



# *Becoming A Counselor:*

**The Light, the Bright, and the Serious  
2nd Edition**

Samuel T. Gladding



# **Becoming a Counselor:**

## **The Light, the Bright, and the Serious, Second Edition**

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# DEDICATION

To Thomas J. Sweeney

*An active and strong voice for counseling as a profession,  
the founder of Chi Sigma Iota (counseling academic  
and professional honor society international),  
a friend and mentor*



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## PREFACE

Some events change your life. Most are not so powerful. Critical occurrences that have an impact are landmark experiences such as leaving home, the death of a parent, the achievement of a goal, failure, an accident, a chance encounter, or a natural disaster. Other transitional times may be less notable but still influential, such as moments of insight, prejudice, or simple acts of kindness. Outside of these memorable incidents, the rest of our existence is rather mundane and routine. Thus, we may be at a loss to recall what we ate or to whom we talked two days ago because neither was significant in life-changing or life-giving ways.

In counseling we see people at crisis points. They are usually ready or willing to make necessary changes, some of which are dramatic. However, as clinicians we seldom remember most of the people we encounter because the helping process is more routine than avant-garde. My experiences reflect that pattern. I can recall only a few of the hundreds of individuals I have assisted. Yet, some events in my personal and professional life have been turning points that have influenced my growth and development in a manner similar to those situations that have most affected my clients. You have had (or most likely will have) some similar experiences. These times are filled with a plethora of emotions and thoughts as well as new behaviors.

The vignettes in this text are representative of many universal dimensions involved in becoming a counselor and helping professional. In these stories, you will find examples of

- the light, that is, the humorous aspects of life and counseling;
- the bright, that is, the insightful nature of life and counseling; and
- the serious, that is, the deeper and more sobering parts of life and counseling.

Sometimes these three dimensions occur simultaneously and are obvious. Sometimes they are sequential and subtle. Regardless, they are a part of the experience of both novice and veteran counselors.

## Preface

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Although the incidents in these stories are unique, they are also broad based. You may find yourself identifying with them and their applicability to you. The “Points to Ponder” section at the conclusion of each section is an especially good place for such reflections. In any case, it is my hope that this book will assist you in living a richer, fuller, deeper, and more meaningful life through gaining insight into yourself and the processes involved in the bittersweet process of choice and change.

In reading this text, remember that some incidents represented here, mainly those that occurred in my own life, are true. However, most of the stories in this book are based on facts that have been altered or embellished a bit. Thus, in all circumstances, characters who are a part of these episodes (unless specifically identified) have been disguised through multiple means such as being combined with similar people in a composite, having their names changed, having their genders switched, or having their presenting problem modified.

There are a number of people who have been pivotal in the publication of this book. Clients, colleagues, and situations are the key sources for what appears on these pages. However, the one who has done the most to transpose my reflections into readable prose is Anita Hughes, my former assistant at Wake Forest University, who initially helped organize and edit much of this material. I could not have completed the task without her. My colleagues in the Department of Counseling at Wake Forest University, especially Donna Henderson, Debbie Newsome, Laura Veach, Tom Elmore, Pamela Karr, and John Anderson, have also been most supportive. Erin Binkley and Elizabeth Cox, my graduate assistants in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 respectively, offered invaluable insights as well. I am likewise grateful for the positive input into my life by Thomas J. Sweeney, to whom this book is dedicated, and the encouragement and constructive comments of Carolyn Baker, Director of Publications at the American Counseling Association (ACA). My gratitude is also extended to Rich Yep, Executive Director of ACA, and to the publication committee members of ACA who reviewed and favorably recommended this work. Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Claire, and our children, Ben, Nate, and Tim, for the rich memories they have provided me in regard to counseling and life. Becoming a counselor is a continuous and challenging process.

—*Samuel T. Gladding*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samuel T. Gladding is a professor and chair of the Department of Counseling at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He has been a practicing counselor in both public and private agencies since 1971. His leadership in the field of counseling includes service as

- president of the American Counseling Association,
- president of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES),
- president of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW),
- president of Chi Sigma Iota (counseling academic and professional honor society international), and
- vice president of the Counseling Association for Humanistic Education and Development (C-AHEAD).

Gladding is the former editor of the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* and the ASGW newsletter. He is also the author of more than 100 professional publications. In 1999, he was cited as being in the top 1% of contributors to the flagship journal of the American Counseling Association, the *Journal of Counseling & Development*, for the 15-year period from 1978 to 1993. Some of Gladding's most recent books are *The Counseling Dictionary* (2nd ed.; 2006), *Counseling: A Comprehensive Profession* (6th ed.; 2009), *Group Work: A Counseling Specialty* (5th ed.; 2008), *Counseling as an Art: The Creative Arts in Counseling* (3rd ed.; 2005), and *Family Therapy: History, Theory and Process* (4th ed.; 2007).

Gladding's previous academic appointments have been at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Fairfield University (Connecticut), and Rockingham Community College (Wentworth, North Carolina). He was also Director of Children's Services at the Rockingham County (North Carolina) Mental Health Center. Gladding received his degrees from Wake Forest University (B.A., M.A.Ed.), Yale University (M.A.R.),

## About the Author

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and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Ph.D.). He is a National Certified Counselor, a Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor, and a Licensed Professional Counselor (North Carolina). He is a member of the North Carolina Board of Examiners in Counseling.

Gladding is a Fellow of the American Counseling Association and the recipient of other numerous honors, including

- the American Counseling Association's Gilbert and Kathleen Wrenn Caring and Humanitarian Person Award,
- the American Counseling Association Foundation's Bridge Builder Award,
- the Association for Creativity in Counseling Lifetime Achievement Award,
- the Association for Spirituality, Ethics, and Religious Issues in Counseling Humanitarian Award,
- the Chi Sigma Iota Thomas J. Sweeney Professional Leadership Award,
- the C-AHEAD Joseph W. and Lucille U. Hollis Outstanding Publication Award,
- the ACES Professional Leadership Award,
- the ASGW Eminent Career Award, and
- the North Carolina Counseling Association's (NCCA) Ella Stephen Barrett Award for leadership and service to the counseling profession.

Dr. Gladding is married to Claire Tillson Gladding and is the father of three children: Ben, Nate, and Tim. Outside of counseling, he enjoys tennis, swimming, music and humor.