

# A Dedication to Bruce Donald Buchanan

Donna DeAngelis, MSW; Kathleen Hoffman, MFA; and Steve Marson, Ph.D.

*Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Volume 17, Number 2 (2020)

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With great sadness, we announce the recent passing of our colleague and friend Bruce Buchanan. Bruce was a charter member of our editorial board and assisted in the process of conceptualizing the *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. Since that time, he was deeply involved in editing and assessing clinical social work manuscripts. He was a tremendous asset to the journal and will be missed by all of us who worked with him. Because of his popularity, three journal associates have written this dedication. They include Donna DeAngelis, Kathleen Hoffman, and Steve Marson.



Directors, chair of the ASWB (Association of Social Work Boards; the name was changed in 1999) Nominating Committee, chair of the Disciplinary and Regulatory Standards Committee, and member and chair of the ASWB Examination Committee. On the all-important Examination Committee, he led the Clinical exam section. He also chaired the Job Analysis Task Force, as well as too many other committees to mention. But Bruce loved best the Exam Committee and its work. He never missed a meeting!

Bruce served as the ASWB president from 2001 to 2004, which included a year as president-elect and a year as past president. During that time, we traveled to many meetings together. Two trips stand out in my memory. We were in New York City to meet with the New York State Social Work Board about the examination. Bruce hadn't been there before and we walked all over Manhattan visiting the Empire State and Chrysler buildings, Central Park, Rockefeller Center, and as many neighborhoods as we could in an afternoon. He was like a kid in a candy shop! During that trip I was fortunate to be able to take Bruce out to dinner to celebrate his 50th birthday. The second memorable meeting was in Washington, D.C., for a National Association of Social Workers (NASW) leadership conference. It was the first week in December, and it had snowed. We had to walk several blocks in ankle-deep snow. Bruce did not have boots and walked the three days of the

**Donna DeAngelis:** What I remember most about Bruce is his laugh. When Bruce laughed, I had to laugh with him whether or not I knew what he was laughing about. He laughed at his own jokes and he laughed at himself, a wonderful quality to have.

Bruce served as a member and chairperson of the Iowa Board of Social Work and was active in the American Association of State Social Work Boards (AASSWB). I met Bruce in October 1994, when he was a member of the AASSWB search committee for a new executive director. Bruce later admitted, after I was hired and signed a contract, that he and his colleague Dr. Sunny Andrews were watching the University of Nebraska football game on a TV on mute behind me in the interview room! Maybe that's why I got the job. In addition to being president, Bruce was a member of the AASSWB Board of

conference in his loafers, taking his shoes off at his chair so they and his feet could dry! Bruce was dedicated.

Bruce was active in NASW and many other social work organizations, but I like to think that ASWB was his favorite. Bruce has always been my favorite, and I and the social work profession he loved will miss him very much.

**Kathleen Hoffman:** Bruce Buchanan was the kind of man who would admit to the nickname “Babycakes” without hesitation. He was a big guy in every way—physically, mentally, and emotionally. He liked people a lot, even the “pissed-off adolescents” that he said were his specialty. I can imagine those sulky kids coming in, resenting being sent for therapy, and deciding within the first session that this was a man who understood them and wouldn’t be put off by anything they did or said.

As a non-social worker who was deputy executive director of ASWB, I learned that social workers might have a quirk or two but they were good people who believed in empathy first of all. Bruce was the king of empathy, and he wanted people to return his feelings in kind.

When the then American Association of State Social Work Boards in 1999 held its 20th anniversary celebration in New Orleans, Bruce stood up on the floor of the delegate assembly to proclaim that what had been a troubled past was now firmly behind the organization. Everyone would always pull together, he said, because—here quoting somewhat loosely from a “Pogo” comic strip—“We Are Us!” That was Bruce. A bit of a cheerleader dedicated to the idea that everyone wanted to do right by each other. He also made the suggestion in that same session that the name should be shortened and made more inclusive, since the American Association of State Social Work Boards had recently added Canadian provinces to membership. The vote approving his idea was quick.

