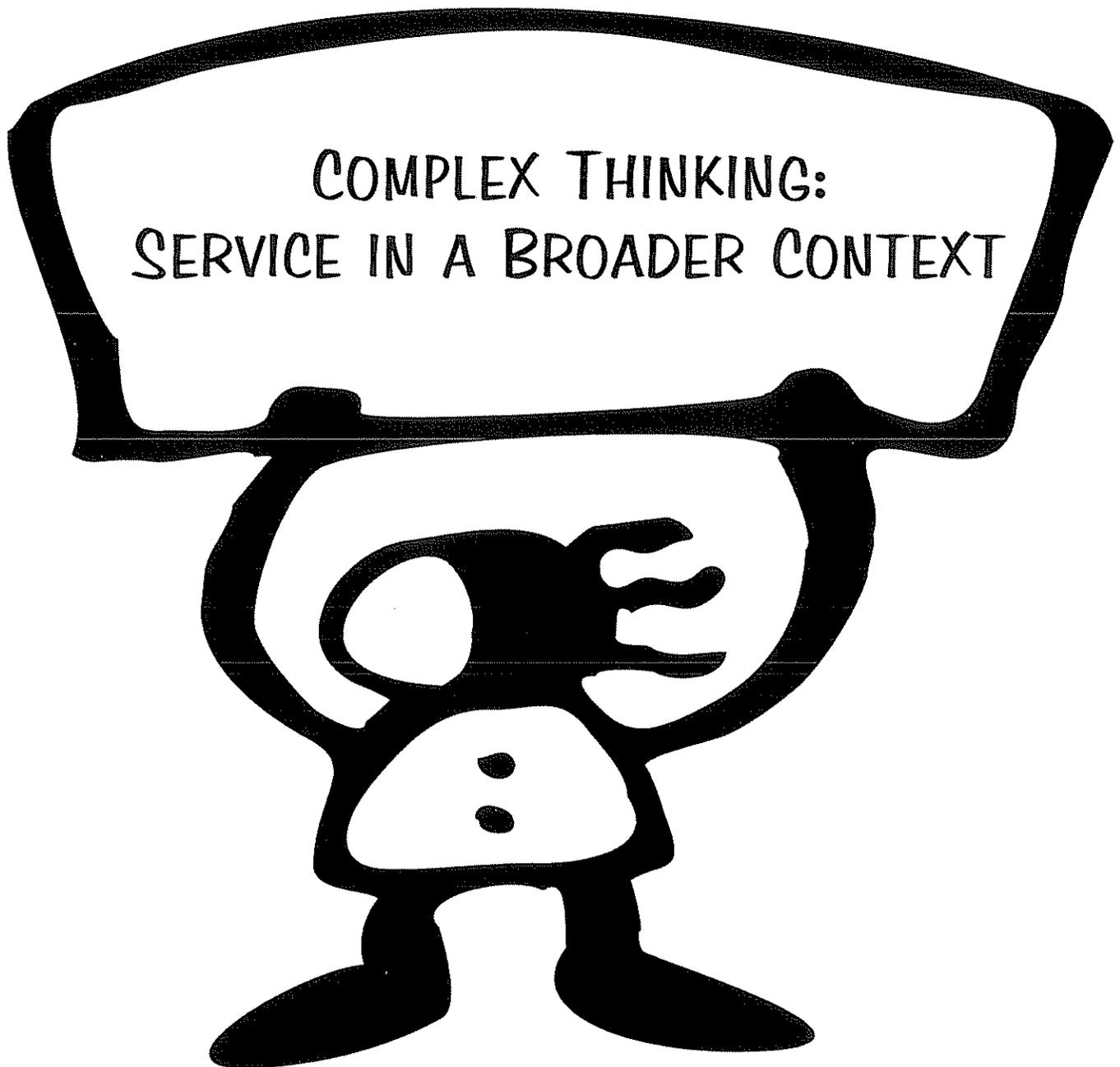


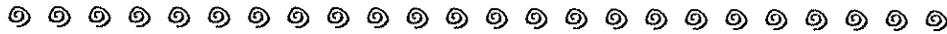
PART THREE

COMPLEX THINKING:
SERVICE IN A BROADER CONTEXT



INTRODUCTION:

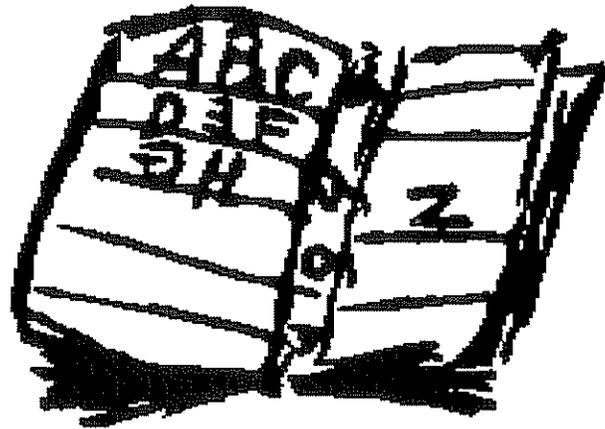
SERVICE IN A BROADER CONTEXT



Part Three: "Service in a Broader Context" builds upon the foundation of Part Two: "From Narrative to Analysis." Part Two focused on examining participants' experiences in community and public service through discussions, exercises and activities. By committing to critical reflection and discussion, participants used their own experiences as opportunities for learning. They were able to examine their efforts, the relationships they have developed and the impact of their work. They were challenged to articulate the meaning and significance of their service. Hopefully, this process enabled participants to move from merely *describing* their efforts to articulating what they *think* about their service. Just as importantly, they listened to different, sometimes disparate perspectives and engaged in debates over conflicting ideas about service and society.

Through reflection and discussion, members have learned to analyze service experiences. Most likely, this process has assisted in practical matters, by helping participants to solve common problems, evaluate their ongoing work, and think creatively about ways to have the most individual and collective impact. By

setting up group discussion guidelines, participants had the opportunity to be explicit about what constitutes free and open discussion. The group learning exercises established a framework for open



and dynamic discussions. Through mapping, participants learned to be careful observers of communities, and established new approaches for building on the strengths and capacities of the people and institutions with whom they worked. Through the discussion on motivations for service, group members saw that service has different meanings and different contexts, and they had the opportunity to examine some of the controversies in different traditions.

All of this sets the stage for discussing community and public service within a



broader social, political and historical context. In “Complex Thinking: Service Within a Broader Context,” participants will have the opportunity to examine service itself from different perspectives. Having learned *how to learn* through experience, reflection and discussion, participants will now step away from their own concrete endeavors to consider how others have viewed service, community and public life throughout history. This is the final step in the three step process we have outlined in this book.

Having dispelled the myth that service is merely “good works” and can accomplish important things without a context or an agenda, Part Three encourages participants to decide for themselves the civic significance of service. It does this by offering readings that participants can discuss. This pushes participants to consider the general principles which their service, by now, should have touched on.

Part Three is also intended to prepare young people to leave structured service programs with an arsenal of ideas to draw upon. Too often, participants, once they leave their programs, have a hard time explaining the significance of their service experience to other people who ask them about it. These

readings should provide them with ways to become more articulate and capable of providing people with deeper explanations of the purposes and meanings of public service. The readings, questions and discussions encourage participants to consider seriously how their experiences will affect their way of thinking and acting as a citizen, once their service program is over. By subjecting their own motivations and beliefs to examination, participants will develop the tools necessary to become more thoughtful participants in public life. Having participated in the complex process of acting and deliberating on serious public issues, participants will be better equipped to be active citizens.

Part Three engages broad questions raised by service. It enables participants to confront difficult issues and to discuss abstract concepts and ideas. Who does service help and why? How is service transformative? Why is service controversial? How have notions of service changed over time? How does service fit into social movements and fights for social justice? How does service fit into a politically and economically conservative agenda?



‘Complex Thinking’ should come at a point when service participants are ready dig deeper. If they have begun asking *themselves* broader questions about the significance of their efforts in light of the realities they face when engaged in service, Part Three will provide a structure through which to explore these questions — by providing readings for the group to examine together and suggesting questions which can guide discussions.

At this point, we provide you with suggested readings and questions for group discussion. And that’s all we provide. This minimal amount of suggestion is intended to encourage the group to run these sessions themselves — drawing upon the requisite trust and critical skills built up in Parts One and Two. We strongly suggest that group participants be encouraged to bring in their own readings on various topic matters they are interested in. The more the group does on its own, the better the process will be.

With that said, we do provide a structure to the readings that follow. We begin by including personal experiences written by young people who have performed service and have reflected on the deeper significance of service for them. We also include an individual writing exercise that allows participants to write their own accounts of how service changed them.

Then we provide you with autobiographical accounts of historical figures who have examined how service transformed their lives. This includes people like Jane Addams, a famous social worker at the turn of the century, and Jimmy Carter, former president of the United States. Next, we provide you with readings which engage participants in debates about the underlying purposes of service within a democratic society. Be prepared for conflicting viewpoints here. Some writers argue that service is inherently condescending and immoral. Some writers argue that service only helps those doing the serving to feel good about themselves. Others argue that service is a core element in democratic education and citizenship. Participants must learn that these are serious conflicts that can’t be overlooked or ignored. After setting out these conflicts, we turn to some readings on the meanings of national service. These should be especially helpful for participants in AmeriCorps programs.

After each reading, we suggest questions that can help lead group discussions. These should be taken only as suggestions. The group itself will need to determine what exactly they want to examine. Remember, we provide you with the basic tools here; it’s up to the group to decide what exactly to discuss.



SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATION

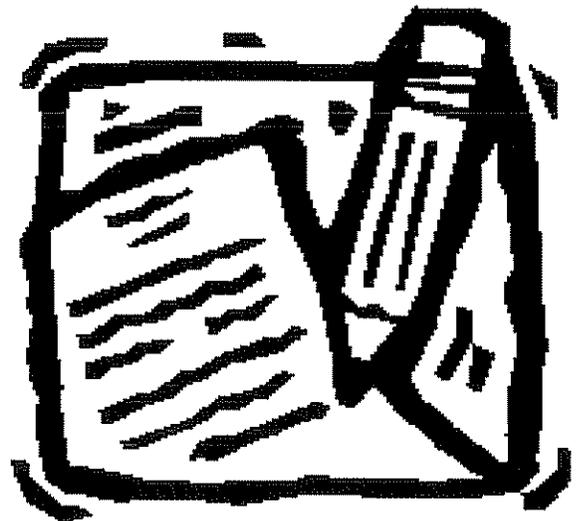
By this point, you should feel comfortable leading group discussions. If you have any questions, you can refer to notes for facilitation in Part Two. The following suggestions may be helpful to you as you move from a process of learning together through reflection on experience to engaging a broader range of perspectives, experiences and ways of thinking about service.

- ⊙ You must feel that the group is committed to Part Three. Serious discussion of difficult ideas takes a great deal of energy. The group should also be committed to facing conflicts and discussing ideas without attacking personalities. For more on these things, you can consult Parts One and Two.
- ⊙ We suggest that you rotate facilitators of discussion. At this point, participants should know enough about what makes good group discussions work well. Therefore, you want to turn more responsibility over to them. One way to do this is to have people choose what topics they want to focus on and then commit to leading the group during that session. When people know that eventually they'll have to lead discussions themselves, they have a tendency to be more active during discussions that other people are leading. In addition, participants should research their own topic matters and bring in helpful readings (if participants ask where they should go to find reading materials, alert them to the most helpful community institution there is — and one they should have learned about by doing community asset mapping — the public library). Anything you can do to ensure more “buy-in” from group participants will obviously help out here.
- ⊙ You might want to spend some time giving participants an opportunity to think about and discuss the kinds of questions they want to consider before delving into readings. If you have a limited amount of time to spend on Part Three, group members' investment in the discussions should be a bigger priority than following the structure we have provided.
- ⊙ Encourage group members to engage the readings and questions informally. Make sure they are available to people who might want to read articles that the full group will not be reading.
- ⊙ There may be some fiery debates over some of the controversial articles. The facilitator will need to make use of the skills and roles outlined in Part Two to keep the process moving smoothly and to remind the group that they have much to learn from one another.



IT GOT THEM THINKING:

REFLECTIONS
ON SERVICE BY
YOUNG PEOPLE



"IT GOT THEM THINKING:" REFLECTIONS ON SERVICE BY YOUNG PEOPLE

In the essays that follow, young people involved in community service programs and projects write about their participation. They raise questions, ideas and proposals based on their experiences in community and public service. In essence, they have used their own service as a starting point, moving from that point to engage more deeply and more broadly into many social, cultural, educational and political issues.

Some of the essays contradict one another. Some raise questions about service itself, while others focus on particular aspects of a project or area of interest. Others corroborate what has been said before, but raise more complex ideas. Some evaluate their programs, some make recommendations, some question their impact, some engage broader educational and political issues.

These essays are interesting and exciting because they do make the connections between service and public life. They illustrate how experience in service does demand

that people become more critical, more thoughtful and more aware of issues

“...They illustrate how experience in service does demand that people become more critical, more thoughtful and more aware of issues that confront our society. The young people that write here do not do it from a self-centered perspective...”

that confront our society. The young people that write here do not do it from a self-centered perspective. They are increasingly conscious of the effects of their efforts on others. They engage the complexities (sometimes the contradictions) that are a part of public life. They confront serious social and political concerns, not because they want to hear themselves, and not out of grandiose

notions that they can change the world. Instead, their essays come from a place of proven commitment and involvement. They reflect the kind of toughened idealism and realistic faith in public life and collective endeavors that is the mark of a strong democracy.



CONNECTING

BY HEATHER CHAN

Chan is a member of Princeton University's Class of 1998. She wrote this essay when she was a first year student. This essay originally appeared on the Student Volunteer Council's web site and is reprinted with the permission of the author.

On a Tuesday afternoon this past November I was playing "Follow the Leader" in a park in Trenton with some of the kids from New Visions, the youth outreach program where I volunteer. The qualities I love best about fall were all apparent that day: the crisp, cold air, the red-orange hues covering the trees and sky, the textured rays of the sun through the leaves, and a wide open space that held all kinds of potential for fun and games.

We formed a line of ten and wove our way up and down the field, through the five girls (ages 8-10) and sand pit, up the slide, down the slide and over to the monkey bars. We were five volunteers (two from Princeton and three from Trenton State University), all thoroughly caught up in keeping with the rules of this simple game. *"You have to go around this step, and up to the top this way! ... Left foot first ... flap your arms like this! ... Show her how to do it."*

When our joyful, chattering procession arrived at the paint-chipped bars of the jungle gym each person slowed down accordingly and climbed onto the first rung with a new solemn determination. I remember clearly how supportive all the girls were of each other and how seriously they took the task of getting all ten bodies through "the jungle." One of the volunteers was having trouble getting over a certain obstacle, and the girls were both eager and generous with their support and advice. Armed with such enthusiasm we made it through and continued traipsing along single-file with

smiles on our faces. It was the biggest smile that I had on that day.

My thoughts aren't always as carefree as this episode suggests. On a serious note, I often wonder how well I'm connected with the kids and if, in their minds, I have earned a personality and identity beyond "the big kid/adult that comes and plays with us once a week." I want to reciprocate the joy that I get from playing games like "Follow the Leader", and I worry that I don't make enough of a difference, or that I'm not as engaging as I would like to be.

