Introduction

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This book grew out of my personal journey. In 2008, I made the decision to retire from a career in sociological practice and teaching and to relocate to a new community. However, like most major life decisions, mine was associated with anxiety about the correctness of my choices. After more than thirty years in Pennsylvania, my husband and I moved to what had been our vacation house on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland—an interim step in our eventual decision to relocate to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Other than my husband, I knew of no other retired sociologists nearby and thought that knowing others at a similar life stage would be interesting and also supportive in alleviating the loss of a professional identity that comes with the transition to retirement.

That year, the Eastern Sociological Society (ESS) meetings were conveniently held in Baltimore. I contacted a friend and fellow sociologist, Natalie Sokoloff, who had not yet retired, and asked whether she would like to co-organize a session for sociologists who were retired or contemplating retirement. She enthusiastically agreed, and our session was well received. We had clearly struck a chord among colleagues at a similar career stage, and the ESS Opportunities in Retirement Network (ORN) was born. Although I am no longer directly involved, this group has continued to have an annual session at the ESS meetings.

In 2010, my husband, Jon, and I took the next step in our retirement journey, sold the house in Maryland, and moved to Fearrington Village (near Chapel Hill), a community consisting largely of retired professionals

from many fields, including a few sociologists. Finding kindred spirits was not so difficult here, and Jon and I were able to get together with Peter Stein, a retired sociologist friend living in Chapel Hill, and Tuck Green, a retired sociologist also living in Fearrington Village. We talked about how the opportunity to participate in a group like ours was probably not an option for many retirees, and I proposed the possibility of a national ORN associated with the American Sociological Association (ASA).

Peter contacted ASA to set up a meeting, and in October 2013, Jon, Peter, and I met with Sally Hillsman and many members of her staff in Washington. They were very supportive of our idea and asked us to write a formal proposal for presentation to the ASA council. With the assistance of Jon, Peter, Tuck, and Karen Edwards, who had been assigned as our ASA liaison, I put together a proposal to create ORN as an official component of ASA, and the proposal was approved. Sadly, Tuck passed away before this book was published, but he did live to see the creation of both the national ORN and a retirement component that he initiated in the Midwest Sociological Society.

One of the first outcomes of the establishment of ORN was the creation of a Listserv for retired/emeritus members of ASA. The response was overwhelming! Numerous famous and not-so-famous retired sociologists posted messages about their activities in retirement. Many expressed their appreciation for a way to lessen their feelings of isolation from colleagues. I even connected with my first sociology professor at Harpur College (now SUNY's Binghamton University), Paul Eberts, whom I had never before thanked for introducing me to the field that would become my career.

Reading so many interesting stories of life in retirement gave me the idea for this book. I thought, "These could be expanded into chapters that would be fascinating to others at various career stages." I thought the book would be useful to sociologists and other professionals who were retired or contemplating retirement, as well as to students thinking about a career in sociology. A book of this nature also seemed to have potential value for courses on the sociology of aging, the life course, or occupations. So I asked Peter whether he would be interested in coediting such a book, and he agreed. We talked to Karen Edwards about publication under the auspices of ASA, and she got permission to publish our work as an e-book. Later in the process, we approached a number of university presses about the possibility of publishing a hard copy, and Temple University Press enthusiastically agreed to be a partner in the publication process.

Through the Listserv and a notice in *Footnotes*, ASA's newsletter, we issued a call for submissions, asking contributors to use a life-course perspective and to address the role of sociology in their lives. We eventually received manuscripts from twenty-two individuals, all of whom have had very productive careers. Each manuscript was sent to three peer reviewers,

and most of the authors were asked to revise and resubmit their work. We accepted twenty of the revised manuscripts for publication in this book. Some of our later submissions came from our peer reviewers, who were inspired to write their own stories after reading the accounts of others. Because these essays are memoirs, we decided to minimize citations, which are generally found in more academic works.

Although the authors responded appropriately to our call for submissions, their approaches varied considerably. Some presented a more or less straightforward account of their lives from childhood through retirement, whereas others chose to focus on a particular time period. For example, Natalie Sokoloff discusses in depth the process involved in making the decision to retire. Janet Giele chose to include commonalities in the lives of other sociologists who grew up in the same Ohio county as she did. We think these diverse approaches add interest to the book.

