



THIRD EDITION

# BECOMING A Counselor

*The Light, the Bright, and the Serious*

Samuel T. Gladding

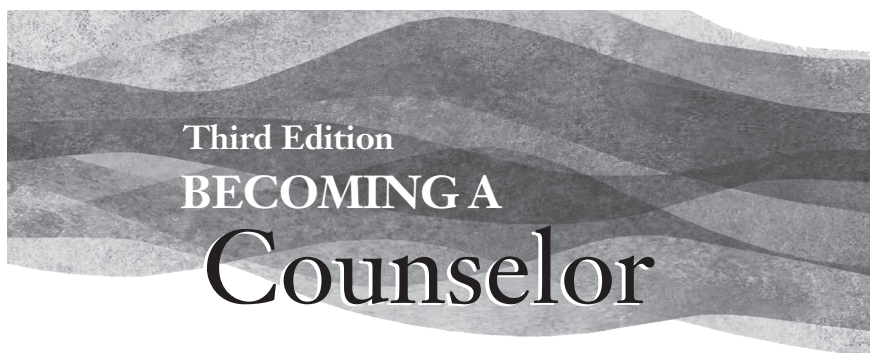


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# Dedication

To Thomas J. Sweeney, Rich Yep, David Kaplan, and Courtland Lee  
Active and strong voices for counseling as a profession!

&

To Donna Henderson, my professional colleague  
and friend of 22 years



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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 2 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 lives have been turning points that have influenced my growth and development in a manner like 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 person and a helping professional. In these stories, you will find examples of

- the light, that is, the humorous developments in life and in counseling;
- the bright, that is, the insight that comes from life experiences and counseling; and
- the serious, that is, the deeper and more sobering dimensions of life and counseling.

Sometimes these three dimensions—the light, the bright, and the serious—occur simultaneously and are obvious. Sometimes they are sequential and more nuanced. Regardless, they are a part of the experience of novice and veteran counselors.

Although the incidents in these stories are unique, they are broad based. You may find yourself identifying with some of the events and their applicability to you. The “Points to Ponder” section at the conclusion of each chapter 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 greater awareness of yourself and the stages involved in the bittersweet process of choice and change.

In reading this text, remember that although the incidents recorded here occurred, a few of the stories have been embellished a bit. In all circumstances, characters who were a part of these episodes, unless specifically identified, have been disguised through multiple means, such as combining them with similar people in a composite, changing their names, switching their genders, or modifying their presenting problem.

### **New to the Third Edition**

This third edition of *Becoming a Counselor* has grown from 121 stories to 156! It has also expanded in scope. The previous editions of this book contained some stories of my coming of age. This edition contains two dozen more from early childhood through college. Some of the incidents in these early memories influence my life today (e.g., “Hard Work”). A number of them I look back on with nostalgia (e.g., “Sex at Church”). Then there is another group I find unbelievable, as in “What was I thinking?” (e.g., “Water Works! A Rush Downstream to the Reservoir”). Regardless, these stories show who I was developmentally at a point in time, and they are timeless as memories.

Besides having more stories, this edition of *Becoming a Counselor* has grown from 14 to 17 sections. Each section begins with a “Becoming” theme. These sections describe how I was becoming who I am today through such matters as making mistakes early in my career or venturing into the land of leadership.

Another change in this book is that I have created a brief prelude—“The World Into Which I Was Born”—that describes the circumstances of my family when I entered the world in 1945. This introduction makes it easier for you to understand my worldview at the time and some of the behaviors I displayed growing up and maturing. An additional feature of this volume is Appendix A, which gives a brief overview of my life. It describes some of the main events in my development as a person, including successes and setbacks. I hope that it will help you gauge your own progress as a person and realize anew that life is not linear.

Finally, I have added a few more stories about my life as an adult and tweaked a few of the stories in previous editions to make them more readable (see Appendix B). In all these vignettes, I have dealt with the ABCs of reality—affect, behavior, and cognition—and how they individually and collectively impact who we are and how we function through the years.

