

## Yesterday's Voices/Today's Issues

For most of us, the summer is a time of planning for the year ahead. It is a time of seeking what is new - new research findings, new theoretical formulations, new interventive methods - to help us in the practice and teaching of gerontological social work. At SBW Partners, we thought it a good time to re-visit the enduring truths of what is old. Here, for your consideration, are passages from past leaders of our profession that resonate with us today.

**Bertha Capen Reynolds, 1951. Social Work and Social Living: Explorations in Philosophy and Practice. NASW Reprint.**

"That which is painful in old age - not belonging and hence not being able to give, while one must take from others - is a very real hurt that anyone may feel over being helped... It is not hard to take help in a circle in which one feels sure of belonging... It is not hard if one has a reasonable hope of being able to contribute to the group again. It hurts to be helped when one is thereby relegated to the status of a child or permanently handicapped person. It hurts to feel that one will be expected to pay for the help in some way which he would not choose, or perhaps can not even foresee. It hurts to feel doubtful of being able to repay at all and by that means to be again in full status as a giving, as well as receiving, member of the group... Help must be connected with increase, not diminution, of self respect, and it must imply the possibility of a reciprocal relationship of sharing, within a group to which both giver and recipient belong." pp. 25 & 162

**Edna Wasser, 1966. Creative Approaches In Casework with the Aging Family Service Association of America.**

"Most people find it hard, in the normal course of life, not to receive affection and not even to be kissed occasionally. Yet an older person may have outlived those who provided him this kind of personal warmth. Caseworkers, generally younger and healthier than their elderly clients, need to "climb inside" the client's skin, as it were, to understand empathically his feelings and psychological needs and to form a relationship with him. A sense of humor and lightness of touch are needed too, just as they are with younger clients." p. 43

**Carol H. Meyer, 1975. Social Work with the Aging. Washington, DC: NASW Press.**

"In general, most practitioners resist professional work with the aging. This resistance appears to be related to society's stereotyped notions that the aging are at the 'end of the line,' that there is too little time left to accomplish anything in treatment, that success will be short lived, that death is the inevitable end of the case. This view reveals a medical disease model of practice, with its implicit suggestion of a successful ending or 'cure' as a consequence of treatment... But a cure for what? Aging is not a disease; it is a natural life process that begins at birth. And for those who are fortunate, life continues in the seventh or eighth decade and even beyond. Each age level in life has its specific developmental tasks, the best known of which are the maturational tasks involved in the mastery of the identity crisis during adolescence. Yet people do continue during the course of their lives to master the developmental tasks of adulthood, middle age, and the several stages of aging." p. 2

**SBW Partners** is a fee-for-service firm devoted to advancing social work practice in aging. Services are provided by Dr. Barbara Silverstone and Dr. Ann Burack-Weiss, the firm's founding partners, and a group of associates. We provide consultation and staff development for agencies, supervision for practitioners and corporate training programs. For more information, please visit [www.sbwpartners.com](http://www.sbwpartners.com) or call 212.337.2555.

**Look for our next issue  
coming in September!**

**Have a wonderful &  
relaxing summer!**