That same day after "Follow the Leader" disbanded for the sake of other games, I noticed one of the girls, Jessica, had separated from the bunch and so I went over to talk to her. She didn't offer any complaints, but after I persisted in asking, she admitted to feeling left out of the group. She wasn't ready to rejoin the others, so I stayed behind and we walked quietly among the trees and talked about her sisters. Suddenly Jessica perked up and started picking stones up off the ground and then stopped to offer me a few. She pointed ahead to a small bridge over a creek and smiled.

I spend my Thursday afternoons playing with the kids at New Visions and giving them my attention. They spend their Thursday afternoons playing with each other and with me. We spend a lot of time playing ... and every so often there are occasions, such as the one on the bridge, where I feel that for a moment we've really connected.

IT GOT THEM THINKING



Questions for Discussion

1. What in Heather Chang's experience do you identify with and how? Can you understand her general sense of not accomplishing enough?

2. Chang values the time she spends with children in the area near her college. She has a good time with them and feels good about paying attention to them. What do you think she learns from her interactions with the kids? What are some of the things people learn through interactions with those from different cultures and backgrounds?

3. The college Chang attends is in Princeton, a wealthy suburb a few miles away from Trenton, where the New Visions program operates. The author writes that she is sometimes concerned that she and the kids are not always connecting, that she is not making a difference in their lives. What are some of the possible reasons for her concern (for example, she does not know the kids well, she is not familiar with the kids' lives, etc.)? Why is it important in our nation for people of different backgrounds to connect? Or is it important? What do you think is needed in order for this to happen?



AID FOR AIDS

BY MARK FERGUSON

Ferguson was the co-coordinator of "AIDS about AIDS" at Guilford College in Greensboro, NC, and a Bonner Scholar Alumni. Ferguson was highlighted in a special Young Visionaries Award issue of Who Cares: A Toolkit for Social Change, and was given an award from the magazine as a result of his commitment to AIDS education and outreach. This essay was reprinted with permission of Who Cares: A Toolkit for Social Change.

Two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson asserted, "A debt of service is due from every man to his country proportioned to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured to him." This "debt of service" was visibly necessary within smaller societies—tribes, villages, even in the colonial United States. Yet in the ever-expanding modern world, we see responsibility shouldered increasingly by social institutions, including the church, the state, and private industry.

These agents have assumed every role, from moral dictator to wet-nurse. However benevolent their intentions, such sponsoring institutions threaten to smother society with Band-Aid fixes. Their programs can only alleviate hardship effectively when they unite with, and even ignite, citizens' investment in their own communities.

Consider the nation's response to AIDS. During the early 1980s, before government and corporate funding was made available, a hodge-podge of concerned individuals banded together.

Their makeshift system of care swelled into a sprawling network of action and education, spurring the significant institutional attention AIDS receives today. AIDS activism continues to be sustained by a balance of institutional support and individual action.

For my second year I am co-coordinating "AIDS about AIDS," Acquiring Information and Destroying Stereotypes about HIV and AIDS. This student-organized and student-oriented national conference extends an opportunity for young people to understand how AIDS has swept through our country and how personal participation is critical in halting its destructiveness. From high-profile initiatives like AmeriCorps to scores of AIDS caregivers, Little League coaches and volunteer tutors, we are establishing a community service network to complement our social welfare programs.

Americans are reinvesting in their communities and dismissing the blind hope that institutions will heal all societal wounds. While structural safeguards are valuable crutches for a crippled nation, they cannot replace the therapy of individual commitment and personal action.



Questions for Discussion

1. Ferguson relates his own community service endeavors to a historical and philosophical principle about citizens' responsibility to serve their country. He sees individual civic involvement as a necessary partner to institutional approaches for addressing social problems. How do community service efforts relate to other approaches to societal problems? Is community service ever in conflict with these other approaches? Why or why not?
2. Ferguson cites the grassroots response to the AIDS pandemic as an example of citizen mobilization that spurred institutions to action. What other examples can you give of citizens creating institutional social change?
3. What do you think Ferguson means when he alludes to "institutions" in paragraph #5? What is his critique of institutions? How do you define an institution? Do you hold the same critique as Ferguson?
4. Why do you think it is important for citizens to work alongside more organized institutions to address problems? Do you think citizen community service should only be about "healing societal wounds"? What other things could volunteers do to make our country a more vibrant, healthy place?
5. What role should the church, the state and private industry play in solving social problems and what role should not be played by these institutions? In your experience, are volunteers supplementing or replacing these institutions? What should the role of volunteers be?



TOWARD A NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM

BY SHUBHA CHAKRAVARTY

Shubha Chakravarty is a member of Stanford University's Class of 1999. The article appeared originally in the Spring 1997 issue of Commons, a publication of Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service. This essay was reprinted with the permission of the Haas Center.

When I first began working with Students for Environmental Action at Stanford (SEAS), it seemed like a very different kind of environmentalism to me. The projects that SEAS worked on were nothing like what the environmental group in my high school had worked on. The idea that an environmental group would be interested in issues like affirmative action and university investment attracted me to this organization.

During my second weekend at Stanford, I went on a road trip with SEAS to Mount Graham, Arizona, where we met members of an Apache tribe who were fighting to protect their land from environmentally-destructive construction. It was an intense introduction to SEAS; I had to realize for myself that the racial, political, and environmental issues were all related in that case. Furthermore, the trip made me think about what exactly "environmentalism" can and should be.

Why does SEAS approach environmentalism in the way we do? Why don't we spend more energy on doing activities which physically improve the environment, such as clean-ups and tree planting? While we agree in SEAS that these activities are important, and often participate in them, we generally focus our energies on other, less direct ways of helping the environment. I think it stems partially from a frustration with more direct forms of service. Direct service does not always attack the cause of the problem that necessitated the service in the first place.

For example, if SEAS were to embark on a project to clean up local creeks, without holding responsible the organizations which originally polluted them, our efforts never will

be enough to keep the creeks clean. If we as students instead organize around the issue of making polluters responsible for their own pollution, we have essentially eliminated the *need* for creek clean-ups. This type of organizing, we would argue, is as valid a form of service as the actual clean-ups. Where do direct service and activism meet? In one of her winter quarter presentations, Visiting Mentor Linda Wong explained the two as sort of an organic whole. She said that you could not and should not have one without the other. In trying to provide an outlet for this more "activist" type of service, SEAS has developed this different approach to environmentalism that at first seems unfamiliar to most.

It's funny that I am uncomfortable using the word "environmentalist." In fact, I often feel weird about telling people I am an environmentalist when I meet them because the term is loaded with stereotypes. Suddenly I am expected to recycle everything in sight and shovel compost once a week. These stereotypes have become affiliated with a movement that I do not necessarily consider myself a part of. It is a movement begun primarily by Americans who claimed that "environmental concerns were everyone's concerns," and yet it still carries the reputation of being primarily white and middle class. Environmentalism does not have to be this way. In fact, it cannot be this way.

The people who are most affected by and oppose environmental destruction are the people who live in the towns in which the destruction occurs, such as the people of Burma, who are watching their rain forests being destroyed for the sake of an oil pipeline. It is the people in East Palo Alto who fear contamination from the nearby ROMIC plant. The people in these communities who fight against injustices are also environmentalists, and they are part of a large and effective environmental movement that doesn't always jive with the traditional



sense of who “environmentalists” are.

As a student group, SEAS does not always succeed in creating efficient and inclusive projects, and we certainly are not the right group for every environmentalist. We have the difficult challenge of student organizing, which has inherent time and sustainability

limitations. But SEAS has redefined and shaped the ideas of both public service and environmentalism for me and most of the members of the group. And if we help to bring about a deeper understanding of the types of complex issues that we address, then I think we have accomplished a lot.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is Chakravarty’s argument for combining political work with direct community service? How does she differentiate between direct service and the other activities of SEAS? What counter arguments would you present for the role of direct service in solving social problems?
2. Chakravarty is uncomfortable with the term, “environmentalist.” She does not relate to many of the commonly held images of environmental activists, or with the movement’s reputation as being, “primarily white and middle class.” What does it mean for a movement to be identified with a race and a class? Why do you think that happens? Does it help or hurt a movement? What other social movements are so strictly defined? Which movements have transcended strict identifications?
3. SEAS is exploring and promoting a wider vision of public service. Does the group’s examination and analysis of community and environmental issues show any limitations in the direct service model? What obstacles do you think SEAS might face in accomplishing their goals? How might they overcome those obstacles?
4. Think about the kinds of community service activities you have been involved in. What are some of the political or cultural issues associated with them? What kinds of activities would augment direct service? What might stop you from doing these activities?



LIVING IN THE SPIRIT: THE WORD FROM SHAC ON DEVELOPING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

BY MONTY BLACK

Living in the Spirit was written by Monty Black, a member of Stanford University's Class of 1997. The article appeared originally in the Winter 1997 issue of Commons, a publication of Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service. This essay was reprinted with the permission of the Haas Center.

In many ways, the Stanford Homelessness Action Coalition is a failure. The broken state of our organization should be honestly admitted. If I were to try to recount all of the things we've accomplished this past summer or this quarter, I would be hard pressed to come up with much of anything. The average student attendance at one of our weekly meetings hovers around three to six people. So few students... so little accomplished. Why use this newsletter to drag SHAC out into the light instead of just letting it carry on its shadowy existence?

Because SHAC deals honestly with issues of community involvement. Although the members of SHAC could try to create a well-oiled machine with committees and subcommittees working diligently to create massive institutions of homeless aid, we would still be left with the question: What kind of spirit is the source for our activity? Is it honestly a love for the people with whom we work? Since I started working with SHAC I've learned that there are better standards with which to measure an organization than its "accomplishments."

Here, I would like to relate a bit of personal testimony. This summer I worked very hard for SHAC. I spent much of my time talking to local people at the drop-in center (sometimes interrogating them, I regret to say) about what needed to be done and then I would spend the rest of my time trying to do it. I worked frenetically, a holy crusader biking from meeting to meeting, constantly worrying that there was something I had forgotten to do or some key player I had forgotten to string up in my grand puppeteering schemes.

You see, community organizing, like anything else, can be both a blessing and a curse. Why

do we want the results that we want? Who are we really doing it for? Whenever someone goes about trying to understand other people's lives, I think they should take a step back and try to understand their own first. For all our good intentions, we are twisted, twisted creatures. When I found myself waking up in the mornings with headaches, because my mind had spent the whole night recycling all the opportunities I had missed and all the intricate ways I could have better secured my work's success, I took my foot off the gas. Here's a quote from a guy named Krishnamurthy that helped me out:

"Individual enlightenment does affect large groups of people, but only if one is not eager for results. If one thinks in terms of gain and effect, right transformation of oneself is not possible." (Education and The Significance of Life p53.)

Since this summer, I've been spending a lot of time contemplating the spirit of my activism. At the organizational level, with SHAC, I think many of the community members easily see through to the hearts of the students involved. I think they know when students are using SHAC and the homeless people themselves as stepping stones for a career in professional activism. I think they know when students, in need of validating their own influence on the world, push for massive organizing among people whom they barely know.

And so it can often mean much more when a student sits down with a homeless person to talk about things going on in their lives, the homeless person's and the student's. The things friends talk about, instead of talking about the upcoming protest that the homeless person should attend. At our last SHAC meeting, we spent most of our time laughing,



having pillow fights, joking about the number of students in SHAC and coming up with snappy put-downs for each other. The things friends do. Not a whole lot was accomplished, but the intangible things we

shared are beyond measure. The lesson I learned was: chill out and be friendly. Good organizers are often bad company.

Questions for Discussion

1. Black states that SHAC cannot quantify its accomplishments, or even explain clearly the results of its recent activities. Yet the project has something to teach others about building relationships with those they “serve.” What can SHAC teach? Why is this important?
2. Do you believe you have to “love” the people with whom you work to be involved with integrity and accountability? Why or why not? What do you think Black means by “love”? Do you think he means intimacy, or “connecting” as Chang defines it, or something else? How does Black measure “accomplishments”?
3. Black presents an implicit critique of some volunteers, suggesting that they become involved in community service as either a gateway to careers as activists, or that they work hard in community organizing in order to validate their own influence on the world. Have you experienced this yourself? How do these approaches affect the service work accomplished? How do they contradict a democratic approach to service?
4. Black writes about developing a more democratic process of getting things done at SHAC—listening to others, coming to understand their lives and their concerns, facing head-on some of the difficulties that people from very different backgrounds can have when they try to work together. Is this process a legitimate one for a SHAC member to want to have? Should someone who might leave an organization / community after a year or so hope for such a deep level of involvement? Why or why not?
5. Do you think people who work with you through your service site see through your motives, as Black suggests in his experience? If so, how and why?



KING OF THE HILL

BY COSBY HUNT

“King of the Hill” was written by Cosby Hunt, a Teach for America participant (1993-95), who taught history, economics and government and coached soccer and tennis at a high school in Sandersville, Georgia. The following short story was written as a reflection piece and is reprinted with permission from the author.

PART ONE

Wilson Jefferson’s 5th period American History class came streaming into room 519 with no idea of the “good stuff”, as Mr. Jefferson was so fond of saying, he had in store for them. The warm-up assignment occupied its usual place in the corner of the chalkboard; it read:

“Pick any one of the organizations in this community or in the city at large and explain how you feel its work is important to the people it serves and/or society overall. Alternative: describe a service which you think is not being properly provided in the community. It may be one which is currently provided (not to your satisfaction) or it may be one which you think someone should start.”

A few of the students groaned as they saw the length of the instructions, which Wilson required them to copy. “Dey go Mr. Jefferson again with dem damn warm-up assignments ...” That was Cyrus: No surprise. “Top of the morning to you, too, Cyrus. It won’t take you very long to copy those instructions,” responded Wilson. He had found long ago that he needed to require his students to write the directions to each warm-up so that he and they could keep track of what was going on in their notebooks. He had also discovered that the directions were a way of establishing relative calm at the beginning of class. Where was it that he had read something along the lines of “a noisy classroom is the sign of active learning”? Perhaps, but his students got plenty noisy and a little too active on some days. The warm-ups afforded a temporal peace and quiet which helped Wilson get his thoughts together at the beginning of each class.

Class was in the middle of their unit on the Great Depression and the New Deal. What Wilson saw in that time period was a new American commitment to service. Yes, the Works Progress Administra-

tion (WPA) and other organizations paid their workers, but the idea was there: people getting out into their communities and doing good: paving roads, building schools, and doing whatever else had to be done. Roosevelt was a genius.

Wilson planned to use the lessons about the New Deal as a springboard to a service-learning project for his students. After their warm-up assignments, he would explain to them that they were all, himself included, about to embark on a new phase in learning: service-learning. Each student would choose some positive, organized aspect of community life to which he or she wanted to contribute and spend at least 60 hours involved in whatever way was appropriate. He had letters and permission slips ready for each student to take home; he even had journals for each of them to get down their thoughts about the experience. He was proud of himself.

Before he could parlay the warm-up into the lesson of the day, Shante Williams looked up from her warm-up assignment and proclaimed: “I hate America, Mr. Jefferson.” Wilson had been waiting for such a comment for some time. He was reminded of his former student, Tisha Washington—one of his favorites that year. Tisha used to cross out “American” at the top of his history and government tests and replace it with “AmeriKKKan.” At first he was taken aback by this affront to patriotism, but then he began to appreciate the gesture as a sign of the elusive critical-thinking of which educators are always speaking. He had once sat in for Ms. Joseph, the teacher next door, and saw that Tisha did the same thing on her tests. Ms. Joseph’s response was to cross out Tisha’s “correction” and circle the original spelling — a battle Wilson had no desire to join.

“Well, Shante, stop beating around the bush; how do you really feel?”

