

GSAPP Alumni Newsletter

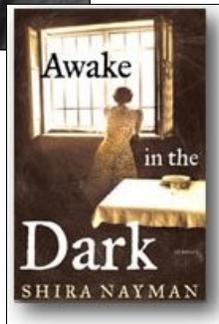
The GSAPP Alumni Organization—Rutgers University

Spring 2007—Volume VIII—No. 1

The Writing of *Awake in the Dark*

By Shira Nayman, Psy.D. '87

Editor's Note: GSAPP graduate Shira Nayman's new book *Awake in the Dark*, a collection of fictional short stories, has been received with rave reviews. Here she shares the background and confluence of experience that led her to write these tales.



In his recent autobiography, Gabriel Garcia Marquez evokes the boisterous, multigenerational home of his childhood, in which the air was alive with the stories of his family's past. The stories formed a kind of narrative map for his developing sense of self. Almost every autobiography I can think of makes mention of family stories told to the author as a child—stories that are delicately brought to bear on a host of questions: *Where did we come from? What happened to our family in the past? What is history's specific legacy which has brought us here, to this present?*

These questions lean in closely to another kind of inquiry: Where do I fit into this world? Who am I?

The stories we are told as children can be happy and wholesome and full of sweetness and light. But they can also be crucibles of suffering. As we grow, we learn more about our wider community and socio-historical context, and must often reckon with stories of persecution, brutality and pain. How do I grapple with the effects of historical trauma? How does knowledge of the suffering of my own people affect me, in the deepest recesses of my soul?

And what if instead of stories, there is silence—a dreadful blackness that echoes with horrors too disturbing, too unbalancing, even to name? Perhaps the psychological logic, if there is one, goes something like this: better a hollow, empty self, than a self built on a shriek of pain.

Toni Morrison comes to mind, in thinking about contemporary writers who have explored the ways in which the traumatic history of one's people can reverberate down through the generations and into the closest reaches of the self. Many of her characters battle a weighty legacy that roils within in deep and defining ways. Louise Erdrich, writing about characters of Native American origin, also comes at this theme in rich and profound ways.

As a child of immigrants from South Africa, I grew up in the

close-knit, Jewish community of Melbourne, Australia, which was comprised largely of Holocaust survivors. The air I breathed was infused with a claustrophobic silence. This was not the quiet of meditation, or the peacefulness of the wide outdoors. It was a silence that rang with stifled screams and seemed to lurk everywhere: behind and within the bright surfaces of my everyday life—a comfortable, middle-class existence, in which education and culture were the focus, and dailiness was marked with well-being and plenty. The juxtaposition was odd; and the result, for me, was an uncanny awareness from early on that things are rarely what they seem—that danger is in fact ever-present, if carefully shunted away, out of sight.

As I got older, and embarked upon a Jewish education, I learned about the horrors that had been visited upon Jewish people from the earliest times. I vividly remember learning about how Rabbi Akiva, one of the great Jewish martyrs, had his flesh raked with hot combs, as well as many other distant tortures and destructions that made Yom Kippur—the Jewish Day of Remembrance—replete with events to commemorate.

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From the Alumni Organization President's Message

Dear GSAPP Alumni:

As I start my term as President of the GSAPP Alumni Organization, I want to recognize the extraordinary efforts of Bonnie Markham, PhD, PsyD, who has provided outstanding guidance to our organization over the past four years. Thank you for all your hard work and exceptional leadership!

We recently had an Alumni Organization board meeting at which many important topics were discussed. One of the key issues over the next year will be increasing our membership. With more members, we will be able to support more activities with direct meaning for our GSAPP graduates, our current students, and the efforts of the Dean and faculty in continuing to maintain GSAPP's leadership position in professional psychology.

Recently, and with regret, Dean Messer announced that the Organizational PsyD program will no longer be accepting new admissions. Your alumni organization wants to ensure that all our PsyD alumni, but now especially our Organizational alumni and current students, have their concerns addressed, and that your Alumni Organization continues to meet the needs of all graduates. I welcome any suggestions from alumni on how best to achieve this goal.

