

THE COHEN INTERVIEWS

URSULA BEHR – Interview No 3

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This is one of 26 interviews with social work pioneers conducted by the late Alan Cohen in 1980 - 81. The period of social work history Alan wished to explore with the interviewees was 1929 - 59. With one exception (No 24, Clare Winnicott) the interviews were unpublished until this edition in 2013. The copyright is held by the not for profit organisation WISEArchive.

Each interview is presented as a free-standing publication with its own set of notes. However, readers interested in the Cohen Interviews as a whole and the period discussed are referred to:

- (a) the other 25 interviews
- (b) the Editors' Introduction
- (c) the Select Bibliography.

All of these can be found at

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/subject_guides/social_work

Ursula Behr (1912--?2001) emerges from the Cohen interview as an interesting but somewhat self-effacing personality, given the outstanding and pioneering contribution she made to the development of social work in the field of child care. Luckily we have first hand testimonies about her qualities that counterbalance the innate modesty. In interview no 24 Clare Winnicott remarks on the frequent movement by Children's Officers from authority to authority and "Nobody stayed. Ursula Behr is quite exceptional, stayed in her job all the way. The rest moved."

Professor Olive Stevenson recalls (in her *Reflections on a Life in Social Work*) the painful occasion when, as a student on Clare Winnicott's child care course at LSE, during her field work placement an unnamed unqualified worker in Surrey opined that she would not make a good social worker. "Clare...cleverly placed me instead with a most unusual qualified worker who also had a PhD. Her name was Ursula Behr, a German Jewish refugee. She was comfortable with my urgent and powerful interest in the role and I was comfortable working with her. She was not threatened by my challenging (or rather cheeky) behaviour, which included, I seem to recall, teasing her that she took her hands off the steering wheel when she was talking. (She did.)"

As with so much in my life, the fact that Ursula was Jewish was a strand in my long- term interest in Jewish people and their history. Not that Ursula talked of it but I had by then

seen films of Auschwitz and was well aware of the Holocaust. When I met her mother I made these connections. I greatly respected Ursula Behr. Best of all, she respected me as I was; that freed me to be myself.”

The Editors are grateful to Professor Andrew Sackville for highlighting another source that says much about UB, *The ACCO Story* by Alan Jacka, a former President of the Association writing in 1974. Chapter 1 on *Pioneer Personalities* includes:

“One of the first meetings of the Association was in the Lutheran Church Hall in St. Pancras and Ursula Behr collected twelve half-crowns to cover the postage expenses. That must have been sometime in 1949, but no records of the meeting have survived.”

“Ursula Behr is the inevitable second choice of a representative pioneer personality because she was in at the very beginning, a student on the first LSE course, collecting those twelve half-crowns in 1948 and being elected national treasurer at the first Annual general Meeting in 1949. Moreover she was always there at South East region meetings, serving as Secretary, or in fact as whatever was necessary to keep things going. She is typically the conscientious worker, always managing to find the time and energy to do what is necessary, serving once more ... for a two-year spell in 1965 and 1966, presumably because no-one else was prepared to take it on. What a good job that she and her mother and sister came to England when they did. What a good job that she found the urge, and the resources, to undertake child care training. It is characteristic that in the last few years she should have put her head, and slender resources, together with two other people to acquire, equip, staff and open a place where unmarried mothers could live with their babies in Chelmsford. Why? Because there was a need, and because nobody else would. That is the spirit of the pioneer, and that is why she was a gift from heaven to the infant Association. Modest, unassuming, competent and energetic, she represents something without price in the social work field”.

A.C. Ursula Behr. When did you first come into social work?

U.B. Well really only through the child care training. I had done a parish worker’s job for three years, but those were my first contacts with social work. Previously I had done all sorts of jobs coming over from Germany as a refugee. As you know one didn’t get permits to work in anything but domestic work first of all. And then gradually I got office work, and then work in Bloomsbury House where all the refugee organisations had their HQ, but it was still in a secretarial capacity, not social work. I got a whiff of social work, occasionally, through contacts with the organisation and then I got the parish work. I did this for three years and then I had to start earning more money. My mother came over from Germany after the war and I had to support both of us with a little help from my bother-in-law. So I saw this advertisement in *The Times*, that offered the child care training, and I thought this might be something I could do.

A.C. When was this?

U.B. It was in 1947. It was the first child care course ever. [1]

A.C. When you said parish work, what was that?

- U.B. It was a small German-speaking congregation in London. They had been here since 1694, [2] and came over with the Georges, the Hanoverian Kings and their entourage and then during the first world war the congregation was of course scattered and was collected again by a pastor about 1940/41 and I became the parish worker there.
- A.C. So you'd always had some kind of interest in doing a job which involved the welfare of people.
- U.B. People, yes. It also involved secretarial work because that comes into parish work as well of course.
- A.C. If you had to say whether it was religious, philosophical, political reasons that brought you into that, would it be religious?
- U.B. Partly, and one didn't have much choice in those days as a refugee. Yes partly religious, it was that I had been a member of the congregation and in those days everybody had to contribute what they could. Some people could do sewing and cooking and all sorts of things, and I had this secretarial training, and at first for years, I helped the pastor just voluntarily, as the others did, and then he somehow got the money for a full time parish worker, and I got the job. Sort of slid into it!
- A.C. So you were already, in a sense, set on that path, and saw the chance with the training?
- U.B. I certainly didn't want to have just a humdrum office job.
- A.C. Can you remember what happened when you replied to the advertisement? Can you remember anything about that?
- U.B. Yes indeed. There was first the interview at the Home Office, and I always tell this story as a funny story. My impression was that there were about 12 people interviewing me and Mrs Winnicott (Interviewee no 24) assures me that there were never more than 3! And I was so anxious and bewildered that I don't remember much but I do remember that they asked me, had I had any experience with children, and I had to say in all honesty, "No I hadn't" except that when I first came over to this country I had looked after a little girl in my domestic job. And one of the ladies wanted to help me out and said "Oh I'm sure if you've been a parish worker you've had a Sunday school." And I said, "No these people from refugee congregations were not sufficiently established in this country to start families, and those that were just beginning to start them hadn't any children who were of Sunday school age." But they had me all the same. Then I had a second interview at the LSE because I wanted if at all possible to be in London; to study in London. I got through that and I think Mrs. Winnicott was very much one of the driving forces in that.
- A.C. Can you remember things about the course?
- U.B. Oh yes. I enjoyed every minute of it. I enjoyed the human growth and development side, which opened up quite new aspects to me on psychological development of human beings. I found the legislation side quite easy and congenial. One must bear in mind that in those days there was far less legislation than there is now. The main Acts we had to learn were really the new Children Act, which wasn't even an Act,

yet. When the course started it was the Children Bill. Then the 1933 Children and Young Person's Act, the 1926 Adoption Act, and the 1913 Mental Health Act. [3]

A.C. Mental Deficiency Act. 1913 and 1927 were the two Mental Deficiency Acts.

U.B. Yes. So I mean there wasn't that volume of legislation that people have now. It was very very stimulating, the course itself, the members, were very congenial, although there was quite a difference in age. Some were married, some were unmarried, and we really stuck together as a course. We celebrated our fifth and our tenth jubilee afterwards, with the Winnicotts [Donald and Clare] and one of the most exciting experiences was to get tickets for the House of Lords, which Mrs. Winnicott has procured for us, to hear the Children Bill debated.

A.C. That's where the debate took place... was it in the Lords?

U.B. Yes. And I had very stimulating lectures by Professor Ginsberg, [4] which I attended on social psychology and social philosophy. Karl Mannheim on law. [5] All the great names. We had practical placements.

A.C. Who taught the human growth and development?

U.B. Mrs Winnicott herself and she had psychiatrists in, for example Dr. Winnicott. [6] Of course Mrs Winnicott wasn't Mrs Winnicott then; she was Miss Britton. And they were our main teachers. She took also the tutorials for all of us.

A.C. She had all of your as tutees did she?

U.B. Yes, 18 of us. I think I'm right in saying that. We all had tutorials with her. We had Miss Gardner [7] at the Institute, and unfortunately Susan Isaacs was just dying at the time, and so Miss Gardner was very concerned about her. Members of our course were getting a bit impatient and saying, "Is this child never growing up and getting beyond the two year stage?" And I stuck it out and was rewarded by a perfectly brilliant lecture at the end about the adult. And I've never regretted it; sitting through it. We visited establishments. For instance we went to the Caldecott Community [8]. And we discussed amongst ourselves. We sat there and went at it hammer and tongs.

