To Survive, To Become: Our Way of Life
(Presidential Address)

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As we convene and converse here in Kansas City, we need to be reminded of certain interstitial features of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Historians are fond of recounting past events and finding relevance for today’s issues and problems. Lessons are often based on the premise that nearly any way we turn, someone or some group has trod a strikingly similar path sometime in the past. If we are observant and smart enough, we can save valuable time proceeding forward with a knowledge of the past; thus we take far less time proving what already has been proven.

In this push-pull era of turbulence and transformation, we have an obligation to keep our wits about us, even when there is the tendency to get wildly scattered. Contemporary states of confusion and frustration seem to have a direct relationship to the dilemmas, ambivalences, and paradoxes swirling around us. As occupational therapy personnel we are obliged to know and understand the altered circumstances we face in today’s environment, and turn them to our advantage.

Like other similar professional groups, we are experiencing turbulence. Making sense of this turbulence is an important concern, and we believe we have a measure of understanding, as evidenced by a well-crafted environmental impact statement. To go beyond this statement is to examine some of our long-standing beliefs and determine how they affect how we will survive, what we will become, and what the circumstances are of our unusual way of life.

Pioneering: A Gigantic Human Experiment
We are in the clutch of an incredible transformation, similar in character to what the pioneers faced 100 years ago. They gathered in this locale [Kansas City] prior to pressing westward to the treeless plains. They paused here, not so much to look over their shoulders from where they had come, rather, to develop what we would now call strategies and resources for the oncoming days, years, even decades. With plans laid, equipment and supplies stowed, they proceeded into the unknown, but promising, wilderness.

Chroniclers of life-styles and the environment of these daring pioneers agree there were two overriding goals to be achieved: to survive and then to become. Walter Prescott Webb in The Great Plains (1) vividly describes what it meant to survive. As the pioneers crossed over the 98th meridian, approximately 170 miles west of Kansas City, they encountered an “institutional fault,” similar to a geological fault. They threw themselves upon this barrier: armed and equipped with the weapons, tools, ideas, and institutions which had served them so long and so well in the woods that now lay behind them. Inevitably they failed in their first efforts, and they continued to fail until they worked out a technique of pioneering adapted to the plains rather than to the woodlands . . . Their (adaptive) efforts constituted a gigantic human experiment with an environment.

Pioneer Womens’ Belief System
Understandably, the first order of business was to remove the thick sod for building homes and fence the land. The plowed prairie was used for growing the crops needed to sustain life. Surface water was not plentiful, particularly during the summer growing season. The wind, always present, liad to be harnessed to draw the water to the surface; thus, the windmill came into being.

What served these pioneers best were the beliefs and convictions so critical to survival and becoming. The women assumed the larger responsibility for articulating and practicing a belief system consonant with the harsh, often deprived, way of life. Joanna Stratton’s popular book Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier (2) is a compilation of women’s accounts of their lives on the prairie, starting with her great grandmother, who arrived in Kansas in 1884. Stratton describes her subjects this way: “Most of them were literate . . . (having) received their fundamental education in country schoolhouses or women’s seminaries back home . . . They maintained an unwavering faith

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in God and in the future... With a firm dedication to the welfare of their families, they ultimately set out to civilize the frontier itself." (23-24)

Of great importance were the attitudes about their station in life and relationships with their husbands. The work of survival brought forth heavier workloads than they had known previously. The isolation forced the family into a self-sufficiency that was previously unnecessary. The husbands and wives formed quite different partnerships, combining strengths and abilities to sustain life and raise children. The outcome was that the women found themselves on a more equal footing with the men than previously.