I encourage anyone who would like to be more involved in our Alumni Organization to get in touch with me at cm@caroline.mossip.net. If you have ideas for programs, or suggestions on how to improve our organization, please let me know. We are planning a number of activities of interest to alumni and current students, including a social event in April, and our next Career Continuum program in November. I look forward to hearing your creative ideas for making the GSAPP Alumni Organization even better in future.

Warmest regards,

Caroline Mossip PsyD '83
President, GSAPP Alumni Organization

From the Alumni Organization Memo from the Editor

GSAPP Alumni take up many roles in the world of professional psychology, going well beyond the general categories defined by the Clinical, School and Organizational departments of our school. Some of us are even in fields that can scarcely be called Psychology at all, taking our GSAPP experience and training to new and innovative ways to affect the world. In this issue, we explore some of these lesser-known ways to harness our training.

Shira Nayman's article demonstrates a subtle yet powerful use of GSAPP training. Her book of short stories has been met with critical acclaim and popular recognition (see the nine customer reviews on Amazon.com, for example, all of whom rated it 5 stars!). But her psychology background is found whispering between the lines, rather than screaming from the words. Issues such as trauma, child development, culture, community, are all explored in her book, but rather than from a scholarly frame, she uses the "heightened realm of reality that is... fiction."

Roy Aranda has channeled his knowledge of cognitive processes to a new area: memorizing the law!! And he has started disseminating his techniques to law students around the country. I suggest checking out his article, and trying some of the strategies he lays out. You might improve your own ability to recall important information, and reduce those pesky "senior moments."

GSAPP alumni Haydee Montenegro, David Sacks, and Cheryl Rothery-Jackson are now Training Directors at other schools of Professional Psychology. In this issue they start a series comparing their experience at GSAPP with the current situation at each of the schools where they coordinate the training of doctoral psychology students. We hope to include current GSAPP faculty in future installments of their discussion.

Finally, in this issue we again hear some thoughts about a past article. I've written a response to Beth Haessig's piece on electronic toys (Spring 2006 issue), and she in turn reacts to what I've written.

I'm sure that you, too, are finding exciting ways to use your GSAPP training. Please let me know what they are, so you can share them with the wider GSAPP alumni community.

Jeffrey Axelbank, Psy.D., '92

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From GSAPP A Letter from the Dean

Dear GSAPP Alumni,

As you may recall, I wrote to all of you on June 15, 2006, to inform you of the financial difficulties GSAPP was facing, along with every other Rutgers unit. I urged you to make a special contribution, which would be earmarked for applied courses taught by practitioners like yourselves that are so central to a GSAPP education. The response was very heartening: \$48,181 was contributed by 53 individuals. This money made a real difference in that we did not have to cancel any courses whereas many other units did, and we have been able to retain our contributing and visiting faculty.

In this issue of the GSAPP Newsletter, I want to acknowledge the contributors (other than those who asked to remain anonymous). In a future issue of the Newsletter, I will acknowledge in similar fashion those who have contributed to GSAPP through the most recent RU telethon or at other times during the previous year.

Because GSAPP is quite young, our alumni base is relatively small (about 800). Each of your contributions matters to us and is a vote of confidence in our ability to train high level, applied psychologists. For all this, I thank you on behalf of GSAPP and myself. Within the next few months, I plan to provide you with an update of some of the exciting things happening at GSAPP.

Stanley Messer
Dean, GSAPP

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The Writing of *Awake in the Dark*

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Far more immediate, of course, was The Holocaust. The accounts of this period were not to be found in dusty books adorned with humorless illustrations, but were, rather, flung at me in flickering images from newsreels and movies, photographs of people who looked just like me and my family and friends, being rounded up, bludgeoned to death, or shot. Photographs of high-capacity, corpse-burning crematoria, and endless other ghoulish realities from that period—which after all had only ended fifteen years before my birth—were part of my own personal history, among the stories told to me during those critical developmental years in which one’s own self is spun into being.

I heard about this recent history in the classroom, and in certain glancing ways at home, but not in the homes of my friends, many of whose parents had branded, into their forearms, the greenish-black numbers that identified them as survivors of Nazi death camps. These parents spoke with heavy

Polish accents and looked at their children—and at me—with eyes whose depth or shallowness I didn’t understand. They were eyes that were not so much trying to hide the past, but to find a way to peer beyond it; when they looked at me, I could feel the contours of what they were looking *through*: poisonous, acrid, but also horrifyingly human.