IT GOT THEM THINKING



Sarcasm seeped out even when it wasn't welcome. His students were accustomed to it and understood it as a part of their teacher's "ways."

"It's just that I been readin' 'bout all the messed up things this country's done to other countries in World History class; then I come in here right after that class, and see the same things, except America's supposed to be the good guy in this class."

Maybe, he thought to himself, we should make everyone go the Shante route: Repeat World History so that they can take it at the same time as American History and integrate some of the themes.

Wilson was excited to whip out the metaphor he had been saving for such an occasion.

"Okay Shante, there's no doubt that this country has done some awful stuff and tries to make out like it's always on the up and up, but you're not the first American to call out Uncle Sam. I want you to imagine that those glasses you have on are special glasses which allow you to see all the messed up stuff around you..."

"I see it *all*."

"I'm sure you do. So if you took off those glasses you wouldn't be able to see all the messed up stuff. Right? At the same time, you couldn't see and appreciate all the good things around you. Would you still want to wear your glasses? Are you getting my point? You know it took me a little while to think up that metaphor."

"I still can't stand this place sometimes."

"Just keep on those glasses and look for ways to change the ugly stuff, how about that?"

"Which brings us to the topic of the warm-up assignments and the good stuff for the day." Five hands

shot up immediately. "No, folks, we're not going to have time to share what you wrote today. Save that enthusiasm for what I'm about to lay on you."

Wilson went into his impassioned introduction to the service-learning component he had added to his class. It was the first year he was trying such a bold move, but as he told his fifth period, this was a group which could handle it.

"I want you to get out there and be real citizens. Voting is only the least of our responsibilities, and most of you can't vote, anyway. The point is this: we don't have time to complain about the problems if we're out there trying to fix them, and as citizens it is our responsibility to contribute to the well being of our communities."

"Mr. Jefferson, how come we can vote for prezident and die for our country at 18, but not drink 'til we're 21?" A favorite student gripe.

"Well, you know that stuff 'll kill you? You should be thankful the good legislators of this city have kept that poison out of your hands until you're responsible enough to handle it. It might not be a bad idea for some of you to volunteer at the local drug and alcohol treatment center."

He hadn't really meant to be funny with that last comment, but by that time, the students were already responding with the usual winks and side comments to one another about their various weekend—and weekday, for that matter—"habits."

Wilson wrapped up his pep talk and handed out the materials for them to take home. He would have to follow up the "literature" — with calls to every home that week.



Questions for Discussion

1. Mr. Wilson challenges his student Shante on her critique of American society and politics. Did he do the right thing in challenging her? How do you challenge people to think differently? When is it right and when is it wrong?
2. What expectations did Mr. Wilson set up for service? Were those the right expectations? Why or why not? What might other motivations/expectations have been?
3. Some people get involved with service because it will make their resumes sparkle. Others get involved because of strong civic ideals. How do you balance “high” motivations for doing something with those motivations that are not as high?
4. Mr. Wilson is teaching in a school where the majority of the students come from poor families, most of which are African American. Might people from this community have valid reasons to reject the notion of civic responsibility? How would you argue against their perspective?
6. Why do you think Mr. Wilson was so impressed with Roosevelt’s approach to problems during the Great Depression?



KING OF THE HILL

PART TWO

On his way home from school that day he thought more about the journey on which his class was about to embark. For some reason he thought back to his college expository writing professor, Dr. Serloff, slumped in his chair talking about how college wasn't what it used to be. Gone were the intellectual and architectural utopias ripe with philosophical debate, ivy, and pillared buildings. He and his intellectual colleagues would sit in the sun with a pile of books on the French Revolution, the trial of Socrates, and bemoan the loss of civility in the world around them. He went on to mention how most people in his day didn't work while they were in school:

"I mean, why would you want to work? You spend the next forty years of your life working; college is the last stop before all that misery. You should be reading good books, laying in the sunshine and figuring out whether to make your banner for the upcoming football game or head down to the pub that night, for God's sake!"

He had gone to Yale. Wilson wondered if Yale was to blame for Dr. Serloff's snobbery and that disgusting but endearing snort he made when he was amused (usually by himself). The wisdom of the statement appealed to Wilson at the time, especially as he thought about his friends struggling with part-time jobs and financial aid. Four years of freedom without hassle...

"Well, we're a long way from Yale," he said quietly to himself as the doors opened at the Columbia Heights stop. Two more stops to go.

None of his students would be going to Yale. Most of them were only vaguely thinking about college, a notion which depended in part on whether or not the city's university would be solvent the next year. Those who would go to college would have to work or hope for a generous financial aid package. Many of them were working now. He returned to Shante's statement that day and thought that he, too, might hate America if he worked in the sketchy retail joint which employed her.

Was he bringing extra-burden into his

students' lives by having them "volunteer"? Most of them were getting more than their fair share of real-world experience. Some days what he wanted for them more than anything was to be able to enter Dr. Serloff's Ivy League world and sit in some field making the tough call whether to keep reading, sample the cafeteria's delights, or head to the lecture on metaphysics taking place in the student union.

Wilson remembered his high school "social service" requirement, which he completed the summer after his junior year. He worked in a foster home for boys ages 9 to 14. The school wasn't that far from his school, but it seemed like it at the time. His old school sits at the highest point in the city. The tweed-wearing administrators there must have patted themselves on the back as they sent their preppy young scholars off to work with the hoi polloi for a little while (60 hours, to be exact) before returning to the haven on the hill. Wilson had loved his time at the foster home, if only because he had never had younger brothers.

Wilson's father had little respect for the social service requirement. He thought it ridiculous that these rich kids would "donate" some time to some soup kitchen for a few hours only to head off to the Ivy League soon thereafter and never participate in such menial work ever again. His father thought it made the "servers" feel good about themselves, but did nothing to solve the problems at hand. Wilson thought his father's sentiments were rather cynical at the time, but he had to admit that the comment had aged well.

Some of Wilson's students were just grown-up versions of the "little brothers" he had at the foster home. There was no coming down-from-on-high with most of his students, many of whom would be volunteering in places which had served them and their families at one time or another. He knew that this experience would be the right thing to do: people actively taking part in their immediate surroundings.

But would his class lose its aura as a haven from the grim realities of the students' outside lives with this plan? Wilson had felt flattered when a student had told him that his class was such a place, but is that what class should be? He held on to the notion that school, for



his kids, must provide a break from other aspects of their lives. Maybe some part of him knew that was wrong and threw this service-learning into the mix to end that notion.

Surely both students and parents would question the wisdom of a class requirement which forced them to work without pay. Many of his students were contributing to their families' incomes; these projects might mean one less trip to the grocery store for some.

"Fuller, more beneficial participation in our community." That was the phrase he had used in the letter to the parents. Meanwhile, the parents of at least three of his students were doing their damndest to curtail that participation via vouchers. One had asked Wilson about his alma mater: "Uh, I loved it, but ... well, I mean it certainly is a good education..." As much as he had loved the school on the hill, he hated to see people view it as a panacea or the great escape. Wilson hoped that the service projects would give people a fuller appreciation for where they lived. Instead of seeing their neighborhoods as traps from which to escape or as places worth staying in only because of family and habit, he wanted people to appreciate them as home—home they wanted to make the best place they could.

Then again, he hadn't grown up there; maybe he was just romanticizing the place—a neighborhood he still hesitated to join as a resident. "Hey, I don't want to be rolling in to buy Anusol one night and have one of my students ringing it up," he had told his friends as a rationalization.

"How would he serve?" He wondered. Of course he had to serve as well or his students wouldn't buy the plan. While he had always viewed teaching in the inner city as his service, he did get paid for it after all. The pep in his step on paydays reminded him that it wasn't all blood, sweat, and tears. Would he tutor? Naw - too much like teaching. He wanted to do something which didn't force him to be the center of the show.

Maybe he could set up that exchange program between his school and one of the schools in the suburbs. Or, God help us—the school on the hill. Certainly some of those students were needy in ways which the men of tweed hadn't thought. His female students at Marshall could show the prep school girls the latest in weave techniques, and the prepsters would return the favor by showing off the latest moves from their ballroom dancing class. His father would be amused.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the primary concerns Mr. Wilson grapples with in the story, as he is developing a service-learning program for his students?
2. What are some important justifications for people becoming active participants in their own neighborhoods? How might they then join with other communities?
3. Mr. Wilson wants his students and their families to value and care about their communities, but he himself does not want to move to that neighborhood. Do you think this has to necessarily be a contradiction?
4. Was Mr. Wilson's school exchange focused primarily on service, or on some sort of cultural and social exchange? How would such an exchange serve the needs of the nation? Where in our society do people from very different backgrounds come together?
5. Does everyone need to serve? Might some people in our society need to have the experience of serving more than others? Mr. Wilson talks about service-learning possibly altering a family's income, since his students are working part-time to help out at home. Is this too high a price for the lessons in citizenship Wilson hopes to teach? How else might these young people learn the same lessons? Do you think the students might be learning different or even opposite lessons at places like the "sketchy retail joint" where Shante works?



STARTING A NONPROFIT COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION

BY KIM GROSE

In the following piece, author Kim Grose reflects on her experiences since graduation from Stanford University in 1990. She is the co-founder and co-director of Partners in School Innovation, a Bay Area (California) non-profit organization supporting public school reform in low-income communities. Partners is part of the AmeriCorps national service network and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. At Stanford, Kim worked with TEAM and was co-founder of the Stanford Project on National Service. The essay appeared originally in the Spring 1997 issue of Commons, a publication of Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service.

As I sit down to write a reflection for COMMONS, I find myself at a real career crossroads. It has been seven years since I graduated from Stanford, and four since a colleague and I launched Partners in School Innovation. In August I will take my leave of this organization and do what most people don't do until later in life, if at all: take a sabbatical to read, write, hike, sleep, and reflect.

I began Partners for several reasons: first, when I graduated from Stanford I would have loved to be a Partner in a school, but the job didn't exist. I am glad that there is now at least a small opportunity for young people who are committed to children and education to really help public schools improve, without necessarily committing to a career in teaching. Second, I wanted to try to demonstrate that national service (something I had advocated for as a student at Stanford) could be used as a critical vehicle for institutional and community building. While I am afraid the public policy of national service has become very politicized over the last few years, and I am less sure what the core vision of AmeriCorps and national service is, I do believe that Partners in School Innovation has contributed to broadening the realm of possibilities for what AmeriCorps members can do, in this state and across the country.

Third, and the one really at the core of my convictions, was that I believed we were failing our

children in this country, particularly in public education. Everyone has a responsibility to make things better, and national service could be one way to support the people within the schools — teachers, students, parents, and others — who really know how to make that change a reality. On a day-to-day basis, I find myself steeped in the hard-to-find forest among all the trees. But when I do get a chance to review the progress over four years, I am amazed at how much has been accomplished by extraordinarily hard working and passionate teachers, principals, parents and Partners. We now know, for example, that students at one elementary school are reading at much higher levels because of a strategy that we worked with teachers to introduce, called reciprocal teaching. Also, we know that hundreds and hundreds more parents than before are actively supporting the schools and their children's learning because Partners have helped them to learn ways they could work with their children at home, or communicate better with their teachers.

I encourage people to find out more about Partners and other organizations working in the public schools, because I have learned through this experience how much really is possible. Rather than share here on that level, I thought others involved in similar kinds of work may be interested in some of the broader questions I find myself leaving with, since I imagine they are questions we all struggle with in one way or another:



1. Given the increasing overall pace of life in this country, and the decreasing resources for low-income communities and education, is it possible for people really to contribute to making change without burning out?

I feel in many ways I have failed in my efforts to build reflection and personal nourishment into my fast-paced life. Partly it is external constraints — the fundraising that has to happen for us to meet payroll, the response to others' crises in the schools or on our staff that I can't choose not to do, yet make me feel in a vice of never-ending demands, never-completed action plans. It makes me angry that it is so hard to seek out resources for improving public education in one of the wealthiest communities in the world. And it makes me worry about how good non-profit organizations can ever really grow and sustain themselves.

But partly I also feel that I am responsible for the reality of that pace. I created the organization, I am in a position to make choices about our goals and priorities, and yet I have found it unbelievably hard to “punch the minus button” when what we are dealing with is service to children. I also have struggled personally with health problems and exhaustion. I am hoping to learn how to find inner strength and renewal (my New Yorker parents are appalled at such California New-Age language!) so that I can lead in a way that is more healthy for myself and others around me in the future.

2. What is my place, as a white, middle class woman, in the struggle for social change?

In my position as a co-director of a diverse, young organization committed to educational change, I have been challenged enormously to think hard about what my own motivations are for my work, what my assumptions are, especially regarding my race and my class. I have tried to take seriously the arguments that Lisa Delpit makes in her book, *Other People's Children*, about teaching children of color, in the way we approach hiring and supporting Partners and staff. But people here and elsewhere continue to help me see “blind spots” in my own language and actions, and how those play out in our organization.

Sometimes I find it incredibly hard to work with recent college graduates who are so trained in critique and so convinced of their righteousness. But I know, too, how important their passion and convictions are to the potential for real change in our society. It is simply a challenge to so often be on the receiving end of the critique, when we have all worked hard to create an organization from the beginning that is highly diverse, collaborative, reflective, progressive. We are operating within a society that does not necessarily support such values, and we simply have a long way to go. I hope over the next year I will be able to process more fully my experiences with these issues and others relating to school change and organization-building, and then share them with the Haas Center community and elsewhere.



Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the nature of the issues Grose is grappling with four years after the founding of partners in School Innovation? Practical? Theoretical? Internal? External? All of the above? What are some of the issues that your service organization is grappling with?
2. Why did Grose and a colleague found Partners? Do you think a community service program can have a long term effect on public education? Why or why not? What does Grose believe?
3. Grose states that she believes that we are failing children in this country and that “everyone has the responsibility to make things better.” Then she states that young people can support, “the people — who really know how to make that change a reality.” How does Partners address the issue of power in community service? How does it approach civic responsibility?
4. When Grose expresses concern at her status as a white, middle class woman, what do you think she is alluding to exactly? If everyone is responsible for making positive change in public education, why is it significant that Grose is a white, middle class female? How might her motivations and assumptions affect the work she does? What about the work Partners does? What would you suspect her “blind spots” are? Do you have your own?
5. Grose talks about the incredible challenge of working with young people, “so trained in critique and so convinced of their righteousness.” Is this a legitimate complaint or not? Do you think that Grose experienced some tensions between the *institution* she has been partly responsible for building and maintaining and the *individuals*, who come to the program with personal commitments, goals and agendas? What kinds of conflicts might arise? (How does this relate to Ferguson’s argument that we need both institutions and individuals dedicated to improving our society?)
6. What are some of your concerns about the community service work you are doing? Do any correlate to Grose’s?
7. Looking into the future, how do you see yourself in four years? Does Grose’s path inspire you? How do you see the people at your service site? How do you see the United States in general?



CITY YEAR

BY SUZANNE GOLDSMITH

The author, Suzanne Goldsmith, spent a year as a participant - researcher with Boston's City Year Program, a national youth service program. The following is an excerpt from her book, A City Year. In it, she describes the complex relationships that developed between diverse participants of the community service program with which she worked. This excerpt was reprinted.

When I tell people about my time in City Year, they usually ask me what my teammates are doing now, and in their hopeful faces I can see an expectation that I will tell them dramatic success stories, uplifting tales of lives turned around through service. Listeners are sometimes disappointed to learn that one of my teammates is in jail, that one is unemployed, one now has an out-of-wedlock child, and one still struggles with his drug and alcohol abuse. I, too, have felt discouragement at the trajectory of some of my former teammates' lives since leaving City Year.