To illustrate the altered relationships between women and men of the prairie and to reassure those who believe that history has a tendency to repeat itself, I offer this brief commentary gleaned from the diary of a pioneer bride of nearly 100 years ago:

I already had ideas of my own about the husband being the head of the family. I had taken the precaution to sound him on "obey" in the marriage pact and found he did not approve of the term. Approval or no approval, that word "obey" would have to be left out. I had served my time of tutelage to my parents as all children are supposed to. I was a woman now and capable of being the other half of the head of the family. His word and my word would have equal strength. God had endowed me with reason and understanding and a sense of responsibility. I was going west to try out as a woman now and was a woman now and capable of being the other half of the head of the family. His word and my word would have equal strength. God had endowed me with reason and understanding and a sense of responsibility. I was going west to try out as a wife and homemaker. (2, p 58)

Stratton's book (2) richly recounts not just stories of women living in the soddy, raising children, or standing stoically and equally beside their husbands. It also relates the dominant roles women played in those activities so vital to the becoming of a different society. I am referring to the establishment of public education, the resolution of a variety of local political issues, and what we now would call consciousness raising through civic affairs and reform movements, such as temperance and suffrage. Because of the women's movement of those days, Kansas was the first state to consider women's suffrage, nearly 60 years before it became a national right. The country's attention was acutely drawn to the suffrage movement on the Great Plains, in spite of the fact that the nation was knowingly approaching the devastating conflict known as the Civil War.

Writing on behalf of these exemplary women, Stratton concludes that their accomplishments should not be recalled solely in terms of the schools, churches, local political systems they established, or the ideological victories they achieved. "In the long run, it is the strength of their individualism, their faith and their determination which have remained as an important part of their common heritage." (p 267)

This brief account is intended to illustrate some striking similarities between the pioneers' way of life, with its struggle to survive and become, and the present day, with its challenges, burdens, and encumbrances. Then, as now, differences were made because of a strong belief system, determination, fortitude, a yearning for prosperity, and the promise of the future. Such values were enacted daily by the women of the prairie. Today, because occupational therapy personnel are primarily women, it should serve as a source of encouragement that the values central to human occupation, those unique endeavors of work and leisure, are in the hands of the right people.

Today: The Age of Transformation

Presently, Americans are living in an age of incredible transformation; no two days are quite alike. It is the postindustrial information age, and service work exceeds the production of goods. According to Naisbitt, (3) "We have for the first time an economy based on a key resource that is not only renewable, but self-generating. Running out of (information) is not a problem..." (p 24). He exemplifies this by indicating that technical and scientific information is now increasing 13% a year, which means it doubles every five and one-half years. This rate will soon increase to 40% a year because of increases in scientific workers and sophisticated information systems. He provides the warning that "We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge" (p 24).

Dilemmas and Ambivalences

The transformation from the industrial to the information age is not yet complete, consequently, we are caught in a series of dilemmas and ambivalences. Richard Louv (4), a graduate of the University of Kansas School of Journalism states in America II that a new nation is arising from the body of the first. "It has a physical form: a very different kind of city; a radically changed rural and small-town life; a rever-
lution in shelter; a new workplace. But the second America is also a state of mind: a powerful yearning for opportunity, for old values and new technologies, for refuge and escape” (p xi). The second America is only now beginning to be identifiable, and its roots are less than 20 years old, beginning with the peaking and declining of industrialism in the mid-1960’s.

We are now two cultures. Like a quarreling parent and child, the fading America and the emerging America view the world in entirely different ways . . . America I steeped in tradition, the past trapped in the present, explosively dangerous in its frustration and distrustful of the new high technologies; America II is almost adolescent in its headstrong exuberance. It sees the nation transforming into something new and fresh; it perceives the future as a new technological frontier to be conquered and won. (p xii)

The journalist Ellen Goodman (5), in her book Turning Points, discusses the societal changes that are taking place because of the civil rights, peace, and women’s movements. She says that conflicts about new roles have deepened into a national ambivalence about our basic values.