As children, we are perhaps the sum total of how we are gazed at, how we are seen, as well as of how our own searching, outward gaze is received. I realize now just how profoundly the anguished gazes of my childhood—and the toxic atmosphere of the Catastrophe they could not help but reflect—are configured into my own self.

But there was something else I intuited as a child growing up around people who had endured unimaginable suffering and loss. That if human beings are capable of acts of cruelty, denigration, torture and destruction so extreme, they are capable also of heroic endurance—*of the capacity to go on*: to give birth again, and to cherish and nurture new life against all the odds. I saw this, too,

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Alumni Speakout

Memorization Exercises for Law Students: A Neuropsychological Approach

By Roy Aranda, Psy.D., '82

Editor's Note: Roy Aranda, a forensic and Neuropsychology specialist, has incorporated various psychological strategies into the memorization necessary to succeed in law school. He has promoted these techniques through an article and lecture geared towards law school students. In this article, he describes the method he devised.

I graduated from GSAPP in 1982, have a private practice in Queens, N.Y. and Long Island, have taught Psychology and the Law at Hofstra University since 1991, and have been a forensic psychologist for many years. I completed a 2-year neuropsychology program in 2001 to broaden my forensic acumen. Still, something was missing. I decided to pursue a legal education and am nearing completion.

Studying law and memorizing black letter law rules proved to be the most difficult educational challenge in my life. One day, spontaneously, I closed my eyes and the vision of a law rule came into focus as I tried to conjure up the image of the page where I had seen it. This "aha" experience opened up my eyes in more ways than one. It occurred to me that the same techniques I learned as a clinical and neuropsychologist could be applied to the study of law, and more specifically, to learn black letter rules and improve my ability to visualize and follow a legal fact pattern.

Mental Images and Sensory Awareness

There are many different kinds of memory and processes at play in the brain including how memories are formed (encoding), retained (storage), and recalled (retrieval). Different parts of the brain are responsible for the various types of memories. There is a wealth of research and an abundance of techniques involving memory and how to improve it. It is clear that the ability to form mental images can be developed.

Try the following exercise:

Look at a picture from a magazine or postcard for about 15 seconds, close your eyes for a moment and then open your eyes. Without looking at the picture again, what did you see? Now look at the picture once more. What did you miss? Take a close look and focus on something you missed. Now close your eyes and take a moment to conjure the image in your mind's eye, and then open your eyes again. Was the image clearer? Did you see something that you had missed before? Now take another look and see something else you missed. Once again, close your eyes for a moment, form a mental image, and then open your eyes. Was the image clearer? Did you see more items?

Look at the picture again and do the following:

Scan the picture from top to bottom; scan from left to right. We read from left to right and can read from top to bottom. This type of visual scanning is natural, but I want you to make a concerted effort to break the image into quadrants and focus first on the top left corner, move your eyes towards the right, when you reach the end shift your gaze to the lower left quadrant and again scan towards the right. By breaking down the picture into quadrants or pieces, it helps organize your visual perception, makes it easier to store, and later, when attempting to recall the image, this organization facilitates retrieval.

Now apply the above visualization exercise to a rule statement.

Close your eyes and visualize the rule for common law burglary (your idea of what burglary is) in your mind's eye. Was it easy? Not so easy?

Look at the rule now:

At common law, burglary is the breaking and entering of the dwelling of another, at night, with the intent to commit a felony therein.

Close your eyes momentarily and try to conjure up the image of the rule, and then open your eyes. Could you see the words, the elements, the lines and approximate number of words?

Now examine the following:

Burglary is the 1) breaking and 2) entering, 3) of the dwelling 4) of another, 5) at night, 6) with the intent to commit a felony therein.

Close your eyes after looking at the rule statement briefly, form the image of the rule, and open your eyes. Was it easier with the elements broken down into numbers in a linear organization?

