A ROLE MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORK: CATHERINE GAYLE WILLIAMS

by

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PREFACE

Completion of graduate school requires a final project or thesis. That thought was constantly in my subconscious throughout graduate school. I was hopeful that a topic would surface during my course-work or my practicum. I was wrong. The unknown topic eluded me. As the deadline for filing my final exam proposal approached, my subconscious remained in the dark. My search began.

I spent many hours at North Hall reviewing the card catalogs of prior final projects and noting those of possible interest to me. Many of them I made copies of, and read. I also discussed my dilemma and questioned many people including friends, fellow students, and faculty. Numerous suggestions were made. They included: a survey of past and present graduate students with their expectations of graduate school and its impact after completion, a research project on gambling, how students chose their final projects, and the history of Iowa human services.

The memory of a discussion with a friend involving the Iowa Department of Social Services surfaced. He believed their policies and services were very poor. I defended the Department with my belief that Iowa had indeed progressed over the years in many areas of human service delivery and, in fact, was the model for many other states.
This prompted me to very seriously consider reviewing and writing my final project on the history of Iowa's Department of Social Services. A majority of students stay in Iowa, and many are employed by the Department. Its history and accomplishments, I felt, were not understood by enough students. After discussing this with a number of faculty members, it was decided that the project was a major undertaking and fell into the category of dissertations, not final projects. So, I abandoned the idea.

Another area of interest to me was minority recruitment at the School of Social Work. Seeing only a very few fellow students of minority groups, I wondered if this practice needed improving. After a little research, I soon discovered that minority recruitment had a very good record. So, I also abandoned this area of interest as a subject matter.

During this period of searching, following leads, and exploring, I continued to feel the need to do something of a creative nature which would aid me in integrating my learning experiences of the previous 18 months. Being in the concentration of organization of human services, I also wanted to look at individuals in their roles as administrators. Graduate school teaches knowledge and skills. Values, in addition to knowledge and skills, are the third important component of social work. This third component, I believe, is the most crucial. I wanted to explore it further. All these ideas had been in, what
I refer to, as my "fireless cooker".*

The pieces finally combined to form my topic. I decided to write a biographical paper on Catherine Gayle Williams. Catherine is a retired Deputy Commissioner of Iowa's Department of Social Services. Catherine is also a female, black, and a graduate of The University of Iowa's School of Social Work. She had been employed by the Iowa Department of Social Services for many years and had worked her way up. Her life history included all my areas of interest. This project would also fulfill my search for values and take me out of book learning and into reality.

Following the selection of the life and times of Catherine Gayle Williams, and after gaining Catherine's approval and support for my project, I began developing my hypothesis. My hypothesis was: Catherine Gayle Williams is a role model for social work and had a very constructive impact on human services in Iowa.

*Fireless cooker: 1. An insulated chest in which containers of food were placed on discs of hot soapstone, after being partly cooked over a flame, to continue a process of long, slow cooking. 2. A symbol of a learning process and teaching method where the brain continues to function in periods of rest and even sleep after hard thinking had been applied to a problem. Nature will work with us if we allow time for the readjustments in mind and emotions which are necessary before a workable solution can be achieved. (Reynolds, 1963, p. 201).
In addition to obtaining Catherine's permission for the undertaking of my project, it was also agreed upon by both of us that Catherine be allowed to first approve this project's outcome before it was given to my committee. Catherine also gave her permission for me to interview her past and present associates regarding her life.

The methods that I chose to complete this project were through research techniques and through oral history taking. I accomplished this by: auditing the Perspectives on Social Welfare: A Biographical Approach course offered by the School of Social Work; cross referencing names of various individuals with Catherine for possible interview sessions; researching and reviewing the development of human services in Iowa; reviewing the public records of Catherine's achievements in the Department of Social Services.

The interview sessions with Catherine and the sessions with several individuals were tape recorded. These recordings were then transcribed. The transcripts, along with the information obtained from my research, were the primary sources for the completion of this project.
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Chapter I provides background information on Catherine's early life. The remaining chapters will take the reader through Catherine's first career in dancing, her transition back to Des Moines, her start in social work and completion of undergraduate school, the decision to make social work her second career, administrative advancements and techniques, her retirement and future, and reflections about Catherine by others. I will finish this project with my own conclusions and discussion.

Because I believe a full portrait of an individual's life cannot be accomplished over a few weeks or months, the following is a brief sketch. This sketch will provide the reader with a glimpse at Catherine's values. It will also provide some of the accomplishments of one individual toward the development of human potential in the lives of countless others. The sketch also will partially illustrate Catherine's impact on social work and provide the reader with a role model for social work.

The following remark, made by a past leader in social work, best describes my approach for completion of this sketch.

If you feel a hearty interest in any subject, procure the best authority upon that subject and make it your own; then all your further investigations group themselves, as a handful of needles would center toward a magnet.

Mary E. Richmond
CHAPTER I

Early Years

Catherine Gayle Williams was born November 21, 1914 in Des Moines, Iowa. The fourth child of what was eventually to become a family of seven children, four boys and three girls, Catherine remembers a very matriarchal family situation in her early years.

Her father "was a mixture of Welch or Caucasian, and certainly some black in there somewhere." Catherine never met her grandparents on her father's side. "Never knew who they were. My sense of it is that he was orphaned and he had been in a foster home with a woman, who was at the time of her death, 111 years old."

On Catherine's mother's side, her "grandmother's heritage was Indian and black," and her grandfather was black, because Catherine still treasures "a picture of his mother who was out of slavery."

The matriarchal situation was partly because "my grandmother, at that time, lived across the street from us and as I look back, she still managed my mother. I can remember her shopping for us, at school time, buying bolts of material -- my grandmother, that is, and making our dresses. I can remember her buying me some shoes that I hated. They looked like Pilgrim's shoes because they had great big buckles on the front and I was embarrassed to wear them."
Catherine had other encounters with her grandmother through her childhood, such as on the occasion she "got in trouble in school. (Elementary school). I went to Clarkson Elementary School. We were playing at recess, jumping rope, or doing something, and somebody ran in front of me when it was my turn to jump. And I said, 'If you don't get out of my way I'm going to kick your butt!' Well, she told the teacher. So the teacher said, 'Will you please go home and get a note from your parents, and then come back?' Well, I go down to the corner and I come back and I say, 'My mother says she's very sorry.' The teacher says, 'No-no, that won't do. Go get a note!' So, I take this note home and, of course, it would go to grandmother, and they are trying to figure out what the note says, 'What does this say here, you had to kick her in her...' and I said, 'It says back!' She (grandmother) says, 'No, I'm afraid that that is not what it says...'

um, at that time, I learned also that my grandmother believed in the switch, so I decided I wasn't going to cry. So, I would never cry. That angered her and I told her and she would say, 'You're stubborn and you're not going to cry,' and so I'd get whipped more and more."

Catherine's mother, in contrast, did not believe in spanking her children. "Her approach to raising kids was entirely different...she was always placating, trying to make us understand." Catherine vividly remembers her mother as a "sweet and forgiving person." Although most of her life, Catherine's mother was in poor health, she always had time and showed patience with her
children. "I can also remember deciding I wanted to have a party. I didn't know that I had to work this out with mother. I just decided I was going to have one, and told my mother I had invited kids to a party. My mother was the type of person who never destroyed that kind of thing. She said, 'Well, I don't know what we can do,' but she got something together, so I could have this party - apples, or something. But, she was very good to us like that. She would take us for walks, in the woods. At that time, behind Riverview was a park and woods. She would take us there and she would identify the flowers for us. She was always doing something like that for us. Although we didn't have anything, she was a person who always helped us see that things were really not as bad as we thought." Another example of this sweetness that Catherine recalled in her mother was the time Catherine came in the house, after playing all day outside, to find that her mother "had put the boys together, and had fixed this room up for her girl. I can remember ooh-ing and ahh-ing and thinking how beautiful it was...mother had completely redone my room. But she was always like that. Whatever she thought she could do, she sure did her best."