But as Tony pointed out, life changes often happen slowly, incrementally. Small gains are sometimes more profound than they at first appear. And seeds planted at one time may not bear fruit until a month, a year, or even ten years later.

From these interviews I learned that the results of service and of membership in a diverse team may be serendipitous and unexpected. I was surprised and moved by much of what I heard.

My team faced challenges that went well beyond those confronted by most other City Year teams. Chance and hasty decisions combined to give the Reebok team a high concentration of members who were most at risk of dropping out: high school dropouts and people with criminal records or substance-abuse problems. The violent shock and grief of losing Tyrone disrupted the process of bonding and resulted in teamwide depression. *[Note: One member of their City Year team was murdered during the second month of the program.]* In that context, it is not hard to understand why our completion rate (only half of the original team members finished the year) was so much lower than the overall City Year completion rate, which was close to 85

percent, and why some Reebok team members still lead troubled lives.

But perhaps the extraordinary challenges the Reebok team faced make our experience even more instructive. I hope that advocates of national service will heed some of the warnings and criticisms my teammates offered: the need to avoid applying double standards for service participants from different backgrounds, for example, and the need to provide better counseling and support for those whose home lives, circumstances, disabilities, or histories are barriers to self-improvement and effective service. The need to continually examine what is being accomplished and what is not, and to recalibrate goals accordingly. The need to pay more attention to preparing people for the challenges they may face once their service year is over.

I also hope that those who seek to assess the value of national service will take note of the subtle and idiosyncratic results my teammates described, some of which are not likely to show up on five-year tracking surveys.

Richie, for instance, does not draw a specific link between his improving circumstances and his time in City Year, but the cherished respect he is now earning through honest work is something he first glimpsed while helping children at the Blackstone school. June does not yet know how to achieve what she wants, but she knows she misses the camaraderie she found in City Year, and she would like to recreate it in her life. Earl's claim that City Year taught him to "work eight hours without dying" is no small achievement; nor is Amy's claim that she "learned to feel" in City Year, nor Alison's discovery of a calling and a hidden talent in service, nor the trust and sense of family Rosa found within the team, nor Will's new awareness of his own privilege and his



desire to give back to the community, nor Jackie's developing commitment to helping empower black and inner-city youth.

I was moved to see how team members have become vivid and important figures in one another's lives. For Earl, his connection to Alison, to Tony, and others is a lifeline to a stabler world, something he reaches for in moments of crisis. Others on the team do not always communicate but are eager to know what one another are doing. Two years later, a sense of connection to each other is still strong for most team members.

I have often thought of an exchange I overheard between Brendan and David after a contentious team meeting at the beginning of the year. "We're never going to all like each other," Brendan said. "We're just too different. We're never even going to be able to work together!"

"Oh, yes we will," David replied. "I'm shooting for family."

Families are not always the best model. They fight a lot, and sometimes within a family, dire things go wrong. But siblings can love each other even when they don't like each other. And when something bad or good happens to them, the others feel it. In a way, it happens to them all.

It was same for us, the Reebok team. Like a family, we became connected. For nine months we breathed the same dusty air, hefted the same tools, locked eyes across the same long pressure-treated

boards. We tolerated the same hours, confronted the same obstacles, met the same people, relished the same successes, and suffered the same disappointments and losses. We made some small improvements in the city where we lived. We shared a history, an enterprise, a portion of each other's lives. And because we value that history, we value each other.

We had a team reunion in January 1993. The event was a small ceremony to honor Tyrone. Another youth organization was donating money to City Year in his remembrance, and Tony invited all of us to attend. Not everyone was there; Charles and Earl were in jail that day, David and Chris were too far away to come, and Richie's whereabouts were unknown at the time, but Brendan came, as did Amy, Rosa, Alison, Jackie, Tracy, Will, and June. It was a bittersweet gathering, and we promised one another we would do it again.

Communities are not built of friends, or of groups of people with similar styles and tastes, or even of people who like or understand each other. They are built of people who feel they are part of something that is bigger than themselves: a shared goal or enterprise, like righting a wrong, or building a road, or raising children, or living honorably, or worshiping a god. To build community requires only the ability to see value in others; to look at them and see a potential partner in one's enterprise.



Questions for Discussion

1. Goldsmith suggests that the valuable benefits of community service are long term and difficult to quantify. Do you agree? How does this differ from the rhetoric often heard about community service?
2. What do you think the “double standards” are for participants from different backgrounds? How do you think they might come to exist within programs like City Year? How might you avoid them?
3. Why do you think the violent death of a teammate would shatter a community service team?
4. Goldsmith makes a guarded critique of traditional methods of evaluating service programs when she asserts that her teammates have experienced, “subtle and idiosyncratic success that would go unnoticed in, “five-year tracking studies.” Do you agree with her that the effects of service on participants are subtle and take a long time to become apparent? Why is this a long term process?
5. Goldsmith states that communities are built of people who feel that they are part of something larger than themselves. Do you agree? Do you believe that service is a good way to build community? What other ways do you suggest?
6. Goldsmith readily states that the City Year program did not achieve all its goals and that many of her Reebok teammates did not complete the program and did not seem to gain much from the program. Yet, her final comments suggest an idealism and a commitment to service and public life. What are your criticisms and hopes for the impacts of your service on both the community you serve and the participants in your program?



WRITING EXERCISE:

REFLECTING ON SERVICE



WRITING EXERCISE: REFLECTING ON SERVICE

The authors of the previous essays and stories were engaged in service programs similar to yours. Their experiences informed many of their thoughts and arguments about community and public service, relationships between different members of communities and society and significant public issues such as education and health care. The following exercise provides you with a structure to engage in the same critical reflection process. By writing a structured reflection paper, you will have the opportunity to make the connections between your experiences through service and theories, concepts and arguments that relate to them.

Developed by Pat Arnold of Vanderbilt University, the following guidelines for a reflection paper use David Kolb's (see page 104) four phases of the learning process as their structure:

1. A concrete experience
2. A time to reflect on that experience
3. An opportunity to apply concepts, models and theories to explain the experience
4. An opportunity to test, evaluate and reconceptualize one's understanding of the experience

The model also incorporates criteria for evaluation. A facilitator might evaluate papers. It might make more sense for group members to critique one another's essays, using the criteria suggested. This way, participants have the opportunity to engage seriously one another's ideas and to try to understand one another's reasoning and arguments.

Your essay should be divided into four parts. Before you begin, choose a topic from your service experience that is compelling, or that seems to lead naturally to theoretical issues. Dramatic events are good choices (an event that shocked you, an altercation or conflict, etc.) as are situations and scenarios that are ongoing.



THE FOUR PHASES

Phase One Concrete Experience

Describe specific behaviors which occurred during the incident or facts related to a particular situation. Be specific, using dates, places and other details. Be objective — explain clearly what happened in preparation for later analysis.

(In Monty Black's piece, "Living in the Spirit," he describes his efforts to be as active and involved in community organizing as possible. He discusses his activities in detail.)

Phase Two Reflective Observation

Write your thoughts about the event or situation. How do you feel about it? What questions does it leave you with? What is your perception about others' thoughts and feelings about the event. How do you think this event has affected individuals in your service setting and why?

(In "Living in the Spirit," Black confesses to running himself into the ground, trying to make things happen in the community, without seeing many results. He questions his own motivations to do community organizing and the motivations of other students. He brings up the notion that those "being organized" mistrust the efforts of organizers and postulates reasons for this.)

Phase Three Abstract Conceptualization

Describe the relationship between the event(s) observed and experienced, and theories and concepts that relate to it. What theories help you to explain and understand the situation itself and/or the dynamics you saw and experienced? Where might your assumptions at the time or afterward have been shortsighted or faulty?

Given the situation as you understand it, do you have any critiques of the applied theories or conceptual models?

(Black could have engaged a number of ideas to analyze his experience. He might have looked to history to analyze the relationships between organizers and communities. From his interest in what was accomplished and the process that was used, he might have explored ideas of quantitative / qualitative evaluation. He could have decided a different organizational structure for SHAC might have made a difference and explored organizational theory. His explorations of love and motivation might have led him to moral philosophy or theology.)

Phase Four Active Experimentation

How does this learning relate to your service? How can you test your new assumptions and ideas? Will you change how you act because of your ideas? Might what you have learned apply to other situations in the future? Next time, what would you try in a similar situation? For other citizens who may not have had your experience, what is significant about the event you described and the ideas behind it? How might you articulate this experience and what you have learned from it to others?

(Black wrote that he was leaving Stanford to explore more ideas with SHAC. Perhaps he did experiment based on the combination of reflective experience and an exploration of pertinent ideas.)



By following Kolb's four phases of the learning cycle, you will have the opportunity to examine carefully a situation or series of events that have arisen in your service experience. You have the opportunity to make connections between service and broader issues and concerns. Through this process of reflected experience, you can become better able to consider important issues in public life and to propose and work for reasonable solutions to public problems.

Writing Exercise



LEARNING FROM OTHERS:

PERSONAL VOYAGES



INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL VOYAGES

In the following essays and writings, people who have been engaged in service and public life discuss their involvement and its significance. Well known public and historic figures, such as President Jimmy Carter and settlement house movement founder Jane Addams, as well as ordinary citizens reflect on their personal voyages through public life and service. They explain how they made a long term commitment to caring about the state of their communities and the relevance of service to their lives.



These essays bring to life the ways that people have learned through experience. These experiences are diverse — some are about racism, some about education, some about poverty — but all of them illustrate the reflective process. In the essays that follow, writers abstract from personal experience to larger issues and explore what role they play in solving problems.

Finally, the following essays show that long term commitment is sometimes an outcome of seriously thinking about why service is important and how it can provide people with a permanent framework to orient themselves toward their lives.

As you read the following stories and accounts, ask yourself what these people's experiences teach you about your own, especially now as you are verging on ending your formal service experience.



JANE ADDAMS

REASONS TO ENGAGE IN SERVICE

At the turn of the century, in the midst of the United States' shift from an agricultural society characterized by small towns to an urban and industrial nation, Jane Addams organized "Hull House" — a settlement house where young women lived and worked with local residents (usually poor, newly arrived immigrants). Serving a largely immigrant population, Hull House soon blossomed into a dynamic center of community life and social reform. Among other activities, Hull House initiated a home for working girls, a day care program, a Labor Museum, a club for boys, and a Little Theater. Addams became an active figure in urban politics, speaking and writing on legislative reforms to improve the lives of the working poor. Addams's publications on urban life include Hull House Maps and Papers (1895), Democracy and Social Ethics (1902), and The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets (1909). In A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil (1912) Addams argued for women's suffrage as a way to combat prostitution.

Addams also became a national leader in welfare reform and women's rights. She stayed at Hull House until she died. In this selection, taken from her classic work, Twenty Years at Hull House, she describes how she decided to commit herself to such an enormous and brave undertaking.

The winter after I left school was spent in the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia, but the development of the spinal difficulty which had shadowed me from childhood forced me into Dr. Weir Mitchell's hospital for the late-spring, and the next winter I was literally bound to a bed in my sister's house for six months. In spite of its tedium, the long winter had its mitigations, for after the first few weeks I was able to read with a luxurious consciousness of leisure, and I remember opening the first volume of Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* with a lively sense of gratitude that it was not Gray's *Anatomy*, having found, like many another, that general culture is a much easier undertaking than professional study. The long illness inevitably put aside the immediate prosecution of a medical course, and although I had passed my examinations creditably enough in the required subjects for the first year, I was very glad to have a physician's sanction for giving up clinics and dissecting rooms and to follow his prescription of spending the next two years in Europe.

Before I returned to America I had discovered that there were other genuine reasons for living among the poor than that of practicing medicine upon them, and my brief foray into the profession was never resumed.

The long illness left me in a state of nervous

exhaustion with which I struggled for years, traces of it remaining long after Hull-House was opened in 1889. At the best it allowed me but a limited amount of energy, so that doubtless there was much nervous depression at the foundation of the spiritual struggles which [I struggled with.] However, it could not have been all due to my health, for as my wise little notebook sententiously remarked, "In his own way each man must struggle, lest the moral law become a far-off abstraction utterly separated from his active life."

It would, of course, be impossible to remember that some of these struggles ever took place at all, were it not for these selfsame notebooks, in which, however, I no longer wrote in moments of high resolve, but judging from the internal evidence afforded by the books themselves, only in moments of deep depression when overwhelmed by a sense of failure.

One of the most poignant of these experiences, which occurred during the first few months after our landing upon the other side of the Atlantic, was on a Saturday night, when I received an ineradicable impression of the wretchedness of East London, and also saw for the first time the overcrowded quarters of a great city at midnight. A small party of tourists were taken to the East End by a city missionary to witness the Saturday night sale of decaying vegetables and fruit, which, owing to the Sunday laws in London, could not



be sold until Monday, and, as they were beyond safe keeping, were disposed of at auction as late as possible on Saturday night. On Mile End Road, from the top of an omnibus which paused at the end of a dingy street lighted by only occasional flares of gas, we saw two huge masses of ill-clad people clamoring around two hucksters' carts. They were bidding their farthings and ha'pennies for a vegetable held up by the auctioneer, which he at last scornfully flung, with a gibe for its cheapness, to the successful bidder. In the momentary pause only one man detached himself from the groups. He had bidden in a cabbage, and when it struck his hand, he instantly sat down on the curb, tore it with his teeth, and hastily devoured it, unwashed and uncooked as it was. He and his fellows were types of the "submerged tenth," as our missionary guide told us, with some little satisfaction in the then new phrase, and he further added that so many of them could scarcely be seen in one spot save at this Saturday night auction, the desire for cheap food being apparently the one thing which could move them simultaneously. They were huddled into ill-fitting, cast-off clothing, the ragged finery which one sees only in East London. Their pale faces were dominated by the most unlovely of human expressions, the cunning and shrewdness if he cannot make a successful trade, and yet the final impression was not of the ragged and tawdry clothing nor of the pinched and sallow faces, but of the myriads of hands, empty, pathetic, nerveless and workworn, showing white in the uncertain light of the street, and clutching forward for food which already was unfit to eat.

Perhaps nothing is so fraught with significance as the human hand, the oldest tool with which man has dug his way from savagery, and with which he is constantly groping forward. I have never since been able to see a number of hands held upward, even when they are moving rhythmically in a calisthenic exercise, or when they belong to a class of chubby children who wave them in eager response to a teacher's query, without a certain revival of this memory, a clutching at the heart reminiscent of the despair and resentment which seized me then.

For the following weeks I went around London almost furtively, afraid to look down narrow streets and alleys lest they disclose again this hideous human need and suffering. I carried with me for days at a time that curious surprise we experience when we first come back into the streets after days given over to sorrow or

death; we are bewildered that the world should be going on as usual, unable to determine which is real, the inner pang or the outward seeming. In time all huge London came to seem unreal save the poverty in its East End. During the following two years on the continent, while I was irresistibly drawn to the poorer quarters of each city, nothing among the beggars of South Italy nor among the saltminers of Austria carried with it the same conviction of human wretchedness which was conveyed by this momentary glimpse of an East London street. It was, of course, a most fragmentary and lurid view of the poverty of East London, and quite unfair. I should have been shown either less or more, for I went away with no notion of the hundreds of men and women who had gallantly identified their fortunes with these empty-handed people, and who, in church and chapel, "relief works," and charities, were at least making an effort towards its mitigation.

