



We are celebrating!!

As Community Place celebrates our twenty years of service we will, from time to time, reflect on those who came before, the staff and participants who came through the doors of Lewis Street Center, Genesee Settlement House (GSH), and Eastside Community Center.

March is also Women's History Month so we think it is best to start with Genesee Settlement House legend Mary Hannick. Ms. Hannick served as Director of Genesee Settlement House from 1947 until 1971. Previous to her time at GSH, she was the Director of Charles Settlement House and served in World War II with the Red Cross. At Genesee Settlement House, she shepherded a number of programs that live on to this day such as the afterschool program, summer recreation camp, and a program for the developmentally disabled.



We reached out for alumni stories to celebrate and would like to present you with some memories of Genesee Settlement House and what it means. The following comes from Tim M.

"In the summer of 1966, I had just graduated from St. John Fisher College with a degree in Sociology. My plan was to go to the Syracuse University School of Social Work that fall, and that decision was the direct result of a presentation I attended by Miss Mary Hannick. Had it not been for her, and a few other accidentally instrumental people in my life, things would have gone much differently, I'm sure.

I was hired to work for the summer of '66 at Genesee Settlement House. At the time, the settlement house was what was referred to as a Red Feather Agency, which I think was a forerunner of the United Way system. It was a community fund that helped to finance a number of social services organizations in the greater Rochester area. I was enrolled in a social work intern program, offered at Genesee Settlement House, in advance of my starting my social work studies in the fall of that year.

In the summer of 1966, there were two summer programs being run simultaneously by Genesee Settlement House, if memory serves me correctly.

One was called Camp Fisher (as I recall), and one called Camp Philander. The major difference between the two was that for the majority of the time, the Camp Fisher kids were” bussed out” of the neighborhood on different trips and excursions, and the other camp kids were not. Camp Fisher was the more expensive camp, and I know we all envied the kids and the counselors, who went off by bus each day to some exciting location.

The majority of our time at Camp Philander was spent on a huge, dusty, grassless vacant lot on the corner of Philander Street and some other street, about a block or two away from the settlement house. As I recall, there were almost no trees on the lot, and that summer was an intensely warm one! We had almost no shade. I think we may have had some pop-up tents...at least one appears in the single photo I have left from that summer.

I was assigned a group of 8-10 boys, all from the immediate neighborhood: a racially mixed group of kids. The age group was about 9 or 10 years old. A good group of kids, who all got along just fine.

I recall a few kids in particular: there was Charlie, a skinny little white kid with a single mom, who almost immediately latched on to me and stuck like glue. He was the first to arrive each morning, and always wanted to be by my side. Then there was Willie, a pudgy little black kid, who always called me “Mr. MACK-man”. (This photo of my group. We were doing a song from the musical, “The Music Man”, and our song was “76 Trombones”! The significance of the costumes, I can’t recall. That’s Charlie on the far right, and I think Willie is next to him, with me behind. I think that Walt is in the background of the photo.)



On rainy days we walked to the settlement house gym, and on a few occasions, we got to go out of the neighborhood...like a day at Charlotte Beach. But most days, we were on the vacant lot, playing kick ball, having some quiet reading times, and eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, washed down with a heavily sugared orange drink that we all called “bug juice.” Consumed at air temperature!

There was no sports equipment to speak of, no basketball court, no ball diamond and certainly no gloves and bats, that I remember. There was an arts and crafts cart, about the size of a small dresser on wheels, that we pushed to the lot each day. It contained paper, crayons, scissors, and that was about it. All the groups shared the arts and crafts supplies.

Walt Higley was the Camp Director, and maybe the Assistant Director of the agency, I’m not sure. He later went on to teach at the Syracuse University School of Social Work, I believe. He would occasionally meet with the summer intern workers, and talk with us about social work, and our own experiences.

I recall visiting the gym with some of the local families, when the government

surplus food was distributed. Mostly I remember blocks of yellow cheese, in 5 lb. cardboard containers, and I think, powdered milk.

As I was a social work intern, I did get to go on a few home visits with the agency social worker, whose name I do not recall. It was my first taste of seeing inner city life, up close and personal. Coming from a working class, blue collar neighborhood in Rochester myself, I saw what poverty was REALLY like around the settlement house. And I met some wonderful people: many single moms, black and white, struggling to make a life for themselves and their kids. An eye-opening experience, that I am grateful to have had so long ago.

Miss Mary Hannick is legendary in the Rochester area. She was the Executive Director of Genesee Settlement House for years, long before women were commonly hired to such positions. It was at a presentation that she gave to the Sociology Club at St. John Fisher that I met Miss Hannick, maybe in 1964. During her presentation she said that if we wanted to make a difference in the world, we should go on to graduate school for a Master's in Social Work.

I took her words to heart, and did just that. And never regretted it.



I'll close with a recollection of Miss Hannick. A number of years ago, when she was in retirement, I ran into her at a Catholic Charities function. I had seen her a few times over the years, and she claimed to remember me from the summer of 1966. Anyway, she was a strong-willed woman, never took no for an answer, and was unwavering in her commitment to honor the dignity of each individual, and to work tirelessly for social justice.

And she always spoke her mind!

At the end of the evening at the Charities function, I asked her if I could have a photo with her. (See above.)

So, I stood beside this tiny, frail woman and casually put my arm around her shoulder. Just before the photo was taken, she looked up at me and said in a loud voice,

"HUG ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT!"

I was happy to."

Thank you for your recollections Tim.

If you have any stories about Genesee Settlement House, Lewis Street Center, Eastside Community Center, Threshold Center for Youth, or Community Place we would love to hear from you.