Other fond memories of a fun nature that Catherine engaged in as a youngster were playing around a corn mill. "We lived right behind a corn mill. It was there at 6th and York...out of the chute would come all these corn cobs, and they would be stacked up higher than this house, and that was our fun, slide
down those corn cobs...all the kids in the neighborhood...dust and
dirt we would come...that was just beautiful. And also using our
coal shed in the summertime for a playhouse..."

At the age of six, Catherine experienced the death of her
baby brother, Cornell. "I can remember when he died, my mother
told me he had spasms of some kind -- and her holding him and
then getting so excited about that, and the doctor at that time,
Dr. Jefferson, who lived out there and coming. Cornell was
embalmed and kept at home. And I can remember... the living room
being all closed up, the shades drawn and everything, and having
to come quietly downstairs and have to scurry through that room
into the dining room...people didn't explain it to you."

One year after Cornell's death, Catherine's mother gave
birth to her seventh and last child, Paul. Around this time
Catherine's sister, Maxine, came home for a visit from nurses'
training..."we were looking through her text books and in the front
piece of one of her books there was a lady with a distended stomach.
And I decided that (I made some connections, - I'm not sure how),
that was where babies were. And I can remember during that
period my mother had been hospitalized. And my mother came home
and was recuperating at my grandmothers. And somehow, I had looked
down at my stomach and decided that I was pregnant. Now I knew
that it was something that wasn't right, but I didn't know how,
I was about seven or eight, and I knew there was something that
wasn't right. I think I stuck my stomach out, you know, and it
reminded me of that book, because I also, and I think the reason that I thought there was something wrong with me was that while we were looking at the books my father said something to her (Maxine) about maybe you shouldn't be looking at the books. And then he took the book. I guess in my mind that is what made me think this was something that shouldn't be. When my mother came home from the hospital, I didn't know how to face her, because I knew I was pregnant. And I think that I just stuck my stomach out and it reminded me of this picture. I was afraid to talk to her. She said, 'How are you baby?' and I said, 'I'm fine,' or something like that, and that finally just wore away, but I really went through misery. But, I always had a great imagination so that wasn't surprising."

Along with her great imagination was young Catherine's belief in magic, which she used to help her get something that she wanted. "We were poor, no question about it! I believed something in the world takes care of you, and I used to play magic. At that time you wore shoes with holes, ya know...your feet are growin', ya know, and you're not getting shoes, especially when your feet are growing. I used to take my pencil box and say, 'When I get home, I'll have new shoes.' I just had a little ritual...'When I get home, I'll have new shoes.' And sometimes that would work and sometimes it wouldn't."

Although she had one year of college, from the then Des Moines University, Catherine's mother never finished her degree. Her mother chose instead to have a family, which as it turned out was
fairly large, compared to her background as an only child. To help with the family expenses Catherine's mother did domestic work outside her home. Things like ironing and cooking.

As Catherine got older, and with her elder siblings, Maxine away at nurses school in Chicago, Herb "following commercial art in Chicago," and Cecilia, living with her grandparents, Catherine had to take on more home responsibilities. Among these responsibilities were the care of her two younger brothers Richard and Paul. "She (mother) would leave home you know, and then I would be responsible for the boys. We would be fighting - they were not going to take orders from me..." From these experiences, Catherine began thinking more closely about her future life. "I decided that "no," that wasn't going to be my life, but my mother depended on me heavily. So, as we grew up, there certainly was, on my part, a feeling that I was going to do better and get out of being poor. At that time, probably in one respect, I decided I didn't want a home and decided I never wanted a family, because with a whole lot of kids, the kind of things you have to put up with."

In addition to helping her parents out with home responsibilities, Catherine found time to be involved with friends and her community. Catherine was raised in the St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church. A big event on Sunday, after Sunday school, for Catherine "was buying a twenty-five cent pass and riding the streetcar to the Valley Junction." Then, spending Sunday afternoons walking up to 15th and Crocker to the "colored
YW" called the "Blue Triangle" for "girls club." The directors and secretaries always had programs for girls. "Mom always saw we got involved in that stuff. The only things that I never cared for, after I got big enough to refuse to go, were lodges and fraternal organizations. My grandmother was a great lodge person. I can remember her dragging us to those things and the initiation. After one of those, I refused to go back again. Because we were going over 'burning sands' and you were blind folded and all that. I was scared to death and just simply wouldn't go any more. But all during that period, I was involved in our church and Sunday school...receiving a certificate to teach Sunday school. So, I've always had a strong church orientation."

Other activities that Catherine indulged in were walking with her friends to West High to "swim and get filled with water. We would have car fare to ride home, but would spend our car fare for these stale cakes and jelly rolls and eat those and walk home. We spent a lot of time at the park. Picnics, and games like that...all the kids. We would go the Y camp. We would go to Union Park. And those kind of things. Summers were always full."

After attending Clarkson Grade School, Catherine went to Warren G. Harding Junior High School. Her memories of Junior High included the "strength and support" she received from a science teacher, Mrs. Anderson. "I was very insecure, and she (Mrs. Anderson) knew that. She knew I would know, but I would not ever
be able to say. So she helped me with that and I think she must have communicated some of that to my mother, because mom then enrolled me in a public speaking class. I took public speaking from Sylvia Snook. She is still around. I don't know that she ever remembers that I was one of her students, but, my mother did that for me."

Another significant and supportive person that came into Catherine's life around this time was a Mrs. Nichols. "She was a great church woman. I won an oratorical contest for the Elks, and she kind of took me under her wing and she was getting things for me that I needed...cosmetics and things like that."

There were other women that Catherine admired, but wasn't necessarily as close with as she was Mrs. Nichols. "I would just see them and I liked the way they looked, or I liked the way they operated. And it was always, well, I want to be like that."

Along with her oratorical interests, Catherine was involved at the Lillian Edmunds Community Center (now the Willkie House) and "into other kinds of cultural things - art and needlework, that kind of thing. But tap dancing was becoming pretty important to me at that time."

This interest in tap dancing became so important to Catherine that some of her friends such as Lois Baumgartner Hall and Slim Davis, and Catherine began taking tap dancing lessons at the Y.W.C.A. whenever the courses were offered. Slim and Catherine would also practice for hours at Catherine's house by rolling back the rug and dancing on the hardwood floor. The
dancing that Slim and Catherine did together led into weekend
jobs in Des Moines and into talent contests. Also, the many
vaudeville shows that came to town would find Catherine in the
audience. "I used, oh, I used to dream. I'm an incurable
romanticist, I guess. And I used to dream about one day being
on the stage. At the time Earl 'Father' Hines* would broadcast
late at night from the Grand Terrace Ballroom in Chicago. We
got it here on the radio. I would stay up and listen to that
and think about oh, how beautiful that must be. Of course,
there were a lot of vaudeville shows coming here and I would
go to every one of those. I would stay all day, all day long
waiting for dancers to come back, or the show to come back. I
just loved it."

Another love of Catherine's was reading. This complemented
her success in school, which she always pursued and received
encouragement by her parents to take full advantage of. "I always
felt like I did well in school. I was beginning to recognize
that it was leading someplace. In our household there was never
any question of whether or not we were going to go to school. I

*Earl 'Father' Hines: Earl Hines arrived in Chicago around
1924. Hines was a pianist. He also did musical directing. Hines
offered many innovations to music during that era. He also did
composing. He worked with many top musicians, including Louis
Armstrong. Hines then formed his own bands, the legendary Hines
Grand Terrace bands. In 1948 with the collapse of the big band era,
Hines and Armstrong reunited once again in a small group. They
played together for four years, after which time Hines sometimes
can't even remember us ever even talking about we wanted to quit school." But, reading was her real enjoyment, "probably two or three times a week I would walk to the Highland Park Library, get books, bring them home and read them. A lot of my memories was reading." Among her early favorite authors were Charles Dickens. "Dickens always; but my love was Sherlock Holmes' books. Never liked anything I can figure out. I just loved mysteries."

