

# To Readers

AS EXPLAINED FURTHER in the introduction, the cases in this collection came from social workers telling about their experiences. They depict, in considerable detail, difficult and challenging situations these social workers actually encountered in professional practice. This is not always true of cases published in social work textbooks, and makes these cases more like the sort of cases you will encounter in your field placement or employment or that you might hear about in case conferences or peer supervision.

But these cases are like the ones you may encounter professionally in another very important way. They end at a point where the social worker protagonist must make a decision about how to respond. While social work cases traditionally illustrate practice theories or interventions, demonstrating how something should work, these cases depict unresolved situations and thus allow you to analyze the information presented and decide what to do. Indeed, if you must discuss these cases or write a case analysis in a social work course, you will have to carefully analyze the situation and draw your own conclusion about what needs to be done. That may be quite different from what you're accustomed to doing in the classroom. Some students find this learning process challenging, uncomfortable, and even distressing. But it closely approximates the kind of thinking and deciding that will be required of you in professional practice, and for which you no doubt wish to be prepared. These cases will provide opportunities for you to practice and refine those skills.

In addition, these particular cases raise issues related to dying, death, and bereavement in social work practice. In certain practice situations these issues may be expected; in others, unexpected. They are often perplexing and disturbing, especially for novice social workers. Reflecting upon and discussing these cases can help you to develop some professional skill and judgment in the safety of the classroom before you inevitably happen upon similar situations in the field. In short, studying these cases will introduce you to

the messy world of professional practice in ways that textbooks and lectures alone cannot.

Beyond graduate education, these cases may also be used for continuing education or for discussion in supervisory sessions. Professional social workers have reported that they provide an appropriate level of challenge and vividly portray real-life struggles similar to those encountered in practice. Experienced social workers may disagree about how to respond in some instances, as happens frequently in social work practice, but still benefit from discussing these situations.