Americans have always valued individual rights on the one hand and a sense of community on the other. We believe in the independence of family members and the importance of the family unit. We value both self-realization—the quest for individual growth—and self-sacrifice—the virtue of doing for others. We need the warmth, the safety and security of traditions and roots on the one hand, and desire the excitement of risk, adventure, and exploration on the other. We pursue material values and common “materialism.” These ambivalences provide the tension in our society which is both dynamic and unsettled. (p 293)

In the past, sex role assignments rather conveniently took care of any conflicting values; self-realization was largely in the male’s domain, and women were allowed self-sacrifice. The prowling, adventurous spirit was assigned to the men, and the keeping of the values of home, family, and roots belonged to the women. The material world was the males’ environment, and spiritual values were charged to the women. Goodman concludes, “Now, as women join men in working outside the home, both, quite naturally, worry more about what is happening to the family. As both change, they simultaneously both reaffirm the values of roots. As both seek self-realization, we all worry more about narcissism and selfishness. This is the shape of our ambivalence now.” (p 293)

**Forces Shaping America**

A recent special report in US News and World Report (6) offers a comprehensive view of ten forces that have emerged over the past 20 years. A maturing society is evident: For the first time in this country’s history the over-65 population exceeds that of teenagers, and within six years there will be more than 31 million older citizens, whereas the adolescent population will shrink to 23 million. This trend should bring an expansion of leisure purchases and a renewed interest in recreation.

In the workplace, with a 60% increase in the middle-age labor force, problems of advancement are becoming manifest. Rand Corporation demographer Peter Morrison states, “There will be a lot of people queuing up for promotion, but there will be fewer slots opening up than there will be people eager to fill them.” (6, p 41) On the other hand, an impressive pool of talented and experienced workers, who are highly adaptable and capable of solving whatever problems emerge, is also appearing. The generalist is gaining ascendancy over the specialist.

Returning once again to women on the move, employment trends present perplexities. Within the past three decades, the number of women employed outside the home has increased from one in three to two out of three. Nearly 60% of married women with children now work away from home; this is double the number only 20 years ago. There seems to be a connection between this trend and mental health. The Wellesley College Center for Research on Women reports that, “the incidence of depression in women age 35 to 55 has declined dramatically. Among the most content, according to research on women lawyers, are married mothers holding down challenging professional jobs.” (6, pp 47-48)

Although the number of females holding doctorates in the sciences and engineering has more than doubled in the last 10 years, they represent less than 12% of all doctorate holders. Comparable pay is an unresolved predicament, with women earning approximately $8,600 less than men with doctorates. “Overall, women continue to earn about 62% of what men make, a ratio that has remained constant for 30 years. This wage gap is
fostered by the clustering of women in such 'pink collar' fields as nursing and (and) elementary-school teaching..." (6, p 47)

Health care advancements are well known to us. Because of new drugs, open-heart surgery, and expanded consumer interest in diet and exercise, heart disease and stroke conditions have shown impressive declines. Cancer is no longer the "grim reaper." Equally encouraging is the news that the scientific cause of atherosclerosis will have been determined by the turn of the century, and prevention will be possible through drug therapy.

Yet, the dark side has to do with costs. The onset of diagnostic-related groups as part of cost containment may well be only the beginning. Physicians, along with others, are debating the disturbing possibility of a dual health care system, based on the financial capabilities of the patient. When the debate extends inevitably to include the long-term, chronic population, we occupational therapy personnel, with or without an invitation, can expect to be brought into the fray. Unquestionably, this will cause us to reexamine critically our fundamental advocacy of those individuals who are not highly valued by society.

A Significant Shift in Values
A quieter, perhaps more profound, side to the social transformation now faces us. An increasing concern about ecological issues, together with a decided surge in an improved quality of life (e.g., deep-seated worries about a nuclear holocaust, atomic energy, and various forms of pollution) turns value definition and clarification inward. As the research physicist Fritjof Capra (7) points out, "... there is the beginning of a significant shift in values from the admiration of large-scale enterprises and institutions to the notion of 'small is beautiful,' from material consumption to voluntary simplicity, from economic and technological growth to inner growth and development." (p 24) The holistic health and human potential movements, to mention only two, have fired this reemphasis for meaning and the spiritual dimensions of one's life.

Occupational Therapy's Paradoxes
What can all this mean to us who practice occupational therapy principles and employ the technology of occupation? What about our own dilemmas, ambivalences, and paradoxes?