Now look at the rule as follows:

Burglary is the

- 1) Breaking and
- 2) Entering
- 3) Of the dwelling
- 4) Of another
- 5) At night,
- 6) With the intent to commit a felony therein.

Again, close your eyes and do the same drill. Was it easier to visualize the rule statement this way?

You need to experiment, see what works best for you, and practice. Verbalizing the rule and visualizing it enhances storage and retrieval because you are using two modalities (auditory and visual). Writing the rule down, verbalizing it, and forming a mental image is even better because you've added the tactile modality and to some extent kinesthesia (i.e. pertaining to the sensation of the writing movement).

Focusing on key words, pairing words, and even conjuring up the mental image of a burglar going through the elements strengthens the association. With your eyes closed, can you form the image of a burglar wearing a mask breaking the glass of a

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Alumni Speakout

GSAPP Training Compared to Other Professional Schools: Similarities and Differences

Haydee Montenegro Psy.D. '86,
Cheryll Rothery-Jackson, Psy.D. '92,
David Sacks, Psy.D. '93

Editor's Note: Haydee Montenegro (the PsyD Training Director in the Graduate School of Professional Psychology [GSPP] at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, CA), Cheryll Rothery-Jackson (an Associate Professor of Psychology and the Director of Clinical Training in the Department of Professional Psychology at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia), and David Sacks (Director of Training for Clinical Psychology Programs in the American School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University/Washington DC) work as coordinators of training for Professional Psychology programs at different schools. This is the first installment of a series in which they compare their job experiences with their training at GSAPP.

Similarities

David Sacks: At Argosy University/DC's Psy.D. program, there is a conscious focus on studying and integrating psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and family systems approaches to psychotherapy. For instance, I work with first-year students reading Gurman and Messer's *Essential Psychotherapies*. Similar to what I experienced at GSAPP, students often start out more cognitive-behavioral in orientation, and develop more appreciation for psychodynamic theory as they go along. George Stricker, a major force in psychotherapy integration, is influential on the faculty here. I wish more students would undertake personal psychotherapy, but for reasons of time and expense (many students work part-time or even full-time), or perhaps other reasons too, most do not. Diversity is better integrated into the curriculum than at GSAPP in the late '80s-early '90s, partly because of a more diverse student body, partly because of advances in the field. So far as testing is concerned, the Exner Rorschach method is taught; I prefer the eclectic approach I learned from Louis Sass & company!

Haydee Montenegro: My experience at GSAPP was the refreshing immersion in clinical concepts and practice, after extensive training in programs with far more academic emphasis. As my goal was to be qualified to help people and enrich their lives, this was what I needed in my training. The emphasis on the client-therapist relationship and encouragement of flexibility in therapeutic interventions, liberated me from theory-driven clinical strategies.

The above paragraph can also be applicable to my experience in the Doctoral Program at JFKU. Our Program and GSAPP are very similar in our orientation towards a Practitioner-Scholar model.

Cheryll Rothery-Jackson: Like GSAPP, we have a goal of providing both breadth and depth in our curriculum. For example, students are exposed to all of the major theoretical orientations, as well as able to concentrate in the areas of Object Relations and Marriage and Family Therapy, what we refer to as a "synergistic

blend of psychodynamic and systems perspectives." The program also offers a wide variety of training sites that provide students with exposure to diverse populations and forms of treatment. Finally, like GSAPP, we have a goal of training excellent clinicians who are also competent consumers of psychological research.

Differences

Cheryll Rothery-Jackson: There is a much greater focus on quantitative vs. qualitative aspects of training these days. My students are required to count and document every aspect of their practicum experiences, including the number of hours spent with clients, in supervision, at meetings, writing test reports, etc. Students have to document every test they administer and how many times they have administered such tests. They also have to document exhaustive information about their clients, including age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, number of sessions seen, diagnosis, etc. At internship time, the perception (and perhaps, the reality in many cases) is that those with the highest statistics will be the ones to secure the APA-approved internships.

This obsession to accumulate hours induces tremendous anxiety in students. It also sometimes prevents them from focusing on the qualitative aspects of their clinical experiences. This is especially problematic at clinical sites that may not have large numbers of clients to assign, but have other benefits such as the opportunity to conduct longer term therapy or to participate in unique training experiences.