A.C. Can you remember the sort of things you discussed together?

U.B. I think it was mainly the psychodynamic theory which made a great impact on everybody. And I realised then how difficult all this must have been for people who did not have a happy childhood. I happened to have a very good childhood, and therefore I could understand even more, and look back with gratitude on what I had had. But I also realised that people who had had unfortunate experiences in their childhood must have felt very shattered by what they learned about their early influences. I think that was a great subject for discussion. And then of course our practical placements. We had a fortnight each in December 1947 and Easter 1948 in residential establishments. And I was, in December, in a huge Barnardo's Home [9] which has since been closed, and realised how little outside contacts the children had in those days.

- A.C. I was wondering whether the people who you went to on placements regarded you as some kind of threat because you were these new fangled students on this new fangled course, with new fangled knowledge with this new fangled act in the offing.
- U.B. Yes they did indeed! They didn't know whether we were Home Office spies or what. And they thought we would throw our weight about and one had to reassure them, and I found I did it best by really bucking to and doing exactly the same things that they did, including domestic chores, stitching names into socks, etc.
- A.C. Can you remember any anecdotes about that?
- U.B. Yes. In the Barnardo's Home I learned very much how deprived these children were. This was a very big establishment for hundred boys, all of school age, and the only individuality they had was that they were divided into houses. Red house, Green house, Yellow house each with a set of dormitories and bathroom and a Matron attached to it, and a young housemaster, in my case he was married. Once I remember going out with him and his wife and the boys, for a walk and the boys asked me "Are you Mr. P's wife?" I said "No of course not, Mrs. P is his wife." "Well are you one of his wives?" they had no idea that there was one married couple. Another one asked me "When all my parents are dead, shall I be my brother's father?" He meant, of course, shall I have the responsibility for my brother. But that's how he expressed it. To my knowledge during the whole fortnight when I was there, they had no letters, none of them. They were bound to have some religious education and they (Barnados) tried to be very fair. One Sunday they went to the Parish Church where they were the vast majority of congregation. And unfortunately they preached the sermon way above their heads, and the little aeroplanes and trucks came out! I hadn't the heart to stop them. But then the following Sunday they had the Plymouth Brethren in, or the Salvation Army, and there were the choruses and the drums and the noise, and they joined in wholeheartedly, and they taught me a lesson for my later practice. I thought if you want the children to have some religious education and experience, although it says in the fostering agreement, we should bring up the children in their own religion if possible, I thought let them get a little religious education where they can and where they can take it. So that was a lesson I learned there. And also I saw how difficult it was for the children, and for me, at the end of the fortnight, when they felt deprived and rejected again because I had to go. And it has been a point that one had to consider very carefully later on when one had students oneself, preparing them and warning them against making very close relationships, with any particular children.
- A.C. So there was a placement in Barnardo's and anywhere else?
- U.B. There was another residential placement at Easter, that was in a small children's home in Ely, and that was quite different. It was small, it was mixed sexes, it had a youngish and progressive Matron and these children were fully in touch with life. Again, not very many members of their own family visiting; that was the pattern in those days. But the Matron and her family were not far away. They were all quite families with Matron's mummy. Matron's mummy sometimes came in and deputised. Very amusing, one young member of staff got married before I arrived, and I had on the course learned a little skill with felt and curtain rings to make little things. And I took this material with me to that placement. They absolutely fell upon the curtain rings and used them for wedding rings and played weddings all the times. So they

were really in touch with life. Oh I could tell lots of anecdotes about that but it would make it a bit too long. I must tell you one nice little story of twins, cute little things of about 2 ½ - 3 they were then. And as you know children are fairly aggressive and all day long they said "I'll kill you, I'll skin you." But once a young member of staff had really annoyed this little girl by calling her a silly sausage, so she didn't say "I'll kill you I'll skin you" that meant nothing, but she said, "I'm not a silly sausage and I'll tell your boyfriend about you." She knew that that was the thing that was going to hurt! So she knew about relationships and life and I got a much happier impression of that home.

A.C. How about your fellow students on the course. What were their backgrounds? What had they done?

U.B. Some had done nursing. Some had, I think, a social science background. We had several teachers. One who was older than ourselves had been a housewife. There weren't many like myself who had no nursing or teaching background. I think I was the only one with this kind of background.

A.C. You had no social science certificate?

U.B. No I had a D.Phil (Berlin) so they knew I could cope reasonably with academic knowledge.

A.C. So you had completed your education when you came over here?

U.B. Yes I had completed it in Germany.

A.C. What was your degree?

U.B. It was English, Latin and philosophy.

A.C. Goodness! So it must have been very interesting going to the LSE?

U.B. Oh it was! It was! It was like coming home!

A.C. Did you stick with the course, or did you go to other peoples lectures.

U.B. Not many. Ginsberg I took, many of the others didn't because they'd had this, but Mrs. Winnicott discussed with us what we might need, and I was so conscious of my lack of background that I said, "Well I'd better have the lot." And I went to Ginsberg as well. But I didn't go to many outside things, the programme was very full as it was.

A.C. So after the two residential placements what followed then?

U.B. There followed some more academic work during the summer term. We did visits of observation one day a week in other local authorities during all three terms. And of course being child care students we mostly did visits to foster homes and foster children. At least I did so, in my second placement in Surrey. In the first placement I went around with an education welfare officer and I didn't see so very much there because it was hop-picking time and we went to one house after another and always heard the families were out 'oppin'! And I didn't know what they meant! I thought do they mean that all these foster parents had hopped it! But the second term in Surrey was very instructive and the third term I visited quite regularly Dr. Barnardo's,

Barkingside and my particular task was to take children to the child guidance unit which they had there in the compound, and to get the reports from their housemothers, take the children and the reports to the child guidance clinic and take them back again, then discuss with the housemothers. I was quite interested there how isolated the residential staff were in those days. Once I was told the housemother couldn't see me (I usually had lunch there with the housemother). She couldn't see me because she had had to go to some railway terminus to meet another housemother and escort her across London, back to Barkingside. I thought, "My goodness!" this was a woman of about 40 "She can't get herself across London under her own steam." I was amazed. That to a certain extent I observed also later on when I got my job.

- A.C. Do you think it's an occupational hazard of residential child care staff that they are very caring and cosseting of anybody they come into contact with?
- U.B. It could be yes.
- A.C. Did you have contact with other students, other social work students when you were at LSE?
- U.B. At the Institute of Education [10] we had contact with the teachers. But not much no. I had hoped to join the students union and all sorts of things, but I found I just hadn't the time.
- A.C. It sounds as though it was a very busy time.
- U.B. It was, yes.
- A.C. Meanwhile while you were doing the course the local authorities were busy establishing their children's departments, presumably.
- U.B. Yes and appointing their children's officers. And after the academic work at LSE in July we were then placed for a block placement in local authorities and I went to Derby. The children's officer there arrived toward the latter end of my period there, and there were two boarding out officers. One dealt with the children who came under the social welfare department, and the other with those who were committed by the courts and were the responsibility of the education department, and I was under the latter one. But I didn't see much of either of them because the social welfare boarding out officer never set foot in the office from beginning to end, because she was ill. She had apparently been very perturbed by the prospect of having a children's officer. And the other one, my tutor, got run over by a bus and was in hospital for a lot of the time! So I was really thrown in at the deep end and again I had contact with the education welfare officers, and for instance I attended the theatre with him to see that the conditions for the children who worked on stage were adequate. That was quite interesting. But I learned the hard way.
- A.C. Yes and you didn't actually get what we would call today supervision?
- U.B. Oh good gracious no! Pick it up, yes. And I knew the anxiety when I boarded out my first child in Derby. I wanted to sit on the doorstep all night and hear how it was going! The responsibility one felt!
- A.C. Can you remember any anecdotes from that placement?

