Gary B. Melton: Editor and Advocate

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As we transition between editorial teams, we wish to pay tribute to this journal's founding editor-in-chief, Gary B. Melton. Gary served as the journal's editor from 2018 until his passing in the Fall of 2020. Gary was a champion for children's mental health, a tireless advocate for human rights, a man who penned more than 350 publications, and a visionary who demanded the safety of children and families. Among Gary's many accolades was the American Psychological Association (APA) Award for Distinguished Senior Career Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest. The citation (APA, 2014) summarized his contributions as follows:

For his influential scholarship on critical topics in psychology in the public interest, especially child and family law and policy, forensic mental health services, child advocacy, rural psychology, research ethics, and child abuse and neglect. Gary B. Melton has been a masterful legal architect, designing public policies and local practice to create structures and processes that instill norms of community responsibility and make preservation of children's safety and security part of everyday life. His critical thinking, prodigious publication record, tireless service, and mentoring of new generations of professionals have improved our field and the lives of many children and their families. (p. 759).

Indeed, Gary's commitment to children and families led him to accept many public service positions, including serving as vice-chair of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, as a member of the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Youth Violence, and as a consultant to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child. He participated in the working groups of both the APA and the American Bar Association on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and he served on National Academy panels on family violence and elder mistreatment.

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Amid his many commitments, Gary found time to mentor the next generations of scholars and practitioners committed to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and families. He taught at several universities and directed interdisciplinary centers and institutes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of South Carolina, and Clemson University.

Among those fortunate enough to have been taught and mentored by Gary are the two of us. As we step into our new roles as co-editors-in-chief of the *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice (IJCM)*, we are both honored and humbled to be following in the footsteps of such a dedicated scholar and advocate. Although we enter into this role with some trepidation, we are confident in Gary's vision for the child protection and the role IJCM can play in advancing that vision.

Indeed, Gary envisioned a world in which someone would notice and someone would care whenever a child or parent had reason to celebrate, worry or grieve. He argued that the moral imperative to protect children necessitated the creation of caring communities in which families had access to supports and resources where they were, with ease and without stigma. Gary's notion of what child protection should look like was grounded in the reality of the crisis in child welfare systems, particularly in the context of the United States. Gary articulated the challenges plaguing our current child welfare system in a number of places, including in the introductory editorial for this journal (Melton, 2018). In sum, misunderstandings about the scale, scope, and nature of child maltreatment led to the development of a system in which "social workers' time is focused first and foremost on the question of 'What happened?', not 'What can we do to help?'" (Melton, 2005, p. 14). As a result, research has (and continues to) focus on the epidemiology of child maltreatment – its identification, investigation, and sequelae – rather than promoting the development of both theories and empirical evidence with respect to supporting children and families and to the *prevention* of child maltreatment.

These challenges were highlighted by the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1990), of which Gary was a member, which declared the child protection system to be in a state of emergency. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993) later argued for a neighborhood-based child protection strategy in which "all American adults ... resolve to be good neighbors – to know, watch, and support their neighbors' children and to offer help when needed to their neighbors' families" (p. 82).

Gary later went on to lead the first known attempt to implement the Board's recommendations, known as Strong Communities for Children (Strong Communities). A foundation-funded, community-wide initiative (more than \$10 million over 7.5 years) to prevent child abuse and neglect in northwestern South Carolina, Strong Communities sought to keep kids safe by building systems of support for families of young children. The evaluation had promising findings (e.g., McDonnell et al., 2015; McLeigh et al., 2015), and Strong Communities has been replicated in Tel Aviv, Israel (McLeigh et al., 2017).

Gary's efforts to transform child protection included the creation of this journal. Gary envisioned that *IJCM* would serve as a groundbreaking forum for presentation and analysis of innovative research, programs, and policies for and about prevention, control, and mitigation of child abuse and neglect. Further, Gary believed contributions

to *IJCM* would help explicate the importance of grounding child protection within the framework of children's rights. Thanks to the generous support of The Kempe Center, The Kempe Foundation, and The Haruv Institute, this dream began to take shape almost 2 years ago, when the first issue was published by Springer.

What has appeared in the pages of this Journal reflect both Gary's academic abilities and his moral convictions. Gary was a dedicated scholar and firm believer in and contributor to research on child protection. At the same time, Gary had a deep appreciation for what he saw and experienced, both close to home and across the globe. It is hard to imagine the journal without Gary at the helm, but we will do our best to honor his legacy. Indeed, we are optimistic about the journal's continuing development.

In that regard, we wish to take this opportunity to encourage submissions to the journal. We are particularly interested in articles that advance our understanding of child maltreatment prevention, that aim to foster more effective and humane family-serving systems, and that seek to better understand the perceptions and experiences of children themselves. We are also interested in articles that further articulate the role of economic and social stressors (e.g., racism; economic crises; structural inequities) in child maltreatment risk.

As we together mourn the loss of an incredible mentor, friend, researcher, and advocate, we also celebrate the legacy that he leaves behind. We wish to thank the many individuals who have contributed articles to the journal and served as peer reviewers, and we look forward to partnering with you to ensure that Gary's vision continues to take hold so that children are safe, caregivers are supported and communities are strong.

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