Being a member of a minority group in school wasn't really a big concern for Catherine, but being poor was. (She was sometimes the only black person in a grade level). "I never really had that problem, because I had white friends as a kid. I remember going to spend the night with white friends and I think the thing that I was most conscious of was a lot of kids stuff, you know, but never seemed to be racially oriented to me. And then always reacting more to class than I was to race, i.e., black kids who had more. I guess at that time I didn't pay attention to white kids who had more. Because I can remember this girlfriend. Now I can remember Irene, she never wore long underwear, never had to wear long underwear. She wore three quarter length socks, when the snow was knee deep! And we'd say to her, 'Oh, you think you're cute...,' and we would go home and beg, just beg. I don't want to wear them, I don't want to wear them, she doesn't have to wear them! And I can remember wearing long underwear... and rolling it up, you know, to get it out of my sight, because nobody wanted to see that crease up the back of your leg. And,
you couldn't get your legs together because of all this roll of underwear. Oh, just rebellion against the whole thing. So, mine, I think was more than black-white."

Although Catherine didn't encounter many problems with being black, her parents did. "I remember our folks talking about it. They would tell of places here in Des Moines where he (father) could go but my mother couldn't. I guess the condition was that you just were not exposed to it, you know. Being without a lot, you weren't going anywhere that you would really be tested."

Most of his life, Catherine's father was a janitor and shined shoes at a barber shop. Looking back, Catherine sees her father "as a man who must have been very frustrated with the kind of life he had lived, and can only say that there must have been some lack of drive to cause that somewhere. But, he was...he somewhere had picked up a quality of life that has been invaluable to me. And I mean quality! My first introduction to opera or music, those came from him. He didn't like cheapness in any form. I can remember in high school, going to high school, and it would be time to get a coat and I would have something with a fur collar, rat or rabbit, and he would say no, 'It is not real and so you are not getting it.' I wore chinchilla coats until I was out of high school. In terms of quality of clothing, that I got from my dad. My dad was a very fastidious person, because he had very little, but what he managed to do with that, like his suit he wore for 30 years, you would never have known."
One of Catherine's earliest childhood memories involved her father. At the age of "probably about three, I had wandered away from home. I can only remember winding up in this big place, where a lot of women were, and they were holding me. My father came for me. I found out that I had been picked up by the police and had been taken to jail. Those women were inmates. I guess I was unconsciously wanting to see what the world was about."

Again, at "probably age five, I remember being lost again. We had gone to the fair on a Sunday afternoon. I remember my father coming and getting me from the lost and found department."

Catherine's father did not have a college education. He worked very hard to provide what he could for his family. Even though "he had picked up a quality of life, my dad was very practical, saying, 'There is no point filling their minds with stuff, we don't have it.""

It was from this struggling and never really being able to have things that she wanted, because of being poor, that Catherine developed "a feeling that I was going to do better. Many times in terms of my own history, one of the things that I guess really determined for me that there was going to be something for me was when I was in high school. I took a job working for a woman who was a teacher, I guess, and went to her home and that woman had all these shirts for me to iron, a bushel-basketful of shirts. I think I ironed two, and I decided that that was not going to be the way I made my living. She had a book, a
Charles Dickens book, and I sat down and I read that book, probably didn't read all of it, and I left her a note, said there would be no charge, but I wouldn't be back." And Catherine didn't go back. Instead, she set her goals on "going to see the world, and do something with it, when I finished high school. I can remember thinking that all the big cities, after you left Des Moines, all you did was run into one city after another. I didn't know about all this land that was in between...I remember listening to those trains go by, where we lived then, there were railroad tracks running right behind the house, and saying 'where in the world are they going?'"

Catherine was in high school during the beginning of the "Great Depression." Because her parents didn't have much to begin with, just the constant struggling, the depression didn't impact on them. Catherine's "sister was in one of the Youth Conservation Programs. My brother Richard went to CCC Camp."

But, the depression did impact on her grandparents as "they apparently managed very well until they became older, because I can remember thinking they had everything. Then, I guess because of them being older and not understanding, they lost everything they had."

Following graduation from North High School in 1932, which included being Valedictorian of her class, Catherine had to make a choice as to what direction her life would take. Catherine did receive a scholarship, but not enough to cover all the expenses. Realizing there was no money for college, she decided "Well, O.K.,
I'll follow my dancing career. I always wanted to be a great dancer, the greatest dancer in the world. And, I went to Chicago to live with my sister, and started dancing. I didn't know anything about scholarships or anything like that at that time, or I would have been in college probably at that point in time."

Out of her formative years and all through her early years to 1932, Catherine credits her parents with giving her and her siblings "our ability to make choices. And, I guess, I think they are the right choices. I guess that is why I am so committed to a family, and the strengthening of the family, because I know the kinds of things that I got as a kid. At that time, they may have seemed repulsive and repressive. But, there has to be rules, and when you are old enough to handle your own life, then you can make that choice."
CHAPTER II

First Career

"When I left home to dance, well, that was my career." Living with her sister in Chicago, Catherine began "looking for jobs, going where there was work." She attended rehearsals and was "auditioned for shows." "My first dancing job away from home was in the chorus line at Dave's Cafe. I was the country girl, there was no question about that. All these sophisticated folks. But I could dance well enough to pull my own and learned fast. And then there was the call for girls to go into the Grand Terrace in Chicago. Well now, the Grand Terrace, at that time, was just really the top club. And Earl 'Father' Hines was the band there. That was it! About three of us went down for those auditions. The new girls dressed for rehearsal where they stored the pop. Two of us made it. When we made the show, they had to let us in the dressing rooms." There were "chorus girls, or ponies, and the girls who were considered show girls." The show girls "were more sophisticated and they didn't do anything, just walked around. They were statuesque and they could wear the plumes and all that stuff. The show girls never did much dancing. They were just atmosphere. I was never a show girl because I was never tall enough. So, there were always chorus girls and show girls." There were usually "five big production numbers in a show" that had to be learned. "And then they would have these featured entertainers as
a part of the show. I can remember Avon Long. (Avon Long was a dancer and a singer. He was in "Bubblin Brown Sugar," a recent musical.) So I managed to make that Terrace. This is where I made friends with Lois Miller. She was the one who was the most outgoing and reached out to make us feel more comfortable. (Catherine and Lois are still close friends today.) All of them wound up being nice, but it was just the whole business of the out group and the in group, the whole process that you had to go through."

Catherine worked in Dave's Cafe and the Grand Terrace for approximately two to three years, before going west to California. "Lavaida Snow was a great black entertainer working with Frank Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City, California. She always built her own shows. She asked for us to come. There were six of us who went to California. She had sent our bus tickets. We went by bus to California from Chicago. We packed our wardrobe trunks and after paying for that trunk to be shipped out there, I had five dollars. We took our lunches. The bus came through Des Moines and stopped in Des Moines. I jumped in a cab and ran up home to say 'Hi' to my folks. And I said, 'Hi' to my folks and I'm off to see the world again."

"In California Lavaida had found living quarters for us, some kind of a house. What she was doing was replacing some California girls with those of us who came from the midwest. So feelings were running very high. But we were so confident. What we had to do was to learn a show to finish out an old show and learn all the
numbers for a new show. We were saying, 'Well, we'll do it. There isn't anything we can't do.' Mr. Sebastian, a funny man, looked at these girls who came from the east, and wondered how in the world we could do all this. But we pulled it off; he was very happy with us. And so there was hardly anything that we couldn't do, as far as he was concerned."

