouble working when I'm totally

involved on committees, dissertation assignments, etcetera. So I worked one semester like that, and then I negotiated a full-time retirement with the Provost. I moved to Washington State, onto an island, and I've just been very divorced from the social work community. Now we have moved back to California, but I'm in North San Diego County, and I don't have any connections down there.

MCBROOM: Can you think of changes that are really important in the profession from the time you first entered it until right now?

ROBERTS: I don't think this is something new, but I think the trend that was always there is that social work is like medicine that has divided into the clinical or treatment, and the other is more of a preventive structural approach. This is partly in the history of the School, but it is also rooted deeply in the origins of this country. Americans are the world's greatest philanthropists. We make all this money and are driven to the accumulation of money, and then we give it away. More people come into the profession today with their motivation to train and get licensed for private practice. What I find ironic is that in most schools of social work this is discouraged, with the orientation of the faculty very disdainful of clinical practice. Although, since Jane Addams or the Roosevelt Administration, social workers have been very influential in shaping social policy, we have lost our credibility. I don't know what it is. Maybe that is what happens when you become a professional and earn a salary, and you have middle-class expectations in terms of income and lifestyle; it is hard to develop credibility as a spokesperson for the people.

I think there had been a premature over-emphasis on evaluating effectiveness of social work treatment, premature in that I don't think we did the first level research that needs to be done where you have more understanding of the problems you are trying to solve. Yet every

worker is doing their own thing and there is no program, or there is a discrepancy between the program and conceptualization. Unfortunately, I think quite a few social work academics in the 60s, 70s and 80s, really developed their career with negative evaluations of the profession, really fouling their own nest. Unfortunately, in academia we are critical of clinical practitioners, especially if they are not research-oriented. Yet most of these people who are the professional critics have themselves made very little, if any, social contribution.

MCBROOM: Well, it sounds like there is a lot to be done in the future. Have we left out anything that we should have talked about?

ROBERTS: One other thing I think that has happened and maybe it is getting diverse now; a growing separation between the schools of social work and the course of social work development of agencies. I will give you a concrete example. When our students were still doing research projects, it was becoming more and more difficult to get an agency to cooperate and allow a student to do their masters' research and their doctoral research there. It would often be defended on the basis of the cost, and agency time. If you scratched underneath, you would find a quite conscious fear that this research was going to be used against the agency. No matter what you said you were going to study, they were afraid it really could turn into an evaluation of their performance. One of the last things that I did before I became dean was that we changed the curriculum, and we dropped the research projects as a requirement. Holding to my experience in Hong Kong, I taught a course that I put together on the relationship between research and practice, and it gave me a chance to look at all that literature. Also, in thinking about my experience in teaching research, I became convinced that the way to get a student interested in doing research and learning the methodology of the statistics they need to do the

research, is to get them involved in a research project that they are interested in, rather than an interest of faculty. It suddenly dawned on me that we should be doing the same thing with agencies, and i guess as Associate Dean, occasionally I would get a call from an agency saying would someone in your School be interested in studying X or Y, and they were always hopeful that a faculty member would do it. Of course faculty were not willing to do anything that they were not paid to do, but it is not realistic for students, anyway. I sent a memo to all the agencies where we had students placed and said that every year, students would spend a great deal of time and energy trying to identify a problem to research. I could not make any promises, but if the agencies had topics that they and we felt needed research on, we would be interested in knowing about them. I distributed a list to the research teachers. Most of the faculty didn't use it, but some did.

MCBROOM: Bob, thank you very much. I think this is an important addition to the Archives and what we need to know and understand about the development of social work education.

Thank you.