Our visit was made in November, 1883, the very year when the *Pall Mall Gazette* exposure started "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London," and the conscience of England was stirred as never before over this joyless city in the East End of its capital. Even then, vigorous and drastic plans were being discussed, and a splendid program of municipal reforms was already dimly outlined. Of all these, however, I had heard nothing but the vaguest rumor.

No comfort came to me then from any source, and the painful impression was increased because at the very moment of looking down the East London street from the top of the omnibus, I had been sharply and painfully reminded of "The Vision of Sudden Death" which had confronted De Quincey one summer's night as he was being driven through southern England on a high mail coach. Two absorbed lovers suddenly appear between the narrow, blossoming hedgerows in the direct path of the huge vehicle which is sure to crush them to the death. De Quincey tries to send them a warning shout, but finds himself unable to make a sound because his mind is hopelessly entangled in an endeavor to recall the exact lines from the "Iliad" which describe the great cry with which Achilles alarmed all Asia militant.

Only after his memory responds is his will released from its momentary paralysis, and he rides on through the fragrant night with the horror of the escaped calamity thick upon him, but he also bears with him the consciousness that he had given himself over



many years to classic learning — that when suddenly called upon for a quick decision in the world of life and death, he had been able to act only through a literary suggestion.

This is what we were all doing, lumbering our minds with literature that only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes. It seemed to me too preposterous that in my first view of the horror of East London, I should have recalled De Quincey's literary description of the literary suggestion which had once paralyzed him. In my disgust it all appeared a hateful, vicious circle which even the apostles of culture themselves admitted, for had not one of the greatest among the moderns plainly said that "conduct, and not culture is three fourths of human life."

For two years in the midst of my distress over the poverty, which, thus suddenly driven into my consciousness, had become to me the "Weltschmerz," [deep sadness] there was mingled a sense of futility, of misdirected energy, the belief that the pursuit of cultivation would not in the end bring either solace or relief. I gradually reached a conviction that the first generation of college women had taken their learning too quickly, had departed too suddenly from the active, emotional life led by their grandmothers and great-grandmothers; that the contemporary education of young women had developed too exclusively the power of acquiring knowledge and of merely receiving impressions; that somewhere in the process of "being educated" they had lost that simple and almost automatic response to the human appeal, that old healthful reaction resulting in activity from the mere presence of suffering or of helplessness; that they are so sheltered and pampered they have no chance even to make "the great refusal."



I remember a happy busy mother who, complacent with the knowledge that her daughter daily devoted four hours to her music, looked up from her knitting to say, "If I had had your opportunities when I was young, my dear, I should have been a very happy girl. I always had musical talent, but such training as I had, foolish little songs and waltzes and not time for half an hour's practice a day."

The mother did not dream of the sting her words left and that the sensitive girl appreciated only too well that her opportunities were fine and unusual,

but she also knew that in spite of some facility and much good teaching she had no genuine talent and never would fulfill the expectations of her friends. She looked back upon her mother's girlhood with positive envy because it was so full of happy industry and extenuating obstacles, with undisturbed opportunity to believe that her talents were unusual. The girl looked wistfully at her mother, but had not the courage to cry out what was in her heart, "I might believe I had unusual talent if I did not know what good music was; I might enjoy half an hour's practice a day if I were busy and happy the rest of the time. You do not know what life means when all the difficulties are removed! I am simply smothered and sickened with advantages. It is like eating a sweet dessert the first thing in the morning."

This, then, was the difficulty, this sweet dessert in the morning and the assumption that the sheltered, educated girl has nothing to do with the bitter poverty and the social maladjustment which is all about her, and which, after all, cannot be concealed, for it breaks through poetry and literature in a burning tide which overwhelms her; it peers at her in the form of heavy-laden market women and underpaid street laborers, gibing her with a sense of her uselessness.

I recall one snowy morning in Saxe-Coburg, looking from the window of our little hotel upon the town square, that we saw crossing and recrossing it a single file of women with semicircular heavy wooden tanks fastened upon their backs. They were carrying in this primitive fashion to a remote cooling room these tanks filled with a hot brew incident to one stage of beer making. The women were bent forward, not only under the weight which they were bearing, but because the tanks were so high that it would have been impossible for them to have lifted their heads. Their faces and hands, reddened in the cold morning air, showed clearly the white scars where they had been previously scalded by the hot stuff which splashed if they stumbled ever so little on their way. Stung into action by one of those sudden indignations against cruel conditions which at times fill the young with unexpected energy, I found myself across the square in company with my host, interviewing the phlegmatic owner of the brewery who received us with exasperating indifference, or rather received me, for the innkeeper mysteriously slunk away as soon as the great magnate of the town began to speak. I went back to a breakfast for which I had lost my appetite, as I had for Gray's *Life of Prince Albert* and his



wonderful tutor, Baron Stockmar, which I had been reading late the night before. The book had lost its fascination; how could a good man, feeling so keenly his obligation "to make princely the mind of his prince," ignore such conditions of life for the multitude of humble, hard-working folk. We were spending two months in Dresden that winter, given over to much reading of *The History of Art* and to much visiting of its art gallery and opera house, and after such an experience I would invariably suffer a moral revulsion against this feverish search after culture. It was doubtless in such moods that I founded my admiration for Albrecht Durer, taking his wonderful pictures, however, in the most unorthodox manner, merely as human documents. I was chiefly appealed to by his unwillingness to lend himself to a smooth and cultivated view of life, by his determination to record its frustrations and even the hideous forms which darken the day for our human imagination and to ignore no human complications. I believed that his canvases intimated the coming religious and social changes of the Reformation and the peasants' wars, that they were surcharged with pity for the downtrodden, that his sad knights, gravely standing guard, were longing to avert that shedding of blood which is sure to occur when men forget how complicated life is and insist upon reducing it to logical dogmas.



The two years which elapsed before I again

found myself in Europe brought their inevitable changes. Family arrangements had so come about that I had spent three or four months of each of the intervening winters in Baltimore, where I seemed to have reached the nadir of my nervous depression and sense of maladjustment, in spite of my interest in the fascinating lectures given there by Lanciani of Rome, and a definite course of reading under the guidance of a Johns-Hopkins lecturer upon the United Italy movement. In the latter I naturally encountered the influence of Mazzini, which was a source of great comfort to me, although perhaps I went too suddenly from a contemplation of his wonderful ethical and philosophical appeal to the workingmen of Italy, directly to the lecture rooms at Johns Hopkins University, for I was certainly much disillusioned at this time as to the effect of intellectual pursuits upon moral development.

The summers were spent in old home in

northern Illinois and one Sunday morning I received the rite of baptism and became a member of the Presbyterian church in the village. At this time there was certainly no outside pressure pushing me towards such a decision, and at twenty-five one does not ordinarily take such a step from a mere desire to conform. While I was not conscious of any emotional "conversion," I took upon myself the outward expressions of the religious life with all humility and sincerity. It was doubtless true that I was

"Weary of myself and sick of asking
What I am and what I ought to be,"

and that various cherished safeguards and claims to self-dependence had been broken into by many piteous failures. But certainly I had been brought to the conclusion that "sincerely to give up one's conceit or hope of being good in one's own right is the only door to the Universe's deeper reaches." Perhaps the young clergyman recognized this as the test of the Christian temper, at any rate he required little assent to dogma or miracle, and assured me that while both the ministry and the officers of his church were obliged to subscribe to doctrines of well-known severity, the faith required of the laity was almost early Christian in its simplicity. I was conscious of no change from my childish acceptance of the teachings of the Gospels, but at this moment something persuasive within made me long for an outward symbol of fellowship, some bond of peace, some blessed spot where unity of spirit might claim right of way over all differences. There was also growing within me an almost passionate devotion to the ideals of democracy, and when in all history had these ideals been so thrillingly expressed as when the faith of the fisherman and the slave had been boldly opposed to the accepted moral belief that the well-being of a privileged few might justly be built upon the ignorance and sacrifice of the many? Who was I, with my dreams of universal fellowship, that I did not identify myself with the institutional statement of this belief, as it stood in the little village in which I was born, and without which testimony in each remote hamlet of Christendom it would be so easy for the world to slip back into the doctrines of selection and aristocracy?



It was during this second journey to Europe that I attended a meeting of the London match girls who



were on strike and who met daily under the leadership of well-known labor men of London. The low wages that were reported at the meetings, the phoshy jaw which was described and occasionally exhibited, the appearance of the girls themselves I did not, curiously enough, in any wise connect with what was called the labor movement, nor did I understand the efforts of the London trades-unionists, concerning whom I held the vaguest notions. But of course this impression of human misery was added to the others which were already making me so wretched. I think that up to this time I was still filled with the sense which, Wells describes in one of his young characters, that somewhere in Church or State are a body of authoritative people who will put things to rights as soon as they really know what is wrong. Such a young person persistently believes that behind all suffering, behind sin and want, must lie redeeming magnanimity. He may imagine the world to be tragic and terrible, but it never for an instant occurs to him that it may be contemptible or squalid or self-seeking. Apparently I looked upon the efforts of the trades-unionists as a manifestation of [my growing faith in] "loyalty to humanity" and an attempt to aid in its progress.



It is hard to tell just when the very simple plan, which afterward developed into the Settlement began to form itself in my mind. It may have been even before I went to Europe for the second time, but I gradually became convinced that it would be a good thing to rent a house in a part of the city where many primitive and actual needs are found, in which young women who had been given over too exclusively to study, might restore a balance of activity along traditional lines and learn of life from life itself; where they might tryout some of the things they had been taught and put truth "to the ultimate test of the conduct it dictates or inspires." I do not remember to have mentioned this plan to any one until we reached Madrid in April, 1888.

We had been to see a bull fight rendered in the most magnificent Spanish style, where greatly to my surprise and horror, I found that I had seen, with comparative indifference, five bulls and many more horses killed. The sense that this was the last survival of all the glories of the amphitheater, the illusion that the riders on the caparisoned horses might have been knights of a tournament, or the matador a slightly

armed gladiator facing his martyrdom, and all the rest of the obscure yet vivid associations of an historic survival, had carried me beyond the endurance of any of the rest of the party. I finally met them in the foyer, stern and pale with disapproval of my brutal endurance, and but partially recovered from the faintness and disgust which the spectacle itself had produced upon them. I had no defense to offer to their reproaches save that I had not thought much about the bloodshed; but in the evening the natural and inevitable reaction came, and in deep chagrin I felt myself tried and condemned, not only by this disgusting experience but by the entire moral situation which it revealed. It was suddenly made quite clear to me that I was lulling my conscience by a dreamer's scheme, that a mere paper reform had become a defense for continued idleness and that I was making it a *raison d'etre* for going on indefinitely with study and travel. It is easy to become the have dupe of a deferred purpose, of the promise the future can never keep, and I had fallen into the meanest type of self-deception in making myself believe that all this was in preparation for great things to come. Nothing less than the moral reaction following the experience at a bull-fight had been able to reveal to me that so far from following in the wake of a chariot of philanthropic fire, I had been tied to the tail of the veriest ox-cart of self-seeking.

I had made up my mind that next day, whatever happened, I would begin to carry out the plan, if only by talking about it. I can well recall the stumbling and uncertainty with which I finally set it forth to Miss Starr, my old-time school friend, who was one of our party. I even dared to hope that she might join in carrying out the plan, but nevertheless I told it in the fear of that disheartening experience which is so apt to afflict our most cherished plans when they are at last divulged, when we suddenly feel that there is nothing there to talk about, and as the golden dream slips through our fingers we are left to wonder at our own fatuous belief. But gradually the comfort of Miss Starr's companionship, the vigor and enthusiasm which she brought to bear upon it, told both in the growth of the plan and upon the sense of its validity, so that by the time we had reached the enchantment of the Alhambra, the scheme had become convincing and tangible although still most hazy in detail.

A month later we parted in Paris, Miss Starr to go back to Italy, and I to journey on to London to secure as many suggestions as possible from those



wonderful places of which we had heard, Toynbee Hall and the People's Palace'. So that it finally came about that in June, 1888, five years after my first visit in East London, I found myself at Toynbee Hall equipped not only with a letter of introduction from Canon Fremantle, but with high expectations and a certain belief that what-ever perplexities and discouragement concerning the life of the poor were in store for me, I should at least know something at first hand and have the solace of daily activity. I had confidence that although life itself

might contain many difficulties, the period of mere passive receptivity had come to an end, and I had at last finished with the everlasting "preparation for life," however ill-prepared I might be.

It was not until years afterward that I came upon Tolstoy's phrase "the snare of preparation," which he insists we spread before the feet of young people, hopelessly entangling them in a curious inactivity at the very period of life when they are longing to construct the world anew and to conform it to their own ideals.

Questions

1. Addams describes the situation before she founded Hull House as one of nervous depression and lackluster. Why is this? Do you think many people commit themselves to serving others out of depression? Is that a reasonable motivation to serve?
2. Addams implies that literature and education distract us from a natural emotional sympathy for poor people and to committing ourselves to service. Is this true? Is Addams implying that education is somehow bad?
3. What does Addams think service helps young people to overcome? Do you agree with her view?
4. How would you describe the transformation Addams describes here?
5. How does Addams' experience relate (or not relate) to her class background and gender?



JIMMY CARTER

FAITH IN ACTION

Jimmy Carter was the President of the United States from 1976 to 1980. One of the most well known public figures of our time, his work as a politician, humanitarian and diplomat has been guided by his devout faith. In the following excerpt from his book, reprinted with the permission of the publisher, Living Faith (Times Books (C) Jimmy Carter), he discusses his personal and faith-based motivations to serve others and tells of other morally and religiously committed Americans and their contributions to public life.

All of us wonder about our real purpose in life. For a few, this question can become a profound source of anxiety. When we have inner turmoil that needs healing, uncertainty about the meaning of life can grow into an obsession with self-pity or depression. For many people, much the best solution is to think of something we can do for someone else.

The Bible says that God will wipe away our tears (Revelation 21:4). Wiping away someone else's tears is sometimes necessary to help us dispel our own. No matter what we seek in life, we are more likely to find it if we are not self-centered but concentrate on something or someone outside ourselves.

In many ways, Rosalynn and I were devastated after my defeat for reelection as president in 1980. We had really wanted another four years in the White House and had many plans for ourselves and our nation. Now all these hopes were shattered. And, at the age of fifty-six, I was too young to consider retirement. After a few days of considering other possibilities that didn't appeal to either of us, we decided definitely to return home. We still had no idea what to do, but we learned from our financial trustees that our warehouse business had suffered heavy losses while we were away, and we were almost a million dollars in debt. It seemed that we might have to sell all our farmland to pay what we owed. In about three months, however, a large agricultural corporation decided to enter the peanut market, and they bought our warehouse and six others in the Southeast to give them an adequate supply of this crop. The sale price was almost enough to pay our debts.

When my term in office expired, we moved with Amy back to Plains, where she enrolled in the public school and we became, once again, full and active members of our local church. As we repaired our house and grounds, put a floor in the attic to store

possessions accumulated during the past nine years of public service and campaigning, became reacquainted with our farms and woodlands, and settled our urgent business affairs, we also tried to inventory what we might have to invest in a productive future life. We would build The Carter Center and write our memoirs. We also became involved with another interesting and challenging project: Habitat for Humanity.

Working with Habitat for Humanity has changed our attitude about how we can relate to those who really need help. In building homes with "God's people in need," we follow a few simple rules. Volunteers work side by side with families who have been living in subhuman dwellings. The future homeowners are chosen and most other decisions made by a committee formed within the local community. There is no charity involved, if "free handouts" is the meaning of *charity*. The homeowners must contribute about 500 hours of work on their own and neighbors' houses, and they must also repay the full price of their homes, to which they will then have clear title. This is possible because the houses built by Habitat are relatively inexpensive: much of the construction work is done by volunteers, and Habitat's policy is not to charge interest. This makes monthly payments possible from a very low income, even from a welfare check.