- U.B. Yes. One thing that struck me as very good. There was a little girl who came into the office one day. She was a foster child and she had been out shopping for her foster mother and had broken one of the eggs that she had bought, and she came into the office and asked for some paper to wrap it up, and I thought that was rather nice that the child had the confidence to know, "Here is somebody that will help me." Well again nobody knew yet what we were going to do. In Derby we had to go about with corporation money on the buses – tokens. If I had to go further afield, which I had to do sometimes, because they had boarded some children out beyond their city boundary. I had a chauffeur driven car and the chauffeur had to wait until I had finished my business. I found that rather disconcerting because you didn't have the spontaneity, because you always had to think "Now the chauffeur is waiting".
- A.C. You had imagined him tapping his foot?
- U.B. Yes.
- A.C. So that block placement concluded the course did it?
- U.B. That concluded the course, and the certificate was partly dependent upon a good report from the placement.
- A.C. Who wrote your report then if there was no supervisor?
- U.B. The supervisor, so called, wasn't away all the time, and she was very grateful because I invented a system for keeping a record of the visits one had paid and that helped her quite a bit.
- A.C. No records?!
- U.B. Oh they had records but they were all over the place in those days. Mind you there was nothing like the volume of work that we got used to later on.
- A.C. Were there case records and things?
- U.B. Oh yes there were case records. I meant mainly about the dates when she had visited, so that she could see at a glance this child is due for another visit.
- A.C. Did you have to find your own job when you left the course? Or did they circulate lists, or what happened?
- U.B. No. One looked at advertisements and I found I wanted to be somewhere near London if not London. My first choice was London itself, but I didn't get that job. Then Essex advertised and I was interviewed there and got the job.
- A.C. How many were there of you in the original Essex children's department?
- U.B. 12. I think or 13, not sure. It was like that. We each had quite large areas and we had to do everything that cropped up in our areas.
- A.C. Presumably at that time it wasn't an all-qualified staff?
- U.B. No it wasn't; not yet. There were some of the older ones who were necessarily unqualified. There wasn't anybody qualified in child care. They had experience, and I think they were very, very good. But they weren't qualified. They couldn't be

qualified because we were the first child care course. They had other qualifications but not that. My supervisor had been a teacher, and a very nice, very humane person, and I learned a lot from her and I thought I shall never be as good as she is.

- A.C. That's nice you were able to go into a congenial atmosphere.
- U.B. Oh yes, very. In the department it was very nice. Of course working conditions were terrible. We had a huge room, at first, in County Hall. The children's officer sat in the middle of the room in a little glass cage, and it was a struggle to get hold of a telephone. We didn't have our own desks; we shared desks. We had a few typists and they did their best and helped us enormously. And I must say this for Essex, from beginning to end it was a very happy atmosphere in the department. Really a family atmosphere and the children's officer sent the tone because she treated everybody alike, respecting them as a person. It could be the most senior person; it could be the office boy.
- A.C. Who was the Children's Officer?
- U.B. Miss Wansbrough-Jones. **[11]**
- A.C. So you were allotted an area of North Essex?
- U.B. Yes, North and North East. Then there were people in the West and South East.
- A.C. What was it like being pitched in on your own, so to speak.
- U.B. Yes, well, it was a little frightening at first, but I had this very good supervisor for consultation, and they tried to give us easy jobs and first to let us in gently. I was for instance visiting parents who hadn't paid for their children for a long time, and to see what they were going to do about it. But very soon we really had to do the proper reception into care. I remember during my first week in department, a call came from Clacton. It's right on the Coast, and I was working from Chelmsford and had to do it by public transport. A message came, a mother of 8 children had deserted and the children's officer said, "Well do what you like but you know we haven't got any vacancies in the children's homes." So I went out there on the bus, and saw these children. Father had gone to work, but being 8 of them the older ones were reasonably sensible and I said, "I'll be back tomorrow and see what I can do." I went back to the office and did a lot of telephoning. Meanwhile mother did return, because the grapevine worked very well, and I thought we must do something for her because with 8 children and an uncooperative husband, not much money, it is really a burden and sooner or later she'll desert again for good, or she'll go into hospital or something. And I got the Salvation Army to take 5 of the children for a 6 week holiday, and the mother could cope with the youngest ones. And of course we had no power then to pay for these children, strictly speaking not even for my fares to them, and fares to their holiday destination and so on. And I had to get clothes for them from the WVS **[12]** as it was then. And we did it. We had to rely much more on voluntary effort in those days. Salvation Army **[13]** and WVS.
- A.C. Was it Section 1 of the '63 act?
- U.B. That was fifteen years later! So one had to do more difficult things quite soon, but as I say there was good support in the department. And the children's officer herself made herself very available. One could go to her and consult, "Can I do this?"

- A.C. You were saying earlier that travelling by bus made it possible for you to think before you arrived. Of course it would also give you time to build up a whole lot of anxiety, if you know you are going to see 8 children with nowhere to place them!
- U.B. I was fairly fatalistic! I can only do my best!
- A.C. You mentioned just now that business about the parental assessments. Facing parents about contributions.
- U.B. Yes, well fortunately in Essex we had a policy that we child care officers didn't have to do the assessment ourselves. We got particulars, but it was then done by somebody else and I think it helped the relationship a lot that one didn't, and wasn't accused of assessing them for too much and so on. It was only to go in and not to hold pistols at their heads, but to say "What are your circumstances?"
- A.C. Were you chased by the admin officers? And did they say, "Your Mrs. So-and-so hasn't paid"?
- U.B. Well yes we were and that was their job, and they had to do it, but again we were very good friends with them.
- A.C. Then presumably you had to go to the families.
- U.B. Yes, am I telling you too many anecdotes. I went with my supervisor because she had a car and I didn't, to a neighbouring town, to Colchester. And there was a family where three of the children I think were in an approved school, and the father hadn't paid contributions, and our admin officer had chased him all over the place; letters and so on but could never get hold of him. I was sent to the house and when I arrived there, there was a cortege just going off, and I asked the bystanders who it was, and it was the father of these children, who had got run over by a bus. He must have been a complete psychopath! I heard stories he had set fire to the bedding when he felt like it and it was terrible. So I went back and reported this to the admin officer, that he wouldn't be paying any more contributions, and she was very indignant. And she said "Here I have chased him all over the country and he comes back to Essex to be buried!". The family never looked back, because they got quite a good compensation from the bus company and the mother was quite a sensible woman, and the children could come home and all was well.
- A.C. Did you find that the ideas that had been presented on the course were of help to you in your practice?
- U.B. Oh yes very much so. One of the main things we learned was the importance of the family to the child. What we found were Children's Homes full of very isolated children, and it was one of our priorities to trace the relations of these children. A backlog. Yes, indeed. That hadn't been the philosophy at all that these children needed their families.
- A.C. How did you set about that? Tell me about that?
- U.B. We looked at the records and we picked up any old addresses we could find and followed it up from there.
- A.C. What sort of response did you get when you traced the parents.

U.B. Some quite good. I remember tracing one family, young Winston's (many children were called Winston in those days) and I went right to London, and they did remember him and had him home without much ado. I also remember a girl who was then about 14, re-introducing her to her family. She was illegitimate, the mother had then married and the step father had been so cruel to her, (she was then about 5), that she was committed to care. I felt, well, she should have some idea of her family. You see that dispels the fantasies doesn't it, and I took her there. She kept loosely in touch, but the atmosphere was squalid and it was no good. Another one I remember, she was in a children's home and that poor child had not even got a Christian name! When we came to find the birth certificate she didn't even possess a Christian name! They called her something but it wasn't on the birth certificate. And again that case taught me a lot about communication. The mother was incurably ill and in a mental hospital, the father denied paternity and had never made any contact and hadn't even bothered to give the child a name and there she was for 11 years without any personal contact outside the Home. And then somehow, also through records, I discovered an aunt, and this aunt was quite helpful and when the girl left care and got married she gave her a very nice wedding present. The reason why the aunt was so well-meaning enough had never made contact was, that originally this child had been placed for adoption and it had broken down and she had returned to the Home, and nobody had let the aunt know. So you can see how the failure to write this one letter had influenced the whole course of the child's life. Mind you she is now very much richer than her former child care officer! She's got a fabulous position now.

A.C. I took you off track there.

U.B. I remember your question. You wondered how the teaching on the course related to practice. This philosophy of keeping children in touch with their own family was very much one of the aspects that were emphasised. And altogether even if they hadn't got any family of their own, or we couldn't trace it, the importance of fostering. The Children Act 1948 very much emphasised fostering. I think perhaps we went a bit overboard on that in the early days. Fostering at all costs. We tried to be as careful as we could and matched, but I always regarded it as a terrible failure if I couldn't find a foster home for a child. Or worse still if a fostering broke down.

