

Review of the Book: *Beginnings, Middles, & Ends*

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Abstract

The book *Beginnings, Middles, & Ends* by Ogden W. Rogers provides a 100 story reflective understanding of social work. The book is divided into the three major sections; the powerful and mysterious *beginnings*; the hard work and confusion of the *middles*; and the sadness and surprise of the *endings*. Dr. Kindle suggests that the text must be mixed with the readers' own insights and experiences to form meaning. He recommends this book without reservation while claiming it is an exceptional model of reflective social work practice which will leave the reader committed to deeper levels of self-reflection in their practice.

Keywords: Advanced generalist practice, social work, *Beginnings, Middles, & Ends*, book review

Reading this delightfully entertaining book, I was immediately reminded of the Gospels because it contains the same snippets of stories presented with wit, ambiguity, humor, and mystery. Ogden Rogers, professor of social work at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls, is one heck of a storyteller. His 100 stories, the longest one 8 pages long, reveal much of the author and calls for a reflective understanding of this thing we call *social work*. Social work through Rogers' eyes is a lifelong, non-linear journey of discovery. He has grouped his stories into the powerful and mysterious *beginnings*; the hard work and confusion of the *middles*; and the sadness and surprise of the *endings*. In the fourth section Rogers shares dialogs with Hanna which reminded me of *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Albom, 1997) because it contains the same magic of

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mentoring.

I did not follow Rogers' introductory advice to consider each story after reading. Instead, I gulped it down in three readings, gorging myself on these sideways stories "when you thought you were doing one thing, but ended up learning another" (p. 9). In the process, I learned a great deal. As a latecomer into social work and receiving my social work education during the ascendancy of evidence-based behavioral practice, I came away from the reading committed to deeper levels of self-reflection in my practice. I will read this book again, and I expect to do so more slowly and deliberately. There is much worthy of reflection.

Rogers' stories are not moralistic tales with precision, but nuggets of potential inspiration that must be mixed with the readers' own insights and experiences to form meaning. I suspect that every reader will come away with something different, which is both the book's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. The scientist in me worries that student readers might come away with less respect for evidence, but this book is simply too good to ignore. Should I ever be tasked with teaching an introductory course in social work, I imagine that I would include this book in the assigned readings. At the very least it is an exceptional model of reflective social work practice. In my opinion, every social work educator would be proud to produce students with Rogers' capacity for honesty, engagement, and growth.

I recommend this book without reservation. I would recommend this book to anyone considering social work as a career or college major. I would recommend this book to any practicing social worker who feels overwhelmed, unappreciated, and ineffective. I would recommend this to any social work educator flirting with cynicism. Rogers' life stories are inspirational without being trite, maudlin, or insincere. Do yourself a favor and read this book.

References

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson*. New York: Doubleday.

About the Author(s)

After a 30 year career as a Certified Public Accountant, Peter returned to graduate school to retrain for an academic career. While earning three graduate degrees in psychology and social work, Peter gained college teaching experience inside a Texas state prison. He joined the USD faculty in 2010.

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