"It was a big club, a huge club. At that time all those bands would be at Frank Sebastians Cotton Club. I worked with Tommy Dorsey, the Eberly Brothers, and Benny Goodman's group. The Duke (Ellington) of course, was there."

"It was there that we started in the movies. Those calls were always fascinating to me. They would have the calls and you'd go. Every dancer in town would go and then the producers would choose who they wanted for these dance sequences. Your heart is in your mouth until you made it. And I can remember this one show. The audition stint was to do 'trucking,' which was the dance rage and was very popular at that time. And everybody at the club thought that I was really good. And we did the call and auditioned. I was counting on being chosen in the very beginning. The producers didn't really think that. And, oh, I was so hurt. I can remember throwing my dancing shoes across that set. I was just so mad. Later the producer said, 'I understand you are the one who threw your dancing shoes away today!' I said, 'Yeah, I surely did.' He said, 'Well, you can put them back on.' And so, I made that sequence. But, you talk about hard work! Anybody who thinks dancing is play is crazy. We would be up at six
o'clock and work all day and then we would go straight to the club and have dinner. And hit those shows. We would be so dead. That went on for days, maybe six weeks, something like that. So, we would go through that till you would just be staggering around, just blind by the time that stint was over. It would just be a killer! And particularly when you went into rehearsing for shows. Rehearsal would usually be a month. And shows would change maybe every two months. Numbers averaged maybe three to five minutes. So you might actually dance (work) twenty minutes a show. But all the preparation that went into it!"

Catherine remained in California for approximately four years. During this time she was in four movies: "Singing Kid," "Murder in Swingtime," "New Faces of 1937," and "You Can't Have Everything." (Wittenburg, 1981). In 1935, during her employment at Frank Sebastians Cotton Club, social security was introduced and she received her social security number, "and decided this was the new thing." Also during this period, Catherine married Charles Atkinson. Charles was also a dancer and performed in acts. Catherine left the Cotton Club and she and Charles worked "at a small club in Los Angeles. We were working this club with Lionel Hampton and Benny Goodman. And we decided we were coming east. I can remember us saying 'Well, we are leaving.' They had this farewell party. Thats when Charles' bookings got changed, so we didn’t leave. We went back to work and folks said, 'Well now listen, we have already given you a farewell party and here you are back.' We laughed about that."
A short time later, they left California and "went to Buffalo, New York. Because that was his home. He and his partner were working around there and I worked in some clubs. Wherever they would get into a show, there was usually a spot for a girl, and I would go to work in the chorus." From there Catherine returned to Chicago "and worked with Larry Steel in his shows. Larry Steel was a producer. He went to Pittsburg and took his complete show. I went to Pittsburg with that show. And then, when that club closed, we went to Detroit." Charles and Catherine worked in various clubs in Detroit. Charles and his partner worked various places from there and Catherine returned to Chicago and returned to work at Dave's Cafe. During her work at Dave's Cafe "we had another call to come to New York to the Apollo Theatre* and did the same kind of thing in replacing girls in New York."

*Apollo Theatre: Over the years, most of the leading variety stars have appeared at Harlem's Apollo Theatre. The list also includes singers, gospel shows and, rarely, dramatic shows. The Apollo's weekly Amateur Night winners have included Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. The Apollo is a joyous fun house and is the only theatre in Harlem where live entertainers may be seen. (Hughes and Meltzer, 1967, pp. 170-175.)
"When I was in New York, Billy Holliday was singing in clubs. I was just crazy about her style. There was a fellow who usually operated as a stage manager. His hotel room was right down the street from the Apollo. In between shows I can remember us going up to his room and playing all her records. We would just sit and listen. That is when I started collecting all of Billy Holliday's records."

I was working in New York when I got the call for 'The Hot Mikado.'* Bill Robinson was looking for new girls for his show. And then we toured."

"When we traveled with The Mikado, it went everywhere." It played at the Shrine Auditorium in Des Moines on March 11, 1940. Catherine's father, no longer leery of his daughter's career, couldn't have been prouder. (Wittenburg, 1981). "When I came home with The Mikado, he was there to greet the train. He wanted everyone to know that this was his daughter. Although he didn't really care about dancing, he thought that was a really down the road position."

* 'The Hot Mikado' was a modernized version of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'mikado,' starring Bill Robinson. The story and lyrics remained virtually the same as the original, but the tempo and rhythm of the music was changed, particularly for the scenes in which Bill Robinson, as The Mikado, performed his famous tap routines in gold-colored shoes. When the New York World's Fair opened, Michael Todd surprised a great many showmen by moving the production from Broadway, where it was still doing profitable business, to the Fair Grounds, where he presented it at lower prices but to much larger audiences. (Laufe, 1969, pp. 79-80).
Charles Atkinson also toured with the Hot Mikado. Louis Armstrong's present widow, Lucile, was also among the performers. "When the Mikado closed we were in New York. And Charles, at that time, was working with what was called Six Cotton Club Boys,—there were six of them who danced together. We took the show to Atlantic City, New Jersey." Catherine worked as a choreographer "staging shows for this club. Then, we came back to New York and I worked in the Apollo again for a short time. And then I decided to move west. I came back to Chicago at this time. It would be in the forties. We went back to the Old Grand Terrace. There was this kind of class distinction and there were certain places you just didn't work. And then Joe Louis opened a club that was in the same site where Dave's Cafe was. Rhum Boogie was the name of it." Among the performers were Billy Eckstein (with whom Catherine became "real good friends"), and, Joe Williams, and George Kirby. "Charles was on the road. He had started another act, Cholly and Dottie. We divorced during this period. It was March 1, 1944."

In Chicago, after her divorce, Catherine received support from a friend. She lived with Bea Mason. "I met Bea in Chicago. She was a manicurist. We were good friends. And she liked show business. She liked that atmosphere, and she liked the people. She had been a great supporter and mentor over the years in terms of home away from home. I was living with them then." (Catherine and Bea are still friends today, as are Bea and Charles).
It was in Chicago that Catherine once again thought about the prospect of having children. "I can remember it so well. Bea and I were walking down the street, going to my girlfriend's house. And I said, 'I don't ever want to have any kids.' Now that was just an impulsive statement at that time. Listening to people talk about their kids and the trouble they were into is what caused Catherine to make that statement. "I said, 'Well, I don't want it, I just don't want it.' In there, too, was probably a lot of being selfish. I didn't want anything to tie me down during that period. I wanted to be a free spirit, to do what I wanted to. If you have a lot of kids, then you don't have any choices about what you were going to do. You are just going to take care of them and all those things you want will go by the board. All I had to do was think about Momma."

And yet, Catherine's own family did tie her down. "I was always so tight with my mother. As I grew, as a kid, I always had this idea that 'If my mother died before I'm this age, what would I do?' And I'd just cry, as if she were gone. Just thinking about it. And so I always had that need to know that she was there. And as I grew older, I became protective of her. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to come back to the midwest. I could never get back there when I wanted to." (From California) "It was because of her I did not go to Europe. Because I was scared to death that something would happen while I was there. Lois went, with the USO. Lois was trying to get me to go. And
Mom would say, 'Oh, that is so far.' That was the only time that I just would not do it, and it was because of her. The only resentment I think I ever had was the fact that I let that keep me from going. She lived and I could have been there."

Catherine's ties with her family also "kept me straight. What in the world would my mother think? What in the world? You know better. So, no matter what your inclination might be, at that spur of the moment, there was something that said, 'You know this is not for you.' And somewhere that has got to happen."

