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Editorial: Let's Start at the Beginning

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Robert McKinney, Soon to be Editor

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I consider myself to be eloquent; but then, most people who write anything tend to think of themselves that way. Many of us are incorrect in our self-assessments, too. As I sat down to write this editorial, I found that I had lost my tongue. How does a person assume oversight of something that is as important to any discipline as the IJSWVE is to social work? What words might instill faith and confidence in the journal's readers, editors, and contributors? Shall I start by quoting lines from some long-dead poet who writes about change, about the march of time, about metamorphosis?

Perhaps I should start with gratitude.

To each of the members of our three boards – the policy advisory board, the board of copy editors, and the manuscript review board – thank you for accepting me as I don the mantle of editor. Serving as the editor of a journal or a book is an odd task. The editor is the person whose name is listed first. The editor is the person who, for lack of a better term, gets the credit; however, the work of the editor is largely not what matters to the readers. What matters to the readers is the content, which is largely driven and filtered by the editorial team, not the editor. A good editor will rely upon the team, while largely staying out of the way and allowing the members of the team to do what they've been asked to do. To each of you, I am grateful.

To Pascal Rudin and the International Federation of Social Workers, thank you for assuming the daunting responsibility of publishing the IJSWVE. As Steve described in a recent editorial, the journal has grown tremendously in its lifetime. As a result of this, it has bounced around from one publication home to another to another. Publishing an academic journal is not exactly what anyone would describe as a lucrative enterprise. Rather, it is a labor of love, a task that organizations undertake to advocate for their cause, to have a voice. To you and to the IFSW, I offer my thanks for undertaking such a herculean endeavor.

To Steve Marson, thank you for your faith in me. When you approached me, one of your copy editors, about serving as the co-editor of the Routledge Handbook of Social Work Ethics and Values in 2017, I was surprised, to say the least! It was a tremendous learning experience for me and one for which I will be eternally grateful to you. Now, seven years later, we're at another milestone. During your tenure at the journal, you have shepherded it through myriad publishers, with countless members of the editorial staff, and through a seeming unending array of social issues. Female genital cutting, genetic testing, electroconvulsive therapies, fatherhood, social work education, racism, far right radicalism, and refugee work are just a few of the topics that a cursory review of the journal's tables of contents reveal. To give voice to such a breadth of topics with authenticity is a remarkable accomplishment. Yours is the standard to which I obtain. I remain forever in your debt.

I came to social work late in life, and even then, it was only accidental. For much of my life, I was a working musician, playing music in bars and clubs and enjoying life. I knew that there was no real future in that life, at least not for me, but I never knew what else to do. As fate would have it, during my career as a musician, I had come to know several people who were social workers, social work educators, or social work students. All of them said some version of the same thing to me, and countless times. "Bob, you think like a social worker. You act like a social worker. You talk like a social worker. You should be a social worker!" I had absolutely no idea what they meant. When I was 40 years old, and on the heels of some significant life

changes, I heard those voices resonating in my head and decided to pursue the MSW. At the time that I entered the program, I didn't even really know what a social worker was. I only knew of two things that social workers did—school social worker and therapist. My white, middle-class, married parents background had sheltered me from so many of the realities of daily life for lots of folks; however, when I arrived at the orientation for my MSW program and the program director, Dr. Debra Nelson-Gardell, started talking about the values and the ethics of the profession of social work, I immediately knew what my friends meant when they said that I should be a social worker. I found the home that I had been looking for throughout my entire adult life.

Here in the United States, many social workers ascribe to the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. In the first sentence of the document, the Code says that social workers pay “particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.” (<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>, n.d.). The IFSW's global definition of social work adds, “In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.” (<https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>, n.d.). Unlike any other discipline, social work is a values-driven field.

There may be many reasons why people choose their life's vocations. People may become veterinarians because they love animals, or maybe because they love farming and livestock. People may become architects because they love the grandeur of beautiful buildings. People may become teachers because teachers were important to them growing up or because they really believe that they have the drive to guide future generations. People who pursue the professional practice of social work, though, are somehow different. We know at the outset that we are committing to working with and on behalf of the “others,” the people about whom the rest of the world tends to forget. The world marginalizes people living with AIDS, but social workers fight for them. Armies commit injustices to entire societies

while much of the world turns a blind eye, but social workers run to the scene. We as social workers have made the decision that we will be the ones who show up, sometimes at personal risk, when others turn a blind eye.

As I write this, the world is in turmoil. There is war in Gaza. There is war in Ukraine. Myanmar. Sudan. Columbia. Ethiopia. Somalia. Nigeria. Radical right-wing extremism is on the rise in the United States. Germany. Italy. Switzerland. Even Sweden.

At the heart of the resistance to a world of injustices are social workers. We constitute an army of often unseen people who believe that everyone should get a fair chance. We believe that people don't have to be defined by their differences, by the mistakes in their pasts, or by the happenstance factors of their birth or family. As Dr. Mike Parker, retired faculty member at The University of Alabama School of Social Work says, social workers are the one who offer people who are in the midst of utter chaos a cool cup of water. We promise to listen – without judgment – and to offer the gifts and talents that we have to help people find peace, resolution, and justice.

I consider it an honor to enter the position of editor of the IJSWVE. My hope for the journal is that it will continue to grow in terms of readership, the internationality of its authors and editors, and across the scope of human existence.