# Acknowledgments

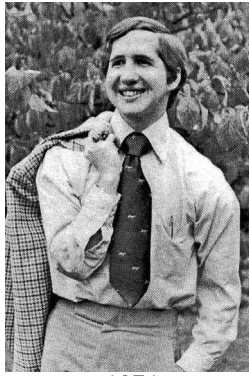
A number of people have been pivotal in the publication of this book and its predecessors. Clients, colleagues, and situations are the key sources for what appears on these pages. However, the one who did the most to transpose my reflections into readable prose for the first edition of this book was Anita Hughes, my assistant in the Provost Office at Wake Forest University, who initially helped type, 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, Pamela Karr, and the late Tom Elmore, were most supportive of this initial effort too.

Erin Binkley and Elizabeth Cox, my graduate assistants in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 respectively, offered invaluable insights into the second edition of this work that were timely and excellent. Likewise, Bobby Lange, my graduate assistant in 2020–2021, has been amazing in providing me suggestions on this third edition and doing the hard work of critiquing each chapter.

I am likewise grateful for the positive input in my life of Thomas J. Sweeney, Rich Yep, David Kaplan, Courtland Lee, and Donna Henderson, to whom this book is dedicated. The encouragement and constructive comments of the American Counseling Association's Carolyn C. Baker (associate publisher), Nancy Driver (digital and print development editor), and Bonny E. Gaston (senior production manager), have been extremely helpful. My gratitude is also extended to the members of the Association's Publications Committee 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 regarding counseling and life. Becoming a counselor is a continuous and challenging process.







1971

## About the Author

**Samuel T. Gladding, PhD**, is a professor and past 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 (ACA),
- president of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES),
- president of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW),
- president of the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC),
- president of Chi Sigma Iota (counseling academic and professional honor society international),
- president of the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB), and
- vice president of the Association for Humanistic Counseling (AHC).

Gladding is the former editor of the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* and the ASGW newsletter. He is also the past chair of the American Counseling Association Foundation. A prolific author of refereed journal articles, books, book chapters, and poetry, Gladding was cited as being in the top 1% of contributors to ACA's flagship journal, the *Journal of Counseling & Development*, for the 15-year period from 1978 to 1993. Some of Gladding's most recent books are *The Creative Arts in Counseling* (6th ed.; 2021), *A Concise Guide to Opioid Addiction for Counselors* (with Kevin Alderson, 2021), *Group Work: A Counseling Specialty* (8th ed.; 2020), *Family Therapy: History, Theory and Process* (7th ed.; 2019), *Choosing the Right Counselor for You* (with Kevin Alderson, 2019), *The Counseling Dictionary* (4th ed.; 2018), and *Counseling: A Comprehensive*

*Profession* (8th ed.; 2018). In addition, Gladding has produced a dozen films on counseling, his most recent being *Adventures in Mental Health*, a humorous animated production.

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 at the beginning of his career. Gladding received his degrees from Wake Forest University (BA, MAEd), Yale University (MAR), and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (PhD). He is a national certified counselor, a certified clinical mental health counselor, and a licensed clinical mental health counselor (North Carolina). He has served as a member of the North Carolina Board of Examiners in Counseling and the Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling.

Gladding is a Fellow of ACA and the recipient of numerous other honors, including

- ACA's Gilbert and Kathleen Wrenn Award for a Humanitarian and Caring Person,
- ACA's Arthur A. Hitchcock Distinguished Professional Service Award,
- ACA's David K. Brooks, Jr. Distinguished Mentor Award,
- the American Counseling Association Foundation's Bridgebuilder Award,
- ACA's President's Award,
- the Association for Creativity in Counseling Lifetime Achievement Award,
- the Association for Spirituality, Ethics, and Religious Issues in Counseling Humanitarian Award,
- Chi Sigma Iota's Thomas J. Sweeney Professional Leadership Award,
- AHC's Joseph W. and Lucille U. Hollis Outstanding Publication Award,
- ACES's Professional Leadership Award,
- ASGW's Eminent Career Award,
- the North Carolina Counseling Association's Ella Stephens Barrett Award for leadership and service to the counseling profession, and
- the American Counseling Association Foundation's 2021 Thomas Hohenshil National Publication Award.

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

# The World Into Which I Was Born

Few people enter the world at an ideal time, and my birth was no exception. I was born on the morning of October 5, 1945. World War II had been officially over for about month, and American military personnel were returning home. Although the end of the war might seem like an ideal time to arrive on earth, especially in a nation that was on the winning side, other circumstances were afoot.