A.C. Terribly demoralising for residential staff too, to be told what they were doing was a very poor second best.

U.B. Oh indeed, indeed.

A.C. You say the philosophy was of the family being most important. It's often said that the child care service operated on the assumption that a poor home was better than a good institution. And a lot of children were kept at home who should not have been kept at home. Is that fair do you think?

U.B. I think it certainly is a reproach that one must accept. I think perhaps we overdid it sometimes, trying desperately to keep the children in their own homes. It may have caused suffering to the children sometimes, but I think by and large it is still a valid philosophy to think 2 times, 10 times before one removes a child from the home. It comes with experience that one can judge. And of course we learn to consult the children and to know their views. Mrs. Winnicott had always been very strong on communicating with the child.

- A.C. So that in the new Act isn't new at all?
- U.B. No! We did try to consult the children and to find out their own wishes.
- A.C. Can you tell a story about that at all?
- U.B. I had had a brother and sister in a foster home for quite some time and they came from a very disturbed family. Father psychopathic and they had been committed to care. They had been in this foster home for years, and the question arose whether they should be adopted by the foster parents. And they didn't want it. They had hardly seen anything of their parents; I had introduced them once or twice. And they had enough family feeling and loyalty not to want to be adopted.
- A.C. So actually the children's voice was an important thing.
- U.B. There was a boy in a children's home who indulged in all sorts of petty delinquencies and he was coming before the court once again and there seemed to be a strong possibility that he might be committed to an approved school. And I discussed this with him and he perceived that I was trying to avoid this committal to an approved school. And he said to me, "Please Miss Behr I want to go to an approved school. They'll make me behave there." He realised he wasn't strong enough in himself to discipline himself and he wanted this strict outside control.
- A.C. That's very interesting. Was that as well understood and as integrated into practice, that idea that children need boundaries, and one isn't just the all-giving all-permissive. Was that was understood in the 40's?
- U.B. It was understood but I think it has come into a little disuse. Not in the 40's yet, no. I think we had learned that on our course, that children need boundaries. I can clearly remember Dr. Winnicott talking about this framework as he called it. But I think it got lost a bit later on. People were too understanding and too indulgent. Some of them. It always depended to a certain extent on the individual.
- A.C. The reason why I ask you that is because as I've always understood it a lot of generalisations about casework seemed to assume that it was incompatible with anything that smacked of direction in any form, and there was a whole thing about whether probation officers could be said to be doing case work because they had got authority in their role. And it really wasn't until early middle 60's that anyone seriously got to grips with looking at the problem of authority and integrating it with casework ideas.
- U.B. Yes, I think this is one strand of it. That one was trying to understand so hard why children behaved as they did, that one felt one couldn't discipline them or punish them and that spilled over into the courts too. You know magistrates often felt so sorry for children, reading about their backgrounds, that they didn't want to send them to approved schools. Mind you some approved schools were better than others, or worse than others! But they did regard this as a punishment, and they didn't see that some children needed this framework and containment. And I think mistakes were made in that direction. I had the feeling sometimes that among the younger child care workers, social workers as they are now called, there was still the problem they had themselves of discipline. They themselves remembered their adolescent rebellion and how irksome discipline was and they really had a problem about authority and discipline. Later on when I had a lot to do with training, and

supervision of students, I discussed that frequently. The average age of the social worker is so much lower, and of course as you well know so many more men came into the service, and perhaps they are inclined, (and that's a very big generalisation), to have more problems with discipline and authority than the women! So that's how that happened. And they wanted to be the same as the clients. They cannot accept that they have more intelligence otherwise they wouldn't be at the college taking this course. And they have mostly a more stable background and that they should be there to support the clients and they cannot be exactly the same. And they find it hard to accept.

- A.C. Can I make sure I've got this right. In your experience in the child care at this time, we're just getting in to the 50's, the social workers were into setting boundaries and understood that well, and it was part of their thinking. I mean they could handle their work in that way.
- U.B. Yes.
- A.C. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but can I be devil's advocate, for my impression is from discussions one would have had say with trained social workers at that time, (in the 1950's) all the talk all the time was about being permissive, understanding, accepting and the implication all the time that permissiveness and acceptance and so on meant that you didn't say "stop" or "no". People were doing it right enough but felt very sheepish.
- U.B. Yes. The emphasis was certainly on permissiveness and acceptance and so on, but I think that the best child care officers who understood their human growth and development properly knew that one had to set boundaries. And especially to small children of course, because otherwise they feel they are all-powerful and get very very anxious about it. With adolescents it's a different story. And I think perhaps this greater permissiveness and acceptance was also a reaction to what had been the case, and how they had been regimented.
- A.C. Gosh, that really is very interesting. Can you remember any more stories about situations where you have had to set the boundaries?
- U.B. I remember one young girl who led me a dance. I don't know what she had done that time, but it was in the middle of the street, and I suddenly turned on her and roared at her. Deliberately. I hadn't lost my temper. I did it quite deliberately because I very rarely did it, and I thought it might make an impression. And she turned purple and we are good friends to this day, she lives very near me.
- A.C. Can we come back to the child care service itself now. I think I'm right in saying that in '50 or '51 there was the Joint Circular from the Ministry of Health, Home Office and Ministry of Education about coordinating. **[14]**
- U.B. Which gave rise to the Ingleby Report was that it?
- A.C. No, Ingleby came after. I think a back stage debate was going on. People were saying that the legislation needed tightening up. And another group were saying that it didn't need tightening up, what we needed was greater cooperation between the services, greater coordination between them. And the three government departments issued a circular which led to the establishment of coordinating

committees in different areas. And also the greater use of case conferences and so on. Can you remember anything about that?

U.B. Not much because I must say my interest in administration isn't as great as it should be. And we had a children's officer who kept this very much in her hands and I was thankful for it because I was left free to get on with my casework, and not to bother very much. But I don't think we had that in Essex very much. Co-ordinating Committee, no. It didn't get off the ground. Certainly didn't become very prominent.

A.C. It was a Committee where usually problematic situations were to be discussed.

U.B. Yes, I know what you mean.

A.C. And agreeing on who was to be a key worker.

U.B. I know, similar to the present Case Conferences.

A.C. Yes. The Co-ordinating Committee was rather a grand affair where discussions about strategy were held, and responsibility for cases agreed.

U.B. I don't think that had got off the ground very much in our area.

A.C. Case conferences were more about tactics really in relation to a family. Did you make use of Case Conferences and so on in Essex?

U.B. We did yes. I personally didn't do it very much, and that may have been a fault of mine because I had been there for so long that I knew the key people personally very well. I preferred to pick up the telephone and say, "What do you know about this?" or "Can you help with that" and work in this way because I felt that case conferences sometimes were a very great waste of time.

A.C. Can you say why?

U.B. Yes. Because you got a lot of people who came from very different areas, housing, health, and each had their different point of view. I think it was beneficial in that they got to know each other's point of view a bit more. But it was also very time consuming. All getting there and talking and not always to the point. I don't belittle case conferences, it was just that I personally liked, sometimes, to use a short cut because time was so precious in those days.

A.C. The service having been established and beginning to grow.

U.B. Oh yes.

A.C. When did there become more of you. Beyond the dozen or thirteen of you covering the whole of Essex? When did it start to grow?

U.B. Gradually. We appointed quite often our former students. The LSE sent students to us and I was, I think, the first student supervisor there, and in those days we still had the practice that they came for a 3 months block, as I had done in my own training, and so they got to know the authority and we got to know them. And quite often they applied then to Essex and we augmented the department in this way. But I can't give you any figures as to how it grew eventually.

