

Presented to the
Saturday Morning Club
January 24, 1981

ACTS OF GENEROSITY

After choosing "Acts of Generosity" I realized that I had taken on a vast subject. It could embrace every generous act from sending a rosary in the first shipment to Italian earthquake sufferers to the immediate, compassionate and complete care given by the Good Samaritan or even to the supreme sacrifices of life by martyrs. However it seemed to me that I, as a social worker for fifty years, could perhaps best tell something of what I have experienced and learned as a volunteer as well as a paid professional.

Many years ago I read an anonymous quotation which has kept coming back to me. It was "Civilization is just a slow process of learning to be kind."

Later I learned of Maimonides' eight degrees of charity which he set forth in the 12th century. These ranged from the highest,

"that of a person... putting a poor man where he can

dispense with other peoples' aid,"

down to the lowest,

"that of him who gives morosely."

I grew up in a comfortable home in Weston, Massachusetts when that was a country town with only a few poor families. To be sure my father was a trustee of the Merriam Fund for the Silent Poor. We did not ask questions when he returned from a visit to someone whose needs had been relayed to him. My mother, a member of the Ladies Committee of the North End Union, could share what she had learned of the problems of first generation Italian women.

In 1929 I emerged from college into a world that offered few jobs to history majors. The next year, learning that Elizabeth Morrison, Secretary of the Family Welfare Society of Cambridge, was short of staff and would welcome my help, I volunteered there.

This was one of the most fortunate choices I ever made as Miss Morrison was a wonderful teacher of what a private family agency, the "general practitioner in family ills," could do. There was not much time for personal casework per se as we lived in a chronic state of emergency taking care of basic needs. At first I just tried to be useful. I delivered shoe and food orders. I helped stuff and stamp the very effective appeals for relief funds that volunteers such as Miss Ellen Hale and Mrs. Matthew Hale wrote and sent to the generous of Cambridge.

For about four months in the winter of 1931 I was in charge of the clothing room which kept many families in shoes and warm clothing. For my half-time job which entailed shopping for new clothing to order as well as sorting used clothing and distributing it, I received \$55.00 a month.

One dividend of this period was my inclusion (when I had time) in the East Cambridge District Conference, one of the four Conferences dating back to the early days of the Associated Charities (the first name of the Family Welfare Society). This agency was founded in 1881 to investigate those who were begging in order to avoid "misplaced charity and give discriminating help where it was necessary." Much of the work was done by Friendly Visitors, well known women who volunteered "to investigate appeals and give friendship, advice and some material aid." I can still see Mrs. Joseph G. Thorp, presiding regally at the Conference, and telling of her visits to Mrs. H., the wife of an alcoholic and mother of many sickly children. I can hear Miss Livermore promising a half ton of coal from "her" fund.

Although I had become a substitute District Secretary, I left the Family Welfare to go to the Simmons College School of Social Work for a year. I had at least learned how ill-prepared I was to be a case worker.

I returned to the Family Welfare in June, 1932 and became the intake worker, a truly heartbreaking job in the depth of the Depression. The Society could

give only brief or supplementary assistance to those whom Public Welfare could not or at times would not help.

To understand the state of public assistance in the 1930s it may be well to go back to fourteenth century England. After the Black Death and a series of poor corn crops the Statute of ~~Laborers~~ of 1349 was passed by Parliament for the suppression of beggary but with recognition that the "impotent" poor were entitled to humane care. Able-bodied beggars were not welcomed and were expected to work.

Throughout the country alms in the parish poor box were not enough to meet the need and slowly compulsory poor rates were levied. Those who might become destitute were officially "warned out" of towns for fear they might become dependents. Yet hospitals were founded and wards set up to receive women, maidens and children to be taught as "labor and learning shall be easier than idleness."

By 1601 the poor law as it existed in England for the next 235 years had evolved. As Robert Kelso reported in The History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts, Overseers of the Poor were to see that able-bodied adults and poor children worked. If levies in parishes did not meet needs, the hundred and then the county would be taxed. Boys were to be apprenticed until they were 24, females until 21. Parents and grandparents and children were held liable for support within the family. The Overseers were to collect and use levies to relieve the lame, impotent, old and blind who were unable to work. Some funds were to be used for prisoners and the balance for hospitals and those who sustained losses by fire, water and sea. On the other side of the coin was a stern settlement law under which destitute newcomers were returned to their former homes.

The settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony brought the Elizabethan law with them. Life in New England was hard and the self-righteous colonists closed their gates to all who were not compatible with their religious beliefs and

those who might become public charges. They feared "pauperism, the ill-born offspring of poverty and unwise giving."

The Overseers became so worried about the burden of supporting more people that they warned out most newcomers and increased the time required for legal settlement. This period gradually went up until in 1793 it was five years. This remained the law here until 1968 when the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for all welfare costs except Veterans Benefits. Even in early days if a person had no town settlement, the province was responsible and could return the indigent to the province or colony where they belonged.