My parents, Russell Burton and Gertrude Barnes Templeman Gladding, were 35 and 34, respectively. They already had two children: Margaret Northam (Peggy), who was 3 (May 21, 1942); and Russell Burton, Jr. (Russell, Jr.), who was 13 months (August 17, 1944). Although my parents had talked about a third child, family history has it I was unexpected. To make matters more complicated, I was born with dislocated hips. I spent much of my first 2 years in Scottish Rite Hospital, where I had three operations to wire my hips back in place. My parents visited on Sundays and brought me a Hershey's chocolate bar when I was old enough to eat one. My brother also had dislocated hips, and both of us had plaster of paris body casts from the waist down at times. We were later informally described as "heavy Chevys." Because my mother, Grandmother Templeman (whom we called "Pal"), and sister, Peggy, could barely lift let alone carry us, they pulled us around the living and dining rooms of our house in a Radio Flyer red wagon modified with a platform and a hole for the bedpan underneath.

My mother was the oldest daughter of four children of Samuel and Inez Templeman. Her two younger sisters were Inez and Ruth, and her younger brother was Samuel II. She was petite, about 5 feet tall, and probably never weighed more than 100 pounds. She was attractive, with a good figure, a sharp mind, and a religious focus as the oldest child of a Baptist minister. What she lacked in size she made up for in spirit—determination, perseverance, and even a bit of feistiness.

She met my father in 1931 at a boarding house owned by her maternal grandfather, Robert Leonard Barnes, in Richmond, Virginia. She had gone to Richmond after graduating from Salem College to

study for a master of arts at Westhampton College—the female campus of then Richmond College—because she could not get a teaching job during the Great Depression. Unbeknownst to her, my father and his brother, Randolph, had rented a room at the house at 3300 Monument Avenue in exchange for money and help with the yardwork. My parents waited 3 years to tie the knot because of the accidental death of my dad's father and because my mother insisted that my dad make a \$100 a month before she would marry him. Their wedding took place in November 1934. My mother's father, Samuel Huntington Templeman, a Baptist minister for whom I was named, walked her down the aisle and then performed the wedding at Brown Memorial Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

My mother and her father were close. He died in March 1945 and my grandmother, Inez Barnes Templeman ("Pal"), came to live with my parents soon thereafter. Thus, in October 1945, my mother was dealing with the birth of an unplanned child, grief surrounding the recent death of her father, and the arrival of her mother into the couple's modest three bedroom, one bathroom house at 957 Church Street in Decatur, Georgia, a city outside Atlanta. After that came the discovery of the dislocated hips and the stress that her two youngest children needed operations and hospitalization if they were ever going to walk.

My father was a bit of a contrast but a complement to my mother. He was the third of four children—two older brothers and a younger sister—born to Henry Arcemus and Maggie Lena Northam Gladding. He stood about 5 feet 10 inches but was thin, weighing around 135 pounds. Like my mother, he wore glasses and had since the age of 4 because of what was described as a "lazy eye." He had a high school and a business school education. He would likely have gone to college, probably Virginia Tech, had it not been for the Great Depression. His family had made a living as farmers on the Eastern Shore of Virginia in Accomack County since the mid-1600s, but 18 months into the Great Depression the farm was foreclosed on and the family became sharecroppers for a few years. Free from the constant labor of being a farmer, my father nurtured his love of the soil by having a large garden—about a third of an acre—behind our house in Decatur. There he grew many of the vegetables our family ate.

As mentioned previously, the ancestors of my father's immediate family had settled on the Eastern Shore in the mid-1600s. In 1945, he found himself an office worker at the Virginia-Carolina (V-C) Chemical Corporation, a company that made fertilizer, in Atlanta. V-C, for whom he worked 27 years, had transferred him from Richmond to Atlanta in 1942. The transfer may well have saved his marriage, because my father's mother and his younger sister, Mildred—both of whom my mother did not like—had moved into my parents' apartment in Richmond in the 1930s, and the atmosphere in their flat was "uncomfortable." Regrettably, in the mid-1940s, my father's oldest brother, Hilton, who

owned a general merchandise store on the Eastern Shore, was fighting lung cancer; he would die in 1946.

Thus, in addition to dealing with an unexpected birth, hospital bills, the arrival at the house of his wife's mother, three children under the age of 5, and stress from his wife's loss of her father, my father was dealing with the imminent death of his oldest brother. Overall, October 1945 was a bittersweet time for the Gladdings, with gains, losses, and uncertainty.