One of the greatest benefits of a decent home is that it gives its owners, often for the first time, a sense of success and fulfillment. Working with other volunteers on tasks ranging from clearing a lot to hanging curtains, laying carpets, sodding a lawn, and planting a garden, the new homeowners come to realize that they can take on difficult tasks and perform them. When they have moved into their own new houses, they are full-fledged citizens, with a new status and additional responsibilities. They must pay taxes, maintain their homes, and



seek jobs. Although Habitat cannot guarantee our homeowners employment, some of the volunteers observe their good qualities and often guide them to jobs that can support a new and self-sufficient life.

Habitat for Humanity was founded by Millard and Linda Fuller. Millard is a dynamic and charismatic lawyer; he and Linda are two of our closest friends. As students at the University of Alabama, Millard and a partner, Morris Dees, set up a number of imaginative entrepreneurial ventures. For example, they collected the best recipes from the mothers of other students and published them in fast-selling books. In addition, they obtained from university records information about every student and sought orders from their parents to deliver cakes or flowers on their children's birthdays. (Morris Dees later became a famous civil rights lawyer and the founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama.)

As a young lawyer and entrepreneur, Millard continued to be innovative and enthusiastic, and he was soon a millionaire, with so much money coming in from his business ventures that he gave up his law practice. One day, much to Millard's shock, Linda told him that she was leaving him and going to New York for marriage counseling because he was neglecting his family and seemed interested only in getting rich. Millard followed her and begged her to come back to him. Finally, in desperation, he declared that he would give away all his money and join Linda in any work that they could share.

He kept his promise, and they soon settled on the biracial Koinonia Farm. There, for five years, the Fullers joined in building houses for destitute black families. Then they and their four children spent three years in Zaire as missionaries supported by several Christian denominations and continued to develop the idea of organizing Habitat for Humanity.

The Fullers say that Habitat uses the "theology of the hammer" or the "economics of Jesus." By the time this book is published, Habitat will have completed homes for more than 50,000 needy families in about 1,500 communities in the United States and in forty-five foreign countries.

Now Rosalynn and I send out a large number of fund raising letters for Habitat, spend occasional days on projects near our home, and join with others for a week each year to build a number of complete homes. To date, we have done this in more than a dozen communities,

including New York City; Tijuana, Mexico; the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation in South Dakota; Liberty City in Miami; Philadelphia; Chicago; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Atlanta; Charlotte, North Carolina; and the Watts area in Los Angeles. In 1996, our project site was near Budapest in Hungary, and we plan to be in the Appalachian Mountain region in Kentucky in 1997.

Rosalynn and I enjoy vacations, and we could go to Hawaii or on a Caribbean cruise every summer for about the same amount it costs us to travel to one of the Habitat building sites. But when I look back on the last twelve years or so, I see that some of my most memorable and gratifying experiences were when I joined other volunteers and worked to exhaustion building a house along side the family who would live there. These exhilarating occasions have been rare in my life, but I have learned that the opportunities are always there, for any of us.

It is difficult to describe the emotions of our Habitat workdays. We see extraordinary commitments and lives changed among formerly forgotten people. On our first project, a nineteen-apartment dwelling in Lower Manhattan, one of our homeowners, a former chef named Roosevelt, was sleeping on the street when we met him. He worked with us on this large and difficult project, and when it was finished he lived on the first floor. Because of his fine character and good work, he became the building superintendent. One day while we were installing the roof, I finished a cold drink and began to crumple the aluminum can. Roosevelt startled me by shouting, "Don't bend the can!" I discovered that this was part of his livelihood; he supported himself and began making his monthly payments by collecting empty cans and bottles.

Later, at one of our projects in Puno, Peru, on the shore of Lake Titicaca, Rosalynn and I observed the local people building their homes far above the tree line, at an altitude of about 13,000 feet. There seemed to be an unspoken assignment of tasks, with the men doing most of the laying of concrete blocks and carpentry work on the homes. The women, some with babies strapped on their backs, were using small chisels and tin cans to dig a channel several hundred yards through solid rock to bring water from a small spring to the new dwellings.

In northwest Nicaragua, we visited a Habitat project with President Daniel Ortega and other Sandinista leaders. There, in an area with an almost pure clay soil too poor for farming, people were living in



wide open, three-sided shacks built of limbs and grass. The clay, however, made excellent bricks and roof tiles, and the homeowners and their families were molding thousands of them by hand. A small power saw was used to cut a few boards from the local trees (which happened to be mahogany), to create roof trusses held together by twisted strands of used barbed wire. Only some mortar mix and a few nails had to be purchased, so the cash needed for a house for ten people was only the equivalent of \$300 in U.S. currency. When homes were completed for every family in the village, the people continued their new industry: manufacturing and selling high-quality bricks and roofing tiles to other villages.

I asked a woman who lived in a Habitat home in Philadelphia what kind of dwelling she had had before. She replied, "There were just two good things in that old place: me and my husband." Another woman standing nearby said, "I've got two teenage sons, whom I rarely saw in the evenings in my other place. Every time the phone rang, I thought it was the police calling about my boys. Now, they're home every night, and they bring their friends to watch television, play games, or study. They said the other day that they used to be too ashamed to let anyone know where they lived."

A Habitat family in Olympia, Washington, had been living in an abandoned automobile. One of their children was an eight-year-old boy, who was very excited about getting a new house. When the family was chosen, he jumped up and down and shouted, "We won! We won! We won!" After the Habitat home was finished and the family moved in, the little boy attended a different school. He had always been in the "slow learners" class, but when he moved his records were lost and he was put in a regular class by mistake. No one noticed the error, and at the end of the first half year, his lowest grade was a B. Now he is still learning with the smartest students. This is what having a decent home for the first time in life can do.



Too often we think about evangelism only as preaching the Gospel, but there is also a powerful ministry in the alleviation of suffering, reaching out in harmony, respect, and partnership to others, and sharing life. One of the most significant aspects of the ministry of Jesus was the combination of his religious witnessing

with his personal service to those he encountered.

What was the main thrust of Christ's ministry? Did he just sit under a fig tree telling stories, or stand on a mountain explaining his theology? No. His ministry was tangible proof of his love for everyone, including the sick, the ostracized, and even those who were believed by their neighbors to be suffering the punishment of God for their sins. This was a powerful witness. Christ was a doer, one whose faith took the form of action, not merely words.

It is a real challenge to correlate our religious faith with what we actually do. In his epistle, James says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). James is not suggesting that we should ignore faith and sharing the Good News with others. He is saying that if we have faith, then we must show it by how we live, what we do. Even in a personal way, we cannot separate faith or belief from our actions or works. When I offered Rosalynn an engagement ring, we both realized that her simple acceptance of it implied the commitment of a lifetime. Similarly, when we accept the free gift of salvation through God's grace, it imposes an obligation — a pleasant one — to serve by striving to live in harmony with his teachings.

Jesus made it plain that he had not come to change "one jot or tittle" of the law (Matthew 5:18), but he went out of his way to demonstrate that a narrow, legalistic interpretation of the Scriptures should not obscure the real meaning of faith in God. He repeatedly forgave and healed people on the Sabbath, reached out to the despised Samaritans and to Roman soldiers and other gentiles, touched lepers and a bleeding woman without considering himself unclean, and condemned merely superficial compliance with the law. These differences with the religious authorities helped lead to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

Christ wants us today to follow his example by expanding the meaning of forgiveness, service, and love — all in a practical way. And he goes on to teach that this is the avenue toward personal peace and freedom. We're not putting ourselves in a cage by reaching out to other people — we're doing just the opposite. To me, Christianity is not a submission to restraints; the essence of Christ's teaching is to liberate us and give us peace.

A few blocks from The Carter Center in Atlanta is a place known as Café 458. There, homeless people can get a hug and a warm welcome, sit down at a table,



select the meal they prefer, and order it from an attentive waiter. Many of them have serious problems, including addiction to drugs or alcohol. The eleven volunteers, who live next door, get to know the “guests” well enough to refer them to treatment centers or to work with them directly.

A salesman, A. B. Short, and his wife, Ann Conner, a nurse-practitioner, opened the café in 1988, knowing that many people needed help but also realizing that standing in soup lines every day offered little permanent benefit.

The guests make table reservations for a month at a time, with extensions provided they are working steadily toward the goals they have set for improving their lives. More than 1,600 people have passed through Café 458, in the process regaining some of their dignity as human beings, and many of them now help as volunteers. Among those who have been through the drug rehabilitation program, only 8 percent have relapsed.

One man named Roy said he had slept in a Dunkin’ Donuts dumpster for ten years before being welcomed at Café 458. He then stopped selling cocaine, took a job with a landscaping company, made foreman in six months, and began to believe in God. He finally met his daughter, and he no longer lives in an enormous trash container. Treated with care and respect, Roy has found a new life.

Many of the people mentioned in this book are fairly well known, but publicity is not necessary for an inspirational life. We recognize Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Pope John Paul II, and others who have become

famous because, in their own ways, they have demonstrated their Christian faith. But Rosalynn and I have had many friends, most of them unknown except among their close neighbors, who have been able to live their faith by combining the apparently conflicting elements of strength and gentleness. These are the people who have motivated us and helped to transform our lives.

People [who serve] show that simple acts can be transforming and highly significant. Life is made up of an accumulation of habits, shaped by the day-by-day, hour-by-hour decisions that we make. There’s a need for me, as a Christian, to take a look at myself and my relationship to others, and ask whenever I make a decision, “What would Christ do?” When I remember and act accordingly, my life can be made more resistant to worry, fear, frustration-and boredom!

“Enduring faith” describes Annie Mae Rhodes, who survived a flood that destroyed her home. But what would I do under the stress of a terrible loss? Could I be equally resilient, forceful, courageous, and innovative, not based on my own physical strength or intelligence or ability to borrow money or to buy another house, but based upon my faith in God? What was Annie Mae’s most important possession—an automobile that has now been hauled off and crushed, an old dog, a modest house that is now just a pile of splintered lumber, or her religious faith, which sustained her in a crisis? Hundreds of flood victims and rescue workers were inspired by the quiet faith of a stooped, confident, quiet seventy-seven-year-old woman.



Questions for Discussion

1. What are the similarities between Carter and Addams? What personal problems does service address for Carter?
2. Carter distinguishes between “charity” and his work with Habitat for Humanity. What distinction does he make? Has your service been more about charity or does it reflect Carter’s view of Habitat for Humanity? Why? How does service make people responsible for themselves?
3. Carter brings up his Christian faith as a propelling reason to serve. Many people believe religious belief can lead to passivity and mere faith (a belief in God that stands apart from our relations with others). How does Carter see the connection between his social activity of Habitat and Christian faith? Do you agree with his view of faith? Can faith lead to inactivity?
4. Carter uses examples of Christ’s life. Should people be expected to live according to the principles of a supposed messiah?
5. Are you religious? If so, how does your faith relate to your involvement in service? If you’re not religious, what motivates your service?
6. Americans believe in a split between the church and the state — between religion (private belief) and public life (secular). Does Carter challenge this split or not? What do you think of this split as it relates to Carter’s and your own religious beliefs?



MARY LOU WOLFF

STIRRINGS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

In oral historian Studs Terkel's book American Dreams: Lost and Found (Pantheon Books, 1980 (C) Studs Terkel), Americans of different generations and from different parts of the country discuss their personal experiences with public life and community service. The following excerpt, reprinted with the permission of the author, tells the story of Mary Lou Wolff, who became a community organizer in Chicago in the 1960s.

We had history in school. I always felt a little uneasy with it. When I was a kid, if I went to the Chicago Historical Society, I felt strange there. I thought that was just for high-class people. I just felt foreign. I'd see some of the suits Abraham Lincoln wore or something. But I remember just feeling ill at ease. The words "democracy" and "government," they just reminded me of school and the nuns giving lessons. As if what they were talking about was musty and had nothing to do with living on Chicago Avenue. Yet I knew things were happening to me.

I read a lot. But it was the Nancy Drew series type of stuff. There was only one thing to be, I thought. To get married and be a mother of kids. My first inkling that there might be something else came when I was in high school. I joined a group called the Young Christian Students. We read things like social encyclopedias of the church. I began to be aware of things like social policies about labor. I had never heard of such a thing before, even though my father was a workingman.

I was beginning to meet a type of people I never met before. There were people from Europe, from worker movements, who would occasionally stop by. There were students. I liked hanging around there and talking to these people. They seemed to treat me seriously, as if I understood what they were talking about. Often I didn't, but they assumed I did. I liked that.

I went to a Catholic girls' college for a year. It was not upper-middle-class, but I thought it was. During the first week I was there, they had a tea to welcome the incoming freshmen. They told us what we should wear. You should have heels on and a pair of white gloves. That completely threw me because I didn't have a pair of white gloves. I felt completely

out of place. So after a year, I decided to quit.

I had romantic ideas. I don't know why I thought to be a worker, to work in a factory, was the best thing of all. Now I think it's crazy. I wish I'd stayed in that college.

I worked at a series of dead-end jobs. I made paper boxes. I soldered radio parts. I was a waitress. I was not successful at any of these things. Suddenly I realized how boring all this is. I was confused. Here was my romantic notion of a worker, and I didn't want to be that either. I once went to a candy company. They looked at my background, the little bit of schooling I had, and they wouldn't hire me. They said: "We think you're a union organizer." I had nothing to do with it. (Laughs.)

After a series of these crazy jobs, I went to work at the headquarters of the Young Christian Students. I edited a magazine for working women. I had a very small salary. Finally, I gave all that up and got married. I was twenty. After I had a few kids, I'd be reading the paper and I'd think about those people from the days before, and I missed them. The way I handled the feeling of vague discontent, I'd say: "That was all kid stuff. Now you have responsibilities. Put those dreams aside. That's over and done with. Those are crazy people."

I had nine children. It was absolutely full-time. Once in a while somebody would remember and say: "Could you come and give a speech?" I'd always say: "No, I'm a mother, I'm too busy." Sometimes I'd spend hours in a rocking chair with a baby, looking at him and wondering what was going on.

My friends were all very nice. We'd get together and exchange recipes for coffee cake. We'd talk about the drapes we were gonna make. I enjoyed all that. But I'd always come home feeling vaguely discontented. My husband made an effort to try and



understand what it was I was talking about. Often, he would throw up his hands and say: "Mary Lou, I don't know what you're talking about. What is it you want to talk about? Do you want to go out and buy a new dress?"

Around the time my last baby was about three, in the sixties, there was a lot of upheaval in the church. We were active Catholics. Vatican II happens. Questions of conscience are being raised. Questions of the war. Edward got to be seventeen or eighteen, and I began to wonder. Nothing political about it. I didn't want my son to go to war.

I didn't even know where Vietnam was. Also at that time, the older kids began to say: "I don't want to go to church." I couldn't comfortably tell them: "You're going to go because that's what we do." I'd find myself havin' a cup of coffee, and I'd be thinking that's a good point they brought up. It happened that circumstances all clicked together. The baby was of an age where I could leave her with the older kids. A new young priest came to our parish. I said to him: "So much of the church is concerned with the education of kids. We adults right now are not so certain of so many questions and upheavals and changes. Why don't you have something for us where we could sit and discuss? I'm interested in adult education."