- A.C. No, it doesn't matter. I'm really just searched round for impressions of the growing service, really I'm trying to lead into a kind of growing consciousness of being child care officers.
- U.B. Well that started very early we founded the Association of Child Care Officers. **[15]** Have you heard about it?
- A.C. I was coming on to that; I didn't realise it was started straight away.
- U.B. Oh yes! 1949 I think it was. We joined with Cardiff and Liverpool and got together and the grand subscription was half a crown. Nobody had any money of course, but we did join. I'll tell you what I can send you, I think I've still got it, the Jubilee Edition of *Accord* and you'll find articles in there; one of them written by myself, and one by a colleague who has since died. How it all began.
- A.C. Have you any reminiscences for the tape?
- U.B. Oh yes. I can remember how we met in the hall of our church I think, in London, and discussed what we would do and the organisation and the reason why we felt the need for our own association.
- A.C. Sorry did you say the hall of your church?
- U.B. The hall yes. It was first a meeting place that I knew of. Then we had meetings in Paddington Green where Dr. Winnicott very kindly put his consulting rooms at our disposal and we also met at the Nursery Nurses Association in Portland Place. We discussed matters of professional interest. In those days our conditions of service and so on took very much second place. It was all learning and it was all so new. Learning and exchanging experiences. We were the South and South East region and we often had joint meetings in London, and we started issuing a newsheet which became a little booklet later on. It was called *Accord* which meant really only Association of Child Care Officers Regional Digest. But it was such a nice name, *Accord*, and we issued it quite regularly, and of course the organisation grew, and we needed secretary and a chairman.
- A.C. Were you a leading light? You said it was the place you knew where you met.
- U.B. Well it just so happened our course and the Cardiff course, **[16]** we had the idea of it simultaneously and we said we would meet. And the question was where to meet. I said well there is this hall. That was all. I was the first treasurer and had the enormous task of collecting all these 10 or 12 half crowns! .
- A.C. You must have wondered what to do with it all?
- U.B. And we then started having annual conferences at Swanwick the conference centre in the Midlands. And that was marvellous. They were really family reunions there, and a very, very nice happy spirit. And of course Mrs. Winnicott came, and Dr. Winnicott too. We had speakers. There were no men at first, and then Derek Jehu **[17]** was the first man who made his appearance on the child care course. And then of course we had many more.
- A.C. He was the first man to train.

- U.B. Yes. At least on the LSE course, I wouldn't swear that he was the very first man altogether. But they were very happy occasions these Swanwick (in Derbyshire) conferences. And we discussed professional things again.
- A.C. Can you give me some examples of the sort of things?
- U.B. Yes, we had speakers. Case descriptions and problems and a lot was talked about adoption. Because you see in 1950 the big Adoption Act came. **[18]** There was quite a lot about that. But it was very largely an exchange of experiences. People brought their problems and their policies.
- A.C. Like a mutual support group it sounds like?
- U.B. It was that. Very much a need for mutual support, and for recognition outside because nobody knew at first who we were. The health visitors were at first somewhat hostile, because we eventually took over the supervision under the Child Life Protection Act **[19]** as it was then, and the supervision of the children placed for adoption.
- A.C. They'd done that before had they?
- U.B. The health visitors had done it. Some of it; the adoption supervision it was called anybody could do it really, and I remember one where the clerk of the court did it. He had no idea of course of child care. Why should he? But that then was taken over by the child care officers, and their outlook was different, because the health visitors had thought very much in terms of hygiene and proper food and so on, and we were more after the developmental aspect and the caring aspect. But we began to cooperate quite happily.
- A.C. When you were talking about your professional discussions, you're coming back to that issue we were talking about a little while ago. Were you then exploring the idea, not the principle of setting boundaries, but the how. How do you communicate with children? How do they convey their needs?
- U.B. I cannot recall any specific talk about that, but in the course of discussions about our cases, it must have come up.
- A.C. The things that I've read round, because of doing this research, Clare Britton as she was, her chapter in Cherry Morris's "Social Casework in Great Britain **[20]** which when I read it impressed me as something that stands today. I would say to a student now, "Read that".
- U.B. Yes and both she and Dr. Winnicott, I remember very clearly, that Dr. Winnicott calling it the framework for the child in which it has to operate.
- A.C. This was in his lectures and things. He talked about the child needs a framework. Can you remember any more about what he said about that?
- U.B. Well as I said before, I think if a child doesn't have that framework it gets this feeling of being all powerful, and they have fantasies anyway that their wishes can kill people, and if one doesn't hold the child within a framework, it is frightened by its own power or imagined power.

- A.C. At the ACCO meetings this sort of thing was discussed, case descriptions, and conditions and salaries took very much second place.
- U.B. Yes. We agonised year after year whether we should become protective. That's to say whether we should protect our interests and conditions of service and so on. It was always turned down for years.
- A.C. Tell me, do you reckon that was because you were nearly all women?
- U.B. Quite possibly. I'm not setting us up with a halo for being so selfless. I have always recognised, personally, and I'm sure others have too, that men cannot afford to leave that out of their considerations. They have their family responsibilities. I'm single and I can please myself as to how much or how little I earn. But you can't do that when you have a family.
- A.C. The medical social workers and the PSWs were in exactly the same position. And the probation officers who were mostly male, used to find their two nastiest males to go off and negotiate the salaries. It was no time to be nice and understanding when you were negotiating money. So you eventually did recruit more men to the child care service didn't you?
- U.B. Oh yes and it was very good because the adolescent boys quite often needed a man to understand them and cope.
- A.C. I'm not asking you to dig back figures from the back of your mind but in terms of just your impression, at what point did you suddenly think there was quite a number, a reasonable proportion or high proportion of men in the child care service?
- U.B. I would say the second half of the 50's, but it's a guess.
- A.C. So this would really date from post-Applied Social Studies course, post-generic course. '54 was the first. I'm thinking about Tom White [21] and people like Tom and Barry Newell [22] and the people that came in, in the second half of the 50's. How about the relationship between the field staff, child care officers and the residential staff during this period.?
- U.B. Well, at first it was a bit tense because you mentioned yourself that the child care officers were the trained ones, that was one thing. Training among residential workers was almost non existent, although the Curtis Report, [23] the interim, had recommended that, even before training for the field workers. But there were very few trained ones. Secondly they got this feelings through the Children Act a bit, that they were very second best, and it is also true that of course the child care officers, field workers, creamed off the easier children for boarding out, and they were left with the difficult residue. Then we started in our Southern and South Eastern regions to have joint conferences. Weekend conferences. And we invited to this people from the Home Office, the children's officers association, the child care field workers and the residential workers. And I remember the first one so well. You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife! And then after we had danced a bit and socialised, it began to get very much better. And it was better with every conference. And, (I'm speaking from my own experience in Essex), great friendships developed between field workers and residential workers and there was really good cooperation. I remember one night I had to take away to a place of safety, a half starved baby, whose mother was mentally ill and just didn't care. I had to take it to a nursery a long

way from Chelmsford, and it was on the Friday before Bank Holiday and I got into a terrific traffic jam and sat there and sat there: I thought "If that baby hadn't been starved before, it'll be starved now!" And I arrived at the nursery at about eleven o'clock at night and there was the Matron and the Assistant Matron and the Area Organiser of the area, "Where have you been? What has happened to you? Have some cocoa. Would you like to stay the night?" They looked after the baby of course. It couldn't have been nicer. It felt so welcome and so warm. Oh and another occasion when I arrived at the remand home as it was then at 3 o'clock in the morning with a girl, "Have some cocoa". It became much more friendly in the course of the years.

- A.C. My own memories of '53, '54 and '56 where I had worked in residence, the residential staff seemed to have a feeling of being beleaguered, misunderstood on all sides. As you said, the manageable children had been fostered. They were crowded out with some very difficult children, we didn't know how to handle them. We handled them very badly I feel now. Feeling that there was no communication between them and field staff. Home Office inspectors would come along and all they seemed to be interested in – whether the flannels were touching the towels, and that shouldn't be, and each child had to have his own individual tin for his toothpaste. We got very cynical about that.
- U.B. There still is a certain amount of hostility but now it is different. The residential workers complain that the field workers don't care, and don't see the children and don't visit the Homes enough. Again I can say from my own experience as a child care officer, I did visit my residential Home where I was liaison officer as much as I could, but if there was a crisis somewhere in the field, the residential visit had to go by the board because I knew at least the children had a roof over their heads and were cared for. That is what is happening now they seem to be under so much more pressure, and the residential workers complain about that; also that they are not sufficiently consulted when plans are made for the child. That I think is plain stupid because the residential workers are the ones who know the child, and I would not have boarded out a child myself from a Home, without having a consultation with the houseparents, and more often than not, introducing the prospective foster parents to them. But it's all this pressure nowadays.
- A.C. Yes indeed. When just now you mentioned having to take a half starved baby into care, I guess a lot of the situations the child care officer meets are very challenging from the point of view of you wanting to be an understanding kind of person and I wondered how you personally found that.
- U.B. Well sometimes you want to strangle the parents and particularly of course when it is the question of ill-treatment. Because we are all still identified with the babies and children. Here goes little me. But I think quite soon one does see then how inadequate the parents are and what their background is, and that mitigates the wrath a little. But it's a social work problem that one has all along. That one has to take oneself in hand and not let one's own biases get the better of one.
- A.C. Do you have any anecdotes of families that really challenged your commitment to that?
- U.B. Yes I remember one mother, quite a reasonable well-to-do mother, and I kept getting reports from neighbours that the child who was then about 5, was ill-treated