Although I enjoyed writing and editing all of my academic articles and books in the past, this project turned out to be enjoyable in a different way, because these authors' accounts were so interesting to read. I was especially fascinated by the stories of working-class roots, like Bob Perrucci's, and stories of encounters with famous sociologists of the past, like Ed Tiryakian's. I was also struck by the parallels between the nonlinear careers of so many of the women and my own circuitous career path. Taken as a whole, these accounts are a fascinating microcosm of the twentieth century, including the Great Depression, World War II, the student protests and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and so much social change.

In his inaugural lecture in the ORN "A Life in Sociology" series, delivered at the ASA meetings in Chicago in 2015, Earl Babbie described his career as that of an "accidental sociologist." This description also fits the essays in this book. None of our authors grew up planning to become a sociologist; probably few children and adolescents do. Rather, these stories confirmed what I already knew as a symbolic interactionist—being in the right situation at the right time makes a difference. In virtually all of the essays, the author describes an encounter or series of encounters, typically with a mentor or significant other, that became a turning point leading to a career in sociology. Bob Perrucci's story of staying in college as a result of a chance encounter with an old friend is a great example.

In addition to accidental turning points, certain kinds of experiences seem to have occurred with relative frequency in this group of sociologists. Quite a few were involved in activism, often early in their lives. Several were involved in the well-known student protests at Berkeley. Many others had somewhat unconventional families of origin that differed in politics, ethnicity, or religion from those of others in their communities. Exposure to nonnormative ideas may have played a role in predisposing these individuals to choose sociology as a career.

Because so many of the essays include experiences in common, Peter and I discussed various ways of grouping them. The clearest difference was gender based. Most of the women's stories reflected the norm of male dominance that prevailed during much of the last century. I could easily identify with Debra Kaufman and Elinore Lurie, whose careers, like mine, took a backseat to those of their husbands for a time. Most of the men had more linear career paths, although military service intervened in some cases. Predictably, family life and child rearing also figured more prominently in the women's accounts.

We also considered separating those with more traditional, middle-class roots, like Janet Giele (and the fellow Ohio-born sociologists she discusses), Tuck Green, and Glen Elder, from the "outsiders," like Peter Hall, who grew up with a sense of differentness because his parents were Communists (in fact, two of our authors, Peter Hall and Fred Pincus, were "red diaper babies"), or Joyce Williams, who was negatively labeled because of her family's poverty. Art Shostak and David Simon both describe growing up Jewish in a non-Jewish community. Elizabeth Higginbotham describes her marginality as an African American woman in various settings.

Another small group of essays reveals the power of personal experience in determining a chosen field of study. Both Tom Scheff and Hank Fischer write movingly about how difficult life experiences led them to study sociology (Fischer) or to focus on a particular area within the field (Scheff). Both Tuck Green and Wendell Bell describe early experiences with low-wage laborers that made them more aware of social inequality and perhaps influenced their later decisions to become sociologists.

We eventually decided to simply group the essays chronologically, based on the year of the author's birth. For the first grouping, "Children of the Great Depression," we borrowed the title of one of our authors' (Glen Elder) books and include those born between 1924 and 1935. These writers' accounts truly reflect the sweep of history during the last century, and many were students of iconic American sociologists. The second grouping, "Coming of Age in the Postwar Years," includes authors born between 1937 and 1948, who generally have retired a little more recently. This division is rather arbitrary, and some of our older authors have more in common with our younger authors than they do with their agemates.

We asked each contributor to include a discussion of his or her activities in retirement. Clearly, these individuals are *busy*. Some continue to teach—in a variety of settings. Many continue to do research and write. For some, retirement is an opportunity to explore subjects of interest that were not pursued during the working years (Hank Fischer is probably the only sociologist to have published an article on the ebony jewelwing dragonfly). Still others are engaging in volunteer work and social and political activism, often making use of their sociological expertise, or finding new interests,

such as genealogy or art. Retirement also offers more time for friends and family. In his nineties, Wendell Bell and his wife are still enjoying ballroom dancing; may their tango last for many more years!

Although we included only essays we received in response to our call for submissions, I continue to encounter wonderful stories of life in retirement. Just recently, I attended a talk by John Shelton Reed, a sociologist who retired from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and who now travels in search of "true 'cue" (barbecue using a wood fire). He has just published his second book of recipes. We hope that you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did and find them useful in charting your own journeys.