After a few weeks, lo and behold, I don't know where he found these people. They lived in the neighborhood for years, and I never knew any of 'em. We came together in the basement of the rectory. It was a shock to me to find out they were all saying: "Yes, we have felt isolated. We had nobody to discuss any of these things with. We'd sure like to talk about some of the changes."

We decided to start an organization. This was the year there was an incredible number of dead elm trees. There's kids, delinquency, heavy traffic, all kinds of problems. But if we could get those elm trees cut down, that would be a good start. Everybody would see that right off the bat.

Some people said: "Let's ask the alderman." The rest of us instinctively said: "Why should we go to him? He had his chance and did nothing. Let's go right down to the department in charge of this." One woman, Dolores Cruz, toured every street in our neighborhood and made a list of every dead elm tree. A group went down and gave this list to the head of Streets, Sanitation and Forestry. He took the list, put it aside, and forgot

about it. Nothing was done. That was a lesson for us.

Dolores came up with a good idea. She made a sign for every dead tree in the whole area: *This is a Dead Tree. It Should Be Cut Down.* It made fun of the officials because they were always cuttin' down trees in front of people's houses, but they were the wrong trees. We had two hundred twenty-five signs up. Within a few days, all those trees were cut down. We learned our first lesson: calling attention, making fun of officials, and going over the head of the alderman.

There was another dramatic issue: a street that was made a speedway when they built the Kennedy Expressway. It was a neighborhood side street that became dangerous. For years we were trying to get stoplights. Nothing happened. There was a motorcycle accident. Two kids were killed. We visited every house, and the response was overwhelming. Three or four hundred people came to our first meeting. We started our organization.

I felt again: Okay, my duty is done. Now I gotta get back to my house. I went back home and started baking cookies again.

Then another little bunch of women said: "Why don't we have a Great Books discussion class?" We all laughed. No people in this neighborhood would be interested. This is not that kind of a neighborhood. Within a few weeks, we had a Great Books discussion class made up of just the regular working-class people. One of the first ones we read is the Declaration of Independence. We spent three hours discussing the first half of the first sentence. This is the first time I, as an adult, ever discussed with other adults what the Declaration of Independence could possibly mean to me. There were intelligent people thinking about the same kind of things that we were thinking about.

Every once in a while I'd pick up a newspaper and read about CAP, (Campaign Against Pollution.) Father Dubi was the young priest at the head of it. They broke rules. They carried on a fight against Commonwealth Edison and finally won an antipollution ordinance. They went into other issues and changed their name to Citizens Action Program.

Our neighborhood was right at the cross section where the Crosstown Expressway was going to be built. People are asking us where is the expressway going to be built, so we know what street it's gonna go down. Should we be opposed to it if it's on this street or opposed if it's on that street? Finally somebody said:



"Why should we be for it at all?" There was a moment of silence. We all looked. That's right. We don't want it at all! Somebody else said: "That's silly. You don't think there's any way you're gonna stop 'em. That's all set for years." The rest of us said: "No. We're not gonna have it come through."

CAP was organizing against it and asked if we'd be interested in meeting with some other people. We were invited to go on an action, which we'd never heard of. This was a new step in organizing. They were gonna go to the office of the alderman and ask him if he had any financial interests in the expressway.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. A whole new thing happened. We went to the alderman's office. Father Dubi was our spokesman. There wasn't room in the office, Alderman Pucinski said, so he'd come out. Pucinski said: "I'll just stand on top of this car here and talk." He took the microphone away from Father Dubi and climbed on the car. Father Dubi pulled the microphone away from him: "This is our microphone, we're using it." I was stunned. I couldn't believe this. A priest pulling a microphone away from an alderman.

We never saw anything like this before. After it was over, the crowd lingered around. Pucinski came out again and Len said: "Are you sure you don't have any financial holdings?" Pucinski got mad and said: "If you weren't a priest, I'd punch you right in the nose." Father Dubi pulled his collar off and said: "Go ahead and punch, try it."

The people I was with said: "Oh, come on, this is turning into a brawl." They were turned off by this. I thought it was great. It was connected with my impatience about too much talk. I began to realize I liked direct action. Not only was it more exciting, but it was a glimmering of the idea that you don't get anywhere if you talk too much. At some point, you must act.

Action. The word came into my vocabulary. They'd call up from CAP and say: "We're gonna have an action tomorrow morning at city hall." It would be a confrontation with some official. We were trying to see the plans for Crosstown. The officials wouldn't let us see them. It was as simple as that at first. They'd say: "It's not your business, you wouldn't understand them." Or: "We don't have them ready, we're studying them." We heard that many times. They'd been studying for several years.

Here, suddenly, was a group of people I liked, admired, saying: "You don't have to always be polite." This was a complete shock. That's something you're taught from the time you're a baby. If you want to get anywhere, you have to be polite. Follow the rules. If officials say, "Sit down and wait," you sit down and wait.

These people were saying you can stand up and demand things. At first, I was troubled by this. What does that mean? Do you insult people? I began to realize, no, I don't see anybody insulting anyone. I see people acting nervy. They're not doing anything wrong. They're just not agreeing to follow somebody else's rules.

I began to think there are rules made by some people, and the purpose of those rules is not really order. The purpose is to keep you in your place. It may be your duty to break some of those rules. I liked it, I enjoyed it.

We once went to see George Dunne (President of the Board of the Cook County Commission) when the board of county commissioners was in session. The commissioners sit down in a well, you're like spectators at the Coliseum. You just sit there and look. The commissioners are sitting in beautiful red velvet chairs. We arrived a little bit early. We had been there the week before, and George Dunne warned us he would throw us out if we ever interrupted the meeting. So what we did was to come early.

Everybody was standing in the gallery. We said: "Let's not stand up here, let's go down there." How do we get down there? There's no door. There the was a wooden railing that separated the spectators from the actors. It's easy. You just climb over the railing. Everybody climbed over, and were in the main section. We said: "While we're here, let's try out these seats. Look at those big seats. Boy, these look great, don't they?" The secretaries were horrified. They said: "You can't sit there, you people. Get out of there." We said: "Why? We're taxpayers." Everybody sat down in the seats. When Mr. Dunne came out, he was horrified, too, and said: "You people just better get out." We said: "No, we want to meet with you." He refused and went back to his office. So we sat there and had our own meeting in the seats. Now it's not a big thing, this kind of trespassing is just new to all of us.

Once we wanted to meet the head of a bank. We had a large group of people. The guards came out and said: "Don't step over into this carpeted area. This marks the corporate offices, you people can't step in it." I mean, it's not that important. But it became important



for us to say: "Are you kidding? Of course we can step on this. Here, watch our feet. We're going to step on this carpet. Now what are you gonna do about it?" (Laughs.) A lot of people think that's causing trouble. But it isn't that. Often you have to sit down and examine what rules are for. Some rules are good and some rules are just to keep you in your place.

I was always a very quiet, polite person. If I had to speak in front of anybody, my face would flush. I would get embarrassed. But the people from CAP seemed to see something different in me. They began to treat me in a way that I wasn't even treating myself. They expected me to do things I never thought I could do. Maybe I *was* different than I thought I was.

People were saying that I'm an organizer. I didn't know exactly what an organizer did. I thought of them as mysterious people. Later I found there was nothing mysterious about them. It was just the work they did. They gave me serious books to read about corporate America, things about expressways. Normally I would think: Let my husband read them. Housewives don't have time for this. But they'd say: "Read it and let us know what you think." I was flattered. At first I reacted out of flattery. But after a while, I began to realize they actually think I'm intelligent enough to know something serious. I was getting some knowledge

of politics, and some deep personal changes were coming about as well.

From that moment on, I began to think it was possible, though difficult, to have a democracy. It was an experiment, risky, chancy. But you couldn't say: "Okay, we got a democracy." It's an ongoing process that has to be carried on with each generation. All that occurred to me as I was writing the speech. I've done more reading and thinking about it since. And I know that's right. It was first time I realized what that was about.



[Discussing the American Dream...] I don't like the word "dream." I don't even want to specify it as American. What I'm beginning to understand is there's a human possibility. There are many, many possible things people can do personally. There are many possible things people can do publicly, politically. Certainly circumstances have to come together. How do you make them come together? That's where all the excitement is. If you can be part of that, then you're aware and alive. That for me is the dream, if you want to call it that. It's not a dream, it's possible. It's everyday stuff.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is similar between Wolff's and Addams' motivations for service? What prompts Wolff to become a community organizer — a sense of justice or just plain boredom with her lot in life as a housewife? What does she want that her family life cannot give her? How does she find it?
2. Wolff's community organization gets started by cutting down diseased elm trees. Why do you think they began with a small act like this? What does this say about the principles of community organizing?
3. What does Wolff like about organizing? She refers to, "Action" in her description about confronting the alderman. Is action the most important thing? Is this all Wolff learns through organizing?
4. Wolff describes differences between confronting public officials and insulting them. What does she mean by this?
5. What is good about confrontation and what is not? Where does Wolff draw the distinction? Is she right?



C. P. ELLIS

PUBLIC LIFE CHALLENGES OLD ASSUMPTIONS

The following selection is also taken from Studs Terkel's book, American Dreams. It tells the story of C.P. Ellis, a former Klansman who dedicated himself to overcoming racism and to working on community relations and public education in the American South.

My father worked in a textile mill in Durham. He died at forty-eight years old. It was probably from cotton dust.

Back then, we never heard of brown lung. I was about seventeen years old and had a mother and sister depending on somebody to make a livin'. It was just barely enough insurance to cover his burial. I had to quit school and go to work. I was about eighth grade when I quit.

My father worked hard but never had enough money to buy decent clothes. When I went to school, I never seemed to have adequate clothes to wear. I always left school late afternoon with a sense of inferiority. The other kids had nice clothes, and I just had what Daddy could buy. I still got some of those inferiority feelin's now that I have to overcome once in a while. I loved my father. He would go with me to ball games. We'd go fishin' together. I was really ashamed of the way he'd dress. He would take this money and give it to me instead of putting it on himself. I always had the feeling about somebody looking at him and makin' fun of him and makin' fun of me. I think it had to do somethin' with my life.

My father and I were very close, but we didn't talk about too many intimate things. He did have a drinking problem. During the week, he would work every day, but by the weekend he was ready to get plastered. I can understand when a guy looks at his paycheck and looks at his bills, and he's worked hard all the week, and his bills are larger than his paycheck. He'd done the best he could the entire week, and there seemed to be no hope. It's an illness thing. Finally you just say: "The heck with it. I'll just get drunk and forget it."

My father was out of work during the depression, and I remember going with him to the finance company uptown, and he was turned down.

That's something that's always stuck. My father never seemed to be happy. It was a constant struggle with him just like it was for me. It's very seldom I'd see him laugh. He was just tryin' to figure out what he could do from one day to the next.

After several years pumping gas at a service station, I got married. We had to have children. Four. One child was born blind and retarded, which was a real additional expense to us. He's never spoken a word. He doesn't know me when I go to see him. But I see him, I hug his neck. I talk to him, tell him I love him. I don't know whether he knows me or not, but I know he's well taken care of. All my life, I had to work, never a day without work, worked all the overtime I could get and still could not survive financially. I began to say there's somethin' wrong with this country. I worked my butt off and just never seemed to break even.

I had some real great ideas about this great nation. (Laughs.) They say to abide by the law, go to church, do right and live for the Lord, and everything'll work out. But it didn't work out. It just kept gettin' worse and worse.

I was workin' a bread route. The highest I made one week was seventy-five dollars. The rent on our house was about twelve dollars a week. I will never forget: outside of this house was a 265-gallon oil drum, and I never did get enough money to fill up that oil drum. What I would do every night, I would run up to the store and buy five gallons of oil and climb up the ladder and pour it in that 265 gallon drum. I could hear that five gallons when it hits the bottom of that oil drum, splatters, and it sounds like it's nothin' in there. But it would keep the house warm for the night. Next day you'd have to do the same thing.

I really began to get bitter. I didn't know who to blame. I tried to find somebody. I began to blame it on black people. I had to hate somebody. Hatin'



America is hard to do because you can't see it to hate it. You gotta have somethin' to look at to hate. (Laughs.) The natural person for me to hate would be black people, because my father before me was a member of the Klan. As far as he was concerned, it was the savior of the white people. It was the only organization in the world that would take care of the white people. So I began to admire the Klan.

I got active in the Klan while I was at the service station. Every Monday night, a group of men would come by and buy a Coca-Cola, go back to the car, take a few drinks, and come back and stand around talkin'. I couldn't help but wonder: Why are these dudes comin' out every Monday? They said they were with the Klan and have meetings close-by. Would I be interested? Boy, that was an opportunity I really looked forward to! To be part of somethin'. I joined the Klan, went from member to chaplain, from chaplain to vice-president, from vice-president to president. The title is exalted cyclops. The first night I went with the fellas, they knocked on the door and gave the signal. They sent some robed Klansmen to talk to me and give me some instructions. I was led into a large meeting room, and this was the time of my life! It was thrilling. Here's a guy who's worked all his life and struggled all his life to be something, and here's the moment to be something. I will never forget it. Four robed Klansmen led me into the hall. The lights were dim, and the only thing you could see was an illuminated cross. I knelt before the cross. I had to make certain vows and promises. We promised to uphold the purity of the white race, fight communism, and protect white woman-hood.

After I had taken my oath, there was loud applause goin' throughout the buildin', musta been at least four hundred people. For this one little ol' person. It was a thrilling moment for C. P. Ellis.

It disturbs me when people who do not really know what it's all about are so very critical of individual Klansmen. The majority of 'em are low-income, whites, people who really don't have a part in something. They have been shut out as well as the blacks. Some are not very well educated either. Just like myself. We had a lot of support from doctors and lawyers and police officers.

I had a call one night from one of our kids. He was about twelve. He said: "I just been robbed downtown by two niggers." I'd had a couple of drinks and that really teed me off. I go downtown and couldn't find the kid. I got worried. I saw two young black people. I had the .32 revolver with me. I said: "Nigger, you seen a

little young white boy up here? I just got a call from him and was told that some niggers robbed him of fifteen cents." I pulled my pistol out and put it right at his head. I said: "I've always wanted to kill a nigger and I think I'll make you the first one." I nearly scared the kid to death, and he ran off.

This was the time when the civil rights movement was really beginnin' to peak. The blacks were beginnin' to demonstrate and picket downtown stores. I never will forget some black lady I hated with a purple passion. Ann Atwater. Every time I'd go downtown, she'd be leadin' a boycott. How I hated — pardon the expression, I don't use it much now — how I just hated that black nigger. (Laughs.) Big, fat, heavy woman. She'd pull about eight demonstrations, and first thing you know they had two, three blacks at the checkout counter. Her and I have had some pretty close confrontations

The Klan would go to the meetings, and the blacks would be there and we'd be there. It was a confrontation every time. I didn't hold back anything. We began to make some inroads with the city councilmen and county commissioners. They began to call us friend. Call us at night on the telephone: "C. P., glad you came to that meeting last night." They didn't want integration either, but they did it secretly, in order to get elected. They couldn't stand up openly and say it, but they were glad somebody was sayin' it. We visited some of the city leaders in their home and talked to 'em privately. It wasn't long before councilmen would call me up: "The blacks are comin' up tonight and makin' outrageous demands. How about some of you people showin' up and have a little balance?" I'd get on the telephone: "The niggers is comin' to the council meeting tonight. Persons in the city's called me and asked us to be there." We'd load up our cars and we'd fill up half the council chambers, and the blacks the other half. During these times, I carried weapons to the meetings, outside my belt. We'd go there armed. We would wind up just hollerin' and fussin' at each other. What happened? As a result of our fightin' one another, the council still had their way. They didn't want to give up control to the blacks nor the Klan. They were usin' us.