and I could never get any proper evidence. With the mother's cooperation, I went to the child guidance clinic. The mother would not have objected to letting the child go to boarding school, but she didn't want a children's Home. Not so much because she would have had to pay for one and not for the other, but because it was more prestigious to be able to say my child goes to a boarding school. But the Home, no. And the psychiatrist was very cooperative and said I'll ascertain her as maladjusted so that we could get her away. But it all takes time, as you know, and I was very, very anxious about it. And then fate came to my aid. The mother developed a virulent cancer and had to go into hospital and died very quickly. And there was a grandmother. And grandmother took the child and she lived happily ever after. So that was one of the anxieties that one had, and I was very cross before I knew the mother was so ill. I was very very cross with the mother the way she handled the child.

A.C. When we were talking about ACCO I wanted to ask you more about that. Did you remain an active member of that group.

U.B. Yes right through. I think I can show you this. photograph. Mrs Winnicott looked that out for me the other day. That was the final celebration, final dinner, when ACCO was merged into BASW.

A.C. Gosh, isn't that lovely! This was 1970 it would be, wouldn't it? Were you ever involved in giving evidence or lobbying on behalf of ACCO? You mentioned the Ingleby Committee.

U.B. No I wasn't.

A.C. So your interests really were always directly involved with the field and with the clients.

U.B. And then when the children's department became part of the social services department with Seebohm, [24] I opted for training. I was getting on then and I felt these excursions at midnight and so on were getting a bit much, and I became a training officer. I was principal care officer and I had had some training functions in the children's department. I had always supervised students, long before I should have done, presumably. But there wasn't anybody trained you see in those days, and one had to rely on the few who were.

A.C. You always carried a case load?

U.B. Oh yes.

A.C. You must have seen a lot of changes in social work ideas in the period up to '59.

U.B. Well the emphasis shifted much more towards giving material help. Authorities varied very much how they interpreted section 1 of the 1963 [Children and Young Persons] Act. [25] That was after '59. Altogether the emphasis was more on giving material help. Of course one could use it marvellously, constructively. For instance in Essex we bought a number of police houses and put problem families there. Equipped them with only the barest necessities so that the family should have scope to use their own resources, and they were of course under supervision and we collected the rent. That was a very, very good use, but I think we never gave too much material help, and tried not to lose sight of the casework. Mainly through the

students I observed very much how casework, for a time at least, went out of fashion. It was almost a dirty world and everybody went over to group work and community work, (at the end of 60's I would say). And I saw the point because I think we had probably neglected the material side too much in our casework efforts, but I also saw the dangers. That they were giving aid and supporting the client's rights and never emphasising their responsibilities.

- A.C. You were talking just earlier about a well-to-do mother. At what point do you think suddenly the whole thing changed? Somehow social work was equated working with poor people all the time and the assumption was that if you were a social worker clients were always poor. When did that assumption start creeping in and people talking as if that were the case do you think?
- U.B. When I think of my clients, mostly they were poorer people. I wouldn't say they were destitute people, but they were poorer people with large families and that sort of thing so I think it was easy to get that impression. But I think it came in a bit as we got the younger and more politically conscious social workers in. And they emphasised the clients' rights very much more. Again it was a good thing but one must strike a balance and I think in social work, unfortunately you do have these fashions and these swings of the pendulum. I tried very much to point out to my trainees that isn't the be all and end all of things. Once I made them, (I had 18 trainees on my trainee course at the time), look through all their cases and see where the basic problem was, poverty and bad housing. Between them they found one case! It is so much more the inadequacy of the person, I am not saying that the people who are inadequate shouldn't have that help, but I wanted them to see that material need wasn't the basic problem.
- A.C. Some local authorities well before the '63 act had already appointed an army of family caseworkers. Was that in Essex?
- U.B. No, not specifically. Well we worked in areas, and the areas became smaller. As more officers were appointment Essex could be divided up more. If somebody had such a police house in his or her areas, then they dealt with that family there.
- A.C. Child care officers did it?
- U.B. Yes but people didn't particularly want to be family caseworkers. They thought it would be too depressing to have to deal only with these problem families. I must say myself I often experienced that if I had a nice adoption, a nice baby happily placed and a happy couple, I regarded that as my light relief. So I could understand that.
- A.C. Had you heard of the work of Family Service Units? **[26]** Where did you hear about them?
- U.B. On the Course, already. I think, I wouldn't swear to it, but I think one of two people had a placement with them, and also we had a lot of placements in family welfare service.
- A.C. So you were familiar with that work. What would you say was the biggest change you saw in social work during this period between '48 and '59? In that eleven years what was the biggest change?

- U.B. I wouldn't say that there was any such dramatic change. I think that as we gathered experience we became more and more aware of the importance of the family for the child and tried more and more, either to keep children in their families or to keep them in touch. That was not easy when they were in foster homes because it took a lot of preparation of foster parents to accept these sometimes very disreputable natural parents. That one became more aware of. I think we became a little more aware of the material needs of people.
- A.C. I was wondering whether there were ideas about there being a local authority family service rather than three different departments?
- U.B. Yes, it was discussed. I don't know whether as early as 1959 but I remember one meeting I was at with the children's officer and medical social workers and I don't know who else; the shadows of Seebohm were just appearing on the horizon and we were discussing pros and cons. And I remember the children's officer saying to me, "Now what is there that you as an experienced child care officer couldn't do for old people?" I said, "I daresay I could learn the legislation of which there isn't much anyway, for the elderly. And I could be reasonably kind and patient with them, but you don't get the feel in your bones until you have worked with them for quite a long time" I know roughly how children will react. But I wouldn't know how old people will react until I had worked with them and seen quite a lot of them. I learned that later when I became training officer and visited old people's Homes. But at that point I think Seebohm reported. They came together too quickly, and I don't think it was actually intended in the original Seebohm document, before they had had time to learn about each others jobs and clients, especially the mental welfare.
- A.C. I think the report talks about teams it doesn't talk about individual social workers.
- U.B. Especially the mental welfare tasks created an awful lot of anxiety. You know going out at night to some psychotic cases.
- A.C. Were there any controversies about ideas, people arguing one thing as opposed to another?
- U.B. I think the period that you mentioned '48 -'59 was still more a period of consolidation and we were beginning, we were learning from experience. For instance one practise that I remember, we had at first been very very keen to keep families of brothers and sisters together. We learned that that was the right thing to do in some cases and not in others, especially if children were very close in age there was terrific rivalry and they wrecked the foster homes for each other. One was the goody and the white headed boy, and the other the black sheep. And then of course he acted up and became blacker and blacker. And we became more discriminating in that respect. And I think there were so many other things, we just learned from experience.
- A.C. That's interesting. When I was mulling it over that's the conclusion I was coming to. Perhaps I've been wrong to assume that there were debates in the sense that there are debates nowadays. What people were arguing about were formulations which reflected the experience.
- U.B. I think they were beginning to do that too. But I think that became more acute later on when we had the '63 Act and when we had this swing towards group work and

community work. I won't say that we didn't have ideas and debates about practice, more detailed, but it was a period of learning and consolidation.