There was a conflict in Catherine's desires at this point in her life. She wanted to be a "free spirit" and travel, yet she felt a strong need to be near her mother. Much of the world was also in conflict. "I was in Chicago when the war broke out, I remember all the horrible feeling. I remember hearing about F.D.R.'s death. I think that's when I really started reading about the war, reading the papers, about what was happening. I'd buy magazines. I didn't buy books so much then. But that was it, I read. That was my greatest enjoyment, always had been. It was a relaxer. But it was also something that I sought because of where it took me. The reading was a way for me to see what the rest of the world was about. I'd always had this love of traveling. Just love to travel, see the world."

As Catherine was beginning to develop an interest in national and world affairs, she was also beginning to think about her own future. "At Joe Louis's Club, is when I really started
thinking 'This is the time for you to start another job.' I loved school. That was never out of my mind. I knew I was going to get back to an educational path. There was always that in my mind. I danced, but I never did a complete identification with that lifestyle. I was a good dancer, but I decided I was never going to be a great star. I wasn't going to get where I wanted. I recognized some limitation there. I decided, 'Well, look, you are not going to be doing this forever.' And I'm not going to be an old chorus girl, and I'm not going to do what most of them were doing, tending bar. And, at that time, there were these popular games in clubs, like twenty-six. People would just kind of play this game. There were a lot of girls who would be dealing that. And that wasn't for me. I have a conviction that if there is anything you really want to do, it'll get done. But you have to work toward that end, it is not all luck. It is a matter of being in the right place and people believing in you. So I said, 'Well, if you are not going to dance forever, then you better get yourself ready to do something else. So I decided I would go back to school. And get myself ready to do something else.'

"I started to Cortez Peters Business College. I went to school full time and continued to dance at night. My classes were in the daytime. I would leave school and go to the club, have my dinner and do my lessons for the next day. And by showtime, well, I was finished. After I finished school, I quit dancing."

Catherine's first career, her dancing years, consisted of
long hours and hard work, the beginning and the end of a marriage, traveling across the United States, the desire to travel outside the United States, and the desire to be near her family. During the turmoil of World War II, Catherine made the choice "to do something else." But to this day, the mention of Catherine's dancing years brings a twinkle to her eye, a smile to her lips, and the statement "Those were the days."
CHAPTER III

Returning Home

After graduation from Cortez Peters Business College, Catherine sought employment in the business world. "I started working for Tiffiny Decorating Company." She worked for the Chicago small business under "a Jewish man, Mr. Alvin Silverman. He had just one office girl. I did accounting, all his books, typing, everything. What he did was decorate women's dress shops, mainly...Sterns, Werners, he'd have contracts to do all those - redecorating all those stores. I can remember helping him cut out wallpaper designs, and I'd mix formulas for paint that they would use. I was the only woman in that office and they were just great to me, they were just great. And so, I was always stretching to the utmost."

Catherine gained some first hand knowledge about small businesses through her job at Tiffiny's. She also helped in the process of redecorating some very affluent women's dress shops. As a result of these experiences, Catherine decided to enter both areas herself.

"I decided I was going to go into business. Bea and I started a dress shop. Bea Mason. I talked her into it, - we'd open up this shop. I decided we could make a fortune. We got a lease for a store on 43rd Street. And so we opened up this shop.
We had enough money to get stock. We decided we were going to bring some 'quality' to 43rd Street. 43rd Street was purely a ghetto area. There were a lot of butcher shops, a few black businesses, and a lot of Jewish businesses." The businesses "would stock with the needs and preferences of that income. Most of the people in that area were working at the packing house. It was not economically affluent in any way. They were just scrubbing for a living, a livelihood. What we wanted to do, the kinds of things we wanted to have, they couldn't move. Our friends in show business would be supporting of us. They would order stuff and I know they were doing it simply because it was us. Bea had stopped doing her manicuring and then she decided we weren't making enough so she started back doing manicuring. She would work in the store on Saturdays. And we were going down the drain fast. We were lucky enough to get out from that lease. We were lucky, really lucky. A woman wanted it and bought it from us. She took it over from us for a hat shop."

Following her attempt at running her own business, Catherine returned to clerical office work. "I took another job working in an office for Charlie and Ella May's Chicken Shack. They had a hotel and a chicken shack on 43rd Street. They sold the best chicken in Chicago. They were known for that. I lived in their hotel there and did their books."

During this time, Catherine's mother was ill. "I'd come home on weekends to visit with my family a lot." Catherine
would receive calls from her sister. "My sister would say, 'Well, you'd better go home.' We'd think she was just going to die. And we would come home. And then she'd get better immediately. The need to see her kids, I guess."

While making those weekend trips, Catherine decided her parents needed her. "It was during that time I realized my mother was very ill. She was not bedfast, but I realized that they could use me at home."

So Catherine returned to Des Moines, sometime in 1947. "Now I had come back to Des Moines and I had planned to stay and look out for my parents. I applied for unemployment compensation and, of course, was interested in finding any job. My father had said, 'You don't need to worry about it, you can live with us - what I can give you,...fine.' But that, of course, was out of the question. I could handle what I needed to, in terms of caring for them, and work too. And I was certainly not going to be sitting around."

"The first job I received was one in an office, at Fair Play Manufacturing Company, West Des Moines. They made scoreboards for athletic games." At Fair Play Manufacturing, Catherine experienced some racial prejudice. "It was kind of a subtle thing, which was one of the reasons I wanted out of that place. There was that kind of a ... a toleration. Now the man I worked for, he didn't care and it was O.K., or he wouldn't have hired me. There was a lot of union people who worked in the shop, and they were a little different. I think they 'suffered' me. But my reaction in a situation, if I sense that kind of a thing,
that kind of a thing, is to get very arrogant."

While working for Fair Play Manufacturing, Catherine took the State of Iowa merit tests for secretary and stenographer. I received the notice to report for work at Polk County Welfare as a stenographer."

Catherine quit her job at Fair Play Manufacturing to begin what would become her second career. Her first day of work holds a special memory. "I can always remember that day because my dad decided this was a new venture, and he went with me. We rode the bus downtown and he walked me to the door of Polk County Welfare Office." Her father apparently wanted "to see that I got there and got launched on this different direction in my career. I suppose he directed some of his pride into his daughter, I don't know. But anyway, he wanted to be a part of it, the first day."
CHAPTER IV

A Different Direction and
Critical Times

This chapter in Catherine's life "was probably the most critical time of my life, both in terms of the loss of my parents, a brother, a sister, and decision-making about what I was going to do with my life. And, it was then I decided that I would go back to school and certainly prepare myself educationally for a career in social work."

It was on January 5, 1948, that Catherine began her new career, a career in a profession that she "knew nothing about." Leland Ahern was the County Director of the Polk County Welfare Department at this time. "He hired me...and gave me opportunities when I first started working at the department (county level) as a stenographer. He let me take time off to go to school...when I started undergraduate school. He really made it possible for me to go to school...I respected and admired that man."

When she was hired by Mr. Ahern, Catherine's job title was "senior clerk." Among her job duties were keeping the records up to date on all the clients served by the Polk County Welfare Department. "At that time we didn't have Medicaid, but we had a medical program, and every client had medical cards. So, you had to keep those medical cards posted. Once a month the medical
society would come over and review those, and someone from the State Department (Medical Review Section) would come and we would make a report on the medical assistance, which had been received by clients. I was also responsible for the files. At that time we had central files there at the Polk County Office and they were locked, so, of course, it was a matter of putting the files back. The (social) workers would use them, and bring them back and pile them up. My job was to see that those all got filed in the evening and the files locked before I left."

While doing various clerical work for over three years, Catherine had the opportunity to observe what social workers do. "I decided that, well, here is certainly a career ladder ahead of me. So, as each time I got in enough time to apply for a different job, and enough experience, I'd take another merit test." In September of 1951, Catherine took and passed the merit exam for her first social work position, known then as "Public Assistance Worker I." This position was the first rung of the ladder Catherine chose to pursue as a new career in her "different direction."

