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Ralph Segalman: 1916-2008

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Ralph Segalman 1916-2008

We have lost the second of our two founding fathers. Ralph and Norm Goroff mobilized members of the Sociology & Social Welfare Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) to create an interdisciplinary journal which applied social scientific methods to social welfare problems. They collected contributions from many of us. The response was strong enough that they could pay us back in less than a year. The first issue of *JSSW*, Fall, 1973 was printed on standard 8-1/2" by 11" paper stapled between cardstock covers. The next issue took a small step toward greater sophistication with a folded and "saddle-stitched" cover. Three years later they moved to "perfect binding" which sounds impressive but just means that the pages were glued into a spine and looked like a normal book. The contents were prepared "camera-ready" by each author, which meant that they were copy-edited by each author. Or not. This led to some embarrassment, but kept costs low.

Ralph and Norm were an original "odd couple." Norm was an old Marxist who believed that everyone was entitled to a job, and if that meant getting an article published he was glad to help. Ralph was a neo-conservative (ahead of his time) and fervent gatekeeper. An epic battle occurred over a candidate for the Editorial Board who Ralph thought was deficient in scholarship and who was being proposed because of ethnicity. Both agreed, however, that our job was not just to be gatekeepers but to work hard to improve any submitted manuscript whether we could publish it or not. I remain committed to that goal.

Ralph was in charge of editing and Norm handled publishing. They were not concerned with a set schedule; when Norm had enough pages, he put out another issue. Sometimes we
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had five or six a year. Once, when he fell behind, he put out three issues bound in one cover. When his printer offered him a deal on overstocked paper, all of 1978 was printed in pink. This probably bothered Ralph, who was a bit of a male chauvinist, but I don't remember any arguments about it.

Ralph relinquished the role of Editor but was still on the Board when I took over the job. His reviews were always multiple-paged and handwritten (in this regard he was not ahead of his time). They were always passionate. I sometimes had to censor them to avoid undue ego damage or libel suits. Even when I tried to avoid his hot-button issues, I still got fervently-engaged responses. When Ralph left the Board, I found that I missed fastening my seat belt before opening his letters.

Ralph championed individual responsibility and self-reliance. He was probably a pioneer of what would come to be called the "strengths perspective" (ahead of his time once again). Beneath the bark he was kind and supportive. If there is a Heaven, Ralph would probably have no trouble earning his wings. But I can't help imagining a version of *It's a Wonderful Life* where Ralph was cast in the role of Clarence, Angel Second Class, assigned to straighten out Jimmy Stewart.

Bob Leighninger