



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

VISTAS Online

VISTAS Online is an innovative publication produced for the American Counseling Association by Dr. Garry R. Walz and Dr. Jeanne C. Bleuer of Counseling Outfitters, LLC. Its purpose is to provide a means of capturing the ideas, information and experiences generated by the annual ACA Conference and selected ACA Division Conferences. Papers on a program or practice that has been validated through research or experience may also be submitted. This digital collection of peer-reviewed articles is authored by counselors, for counselors. *VISTAS Online* contains the full text of over 500 proprietary counseling articles published from 2004 to present.

VISTAS articles and *ACA Digests* are located in the ACA Online Library. To access the ACA Online Library, go to <http://www.counseling.org/> and scroll down to the LIBRARY tab on the left of the homepage.

- Under the Start Your Search Now box, you may search by author, title and key words.
- The ACA Online Library is a member's only benefit. You can join today via the web: [counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org) and via the phone: 800-347-6647 x222.

Vistas™ is commissioned by and is property of the American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304. No part of *Vistas*™ may be reproduced without express permission of the American Counseling Association. All rights reserved.

Join ACA at: <http://www.counseling.org/>



Article 5

**Counseling: A Creative Force in the Fabric of Life
An Explanation of How the 2004/2005 ACA
Theme Developed**

Samuel T. Gladding
ACA President-Elect

We become dated quickly. This fact was brought out to me at my sister's 13th birthday party when one of her friends gave her a record (as opposed to a CD) titled, "Rock and Roll Waltz." The words went this way:

*One night it was late
Came home from a date
Stepped out of my shoes at the door
Then from the front room
I heard a jump tune
I looked in and here's what I saw.
There in the night was a wonderful scene
Mom was dancing with Dad to my record machine
And as they danced only one thing was wrong
They were trying to waltz to a rock and roll song.
One two and then rock
One two and then roll
One two and then stop
It's good for your soul
They did the rock and roll waltz.*

Well, I knew little of rock and roll at the time and probably less

about waltzes, but I did realize something was wrong. The days of the waltz I knew had ended and to try to waltz to rock and roll was, in the more modern lyrics of Elton John, like “trying to find gold in a silver mine.”

So I grew up thinking life changes and, in order for us to be ready for it, we must change and be creative. Therefore, I am proposing an ACA theme for 2004/2005 of “Counseling: A Creative Force in the Fabric of Life.”

Let me be as specific as I can be about the words following the key word “counseling,” for I have thought about these words a lot and tried to choose them carefully. First there is the word “creative.” Synonyms for “creative” include words such as “original, imaginative, innovative, resourceful, ingenious, and inventive.” I think these are strong words and that they are descriptive of the profession of counseling at its best. A few years ago, I had one of my graduate students, Beverly Huffstetler, do some research on the correlation of creativity and counseling. She found the following four facts:

1. Creative people share many of the same characteristics as psychologically healthy people.
2. Creativity means looking at a situation from many new angles while keeping reality in mind.
3. Creativity can be taught (or at least encouraged).
4. There are many creative techniques that counselors can employ to encourage the development of creativity in clients.

Thus, in a day and time that emphasizes “homeland security” and “safety first,” I propose in 2004/2005 that we explore the external and internal international world of counseling to find new and productive possibilities.

The second word in the theme, “force,” can be described as “power, strength, energy, and vigor” as in the Star War’s phrases, “May the Force be with you” and “Trust the Force.” The word and the many phrases that go with it connote a positive presence. That is what I believe counseling is at its finest.

The third word in the phrase following the word “counseling” is “fabric” which, in addition to having a definition as “material,” is also defined as “structure, foundation, basic, and framework.” At the foundation of who we are as human beings, we are woven together more by those factors that tie us together than those that pull us apart. It is these common threads that weave us into cultures and societies that I want to emphasize. We need to recognize and celebrate our differences; but, if we do not come together as people with common concerns and missions, we will surely unravel and wind up tragically.

Finally, in the theme is the word “life,” which of course refers to our existence and our spirit. I believe the profession of counseling should be dedicated to making our individual and collective lives better. That is the legacy we need to leave each and every year, time after time. I believe that if we use our creativity and our energy in counseling toward improving in basic and innovative ways the foundations beneath society, the lives of our clients and communities will improve and what we do will be seen as a mental health movement that makes a difference in the prevention and remediation areas of people everywhere.

The theme, itself, is open to possibilities, which is what I hope we do for those with whom we work. My proposed logo that is being refined at this time will feature a map of the world with the threads that weave us together nationally and internationally running through it. Counseling will be spelled with both one and two *ls* on the top and bottom of the logo so that we let it be known that we recognize, appreciate, and celebrate counseling as a worldwide phenomenon.

We are a young profession, as helping professions go. We have much to accomplish and envision. We will not become what we are capable of unless we allow ourselves to think beyond where we have been to, where we can be, and where we ought to go.

Initially, I said that I realized early that life changes and that creativity is a necessity if a person is to live a rich and fulfilling existence. I must confess that this lesson is one I continue to learn. It occurred in my life again as a parent of young children, several years ago, when my then preschool second child, Nathaniel, was interested

in playing what he described as a “real” game of baseball with me. I tried to dissuade him and just play pitch, but he insisted, even up to the point of calling balls and strikes. Thus, the game began.

I pitched the first ball, and Nathaniel swung, missing by a wide margin. “Strike one,” I announced.

I pitched again with the same results. “Strike two, Nathaniel,” I said.

Looking more determined than ever, Nathaniel stepped up to the piece of wood serving as home plate in our front yard. Then I pitched again – a high, slow, floating ball that could have had a sign on it reading “Hit me, I’m easy” – but alas Nathaniel swung and came up empty a third time.

“Strike three,” I yelled. “Nathaniel, you are out.”

Nathaniel dropped his bat, hung his head, and slowly started walking away from home plate. I wanted to rescue him and yell, “It’s okay. Come back,” but I just watched. As I stood there, I imagined joining the local chapter of “bad parents anonymous.” However, Nathaniel suddenly turned around with a smile on his face, marched confidently back to home plate, picked up the plastic bat he was using and said:

“Dad, I’m a new person.”

Sometimes our clients gain a new perspective on an otherwise dismal situation in surprising ways and act accordingly. They are resilient. Being an effective counselor is giving oneself permission to wait as well as to act. It is giving oneself the green light to be creative and energetic when needed. The foundation my theme is built on is as solid as the research we do and as powerful as our presence in advocacy. Counseling, as we know, can make a difference. It is up to us to define the time and move our profession forward. I hope you will join with me next year in making counseling a creative force in the fabric of life and invite others to do the same. If you do, we will not waltz to the music of life in an awkward and inappropriate way, but dance together as new people with energy and ideas for the common good.