During the period of 1948 through her advancement in September of 1951, Catherine also "started working on plans to go back to school." She enrolled at Drake University in Des Moines taking night school courses. "Then, I started going to summer school. And, in the summer, of course, you had to have morning classes.
Mr. Ahern was so helpful then, because he would let me make up the time." Mr. Ahern told Catherine she could set up her own schedule, "just so long as you can get the work" in her clerical job accomplished. "He was just wonderful in that respect. He really gave me the chance to do it."

While working a full time job and attending Drake, Catherine lived with her parents and younger brother Paul at 1106 W. 12th Street. Catherine's parents had moved to this home while she was in high school. The home was located close to the center of Des Moines, and near Drake.

Catherine watched over and aided her ailing mother, not fully realizing that her father, now 76 years old, was also in poor health. But, twenty one months after her father had escorted her to the Polk County Welfare Department and helped her get "launched" on her new career, Catherine's father died of cancer of the esophagus. Her father had been to the doctor for a check up in the summer of 1949. "When he came home from that examination, the doctor wanted me to call him. I did, and he told me then that your dad's got about six weeks." Catherine's father died on October 5, 1949.

"My sister (Maxine) took my mother on to Chicago with her." Catherine's mother remained with Maxine until her death, which occurred within 52 days of the death of their father. Catherine remembers the time period just prior to her mother's stroke and death vividly. "I had talked to her (mother) that evening, because I was going into Chicago...for Thanksgiving. I said
'Well, I don't know whether I'll come tonight or whether I'll sleep and go over in the morning.' My brother-in-law met me at the station and he said that she (mother) had had the stroke between that time. So, I never really talked to her anymore. She could see us, but she couldn't talk. And so my brother came, Paul was home then, and he came over the next day."

Also, assistance and support were given to Catherine by her dancing years friend, Lois Miller, and her father, a minister, who both lived in Chicago. "We talked and we made the arrangements. O.K., I'll go back home and Maxine can keep her until I can arrange for somebody to look after her, and we'll just handle it that way." Paul stayed on in Chicago with our mother. "I came home so I could go back to work on Monday." It was while she was on the telephone that Catherine received the news of her mother's death. "I was busy telling everybody on the phone that mother had had this stroke, but she will be O.K. Joe Howard, a good family friend (now a judge in Baltimore) came over while I was talking...because my brother (Paul) had called him and said 'Would you tell her mother's gone.'" It was on November 26, 1949, just two months from the day of her mother's 68th birthday, that Catherine's mother died.

Reflecting and contrasting her mother and father's relationship, Catherine views their lives together as "a strange complement. Daddy was a, um, a person I think who was frustrated most of his life. I don't think he ever lived the kind of life he wanted to...He had too many kids to live the way he wanted to,
and he didn't have the education. But, even as I look back on it, I feel that we gained...quality from him...He taught us the value of other things. Doc Scales, was my brother's (Paul) mentor, and was a very good friend of the family. He said to me once, 'Your dad is an aristocrat.' But, father was the type of person who...life closed in on him, in a sense...And, I know he was very tired. Life became a very heavy burden for him."

Catherine's recollection of her mother's life was one of constant struggle with illnesses. "She had heart trouble, so she was always kind of an invalid...she couldn't do too much. And, she was just really a very frail person...I'm sure that a part of what wore my mother out...was bearing her children. But, I'm also sure she was not the kind of person who would have ever said, 'That's the end of that' either...that was honor then...living that way. She was so sensitive, and it didn't take much to upset her. "Mom's 'quality' was more that which related to you as a person."

One year later, "on the anniversary of the day my mother was buried," Catherine lost her younger brother, Richard, in a tragic fire. "He had had infantile paralysis, and he'd come in and out (to visit). He had this little place over in Chesterfield which was on the southeast side (of Des Moines). He spent a lot of time over there...because his life style was just different. He wanted to be doing his thing, and he knew it was upsetting (me), so he'd stay away, but he would always come home. In fact, the day he died, he had come over and wanted to see me
and visit with me. He went home that night and the next thing I knew, they were calling me and telling me he was burned."

Catherine stayed on in the family home working at her new career, and continued her "educational path." Brother Paul lived with her, at their family home, until he went away to finish his schooling in psychiatry. After Paul left, Catherine rented rooms to Drake students "every now and then."

Because she was going to night school, Catherine's education "was different. I was working...I was mature, so I was never really a part of a campus atmosphere.* I can remember thinking, these kids are really pretty provincial. But, mine was a mature approach to the whole thing." It had been almost twenty years since Catherine had graduated from North High School when she started college. "I remember thinking well, you have been out of school a long time, but you really are able to cut this, with the time I could spend with it. I said you are still doing A's and B's. And it's no problem with you and with the time you can spend...nothing else will get in the way...I studied...I was by myself and I could spend all the time I wanted to, because when I was going to Drake, I wasn't married. I'd come home, get the coffee pot on and sit there and get my lessons. There was that compulsion, and I'd sit there and do as much of that before I

*Although Catherine wasn't "really a part of a campus atmosphere," she was a member of a sorority, an international sorority, Delta Sigma Beta. While attending a regional sorority convention in St. Louis, Catherine had the opportunity to hear an old favorite singer of hers from her dancing years, Billy Holiday. "She was appearing there and we went to hear her, and she was not of this world...When we started reading about her dope and all that kind of thing...I finally had to give her up."
went to bed, because I knew the next day there was a job. Although I was probably going three days (nights) a week, because I was taking nine hours, I would try to get as much as I could out of the way. I just had to make it. I was getting tired."

As Catherine continued her schooling part time and her full time job with Polk County Welfare, she found very little time for much social life. "Wasn't a lot of time left to do anything... that was my job (going to school). I became almost isolated during that period. My friends, they didn't need to bother me, as I was spending my time in a different direction. I took all the time I needed, everything else was second. I felt that friends would be out there when I finished."

In October of 1955, Catherine climbed one more rung of the ladder in her new career. She progressed to a public assistance worker II. "I guess, I never had any trouble changing positions... moving up... still making a good record." This promotion followed by two months another death in Catherine's family. Her sister Cecilia, a striving musician passed away on August 22, 1955. So, within less than six years, Catherine experienced the death of four family members, changed directions in careers, returned to school, and had taken on the responsibilities of managing a house.

1955 was also the year that Catherine and Richard Williams began seeing each other on a fairly regular basis. Richard first met Catherine in 1948, after she returned to Des Moines. Their families were friends, and Richard and Catherine's brother
Paul went to school together. Richard received a degree from the Kansas City College of Mortuary Science (1951). He came back to Des Moines and did an internship with Fowler and Sons Funeral Home, completing his training in June of 1952. After passing the state boards in March of 1952, Richard worked for one and one-half years for Fowlers and then changed careers and went to work at the post office. During their courting years Richard and Catherine took in movies, dinner and talking together as forms of entertainment. Although they didn't see each other every day even though Richard lived right around the corner, they maintained this relationship and grew closer as a couple.

Because of Richard's dedication to his mother, who was ill, and Catherine's driving ambition to finish school, and succeed in her career in social work, there was no chance of marriage they both realized, for some time. They did continue dating, when they could, through the 50's and up to their marriage on June 8, 1963.

As Catherine continued in her social work career she gained immense knowledge through her experiences and some new challenges, such as buying her first car. "I was being interviewed by the Board of Supervisors in terms of an appointment...U.S. Congressman Neal Smith was on our board then. I must have gotten it...and then I became a case worker. And that's when I bought my first car. I never had an automobile before in my life...never driven...never thought about it...I was doing casework, using the buses. It was a Chevrolet. I remember not knowing a thing about a car.
They had a state credit union, and I went over and I said, 'Well, I want to buy a car, and I'm not paying more than $500.00.' They really helped me...The man's name was Chancellor. He knew I didn't know a single thing about automobiles, so he called this car company. I never shall forget this used car place. It was right there on East Grand. He said, 'Now, whatever you give her better be a good car, or you are going to be hearing from me.' He was so nice! And, I remember everybody teasing me when they saw me driving that car. I didn't miss a payment, and I remember I felt like I needed to celebrate when I paid for it."