Lest I paint him as a saint, I should convey that he had a sense of humor that wouldn’t stay suppressed and enjoyed nothing more than having people share with him in his enormous laugh. Once he had driven a few ASWB visitors around Iowa for a time, going to the fabled State Fair to see the Butter Cow and then stopping by the bridge in Madison County, Iowa, that was supposedly the one referenced in the book and movie “Bridges of Madison County.” Headed to Iowa City for a meeting of the Exam Committee the next day, we stopped for dinner. At some point he began a story about his mother finding five-year-old him in the middle of a huge mud puddle surrounded by a couple of small girls—and all of them had shed their clothes and replaced them with mud. He acted out the pouncing and subsequent shaking by his outraged mother, in the middle of the restaurant. “Don’t – shake – ever – shake – let me catch you – shake – doing this kind of thing again!”

We all laughed so hard people were glancing over at us, disapproval in their eyes. Had they known Bruce, they would not have disapproved.

A quote from Bruce for the 1999 AASSWB history book is a good summation of the man.

I started with this group in the early ’90s, when I had been on the board in Iowa for a while. The reason I’ve been so thrilled with the association, and wanted to stay with it, is that I’ve been able to watch this group move through some difficult, difficult times, to the point it could have disbanded. And I’ve watched caring people work through those hard times, always with care for the regulation of practice and for social work in general foremost in their minds.

**Steve Marson:** On Monday, August 3, 2020, at 8:59 p.m., my heart dropped into my stomach. I had just sent out a request to review a manuscript

addressing homeless veterans and I received a reply from Bruce's email address. I was expecting to read something thought-provoking followed by something humorous. Instead it was a transmission stating that Bruce had passed away. The email paralyzed me. I just sat at my desk in disbelief.

I first met Bruce in 1999 when I volunteered to join ASWB's Examination Committee. The Examination Committee employs a set of systematic criteria to intensely assess each single test item to be used on the various tests found on licensing exams. It is an intellectually exhausting experience. The process of assessing test items creates an environment filled with intellectual and adversarial positions. Debates like: What adjective is best suited to make this sentence both economical and clear? Seem like a silly debate? Looking from outside, it does seem silly, but consider the high cost of allowing an ambiguous item on a test. All committee members had a clear understanding of their responsibilities. After the first day of intensely tearing apart sentences, professionals become cantankerous—except for Bruce!

Bruce brought stability and reassurance to the exhausted group. Unlike the rest of us, he never seemed to get tired. Most importantly, he used his sense of humor to keep the group grounded in the reality of our mission. He became a role model for everyone.

In 1999, when I first met Bruce, I chaired a national committee that addressed social work values and ethics in higher education. The committee was responsible for leading the profession in the use of technology for teaching "social work values and ethics." The committee immediately realized that values and ethics was the only curriculum area that lacked a practice or academic journal. During this time period, the absence of a journal was a hot topic of discussion between Bruce and me. Through our discussions, he encouraged me to use the committee as a catalyst for the development of a newsletter or a journal. Soon, the *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* (JSWVE) was born,

and Bruce immediately volunteered to be on the editorial board.

Since inception of JSWVE, Bruce has been on the editorial board. He routinely accepted manuscripts for editing that had a clinical focus. His detailed knowledge of clinical social work was a great asset and his commentaries on the manuscripts were a great resource to both the journal and to the various authors he guided through the publication process.

He was not just a colleague; he was my good friend. Even after we no longer could see each other face-to-face, we kept in contact. In my last conversation with him, we hypothesized the various psychiatric diagnoses of Auguste Comte—a philosopher from the 1800s. Without adequate clinical training, I recognized that Comte was a victim of a bipolar disorder. After giving Bruce more details of Comte's aberrant behavior and suicide attempt, he was able to nail down the type of bipolar disorder and then hypothesized several other disorders Comte was likely to have had. Bruce was incredibly accurate. He described Comte in ways that only a person who read Professor Pickering's mammoth three-volume *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* could have. Bruce never read Pickering's books, nor did he remember Comte from his undergraduate studies; but he had an intimate understanding of human behavior. I vividly recall that Bruce was saddened by the emotional crises that Comte faced. He said that if Comte had been born in the 20th century, he could have had normal relations with others and made a greater contribution to science.

As I write this, I am tearful. I feel a great loss in my heart. I lost a good friend and the world has lost a great intellect.

