

## **Jack Yates, Sharon, Massachusetts**

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My invitation to become acquainted with the Training Institute was a bit convoluted. It was perhaps the sort of occurrence that some would describe as "coincidence," or "serendipity." I prefer the word "'invitation', implying "no accident."

I was working in Troy NY as a caseworker for the Department of Mental Hygiene, having taken that job with no background whatsoever in disability services, and to be honest I had developed hardly any deep interest in the work. My half-hearted performance and attitude had resulted in my supervisor deciding to end my employment when my probationary period was soon to end.

But the Troy area director, our top boss, went to the AAMR (now AAIDD) national conference in June 1974 and heard a short concurrent session presentation by Wolf Wolfensberger. It was an introduction to the Principle of Normalization, a word none of us had heard before. My boss, Frank Hynes, was "blown away" by it, as we might have described it at the time. He thought, where could he learn more? There were flyers at the back table of the conference room describing a PASS workshop, so Frank picked one up and brought it home. He invited me to go to PASS by asking, "How would you like to go to a conference in Syracuse?" Why did he invite me, since I was such an underperforming employee? Because he remembered that I had been an English teacher, so told me that he counted on me to write a detailed report of my workshop experience.

I drove to Syracuse, accompanied (ironically) by my supervisor Marie Gavazzi, who had decided I would no longer be working in human services. The workshop was held at the Syracuse Hotel. I arrived early to the lecture room on the Saturday morning on which the workshop was to begin, took a seat in the front row, eager to fill again the valued role of student, the only role in which I had found any success in my life. I was ready with my notepad, my blue fountain pen for capturing the essence of the lecture, and my mechanical pencil for writing marginal notes capturing my editorial comments on the lecture. Mike Hogan, a doctoral student with Wolf at Syracuse University, would be lecturing the first two days, and Wolf would be doing "jump-ups", adding occasional comments and elaborations to Hogan's lecture.

About a half-hour into the opening lecture, Hogan was describing how in every society there are people who have been "devalued," cast into deviant roles by the dominant forces of that society, and that clearly described the people we served in Troy. My mind

suddenly opened. I put down my fountain pen, picked up my pencil, and wrote in the margin, "Holy s..t! This is serious!"

I certainly had known there were serious things in life, in history, in society. I looked upon major issues of the day like civil rights and the war in Vietnam as moral issues, worthy of study and reflection and commitment and action. It had not occurred to me, I am ashamed to say, to see my everyday service work in that light, I had made no such connections-- until that moment, in the front row in Syracuse, listening to Mike Hogan sharing Wolf's understanding of the world. The turning point of my life, no question about it, right then and there.

I wrote the requested report for our boss the instant I got home, handed it to Frank the next morning. He was very impressed, so he overrode Marie's decision to end my career, and he redirected me to work directly for him on administrative tasks, especially writing reports of meetings, study visits, workshops. Frank, and his successor Susan Eisler, approved that as long as I was able to meet their report-writing and other requirements, I was welcome to spend more and more of my time on staff development using Wolf's ideas. Guidance in that growing role was provided by Mike Hogan, who came from Syracuse to work at our regional office.

That was my first TI workshop. My team leader (and thus principal teacher for the week) was Mark Sanderson, who was for many years my supervisor later in Massachusetts, and with whom I am still in close touch. My second TI contact was to be an assistant team leader at a PASS workshop a few months later in Buffalo, at which my team leader was John O'Brien, who later hired me to teach normalization full-time in Georgia, and who became an important teacher for me ever since. I went after that to dozens more PASS workshops offered by the TI and by other organizations, and I believe I attended probably every one of the TI multi-day workshops at least once. I was several times the local coordinator for TI workshops in Georgia and Massachusetts, where I worked in state staff development jobs which gave me the flexibility to spend nearly all my time teaching and arranging classes and workshops based on Wolf's ideas.

In 1978, I considered coming to Syracuse University to study toward a doctorate there, and Mike Hogan and others had done. I talked over the pros and cons of that possibility with Joe Osburn, with Guy Caruso (who later completed his doctorate at SU), and especially with Ed Burke, but I decided based on those conversations not to apply to Syracuse. I would have gone to SU in order to work closely with Wolf. But, I learned from Burke, in order to succeed in that academic environment, I would have had to work also under the direction of other professors, some of whom hated Wolf and his ideas. I concluded that "working with Wolf" could be better pursued by continuing

to work in human services staff training positions and going to as many workshops as I could, so I continued on that path. That was, then, a "crossroads in life" at which I continued straight instead of making a turn. For the rest of my career to the present, I have gone to dozens of workshops as teacher and student, especially in a sort of "total immersion" from 1977 until about 1984, during which I spent a high proportion of my time in multi-day workshops and assessment teams. I have also been one of the chief recruiters of people from Massachusetts and elsewhere to attend TI workshops.

The PASS workshop at the beginning of my relationship with the TI, and the dozens of PASS workshops and SRV workshops since then, focus on human services. I became involved with workshops and program evaluations on Citizen Advocacy, too, beginning in 1978 and continuing to the present. I took an even more avid interest in the TI workshops that looked more directly at the moral issues involved, not only in human service but also in society and in all of human life. Wolf's teaching on the history of human services, of which I heard an early version in 1977 as part of the six-day workshop on residential services, his teaching on the sanctity of human life, which I first attended around 1982, and his workshops on the philosophy of personalism, which I first attended around 1989, were expressions of that direction in Wolf's teaching.

Attending the first workshop offered on "moral coherency" in Atlanta in 1980, was the moral issues learning experience most determinative of that direction of my thinking and my life. The workshop invited its participants compellingly to examine their highest and deepest worldview, and I have tried to sustain such self-examination ever since. As a professional involvement, that led to becoming part of the team of teachers of that workshop and the other moral issues workshops. And outside professional involvement, that led to reflection, re-thinking, and recognition, resulting in my Baptism and Confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church, with Training Institute training coordinator Susan Thomas as my sponsor. The TI workshops were entirely secular in curriculum, but they invited me to the deepest level of re-thinking of what I believed, and of what I would seek to practice, and seek to live.

The Training Institute, then, could be said to have issued me an invitation, given me a gift, conferred upon me a privilege, placed upon me a responsibility. All of which I see as Wolf and others having relayed to me the Lord's invitation, His "calling" to me, my calling in life, for which I am profoundly grateful.