About this time, Catherine really started getting "into the business" (social work). I remember two or three incidents. I was always scared to death of dogs. My supervisor, in public relief, at that time, believed in 'unannounced visits.' I thought she was benevolent and felt compassion, but also liked to keep folks in line. It was a case on the south side, my case, and she thought a man was living in the home. We went around to the back door and there was this dog. I never really conquered my fear of dogs and felt I should have been able to handle this."

"Also, I had a case that involved two men and a woman. One day I went by to visit this client (the woman). Her shirt was loose, but I thought she was pregnant again. She told me no, she wasn't pregnant, just wearing a loose shirt. I remember trying to talk her into doing something...like reading. Looking back, I can see my naivete, in not understanding what was really
going on. I saw a need to have more than desire to help folks."

In 1961, Catherine received her degree from Drake University and fulfilled her goal of a college education. It had taken her almost thirteen years of part time study, but she achieved her desired end result, finishing with a "smorgasboard education, with majors in psychology and sociology." (Drake did not have a social work major at this time).

One of Catherine's fondest memories during her undergraduate years is of Professor Westerhof, who is still "a dear friend. He taught psychology. I sometimes still go over his booklets and tests, because he always wrote a lot on my tests, in terms of the way I responded to things."

Although the only black person in her class at Drake, which "was nothing new, I was the only one in my class in grade school," Catherine never remembers "any overt kinds of racial things" while at college or in her work with Polk County. "I remember clearly some teachers, and my preconceived notion of what they would be like, and be wrong about them. At Polk County I didn't encounter a lot of that, even with clients...People were fairly accepting. If they had any reservations, I never really knew it. There was always some sense of the difference. I wouldn't want to give the impression that I didn't sense that. And a lot of that was inside, and always with you. I think that is something that is always with a black person."

The year after Catherine completed her college degree she climbed another major rung on the social work ladder. In March
of 1962, she became a supervisor in Polk County. Her title was Public Welfare Supervisor I. Irl Carter, a former supervisee, associate, and friend of Catherine's, provided the following description of Catherine and what it was like around the Polk County Welfare Office in the early 1960's. 

"The opinions of people around the agency were very favorable. Nobody was surprised that she had moved up to supervisor at all."

"I had a specialized caseload of ADC families. Catherine was sort of a legend around the agency even by the time I got there in 1960. She was the most respected supervisor in the agency. Catherine was the premiere black and the premiere administrative person other than the director."

"She was the kind of person who would say 'O.K., yes, this is what it says on the books, but now lets see what you can do to get the best service to the client.'"

"The qualities that she had, which led people to place her a little beyond most of the people around the agency, was a kind of commitment to the welfare of the program. She was not bureaucratic in the sense of enforcing rules. If she could find an interpretation of the rule that would be in the client's favor, or the client needed something, she would use that. Even though it was one of two or three interpretations possible, she would consistently choose the one that was best for the client. She was trusted in that she would never break the rules. A rule was a rule and you had to observe it. And in that sense, I
think that she supported the best practice in that agency."

"Catherine never violated the administrative lines. We knew that she was there as a resource. We would feel free to go over and talk to Catherine," (when Irl was supervised by someone else). "I think Catherine had a nice way of kind of making the best out of what they had."

"I don't recall any negatives about Catherine's work with ADC." Catherine was very supportive of people going on for their master's degrees. Around our agency people were aware of it (being black) and to the extent that they knew Catherine and knew that she had some commitment to black activism. But, it never entered into her personal relationships, particularly. She never pulled any sort of game, or asked for special treatment. She operated as a person."

"I could always feel free to go to her, when I was in the agency, for example, and never anticipated that I would be turned away or get short tripped from her. I always expected to be treated as an equal, to get some kind of answer to what I was needing and asking for."

Even though Catherine had an excellent background in public assistance (over ten years of experience), by the time she reached her supervisory level position, she felt "put down in meetings...and that it was irrelevant what I had to say." To achieve her credibility, Catherine "made up my mind I would have paper credentials, not that that would change my thinking about people, but at least it would be the 'rite of passage' where I
wanted to go."

In 1962 Catherine started the process of applying for graduate school at the University of Iowa School of Social Work, to go and earn her credentials, a Master's Degree in Social Work. It was also about this same time that Richard and Catherine were making plans for their wedding. "I was married in 1963, June 8th, I can remember - I got my acceptance to graduate school. I said my luck is - they will both come down at the same time. So, it would be another hard decision to make. But, I decided if I got accepted in graduate school, the marriage would go (work out) too."

As Richard reflected back on this period, shortly after they were married, he realized that "ever since he had known Catherine in 1948, she never wanted to stagnate. She always had some kind of book in her hand. She never stops learning, never! Read all the time." Richard also understood that his marriage to Catherine would not be a traditional marriage of the "little woman" around the house meeting the husbands needs by cooking, cleaning, etc.... So, Richard was well aware of what his marriage to Catherine entailed.

Following their marriage in Chicago, by the Reverend John E. Hunter, now a bishop in her church, Catherine moved to Iowa City, Iowa, to begin her graduate work in the fall of 1963, taking "educational leave" from her Polk County Welfare Department job for two years.
CHAPTER V

Graduate School

Catherine started graduate school at the University of Iowa's School of Social Work in the fall of 1963. She attended with a stipend from Polk County. While in Iowa City, Catherine lived with Helen Lemme. Several other students also lived at the same house.

Upon entering graduate school, Catherine accepted the school's requirements without any preconceived ideas. "My expectations were to take what they had to offer me, to make me a professional social worker." Catherine expected "a student-teacher relationship all the way. I didn't care how old you are or what you know; in a certain setting there is always a learner and a teacher. I wanted an MSW. They knew what they were doing. All I knew was that I needed to meet these requirements, whatever they are! I didn't know what to expect."

Catherine always gave her endeavors her full effort. School was no exception. "When I went to graduate school, I lived down there most of the time. I came home very seldom. That study was mine, and I always did a lot of it. I just demanded the time." On the occasions Catherine did return to Des Moines, "I would be in my room studying, with books everywhere. I would fall asleep, books all over, wake up, and start all over."

Tests, at times, "blew my mind. I can remember sitting there being blank and staring out the window...just blank out. Then,
in coming back to class, kids would ask 'How did you answer this?' I would say, 'I don't even want to hear it!' I would go stark staring mad...if somebody said they answered the question the way I didn't." During a post-test discussion, "I remember sitting and writing a letter to my sister in class. I didn't want to hear what was going on."

Even though Catherine was away from home, she did have a support system. "Our support system was the six of us, plus Helen. The group included Irl Carter, Audra Cole, Paul Cooley, Dick Davis, and Ed Hunt. Paul was an older man. He had a business of his own, but he just wanted to get into social work. Ed floated in and out. Paul was the oldest of the group, Irl was the youngest."

Irl Carter recalls, "A lot of sharing in class, a lot of socializing between classes, down in the basement. We did some things together, studying, going out for a beer. We studied for exams in small groups." Irl described his relationship with Catherine as having "a lot of respect for each other. She conveyed that." They had "similar work backgrounds and gravitated toward each other."

One traumatic event during Catherine's first semester at graduate school was President Kennedy's assassination. "I never shall forget that day. It was my birthday on the 21st and we were going out to the Amanas to celebrate. I was cleaning. Audra called me crying, and when I asked her what was the matter, she said, 'Turn your radio or TV on.' I was just devastated. I
loved that man. I felt we had a President in the White House who really represented the status of a President—good looking, young, his approach was class. At last we didn't have to apologize for who was representing us, with his stands on everything and on civil rights."