**Bruce passed away unexpectedly on Sunday, July 26, 2020, at the age of 66. His charm and humor are dearly missed by those of us who had the pleasure of working with him. Following are memorial statements made by his friends and colleagues.**

In the midst of a summer of uncertainty and sadness, I learned last week that my friend and colleague Bruce Buchanan died unexpectedly. Bruce was the social worker's social worker; he was wise, and giving, and had the best laugh, and was always happy to see everyone, almost every time. I met Bruce through the Association of Social Work Boards many years ago. We began our friendship in committee meetings and delegate assemblies and cemented it in airports traveling back to the Midwest after weekends of work, me to Omaha and Bruce to Des Moines.

Bruce practiced with children and families in Des Moines and won every award possible for his service to the community, to the profession, and to ASWB. He was awarded the NASW Lifetime Achievement award, Social Worker of the Year and many honors for his devotion to children, especially those in need of care in the child welfare system. Bruce was also a lifelong member of the Boy Scouts of America, and a very proud Eagle Scout.

Bruce was the person many of us called with a question on a particular case, or an ethical dilemma, or just the need for a thoughtful and valued second opinion. He admired the work of Carl Whitaker and modeled the simple love and humanity of that perspective in his work. He also fiercely believed in regulation and licensure and the need for professional social workers to practice with the highest ethical standards, because those we serve are the most vulnerable of all. Through the Iowa Board of Social Work and the Association of Social Work Boards, Bruce helped to craft and consistently improve social work licensure, and his impact will long continue to be felt in the profession. Bruce was the ultimate social worker, wise, caring, hard-working, generous and joyous. He will be so very missed by many and by the profession.

**Amanda Randall, Ph.D.**  
**Former ASWB President**

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I am very sorry to hear about the passing of Bruce Buchanan. I had the pleasure of serving with Bruce on the ASWB Board of Directors when he was president and on the Exam Committee when he was chair of the clinical section. Bruce was such an inspiring leader and colleague. He loved social work and he loved being a part of ASWB. To him, ASWB fulfilled his goal of making sure clients and consumers were protected and were provided competent social work services. He knew and mentored for others that a well-prepared social worker can help others to improve their lives but, he also knew and equally mentored for others that social work services had to be provided in a professional, ethical manner. I have so many fond memories of us discussing ethical dilemmas and the manner in which he treated me with professional respect in these energy-filled debates. Bruce had a big presence in my life, in the lives of others and in the social work community. Our world needs his kind of leadership now more than ever. Fortunately, many of us who worked with and served with him will continue to provide social work services in a more competent, fair, and ethical manner because of what we learned from him.

**Janice James, MSW**  
**Former ASWB President**

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I was associated with Bruce through our work with the Association of Social Work Boards for several years. I quickly learned that Bruce was indeed a man of many talents: a social worker par excellence, a strong professional leader, a teller of funny jokes - many of which were reality-based on his life and experiences - and a strong advocate for the state of Iowa. He introduced us to the Iowa State Fair and their famous butter sculptures. He had a compassion for others, and he enjoyed life. He will be missed.

**Ann McAllister, Ph.D.**  
**JSWVE Editorial Board**

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I was so sorry to hear about loss of Bruce. I have fond memories of our talks at the ASWB national meetings. Both of us are from the Midwest. We often talked about how we experienced growing up in the Midwest and the impact of that culture on us.

Bruce was a very pragmatic, practical person who was well grounded in the values and ethics of our profession. His approach to problems was to look for workable, reasonable, realistic solutions to problems and he knew the importance of listening to other points of view. For him, compromise was a viable approach to dealing with divisive issues.

Bruce was a very astute clinician. I appreciated his practice acumen. I enjoyed our discussions about practice challenges and how to confront them.

He was a special person and I am so glad that ASWB meetings gave me the opportunity to know him and call him friend and colleague.

He'll be missed.

**Barbara L. Holzman, AM**  
**Retired, Clinical Social Worker**

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Thank you for letting us know and I am sorry about the passing of your colleague/friend. I am sure Bruce must have been an incredible individual. My thoughts are with you, and Bruce's other friends and family.

With Sympathy,

**Nina Esaki, PhD, MSW, MBA**  
**Assistant Professor, Springfield College**

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May his soul find sweet rest.

**Felicia Rodgers, Ph.D.**

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I'm so sorry to receive this news. I didn't know him, but I care. I'll keep his loved ones in my prayers.

Thanks for letting us know.

**Ravita T. Omabu Okafor, MSW, LCSW**  
**Adult-Child Counselor/Trainer/Consultant**