By the early nineteenth century Boston had reason to dread the arrival of ships from abroad. England was emptying its almshouses and even prisons by transportation. Boston tried to levy a head tax of \$2. on immigrant paupers but in 1834 the Federal courts declared this unconstitutional -- states could not limit immigration. Many sick aliens and paupers went directly from the boat to the almshouse.

Surely no official then could imagine when we could say,

"Give us your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed, to me."

By mid-19th century there had been improvements. The destitute were no longer turned over to the lowest bidder for care. The almshouses now called poorhouses were catchalls but the "furiously mad" were separated from the paupers and sent to asylums.

In 1863 Massachusetts established the first Board of State Charities which was soon copied by other states. This Board and growing public sympathy helped to improve at least the institutions under its control.

When the Depression came neither local nor state agencies were prepared financially or philosophically. Local welfare departments in every single town and city administered relief in their own way whether this was paid for locally or by the state. It was the general policy not to give any assistance if anyone else could be induced to do so. This usually meant that private agencies were expected to provide a large share of even basic living expenses. As late as 1939 when the Boston D.P.W. spent over 12 millions, 8 private agencies gave relief of over \$800,000, most of it to supplement inadequate public allowances. That year Public Welfare gave \$13 to \$14 a week for a family of five.

In Cambridge the Public Welfare Department was supervised by an unpaid Board of Overseers whose agent, in turn, supervised six social workers. In September, 1932 there were 2189 cases; in the course of the year, 4000. Applicants had to prove where they had lived for five years and the settlement clerks were always behind in determining who was to pay the bill.

Emergency aid was rarely given before settlement was established. Single women were aided; able-bodied single men were not.

It was not until 1934 that Public Welfare paid rent up to \$20 a month every other month. This came after landlords started applying for relief.

The whole country was unable to care for the unemployed. Some states had even longer settlement requirements. California which had welcomed newcomers literally sent them "back where they belonged." One family at least was shuttled by train back and forth across the country as two states denied responsibility for them.

The Family Welfare Society tried to supplement Public Welfare but it also exerted all possible pressure to induce the "D.P.W." to meet more of families' basic needs. Even by 1934 the D.P.W. budget allowed \$13.75 a week or \$715 a year for a family of five; the Visiting Nurses' minimum budget called for \$26.27 a week or \$1366 a year.

When ERA, which in 1934 meant the Emergency Relief Administration, gave work it was only to men with two or more dependents and paid \$12.00 a week. Women earned \$9.60. Other New Deal programs brought more varied programs and more adequate earnings. The competition for these jobs, even for professionals, was keen and they kept many from "rusting out" before private employment was available. Civilian Conservation Corps camps gave young men job training. The surplus commodity program benefitted families as well as farmers.

One kind and astute city councilor, learning that large pork roasts were being given out at City Hall in bright orange wrappers, hurried to his store nearby. He returned with large paper bags stamped with his name for all those in the waiting line.

I left Cambridge in 1933 to work for another agency which gave relief so kept in touch with welfare practices. When I returned to the Family Society (as it was now called) in 1948 case work in a family agency had changed greatly. The Society still gave brief financial assistance the first time a family asked for aid or until a first sure payday or Public Welfare grant. However its policy was to expect more prompt and adequate relief from Public Welfare. At times clients made several fairly brief trips back and forth between the two agencies when Public Welfare seemed to evade its responsibility.

We sometimes needed to encourage a proud person to accept public assistance. I remember a thin, very nervous elderly man, a long-retired scholar and teacher, who was referred by his landlady. He explained that he had been living very frugally by using part of the Sunday School fund of which he was treasurer. It took some time to convince him that Old Age Assistance was preferable to embezzlement. He was very relieved when Public Welfare helped him promptly and his church accepted the proceeds of the sale of his last stock as reimbursement.

Since I retired from the Family Society in 1962 I have tried to keep abreast of changes in Public Welfare practices. Often with Federal supervision and shared financing, both of which tend to raise standards, new ways of helping people become self-supporting have evolved. Mothers on Aid to Families with Dependent Children have been given further education even when this entailed paying for child care. Many former clients now pay taxes.

Public Welfare has also been able to give relatively prompt emergency help for food, rent and other necessities and to help with clothing and furniture when fires have occurred. Private family agencies give little financial assistance nowadays.

Today I find myself very concerned about the trend in public assistance toward cutting down on services which are both humane and sensible. The cut in amounts allowed for homemaker service which keep elderly and handicapped people out of nursing homes is false economy.

The rapid closing of whole wards of our mental hospitals has resulted in great suffering. Since 1966 more than 14,000 former patients, even long-term ones who were warehoused in back wards, have been returned to communities without facilities or skilled services to help them. The old asylum established to protect the afflicted from an unkind world has now returned many to a world with which they cannot cope. Housing is a tremendous problem as the number of inexpensive rooming houses has dropped drastically with the gentrification of areas like the South End. Today private refuges such as the Pine Street Inn and Rosie's Place cannot absorb these dispossessed as well as the chronic homeless. There are no longer poor farms to shelter the displaced.