There has also been a necessary "legalization" of activities of training programs. Our practicum sites and the Psy.D. program must maintain formal affiliation agreements full of legal jargon, and students are required to maintain malpractice insurance. When a student has a problem at a site, the Director of Clinical Training may have to consult with legal counsel before instituting an intervention. Professional meetings of Directors of Clinical Training will often include presentations by lawyers on how to work with troubled students in a way that does not place the institution at risk for being sued. Sometimes just one problem student can consume time and energy for months on end. Again, one is forced to focus on the quantitative (for example, "Do I have enough written documentation to defend my actions?") vs. the qualitative (for example, "How can I work with this student to ensure that s/he will address problem areas and develop into a competent professional, or make the necessary decision to leave this profession?").

A positive difference in training programs is the greater focus on infusing diversity into all aspects of the curriculum (which I know has also been happening at GSAPP, as well, since my departure). This has led to higher expectations for both faculty and students to develop and demonstrate multicultural competence, critical in our pluralistic society. APA's requirements for accreditation have really pushed the process forward by mandating that programs demonstrate progress in diversity, to be reflected in the curriculum, field training opportunities, and types of students programs recruit and retain. The challenge to do so has been great, but the result is a very

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Response to Haessig Everything in Moderation, With Understanding

By Jeff Axelbank, Psy.D., '92

Beth Haessig's article ("Take the Batteries out of Our Kids' Electronic Lives," Spring 2006) makes a compelling argument for eliminating electronic entertainment, especially games, from children's lives. Certainly these "little boxes," when used to such excess that they crowd out all other activities can do no good. However, the solution she advocates is draconian, and doesn't consider underlying issues, individual needs and less restrictive alternatives.

Take Max, the boy Haessig tells us about in her piece. He is playing with a Gameboy in the waiting room and cannot interact with the girl next to him. If Max lives in a home with adults who do not interact with him, or if they abuse him, the Gameboy provides him with much-needed soothing. In fact, maybe he needs to play that game to be relaxed enough to function altogether. In that kind of situation, taking away his Gameboy would be cruel and contraindicated. This is not to say that, with therapy, he wouldn't reduce his need for the Gameboy crutch. Once he had some positive relationship experience under his belt he could be encouraged to put the toy down and try some interaction with others, but that would take a while, and putting him in control of that process as much as possible would yield the most success.

But Max is an extreme case, and maybe Haessig's point is more applicable to less disturbed children. She points out that youngsters interacting "through the game" replicates the parallel play of toddlers. However, children playing a video game may indeed have to compromise, negotiate, converse, make eye contact, smile or engage in other complex interpersonal behaviors. Having observed groups of kids playing these games together, it is clear that there can be plenty of interaction and give and take, and that it is far more rich than just parallel play.

The key is moderation, with understanding. If children "engage so singularly with technology" (as Haessig herself puts it) to the exclusion of other games, then Haessig's bleak scenario will come true. But it is not necessary to eliminate the Gameboy-like toys altogether. Rather a little firm limit setting, encouragement, and provision of other options will provide other forms of stimulation and challenge. In addition, asking the question, "Why does this child need this game so badly?" and then addressing the underlying reasons for the child's narrow focus on it is more likely to result in reducing dependence on electronic entertainment. ♦

Response to Axelbank Only in Moderation?

By Beth L Haessig, Psy.D. '91

Is it draconian to eliminate entertainment technology for children? I suggest that it's similar to removing junk food from our children's diet. Maybe moderate amounts are okay, say a coke for breakfast—but only three times a week? There could be times and places where moderate use of electronic entertainment could be acceptable. In dangerous neighborhoods, it's convenient for parents to keep their kids inside, hooked up with technology, rather than allow them to go outside to the perils of the street. But for most children, that doesn't apply. There are important skills that need to be developed during childhood. Activities involving imaginative and inner-directed play with other kids can help develop many of these skills. Why give our children toys that merely keep them busy and entertained? In reference to Dr. Axelbank's example of an abused child, I would offer the child an entirely different treatment plan, which would not include numbing him with a Gameboy.