We debate issues from the inclusion of computers to the exclusion of looms as part of our technology, thus signifying a shift in the "things" of practice. We engage in discourses about a variety of locales, both traditional and nontraditional. We find time and resources to resurvey our profession's territorial boundaries and exhort about how we should go about exchanging goods and services. We rightfully post sentiments throughout the territory, cautiously monitoring political changes that affect our way of life and our rights to survive and become. Soon we expect to have agreed on a professional image that suits our overall purposes and meets our need for better marketing our services. Also, we are about to launch a comprehensive investigation on human occupation that will sharpen, if not change, the focus of practice well into the next century.

We are also encountering paradoxes, significant ingredients in our professional transformation during the 1980s. Marilyn Ferguson (8) states that, "The spirit of our age is fraught with paradox. It is at the same time pragmatic and transcendental. It values both enlightenment and mystery... power and humility... interdependence and individuality." (p 18)

It takes little imagination to translate this into occupational therapy issues. Fraught with paradox connotes our valuing both generalism and specialization. Pragmatic and transcendental corresponds to our practice in physical health and mental health. Enlightenment and mystery resembles the concreteness of sensory integrative and hand occupational therapy modalities, and the reverence we hold for holistic health practices. Power and humility relates to the criticalness of leading, as opposed to being led around the health care arena. Interdependence and individuality translates into the bimodal worth of collaboration and the competition that we now face.

Occupational Therapy and Work
What has become apparent in the change from an industrial to an information age is a revised human agenda, with an accompanying shift in beliefs about work and leisure. We are rapidly discarding the hard-core Puritan ethic that there is inherent good in labor and that leisure is the re-
ward for good work. The new reality is that work is multidimensional with its main purpose to produce something of value for the customer.

Aside from its economic aims, work is attracting a stronger social context. The work environment has always been the locale for people to congregate, converse, and form significant personal relationships. However, the traditional workplace is now being challenged because telecommunications offers an interesting alternative: staying at home. Some observers think the future wave will be a new version of the old notion of the cottage industry. Others believe this future wave won't succeed to any considerable extent. Eventually, the worker will need to return to the traditional workplace to engage in office gossip and interact with other people, thus meeting that ageless psychic need: emotional response from other human beings.

Those who are compelled to remain at home, for instance, moderately to severely disabled persons, will encounter even more pronounced problems of isolation and depersonalization because of all the electronic wizardry lying about the house. Occupational therapy personnel will be called on to alleviate these debilitating difficulties in the new work environment. One occupational therapist, Caroline Brayley, is working on what she calls the "computer syndrome," which has both physical and emotional components. Her treatment methods include new and old techniques readily adaptable to the home workplace.

Another problem is the new meaning of work. In the industrial age, one could point to outcomes, such as the product of the assembly line. Work satisfaction might have been in question because of required mechanization; however, there was always the concrete evidence of a product. In the postindustrial age, because the production of information is less tangible proof of labor, work has become more difficult to conceptualize. As Louv (4) points out, "If what we make does not seem real or solid, or even semi-permanent, then our connections to our work do not seem real or solid. Work is the glue that holds society together; identifiable, role-producing, understandable work." (p 187)

Thus, we must turn elsewhere for a new meaning. As occupational therapy personnel, our efforts have been plagued from our beginnings with certain ambiguities. With a little experience, we become comfortable with puzzles, frustration, and confusion. Because of our commitment to chronicity and the impossible tasks often given us, we have arrived at a definition of work that differs markedly from that of the typical society. Perhaps we have something to share in this new age. When we speak of meaningful, we are generally talking about self-esteem, a fulfilling sense that comes from mastering one's self and the environment and by making a valued contribution to society. The basic question today's typical worker asks is "What is it that I am doing that truly makes a difference?" I strongly suspect we ask that question of ourselves rather routinely. The answer comes from the measurement of that fulfilling sense of self-esteem, a critical element of the work ethic.