There are also threats that if fathers are in the home Aid to Families with Dependent Children will stop -- an invitation to the former destructive practices of desertion and deception. Coverage of 18 to 21 year-olds still in full-time school may end. With teen age unemployment already very high for those without at

least high school diplomas and few apprentice systems this will add to unemployment and possibly crime.

If the appliance and furniture components of the emergency program end as threatened, families will be left after fires or before moves to unfurnished projects without beds, tables and other essentials. Private agencies cannot help in all instances. Even the poor rates of old England provided for those who suffered from fires.

There is a growing tendency to refer to those in need as if they were aliens or even enemies. During the Depression most families knew someone down in his luck who had to accept assistance. By the end of the Depression one out of every eight inhabitants of Cambridge had received some form of aid. Compassion seems to have lessened. This is reflected in the press and lately among politicians. Recently a book entitled Meanness Mania: The Changing Mood has appeared on this subject.

Martin Anderson, the economist chosen as President Reagan's closest advisor on domestic affairs, in 1978 wrote that poverty had been virtually wiped out in the United States. At this time our State Department of Public Welfare estimates that close to 2 million people, about half of them children, receive some kind of aid.

The Secretary of Human Services, Charles Mahoney, in December lashed out at the "moral bankruptcy of the private sector to provide food and shelter for the city's homeless." He seemed unaware that after the State withdrew all support from the Pine Street Inn last year private funds kept it open. Even now when the State provides a subsidy for lodging, food and clothing come from private sources. A group of King's Chapel parishioners is responsible for the evening meal on the 4th Thursday of each month. In September they made 856 large sandwiches and delivered them. There are never any left over.

Of course generosity has not vanished. The seemingly unending number of appeals of organizations working for good causes floods the mails. We are asked to save the seals, the whales, the wild horses as well as the sick, the hungry, the illiterate and the oppressed at home and abroad. Each such appeal means that there are those who care and who ask you to do the same.

John Eliot, apostle to the Indians, was known to give to anyone in need. Finally the parish treasurer, paying him his pastor's quarterly stipend (part in corn, rye, peas and wood), decided to make it difficult for John Eliot to give the cash away before he returned to his wife and six children. He put the coins in a handkerchief and tied it in knots as hard as he could so that he would not give them away, coin by coin. But John on his way home visited a poor widow with sick children and, after struggling with the knots, thrust all the money into the widow's hands saying, "I do believe the good Lord designs you to have it all."

None of us can respond as he did or we would land "in the poor house."

Among the most needed acts of generosity are the hours of service given by volunteers. There are thousands who visit shut-ins and prisoners, who answer hot-lines, who work in hospitals and act as big sisters or brothers. Less immediately those who serve on boards and committees giving generously of their time, energy and skills make possible the direction and the smooth running of both public and private agencies. With the increased employment of women the need for devoted and available volunteers is acute. As one who has been an active volunteer since my gainful employment ended, I can attest to its satisfactions. As Herta Loeser writes in Women, Work and Volunteering, "Volunteering is habit forming."

There are of course problems in the giving of relief and even services. Not all charity is kind in the long run. Steven Marcus in an article, "Their Brothers' Keepers: An Episode from English History" in the book, Doing Good: The Limits of

Benevolence tells of the period in England after 1795 when subsidies were added to inadequate wages on the scale of the price of bread. This minimum guarantee was disastrous to the laborer who lost incentive while his employer won the right to pay low wages. The result was true pauperism with its lack of self respect. There the pendulum swung violently and these subsidies ended abruptly. It was the work-house or nothing. Marcus goes on to say, "We can degrade people by caring for them; and we can degrade them by not caring for them. There are neither simple answers nor simple solutions."

Surely there is still a need for the kindness that civilizes and we certainly are rich enough to share at the degree of charity which so far as is possible makes a man able "to dispense with other people's aid." Let us at least not give morosely.

Aboard the Arbella in 1630 John Winthrop in a sermon entitled "A Model of Christian Charity" said,

"We must entertain each other in brotherly affection: we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities: we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality."

Mary C. Hazard



City of Cambridge

COUNCILLOR WYLIE

1.
IN CITY COUNCIL
May 18, 1981

WHEREAS:

On January 24, 1981, Mrs. Mary Hazard delivered a speech entitled "Acts of Generosity" to the Saturday Morning Club; and

WHEREAS:

Mrs. Hazard who resides on 89 Larch Road, wrote this speech recalling the history of social work and welfare based upon her many years of experience as a social worker in Cambridge; therefore be it

RESOLVED:

That a copy of this speech be transmitted to the City Clerk to the 350th Committee with a request that it be made a part of the official records of the City's 350th Anniversary Proceedings; and be it further

RESOLVED:

That a copy of this resolution be sent to Mrs. Mary Hazard.

In City Council May 18, 1981.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of 6 members.

Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

Paul E. Healy

C. Wylie Re: the Jan. 24, 1981 Speech by
Mrs. Mary Hazard entitled "Acts of Generosity"
be made part of the 350th record.

In City Council,

May 18, 1981

*Order adopted
6 members*

*Speech transmitted to 350th
Committee 5/22/81 by
Betty Buono*