Understanding the reason a child is narrowly focused on a game cube, won't eliminate the dependence. Most likely, he is narrowly focused because it's highly stimulating, available, and fun. And perhaps lack of other activities and skills has exacerbated their dependence. My greatest concerns in the use of electronics are the lost opportunities to develop valuable social skills for our kids while they're in front of a screen. Yes, a little bit of junk food is okay, but I envision a "draconian" world where only healthful food is served to our children. ♦

Class Notes *by year of entrance*

Class notes blanked out for privacy in online version.

*Into the trees
a path
widens unexpectedly.*

The Writing of *Awake in the Dark*

Continued from Page 3

in the faces of my friends' parents and relatives, and placed these images on the graves of my own family members murdered by the Nazis—cousins and uncles and aunts of my parents, who never named them, and only spoke about them in cryptic ways.

All of this—the searing sadness as well as wonder at the capacity for heroic grace—have filled my consciousness for as long as I can remember. It has made for a painful feeling of homelessness, which I have since learned is a notably Jewish kind of experience, though it is also perhaps an element of the modern condition, in a world in which so many people live at a distant from their roots.

These are the feelings that lie behind the writing of my recent book, *Awake in the Dark* (Scribner, 2006; paperback due out in Sept, 2007). The various strands of long-standing preoccupations and personal hauntings were coming together, asking to be given voice in the heightened realm of reality that is, to me, fiction. Thrown in on top of the rest were quandaries I had felt as a psychologist working in psychiatric hospitals, having to do with troubles of a different sort—other kinds of madness. I explore these themes also in the context of questions about personal identity and historical trauma, in the novella that makes up the second half of the book.

Writing this book was an intense and deeply personal journey. My sadness in thinking about the characters I have created has been softened by the wonder I continue to feel before the noble steeliness they display. For while I will always feel anguished by the brutality of which man is capable, I will also always feel humbled and soothed by the human capacity for hope, love, bravery and triumph. ♦

Memorization

Continued from Page 4

window in the back of a ranch house, at night, reaching in with the right arm, unlatching the lock, opening the window, jumping in, walking over to the jewelry box on the dresser, opening it and taking a Rolex watch, putting it in her left pants pocket and then leaving? If so, you just visualized all the elements of common law burglary.

The ability to look at outlines and templates and recall portions with increasing detail and accuracy is more difficult but doable with practice. You will find that there are strategies or “gimmicks” that work best for you. By all means use them and incorporate them into an exercise tailor-made to your particular needs.

Lastly, it is best if you work on your memorization exercise while relaxed, so perform a breathing, sensory and imagery-based, muscle relaxation exercise, or a combination just before your session. ♦

GSAPP Training Compared

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positive and important change.

Haydee Montenegro: Perhaps as a reflection of the time-gap between the two experiences (late '70s and early '80s, vs. the present time), the attention afforded to diversity is of a different quality. GSAPP strived for diversity in the composition of the student body and the placement of students in multicultural clinical practice situations. Students were encouraged to choose dissertation projects that were socially conscious and multi-cultural in nature.

In contrast, GSPP weaves diversity into the fabric of every subject and activity. This process starts with the admission criteria and unfolds throughout the four years of the program. Students are encouraged to explore their personal identities and experiences of privilege and oppression, as a way of facilitating their understanding of their clients. One of my main mandates as Director of Training is to ensure highly diverse clinical practice for our students. Diversity is not limited to race and culture, but it is inclusive of many other frequently marginalized groups. Present-day GSAPP might also be similar in this respect. I would love to get feedback on this issue, as I love my alma mater and I think that our society needs comprehensive diversity training to meet its needs.

David Sacks: A major difference here is the admission of large numbers of students shortly after they complete their BA. They don't possess the life experience and personal maturity of older applicants – often their interview at their practicum site is one of the first “job interviews” they've ever been on! There is a naiveté about wanting to go into private practice – this runs up against the reality that they will train with field supervisors in schools, nonprofit clinics, detention centers – where lots of psychology practice in fact takes place. Part of my personal mission is to channel their helping impulses into the realities of clinical psychology practice – to turn them on to the satisfactions of working in institutional settings serving the needs of the less fortunate. ♦

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