Catherine and her support group "spent a lot of time" discussing civil rights. "We'd take in the marches going on in Iowa City, kids on the streets all night. We'd take hot chocolate and cigarettes up town to them. We didn't know who they were; but they'd appreciate it. I remember discussing my feelings of guilt because I wasn't down there. Our group had a lot of discussions about collective guilt, being responsible about what was going on, and how you could do your part. Well, you're here in school doing what you can. Everybody can't be down there, somebody has to be at home."

In addition to the marches, speakers occasionally came to Iowa City. Irl Carter recalled "Catherine invited me to go along" to hear "Bayard Rustin. He was highly recognized as a black civil rights leader. He was better known than Martin Luther King during the 50's. He was speaking at a church. Catherine was really doing me a favor by inviting me to go along. During that time period it was easy to stay distant from minorities. But that was never an overt sort of thing. Catherine did not push the issue. It was just 'You are a friend of mine, would you like to come along to hear this?' She never pushed the discussion."

Katy Kruse, a Professor at the School of Social Work remembered
"going to a party. There wasn't a lot of socializing - it wasn't encouraged. I can remember going to a party at the house where Catherine lived. Catherine lived where a lot of black students who came to the University of Iowa lived, with Mrs. Lemme. A grade school is named after her. I can remember going to a party there, and that was really unusual to be invited to a party by a student. When you went into that house, there was no escaping the fact that you were definitely in a black household. I can remember feeling a little strange." While Katy was pleased to be invited to a party by a student, she was probably, for the first time, part of a minority.

In graduate school, Catherine was one of two black students.* Mildred Snider, another Professor at the School of Social Work, stated "I don't believe that that was ever a problem with Catherine. She is well put together, and certainly she was well respected by the whole class."

Catherine had very little time for socializing or for civil rights activities. Graduate school was "a full two year program with two practicums." The first was "with a Cedar Rapids psychiatric clinic, two or three days a week. We (the students) always worried about where we were. Frank Itzen (now with the University of Illinois) would say, 'Well, you are where you ought to be.'" Catherine laughingly recalls, "How great that is! Where ought we be? The kids (other students) would be so upset. I used to tell them, 'Oh, but they are Social Work Professors and they know what we are going through. They wouldn't deliberately

*A black man, Harold Pearl, was the other student.
hurt us.' I always told the others they wouldn't do it to us, but I know I suffered. I suffered a great deal!"

"My second year practicum was at the Iowa Family and Children Services." That is where Catherine did her research project, "Attitudes Toward Adoptions in the Negro Community of Des Moines." Edith Zober was her research coordinator. (Edith is now a Professor at Ames, Iowa.) Catherine's "decision to work in this research area was made when I became aware of the need for information to assist Iowa Children's Home Society in...trying to find a suitable home...for the Negro child. This is a difficult responsibility, which is compounded by the persistence of social and economic discrimination against the racial group." Catherine's research concluded that "The study showed a discouraging degree of lack of familiarity with the purpose and function of Iowa Children's Home Society...community and agency concentration on interpretation and information about the function of the agency would be of help in recruiting homes." In addition to "education and information...active home recruitment..." was also recommended.

Catherine was nearing her completion of graduate school. "The seminar class was the one that put it all together for me. I felt they had given us all the different views and approaches. It was up to us to pick out of that eclectic approach the thing which fit you the best and that you could go with, putting it all
together for yourself. I did. My base was always Erik
Erikson.* I guess that's what I mean when I say you have to
internalize. You take this on for yourself, you know that it is
going to be your direction, and your practice. Well, it put
it in order for me, the practical application. You can approach
any human relationship. These are the kinds of things that have
to be brought into consideration. *Erikson and Maslow,** I think
I can take those two and go anywhere."

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*Erik Erikson: Erikson's major work has been to develop
and perfect a conceptual framework to organize knowledge of the
total life cycle of human growth and behavior. His theory of
eight stages of human development encompasses the total life
span. His psychosocial approach to human development is parti-
cularly in accordance with social work with its simultaneous atten-
tion to the individual and the individual's environment.

**Abraham Maslow: Self actualization in terms of actual
behavior and actual procedure is described in eight ways:
experiencing without self-consciousness, making growth choices,
letting the self emerge, being honest, taking responsibility,
using one's intelligence, realizing peak experiences, and opening
oneself up to himself. (Maslow, 1971), pp. 45-47).
Catherine endured an additional stress "just two weeks before graduating. Audra Cole and I had been studying on a park bench. I remember telling her I thought I had cancer, I had a lump on my breast. She went to the doctor with me. I remember the nurse taking my history and her not believing I was as old as I was. It was fine, the problem, only a cyst. The doctor gave the bill to me as a graduation present."

As a requirement for graduation, "in addition to research we wrote comps. The day we took our comps, Helen sent me off in the morning with a little cigar box with cigarettes, gum, and something else in there. She had prepared a survival packet for me. Going over it rained, it just poured that day. POURED! We took it (the comps) in Old Capital. After leaving there we went across to the Airliner. I guess that day we were just glad it was over. And then Audra Helen, and I started sweating out whether we had made the grade. After I got over that, every day it was 'What's it going to be?' We'd get sick, sick at what we should have said. It was painful until the day they posted them. And then I remember not feeling very good when it did get posted. It was bad for some classmates who didn't make it that we thought should have." Catherine graduated in May of 1965.

After Catherine's graduation, "it all fell together for me. Whatever the strifes had been during the situation, they presented you with everything they had. Then you make your own decision about where you want to go with what you had been given. But you don't go in telling them what it is supposed to be. You can't
define your own curriculum. You don't know anything about it, the history, where we started and where we are now. Somebody has to teach that to you. You can put in your own ideas and put it into place once you get through. Until then, you don't understand what it is all about."

Catherine had entered the School of Social Work eager to learn. That attitude was also illustrated in the reflections of Mildred Snider. "She was one of those persons that you couldn't forget if you'd had her as a student. It was a relatively small class so we all got to know each other very well. Catherine had the background through her experience, both her life experience and her professional experience, to make a real contribution to the class and to the school in general. But she also had the ability to take on new knowledge, new ideas, and to stick with it until she had integrated the ideas."

Katy Kruse also remembered Catherine as a graduate student. "She was fairly quiet spoken. She was considered a really able student. That was very evident very quickly. She wasn't the kind of person who demanded to be noticed. She certainly was responsive and involved in what was going on. Catherine was very well prepared, in terms of her experiences. She obviously had a good education. Education was highly valued to Catherine. She came with excellent ground work. She knew how to write, how to express herself, and had the vocabulary. She had an excellent writing ability. I don't mean to suggest that she wasn't articulate, but that she didn't feel any great need to be heard all
the time. A concern of Catherine's has always been that there is never enough emphasis placed by the school on teaching ethical behavior. Value things that are specifically identified with social work. Those are the things that Catherine has always emphasized the importance of."

One very important value that was reinforced for Catherine in graduate school was to work with individuals. Each case deserved to be treated separately and different. Cases should not be generalized.

"When I had finished, I had a couple of recommendations. They came to me to go for my doctorate. One was from Dr. Glick,* and someone else because I got a letter from the University of Minnesota. I told him that I had had all the book learning I intended to get. I was just tired with school and felt it was time to get busy and do something with it. Out of graduate school I felt I was able to put my natural inclination into some order. Social work was one of my careers. A difficult approach to what I wanted to do from then on was to move right straight up through the social work arena."

*Frank Glick was the Director of the School of Social Work at the University of Iowa during the time Catherine was a student. Frank is now retired and lives in Iowa City.