

Robert Hatmaker

“I enjoy practicing social work and keeping my skills sharp, but my first love is teaching. I love to work with students and feel most comfortable in the classroom.”

ROBERT L. HATMAKER
Professor of Social Work

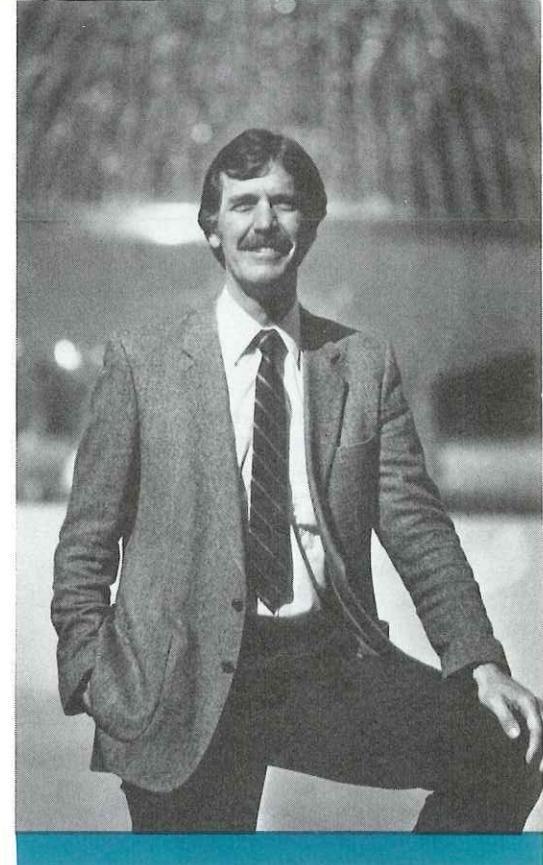
How does a street-wise kid from Detroit, coming from a family of six children, whose father was a West Virginia coal miner and then a door-to-door Detroit milkman, end up a professor of social work at California State University, Fresno? “Often, I wonder about that myself,” Professor Robert Hatmaker says. “I couldn’t have made it without the encouragement and support of my parents and teachers along the way — the kind of help that many people get from social workers today,” he says.

Hatmaker credits equal educational opportunity, encouragement and support from family and friends, and a little bit of good luck for his being a professor today at CSU, Fresno. As a teenager, Hatmaker was active in a church youth group, and his pastor there urged him to go to college. “No one, however, in my family had ever gone to college, so that was a big deal for me,” Hatmaker says. “The basic orientation in our family was hard manual labor — not education.” Despite the odds against him, Hatmaker earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in theology and philosophy from Wheaton College in 1961. The chair of the Department of Sociology at Wheaton College took Hatmaker’s class on a tour of correctional institutions in Minnesota and later recommended that Hatmaker get a Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree. Hatmaker explains, “Doing social work fit in with my religious beliefs. My faith was part of my education.”

In 1963, Hatmaker earned his M.S.W. degree from the University of Michigan, where he focused on juvenile delinquency. “Growing up on the streets of Detroit, Michigan, and having extensive experience working for a church that dealt with street gangs in Chicago prepared me well for my studies and early career working with teenagers,” he says. He later became the clinic director of Boy’s Republic, a Michigan residential treatment program for delinquent boys. A few years later, Hatmaker moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to practice social work in the public schools.

Hatmaker worked in Colorado Springs until a CSU, Fresno professor urged him to consider working at Fresno State. “You could get a university teaching position without a doctorate in those days,” Hatmaker explains. So at 29 years of age, he began teaching on the Fresno campus in 1969. He later earned his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California (1977). According to Hatmaker, “I wanted the doctoral degree not to be a better social worker, but rather to learn to be a better teacher.” In 1981, he took a sabbatical leave and, with his wife, Janice, a clinical psychologist, studied sexual therapy at the Center for Marital and Sexual Studies in Long Beach, California.

Nowadays, the Hatmakers enjoy a popular and successful private psychotherapy practice. “We have a specialization built around my teaching interests and our



practice in marital and sexual counseling,” he says. For relaxation and self-therapy, Hatmaker, a private pilot for 15 years, flies his Cessna 172 to his Pine Mountain Lake retreat, where he and his wife enjoy sailing, walking among the pines, golfing, and leisure reading. They have two children, Cindy age 23, and Doug age 21.

Do you see yourself more as a professor or as a social worker?

I am a professor foremost. I enjoy practicing social work and keeping my skills sharp, but my first love is teaching. I love to work with students and feel most comfortable in the classroom. The give and take with students in the learning process is, for me, very stimulating, challenging, and satisfying. Teaching in a university setting is the best job that I could dream of. University teaching is the best combination of working for someone else and having or running your own shop. Self-employed people have to worry about their business, whether their lights are on or not, quarterly income reports, staff, etc. I don’t have to worry about any of that because somebody else takes care of the shop. Yet, I have the freedom of a self-employed person. I manage my schedule and make my own appointments, and I’m expected to fully manage my professional life. I have a lot of