- A.C. When you've talked about ideas this morning, it all sounds very agency specific, if I can make up that kind of phrase. Does that reflect your view? Would you agree? Were you involved in the genericism versus specific type training debate?
- U.B. Well I was involved as a supervisor because I supervised first the child care students and then the generic students. I think people agreed with the generic system on the whole. You'd better ask Mrs. Winnicott about this because she was much more involved in the policy making of that. No, I don't think there was much opposition to that. And of course I didn't get the brunt of it so much because I got the ones who specialised in child care anyway, as students. I found it very stimulating because I went to LSE to the so-called supervisors' groups and then I learned from the other disciplines and their approach, and it was stimulating. I think it was good on the whole. There was far more opposition to Seebom than to the generic training.
- A.C. You paid a big tribute to the understanding that the human growth and behaviour teaching from Dr. Donald Winnicott and Dorothy Gardner, and what that meant to you. When you talked about human growth and behaviour teaching I guess you were really meaning psycho analytic understanding; the use of psycho-dynamics. Was that the only explanation of family functioning around that time? Did everybody use that kind of language and those kind of notions to understand families, or did people, as they do nowadays, try and look for other vocabularies, or other theories to draw on?
- U.B. Well in those first years I think they, the trained people, pretty well did because they were brought up on those lines. Again Mrs. Winnicott would know much more about that than I. Some of the courses were more psycho-dynamically orientated than others. But I think broadly that was the approach. We did have lectures in social psychology which looked at other aspects too, but that was the core I would say.
- A.C. I was thinking that its been said that the psychoanalytic view point led social workers into concentrating excessively on the role of the individual and his own problems to the exclusion of others
- U.B. Oh yes! That would be fair. Again I think it depended on the individual. You couldn't when there was some real hardship, illness and so on, you couldn't just concentrate on the psycho dynamics of it. You had to do something about the practical side. I remember students sometimes complaining to me when they had to do fairly practical things like receiving a child into care, (if it was a quite straight forward reception into care for a fortnight while mother was having another baby), they said "Oh we are losing our psycho dynamics skills because we are concentrating on the practical things." And one had to point out to them that this reception, however straight forward, was also something where psycho dynamics came very much into play. It could be done sensitively and it could be done very insensitively. So it was all so interwoven. There's really no situation in life when psycho dynamics don't come into it a bit. But perhaps that is an example of how students were psycho dynamically orientated.

- A.C. Some rather critical things have been said about social workers during this period '29 – '59. I'm thinking of the things that Barbara Wootton [27] ended up saying in *Social Science and Social Pathology*. There's a whole chunk in there which is an attack on social workers. They were all making excessive claims that they could do things and she didn't believe they could. For being overly concerned with individual motivation, ignoring social contexts, and saying also that social workers did the sort of job that a private secretary or lawyer did for more wealthy people, and really all you needed as a social worker was a modicum of good manners and some secretarial skills. I just wondered what you'd say about all that? As someone who was actually working during that period and lived in it. What do you think of the criticisms?
- U.B. I don't know how the secretarial skills come in unless she meant report writing and that sort of thing.
- A.C. Phoning on behalf of clients.
- U.B. Oh that sort of thing. Well that certainly came into it, but the core of it is the caring! And social workers I think were, and still are, caring people. And that is what matters to the client. I'll tell you a little anecdote about that. I told you before about this girl at whom I roared once quite deliberately and many many years later when she was married to quite a well-to-do man, she suddenly sent me a very valuable present, which I was very reluctant to accept. Long out of care, and I out of social work, and with it came a little note, "Thank you for always trying to help me." She didn't say that I was always successful in helping her, but she did say that trying had been enough, and that I think, this caring, is what matters to the people. That they know they mean something to you. If you like anecdotes, I remember one problem mother had had far too many children and never paid her debts, and I had an arrangement with her once by which I met her at the post office when she collected her family allowance and I lifted 10/- off her each week, to pay debts and grocery bills and so on. And one day she appeared and thrust a piece of paper into my hand, and said "This will shake you as much as it shook me" and vanished into the post office. When I looked at the paper it was a certificate of pregnancy. But she assumed that it meant as much to me as it did to her, that I was sufficiently concerned that I was as shaken as she was. And I think that is what matters. Neither a secretary nor a lawyer can do that.
- A.C. What about the bit where she said social workers made excessive claims of what they could achieve? Do you think that's a fair criticism of this period?
- U.B. I wouldn't be able to quote any concrete examples of that.
- A.C. She draws a lot on American literature.
- U.B. Ah yes! I think sometimes one could point to quite remarkable successes but of course one also has to take into account one's failures. And when one has been in the same area for as long as I have, one learns to live with one's failures as well. I see them running around the streets here.
- A.C. She says that what she calls the psychiatric approach leads social workers into saying that they have this fantastic understanding of what you are thinking, and what you don't even know you are thinking. They understand and they know it. If they

understand it so blooming well how come they haven't sorted out some of the world's problems because there are some politicians that could benefit from it.

- U.B. One understands quite a lot, but one can't do anything about it. If you understand that a person is as inadequate or unpleasant or criminal as they are, because they have been rejected by their mothers, it may in some cases be very obvious, but how can you make that good and cure that?
- A.C. You don't have to restrict yourself to the period now. Just look back on your career and I wondered what you look back on as being the best social work thing you've done during your career? What gives you the most pleasure and pride to think back on? It can be several things and any kind of thing.
- U.B. One is a fostering where against much opposition from the children's officer I placed two additional children in a foster home where I had already placed two, and the Children's Officer said "No, no its too much, and the foster mother can't do it" And she did. And they are now, three of them, happily married with grandchildren all in touch with the foster mother, in close touch. The son who was the most affected by all his previous history, (they went through hell and high water with him, he went to borstal and prison and what have you), and he adjusted himself and got married, and unfortunately he died young of cancer. But the girls all did very well and that was a great satisfaction to me that fostering.

Others, too, where I have placed children from the nursery and seen them married from the same foster home. And that of course is the result of having been in one area for so long which is perhaps professionally not the best thing, but it did give me a lot of satisfaction. There was another family, a very disturbed woman, three little boys, and one of my very knowledgeable colleagues said, "No they haven't got a chance of a snowball in hell." They did stick together and got on. I know eventually she left, but they were all more or less grown up then and could stand on their own feet more. She was, and remained, a disturbed character. But it was something. One has to limit one's objectives in social work very much and to know what materials one's working with. And sometimes one feels it isn't a great thing that people have achieved and there are still great flaws in their family life and so on. But for the material one has been working with, it is something. But this fostering has given me great satisfaction. And I think there are others where also good fostering has worked. And of course I have had traumatic setbacks and things that have gone wrong.

- A.C. Do you want to say anything about those?
- U.B. One adoption that went badly wrong and I've recently been involved with it, where there was nearly a court case for ill-treatment but it didn't come to it, but I might have given evidence. Because one also has to take into account that what a child needs at one stage and what the foster parents have to give is not necessarily what they need at another stage. There was one foster mother who gave great security to a child who was terribly pushed about and insecure at one point, and needed this almost obsessively clean and tidy environment, and of course later on there was a great fracas. But one learns from all these things.
- A.C. Are you one of these social workers who still keeps up with one or two clients?

U.B. As I say, they keep up with me! It's simply my geographical position. I'm in my own area still and I run into them when I go out shopping. With this good fostering I'm in touch with all of them, and I've been asked not very long ago whether some former foster children would talk to a collection of social workers about their experiences in care, and I was enough in touch with some of them to ask them, and they did.

A.C. They did it did they?

U.B. Yes.

A.C. Lovely.

U.B. I wasn't there myself. I thought they would be less inhibited if I didn't go; and some had a very stormy adolescence I know, talked quite honestly about that. And another one who had a good experience talked about that, so it gave a fairly objective view. I was very happy in this profession.

A.C. Thank you very much.

EDITORS' NOTES TO THE URSULA BEHR INTERVIEW

- 1 UB is referring here to the **first Child Care Course** for the UK which was led by Clare Winnicott at the LSE from 1947 to 1958. Course material included child development, sociology, legal matters and paediatrics. See reference to UB in the interview (No 24) with Clare Winnicott.
- 2 By this date there was a significant **German community in London**, mostly business men from Hamburg, sugar bakers and religious refugees; and by 1700 there were four German churches.
- 3 This is firstly a reference to what became the **Children Act of 1948** and the preceding Bill which was the subject Parliamentary debates following the recommendations of the Curtis Report of 1946. The scope of the **1933 Act** was wide ranging and it regulated the juvenile courts and sentencing policy, the sale of tobacco to children and the hours and age limits for employing them. The **1926 Adoption Act** introduced formal procedures for the first time and regulated the previously loose procedures. Alan Cohen correctly names the **1913 Act** a Mental Deficiency measure. This was to encourage taking people described as "feeble minded" and "morally defective" out of Poor Law institutions and into separate specialist institutions.
- 4 **Morris Ginsberg**. (1889-1970). Lithuanian born, graduated at University College London and was invited by L.T. Hobhouse to join him on the staff of LSE where he eventually became Reader and then Professor of Sociology. *Psychology and Society* (1921) and *Sociology* (1934) were among his publications.
- 5 Karl Mannheim died in January 1947 and so it is likely that UB is referring to Dr. **Hermann Mannheim** (1889 –1974). Born in Germany and studied at four Universities before practising law and later becoming both a judge and a professor.

