



## IN MEMORIAM

Harry A. Wasserman  
Professor of Social Welfare, Emeritus  
Los Angeles  
1921–2004

Professor Emeritus Harry A. Wasserman, a native Ohioan, received his undergraduate education at Oberlin College. He served in the United States Army during World War II. Following receipt of his M.S.W. from the University of Denver he had a distinguished career as a clinical social worker and as administrator, serving as Director of Social Services at Denver General Hospital and as Chief Social Worker at the Children's Asthma Research Institute and Hospital. He continued his academic pursuits, receiving his D.S.W. at the University of California, Berkeley in 1965, the year he joined the faculty of the then School of Social Welfare at UCLA, where he remained an active faculty member until his retirement in 1988.

Throughout his professional life Professor Wasserman was motivated by a deep conviction about the potential of the human spirit and a profound dedication to the realization of that potential in each individual and in the social group. This conviction and dedication was exemplified in his teaching, his scholarship, and his collegueship.

Professor Wasserman taught both in the areas of social work microtheory and practice with individuals and small groups and in the broader societal arenas of social policy and the history and philosophy of social welfare. He was an inspirational teacher for generations of graduate students in social welfare. While the advancing scholarship of the field focused intensively on the study of "how" best to practice social work, he never lost his focus on "why" we practice social work. Deeply committed to the profession's historic mission as a force for social justice and social change, he helped students to understand the supportive role which an advancing professional technology must always play in serving the profession's larger societal mission to serve the poorest and the most vulnerable members of the community. He was equally adept at mentoring students in their pursuits of excellence in clinical practice and in modulating their pursuit of social activism. He played a most constructive role as ombudsperson within the department during the turbulent times of campus unrest, facilitating understanding and community integrity among the faculty and diverse student groups. Students' devotion to him and appreciation of his contributions to their development continued, undiminished, into their subsequent professional careers. He served as consultant to many agencies and even in his retirement served as Mentor and Faculty Member of the California Institute of Clinical Social Work. There was perhaps no greater testimony to his students' continuing devotion to him than the honor bestowed by the Social Welfare Alumni Association. Shortly after his retirement, in recognition of Professor Wasserman's commitment to disenfranchised populations, the Association established the Harry Wasserman Book Scholarship Award given each year to a doctoral student as part of the annual alumni event along with the Harry Wasserman Community Service Award given each year to an outstanding master's degree candidate.

As with his teaching his convictions about the beneficence of supportive interpersonal relationships for optimal human development is strongly evident in his scholarship. Two bodies of work exemplify this commitment. Over several years he and his students conducted several studies of various facets of the formation, development, and functioning of synagogue havurot in Los Angeles, with a particular, although

not exclusive, emphasis on the evolution and impact on individuals and groups of the supportive relationships therein as a response to the present day atomization of primary groups in urban settings. This work was extended to include a comparative study with synagogue havurot in Boston, Massachusetts, a more established and compact community. With Gerald Bubis and Alan Lert this work was published in the book: Synagogue Havrot: A Comparative Study (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983.)

His book with Holly Danforth *The Human Bond: Support Groups and Mutual Aid*, (New York: Springer, 1988), provided a valuable addition to the social support group literature through the synthesis of concepts from social science, social work and mental health literature into a rationale and theoretical base for application to social work practice in the modality. At the applied level, principles derived from a survey of professional social work practice in such groups across a wide range of human circumstance, offer researchers a source of fertile hypotheses as well as practitioner guidelines. A sentence in that book's preface encapsulates well the values and sensibilities which are fundamental to Professor Wasserman's contributions: "In choosing to write about social support and support groups, we wish to celebrate the human bond as the main source of human decency, our capacity to feel and share with others. This book is testimony to our belief in the possibility of a more humane world..."

Professor Wasserman's wife of over 40 years, Denise, whom he met in France while in the Army, preceded him in death. He was survived by his brother Sydney. He is remembered by his colleagues for his rare ability to make real human connections and for communicating hope for a better world.

Jeanne M. Giovannoni  
Leonard Schneiderman