An Occupational Therapy Blueprint

One more contribution we can make to the greater society in this age of ferment and change has to do with the vexing problems of severe employment dislocations and the nonemployability of previously valued workers. Louv (4) offers a vivid description: "In America II, you're either a post-industrial or you're left behind.... The untrained black or the fifty-year old former steel worker has little chance of reaching the first rung on the (postindustrial) ladder, a ladder levitated beyond his or her reach by the new technological forces. They can see it, but they cannot reach it...." (p 184) It's a jungle out there, where the watchword is "survival of the fittest." Louv continues, "The steel mill workers who once were the backbone of the nation's arsenal of democracy are giving way to computer system analysts, to French-fry scoopers and special sauce specialists squirting orange goop from preset guns. Big Mac is supplanting big steel." (p 184) The current generation of Americans entering the work force has a tendency toward functional illiteracy, and blue-collar workers make up nearly 50% of the unemployed. Next in line for employment dislocation probably will be midmanagers and office workers, who will be replaced with computers that can track and report organizational activities. Thus, we have looming a whole new type of disabled workers with occupational performance dysfunctions. This could bring about serious social and technological ferment, with no quick fixes, no easy solutions, and no overnight cures.
Some of us could migrate from our comfortable, traditional habitats in large medical institutions to new settlements that might well resemble Barton’s Consolation House, a vocationally oriented, neighborhood work center, a “laboratory for living,” as it were. These centers would be strategically located, thus easily accessible to dislocated, newly disabled workers. The objectives and functions of the new programs would be to arrest the disorientation and social deterioration of those who have been left behind because of technological change. Through the engagement of the habits of attention, interest, and motivation, we would employ carefully crafted activities along a broad spectrum of human endeavors. We would assist disabled workers in developing new patterns of coping and making discoveries about what each one values and what each one can do well that could be considered valued work. Revised patterns of socialization, consistent with new workplaces, would also be stressed along with adaptive responses to changing circumstances.

The blueprint for such a proposal has existed for 18 years, but has gone unnoticed or ignored. It is located in our professional literature. In 1966, at a seminar on occupational therapy and community psychiatry, J. Sanborn Bockoven, a psychiatrist and superintendent of the Lowell, Massachusetts, Mental Health Center jarred some of us with the following words: “A new discipline of occupational development . . . (applied by) an occupational service worker. In this capacity he (or she) will develop means for analyzing both the manifest and latent perceptual-motor skills of the individual as they relate to his personality and motivational makeup. He (or she) will also develop means for analyzing the physical and mental components of the occupations of the community in which (the occupational service worker) lives, and he (or she) will . . . know the emotional and motivational value (the occupations) have in the particular community in question.” (9, p 24)

In 1970, at the 50th American Occupational Therapy Association annual conference, Bockoven (10) stated, “The need to give top priority to occupational programs is one of extreme urgency. Many thousands of Americans are drifting about in a state of social disorientation suffering the lives of displaced persons . . . They need concrete, tangible activity programs of high visibility to attract their interest and to help them discover their own values and find their way out of demoralization.” (p 224)

It appears that he was able to clearly see well into the present decade.

Admittedly, I have offered only a sketchy plan, yet it should enliven and excite some of us as we pursue the course of our continual evolvement as a major health profession. The plan merits our consideration if we wish to remain true to our timeless belief—“an inborn respect for the realities of life, for the real tasks of living, and for the time it takes the individual to develop his own modes of coping with his tasks.” (11, p 227)

Summary
Occupational therapy’s domain consists of a carefully compounded alchemy of a great vision, transforming the “poetry of the commonplace” into a vital sustainer and prolonger of precious life. Through the judicious application of an unique technology—human occupation—cautiously blended with timeless values and beliefs, we will inevitably succeed where others have failed. The grand tasks of occupational therapy abide and endure: to attend to the multiple, complex, interrelated, and critical human activities of not just living, but living well. Through the habits of attention and interest, we engage the human in regaining the harmony of functions that ensure survival, retaining those characteristics that facilitate and push balanced growth and development, and attaining those interdependent meanings of a purposeful, fulfilled life within the context of a personal and social order.

REFERENCES