At the age of 44, faced with the rise of the Nazis, he emigrated to England and took up an honorary post as Lecturer at LSE and gave important lectures on criminology. See: *Criminology in Transition: essays in honour of Hermann Mannheim*. Tavistock Publications.1965.

- 6 **Donald Winnicott** (1896-1971) was an eminent paediatrician and psychoanalyst. He became well known for his insights and teaching on child development, mother-baby relationships, transitional objects, creativity and the sense of self. He gave credit for the nurturing of many of these concepts to his wife Clare Winnicott, nee Britton, whom he married in 1951. (see Alan Cohen's interview no 24). His work has had major influence on a wide range of therapeutic settings and practitioners and a considerable amount of information is available at www.squiggle-foundation.com.
- 7 **Dorothy Gardner** (1900-1972). Had a long career as a much admired nursery and primary school teacher, university lecturer, researcher and author. With a Froebel training in child development, she taught at schools in London and Edinburgh before coming to Chichester as a lecturer. She was in 1934 among the first students at the new Department of Child Development in the Institute of Education and became a close friend of **Susan Isaacs** (1885-1948), whom she succeeded as Head of that Department. She wrote several books on education and also a biography of Susan Isaacs.
- 8 **The Caldecott Community** had Victorian roots in London but moved to Maidstone in Kent to avoid bombing in the first world war. It provided care and education for children who were in poverty or neglected or separated from their families.
- 9 The homes and orphanages created by the **Barnardo's** organisation from the 1870's onwards were often very large; one home for girls had 1,500 residents.
- 10 **The Institute of Education** was part of London University. See note 7 above.
- 11 **Miss Gwyneth Marianne Wansbrough-Jones**. (1903-1979). Children's Officer and Child Welfare Officer, Essex County Council. Graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge and later studied social welfare at LSE. During Second World War was attached to Ministry of Health looking after the welfare of women and children evacuated around the country and had 1,600 children under her care. Deputy to Geraldine Aves at MOH. In 1956 was a member of a UK team visiting Australia to establish how British children sent there by churches and other organisations were settling down. Served as Hon Secretary to the *Aves Commission on the Role of the Voluntary Worker in the Social Services*. (1966-1969).
- 12 **Women's Volunteer Service (WVS)** was established in 1938 by Stella Isaacs (later Marchioness of Reading). It was initially formed to help recruit women into the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) movement assisting civilians during and after air raids by providing emergency rest centres, feeding, first aid, and assisting with the evacuation and billeting of children. It moved 1.5 million people out of cities in the early days of September 1939. By 1941, 1 million women belonged to the WVS. After the war it was transformed to become a leading voluntary organisation in the field of social care, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service in 1966; and in 2004 simply WRVS in recognition of the fact that 11% of its 60,000 volunteers were men.

- 13 The **Salvation Army** was founded in 1865 by William Booth. Historically it has been less concerned with doctrinal niceties than with moral Christian living. It is well known for its social work such as its missing persons investigation service
- 14 The **Joint Circular of 1950** recommended the creation of “Children’s Co-ordinating Committees”.
- 15 **Association of Child Care Officers. (ACCO)** was the main professional body for social workers looking after the welfare of children in the United Kingdom from 1949 to 1970.
In 1946 the interim report of the *Curtis Committee on Children Deprived of a Normal Home Life* had recommended that training courses for fieldworkers in child care be set up at universities, and four such courses were established. In July 1948 a meeting of students on these courses was called to consider the setting up of a professional association and in November 1949 the Association of Child Care Officers was formed. In 1970 the Association merged with six other social workers' organisations to form the British Association of Social Workers.
- 16 The Home Office had by 1949 recognised a number of training colleges to provide the Certificate in Child Care.
- 17 **Derek Jehu.** Also qualified as a psychologist. Was Children’s Officer for Southampton and later Director of the Leicester University School of Social Work.
- 18 The **Adoption Act 1950** consolidated previous legislation and placed a duty to notify local authorities if anyone planned to place a child in the care of another person, whether by adoption or other means, regardless of the status of the proposed *guardian ad litem*.
- 19 This is reference to the **Infant Life Protection Act of 1897** which regulated the private business of child minding for payment (“baby farming”) and the adoption of children in exchange for a lump sum payment.
- 20 Morris, C. (1950). *Social Casework in Britain*. Faber.
Including chapters by:
- Cormack, U. M. and McDougall, K. *Casework in Social Services and Casework in Practice*
 - Snelling, J. *Medical Social Work*.
 - Hunnybun, N. *Psychiatric Social Work*
 - Deed, D. M. *Family Casework*.
 - Britton, C. *Child Care*
 - Minn, W.G. *Probation*
 - Reeve, B and Steel, E. M. *Moral Welfare*
 - Younghusband, E. *Conclusion*.
- 21 **Tom White** was an active member of ACCO and became its President. Served as Director of Social Services for Coventry from 1970 to 1985.

- 22 **Barry Newell**, later Assistant Children's officer and then Deputy Director of Social Services in Nottinghamshire.
- 23 **Curtis Report** .(1946). Report of the Care of Children Committee. [Chairman Dame Myra Curtis.] (Cmd: 6922). HMSO. This made several recommendations and strongly influenced the content of the 1948 Children Act.
- 24 **The Seebohm Committee** had recommended that children's departments should come under the same roof as education and housing welfare services, mental health support services, home helps and a number of specialist services. The creation of new multi-purpose Social Services Departments were encompassed in the Local Authority Social Services Act of 1970.
- 25 This section of the **1963 Act** empowered local authorities to provide practical and financial help to families in order to promote the welfare of children and prevent family break up. Such preventive work had been recommended by the Ingleby Committee Report in 1960 and had been quietly pursued by many child care officers without clear statutory authority up to 1963.
- 26 **Family Service Units. (FSU)**. An independent charitable social work agency, founded in 1948 in succession to the Pacifist Service Units created during World War 2. Alan Cohen worked for FSU for a period in the 1960's and published in 1998 *The Revolution in post-war family casework: the story of Pacifist Service Units and Family Service Units 1940-1959*. University of Lancaster. In common with the 26 Cohen interviews, this book was based on interviews with pioneers. The charity merged with **Family Action** in 2006.
An FSU archive can be found at the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc.
- 27 **Barbara Frances Wootton**, Baroness Wootton of Abinger (1897–1988). Eminent economist, criminologist and social scientist. After leaving Cambridge, Wootton took up a research studentship at the LSE and later worked for the research department of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. She was Principal of Morley College from 1926, and Director of studies for tutorial classes at London University from 1927 until she became Reader at Bedford College in 1944 and Professor in 1948.
She published widely and her *Social Science and Social Pathology* (with Vera G. Seal and Rosalind Chambers. Allen & Unwin, 1959) remains a classic in the application of utilitarian philosophy and empirical sociology to the enlightened management of society. It is a wide ranging 400 page book and Alan Cohen, in his interview questions, concentrates on a chapter ("Contemporary attitudes in social work") that was very critical of some approaches to social work and the claims made about what social work could achieve. It would be difficult to find more trenchant and sustained criticism of the attitudes, language and assumptions of the selected social work writers and academics quoted – in particular of the claims made for the more high-flown psychoanalytical approaches to solving human problems. These she ridicules and claims that they do a great disservice to social workers in their daily tasks. It is clear from the edited transcripts that Alan Cohen was keen to gather the views of his interviewees about the impact of the Wootton bombshell and most of them give a response.

From 1952 to 1957 she was Nuffield research fellow at Bedford College. She was created a life peer in 1958 and was the first woman to sit on the woolsack in the House of Lords; and later held several senior public appointments. Her reputation as a fiercely independent thinker was sustained during the following years of public service.

Accounts of her life and work are available from her autobiography, *In a World I Never Made* (Allen & Unwin, 1967) and Ann Oakley's biography *A Critical Woman* (Bloomsbury, 2011).

(Sources: Personal Papers of Barbara Wootton, Girton College Archive, Cambridge; and the books cited above).