I began to realize this later down the road. One day I was walkin' downtown and a certain city council member saw me comin'. I expected him to shake my hand because he was talkin' to me at night on the telephone. I had been in his home and visited with him. He crossed the street. Oh shit, I began to think,



somethin's wrong here. Most of 'em are merchants or maybe an attorney, an insurance agent, people like that. As long as they kept low-income whites and low-income blacks fightin', they're gonna maintain control.

I began to get that feeling after I was ignored in public. I thought: Bullshit, you're not gonna use me any more. That's when I began to do some real serious thinkin'.

The same thing is happening in this country today. People are being used by those in control, those who have all the wealth. I'm not espousing communism. We got the greatest system of government in the world. But those who have it simply don't want those who don't have it to have any part of it. Black and white. When it comes to money, the green, the other colors make no difference. (Laughs)

I spent a lot of sleepless nights. I still didn't like blacks. I didn't want to associate with 'em. Blacks, Jews, or Catholics. My father said: "Don't have anything to do with 'em." I didn't until I met a black person and talked with him, eyeball to eyeball, and met a Jewish person and talked to him, eyeball to eyeball. I found out they're people just like me. They cried, they cussed, they prayed, they had desires. Just like myself. Thank God, I got to the point where I can look past labels. But at that time, my mind was closed.

I remember one Monday night Klan meeting. I said something was wrong. Our city fathers were using us. And I didn't like to be used. The reactions of the others was not too pleasant: "Let's just keep fightin' them niggers."

I'd go home at night and I'd have to wrestle with myself. I'd look at a black person walkin' down the street, and the guy'd have ragged shoes or his clothes would worn. That began to do somethin' to me inside. I went through this for about six months. I felt I just had to get out of the Klan. But I wouldn't get out

Then something happened. The state AFL-CIO received a \$78,000 grant: how to solve racial problems in the school system. I got a telephone call from the president of the state AFL-CIO. "We'd like to get some people together from all walks of life." I said: "All walks of life? Who you talkin about?" They said: "Blacks, whites, liberals, conservatives, Klansmen, NAACP people."

I said: "No way am I comin' with all those niggers. I'm not gonna be associated with those type of people." A White Citizens Council guy said: "Let's

go up there and see what's goin' on. It's tax money bein' spent." I walk in the door, and there was a large number of blacks and white liberals. I knew most of 'em by face 'cause I seen 'em demonstratin' around town. Ann Atwater was there. (Laughs.) I just forced myself to go in and sit down.

The meeting was moderated by a great big black guy who said: "I want you all to feel free to say anything you want to say." Some of the blacks stand up and say it's white racism. I took all I could take. I asked for the floor and I cut loose. I said: "No, sir, it's black racism. If we didn't have niggers in the schools, we wouldn't have the problems we got today."

I will never forget. Howard Clements, a black guy, stood up. He said: "I'm certainly glad C. P. Ellis come because he's the most honest man here tonight." I said: "What's that nigger tryin' to do?" (Laughs.) At the end of that meeting, some blacks tried to come up shake my hand, but I wouldn't do it. I walked off. Second night, same group was there. I felt a little more easy because I got some things off my chest. The third night, after they elected all the committees, they want to elect a chairman. Howard Clement stood up and said: "I suggest we elect two co-chairpersons." Joe Beckton, executive director of the Human Relations Commission, just a black as he can be, he nominated me. There was a reaction from some blacks. Nooo. And, of all things, they nominated Ann Atwater, that big old fat black gal that I had just hated with a purple passion, as co-chairman. I thought to myself: Hey, ain't no way I can work with that gal. Finally, I agreed to accept it, 'cause at this point, I was tired of fightin', either for survival or against black people or against Jews or against Catholics.

A Klansman and a militant, black woman, co-chairmen of the school committee. Impossible. How could I work with her? But after about two or three days, it was in our hands. We had to make it a success. This gives me another sense of belongin', a sense of pride. This helped this inferiority feelin' I had. A man who has stood up publicly and said he despised black people, all of a sudden he was willin' to work with 'em. Here's a chance for a low-income white man to be somethin. In spite of all my hatred for blacks and Jews and liberals, I accepted the job. Her and I began to reluctantly work together. (Laughs.) She had as many problems workin' with me as I had workin' with her.

One night, I called her: "Ann, you and I should have a lot of differences and we got 'em now. But



there's somethin' laid out here before us, and if it's gonna be a success, you and I are gonna have to make it one. Can we lay aside some of these feelin's?" She said: "I'm willing if you are." I said: "Let's do it."

My old friends would call me at night: "C. P., what the hell is wrong with you? You're sellin' out the white race." This begin to make me have guilt feelin's. Am I doin' right? Am I doin' wrong? Here I am all of a sudden makin' an about-face and tryin' to deal with my feelin's, my heart. My mind was beginnin' to open up. I was beginnin' to see what was right and what was wrong. I don't want the kids to fight forever.

We were gonna go ten nights. By this time, I had went to work at Duke University, in maintenance. Makin' of very little money. Terry Sanford give me this ten days off with pay. He was president of Duke at the time. He knew I was a Klansman and realized the importance of blacks and whites getting along.

I said: "If we're gonna make this thing a success, I've got to get to my kind of people." The low-income whites. We walked the streets of Durham, and we knocked on doors and invited people. Ann was goin' into the black community. They just wasn't respondin' to us when we made these house calls. Some of 'em were cussin' us out. "You're sellin' us out, Ellis, get out of my door. I don't want to talk to you." Ann was gettin' the same response from blacks: "What are you doin' messin' with that Klansman?"

One day, Ann and I went back to the school and we sat down. We began to talk and just reflect. Ann said: "My daughter came home cryin' every day. She said her teacher was makin' fun of me in front of the other kids." I said: "Boy, the same thing happened to my kid. White liberal teacher was makin' fun of Tim Ellis's father, the Klansman. In front of other peoples. He came home cryin'." At this point (he pauses, swallows hard, stifles a sob)-I begin to see, here we are, two people from the far ends of the fence, havin' identical problems, except her bein' black and me bein' white. From that moment on, I tell ya, that gal and I worked together good. I began to love the girl really. (He weeps.)

The amazing thing about it, her and I, up to that point, had cussed each other, bawled each other, we hated each other. Up to that point we didn't know each other. We didn't know we had things in common. We worked at it, with the people who came to these meetings. They talked about racism, sex education,

about teachers not bein' qualified. After seven, eight nights of real intense discussion, these people who'd never talked to each other before, all of a sudden came up with resolutions. It was really somethin', you had to be there to get the tone and feelin' of it.

At that point, I didn't like integration, but the law says you do this and I've got to do what the law says, okay? We said: "Let's take these resolutions to the school board." The most disheartening thing I've ever faced was the school system refused to implement any one of these resolutions. These were recommendations from the people who pay taxes and pay their salaries. (Laughs.)

I thought they were good answers. Some of 'em I didn't agree with but I been in this thing from the beginning, and whatever comes of it I'm gonna support it. Okay, since the school board refused, I decided I'd just run for the school board.

I spent eighty-five dollars on the campaign. The guy runnin' against me spent several thousand. I really had nobody on my side since The Klan turned against me. The low-income whites turned against me. The liberals didn't particularly like me. The blacks were suspicious of me. The blacks wanted to support me, but they couldn't muster up enough to support a Klansman on the school board (Laughs.) But I made up my mind that what I was doin' was right and I was gonna do it regardless what anybody said. I tell people there's a tremendous possibility in this country to stop wars, the battles, the struggles, the fights' between people. People say: "That's an impossible dream. You sound like Martin Luther King." An ex-Klansman who sounds like Martin Luther King. (Laughs.) I don't think it's an impossible dream. It's happened in my life. It's happened in other people's lives in America.

When the news came over the radio that Martin Luther King was assassinated, I got on the telephone and begin to call other Klansmen. We just had a real party at the service station. Really rejoicin' 'cause that son of a bitch was dead. Our troubles are over with. They say the older you get, the harder it is for you to change. That's not necessarily true. Since I changed, I've set down and listened to tapes of Martin Luther King. I listen to it and tears come to my eyes 'cause I know what he's sayin' now. I know what's happenin'.



Questions for Discussion

1. How does Ellis come to support cross-racial alliances around community-based education? What does he have to overcome? What is his personal transformation? What event(s) spur(s) it?
2. How does contact with different people (for example people who differ in regard to race, religion, etc.) change Ellis? Does community service open up this possibility to others and to you?
3. What is the basis of common ground that Ellis finds with other people? Does this common ground exist for everyone? How can community service create common ground? Or can it?



DALOZ, KEAN, KEAN, AND PARKS, THROUGH THE TRAP

In their book, Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World (Beacon Press, 1996), the authors — Laurent Daloz, Cheryl and James Kean and Sharon Parks — explore the ways in which Americans contribute to the common good, thus building and strengthening the shared public space that anchors the American vision of democratic life. In the following excerpt from the book, reprinted with the permission of Beacon Press, Johanna Chapman explains her commitment to service in the local prison’s education program. She discusses her motivations and how they changed due to her service.

In a different age, Quincy’s Main Street would be swept every day. Trimmed curbs, generous sidewalks, crusty maples and elegant, preserved elms speak of an attention to tradition that self-consciously reflects the town’s patrician roots. Just down the street from the birthplace of John Adams is the Chapman house, one of the antiques on the street. Brick with white wood trim, it carries a modest “1832” above the handsome Georgian door. A few days after our evening at the prison, we open the low, iron gate and walk up the brick path.

Jo greets us warmly at the door. An attractive woman in her late forties, wearing casual slacks and a hand-knit sweater, she mirrors the simple elegance of the neighborhood. Taking our coat, she ushers us into the living room where we are welcomed by her grandmother’s silver tea set and a plateful of almond cookies.

“Can you tell us more about your work and how you came to it?” we ask.

“The work I value most is working in the prison,” she begins. “Expanding opportunities for inmates, doing educational programs. My work is to connect people from the community with the educational programs in the prison. We now have over 150 volunteers who offer programs for hundreds of inmates: tutoring in literacy, GED, English as a Second Language, Health Issues, Job Search, Anger Management, Calligraphy ... you name it.” She pauses for a moment. “But you know, that’s only half of it. It’s a dual goal, really—educating the people on the inside, but also enabling people on the outside to see the humanity of the people in the prison. It’s really about making connections across the walls, about feeling the self-worth of

everybody and of caring and supporting each other.”

“That must be interesting in a community like this” we observe, pointedly glancing across at the large oil painting over the carved oak mantel piece. Her quick laugh melts into a canny smile.

“Oh yes. People look at me and see the wife of a successful physician. I like that. They are usually a bit startled when I start talking about the prison. But they do respond. At first, they come in wearing their social service hats and their angel halos and are all set to do good for the inmates. One of the greatest thrills that I have is seeing them receive instead of just giving.”

“What kinds of things do they receive?” we ask.

“Just the basic surprises,” she replies. “You know, when you are from a privileged background and you first come into a roomful of prison inmates, you see only a group of men dressed in dark denim pants and jackets with white shirts. Every face seems the same, and you don’t even distinguish individuality of build. But in reality they’re all different—black, Hispanic, white. Some come from well-off families, others never had a chance. Everyone has his own private and painful story.

“Most people enter expecting them to be tough or stupid or mysterious. Everything conspires to have you see what you expect to see, and by the time you have gone through the Trap, you feel that everyone is suspicious of everyone else. But as you begin to actually look at the prisoners and make eye contact, in most, you see a softness around their eyes. There is hurt and real pain. Not ugly or intimidating—not meanness, but softness.” She stops for a moment in thought, then adds, “It is not so much that each man has a secret he is fiercely



withholding, as a question he is silently and warily asking. "Why are you here, and how do you see me?"

Then she observes that if the class being offered to the prisoners is about something like money management, or drawing, or something else that is primarily technical in nature, it takes time to get past the awkwardness, the not-knowing, the sense of distance. On the other hand, if the class is about something like managing emotions, or parenting, "You get through the discomfort in about two minutes." The feelings come through raw and poignant, and a human bond is formed between teacher and student, volunteer and inmate.

"These prisoners are human beings who are anxious to move on. Many are ill-educated, most struggle with addiction, but they also have goals and aspirations that are just as real as our own." She holds us with her eyes as she says this. She means it.

Jo is particularly gratified by the success of the "Alternatives to Violence" program in which Quincy residents spend sixteen hours with a group of inmates over a weekend. "It's very intense. We talk about the roots of anger, how to deal with it, and the transforming power that can come from anger. People from this community very quickly realize that they could have been in prison too, because their own anger has been just as powerful, and they have as many problems in dealing with it. So there's a lot of commonality that they begin to share and feel."

"So how does someone like you get involved in a prison?" we ask.

"Well, I guess I've had this philosophy all my life about giving back to society in some form or another. I was trained as a schoolteacher, taught first grade, and stopped when my daughters needed me at home. When we moved to Quincy, we went to the Unitarian Church. The girls were in school by then, so I looked over the committees and saw 'Social Action Committee.'

"I went to the meeting and I'll never forget it because it just blew my mind. I expected to be part of a group to plan activities. But the chair of the committee just said, 'This committee operates a little differently than most committees—each one of us dreams up our own project and does it.' So instead of becoming part of a group I was out there by myself trying to figure out what to do."

"You didn't just turn off and never come

back?" we ask.

"No. I thought, 'Well, okay, what am I going to do as a project?' We lived not too far from the prison, and I was curious about it. So I went over and met the superintendent and told him that I was to do a project for my church and did he have anything for volunteers to do?"

"Looking back on it," she laughs, "it must have been hysterical. Here's Miss Goody-Goody Two Shoes coming in, and he had no idea what to do with me. But he said they could use some curtains in the infirmary. So I said, fine. And I didn't even know how to sew!"

Jo went back home, pulled together a group of women, and they sewed a barrage of sunny, yellow curtains. Later, they hung Christmas decorations in the dining hall. Before long, they had involved several other churches. They did a show of the men's art, wrote a weekly newspaper column, established links with the library, lobbied at the State House. Ultimately, her network became the established funnel for local funds; they developed courses inside the walls, and perhaps most importantly, helped to educate people outside the walls by bringing them through the Trap.

Jo's movement over the years from gathering curtains to gathering energy, time, and money from the community was not without its struggles and doubts. "Prison administrations change," she tells us, "and sometimes the doors are closed to volunteers. Like right now, the superintendent is great, but he has to work in a system where budgets are being cut and at the same time stretched to fill gaps of tragic proportions. The public mood is that prisoners should just bust rocks. They've just taken TV away and cut back on our courses. It's hard when you see people who have had their first positive learning experience suddenly abandoned. Sometimes the waste is overwhelming. And it's sad to see how the stresses on the guards have some of the same consequences—alcoholism, broken homes, limited hopes—all of which play out on the prisoners. The whole system costs far more than the budget can ever show. We have to keep asking ourselves who we can really help." She pauses and looks down for a moment.

"Yet sometimes I'm my own challenge. I've always had a lot of insecurity. I've always thought of myself as reticent about speaking out. I find I'm always telling myself that I can be better, that I'm never quite good enough. But it's also one of the things that propels me to keep going. That and seeing the ones who make it



— and the people in the community who change.

“People have come to work in the prison who you’d never think would set foot in one. The backgrounds and expertise they have are really amazing. And some become transformed people. Several have redirected their careers because of their experience at the prison, and most come to understand issues of crime very differently than they did before.”

“So you are a kind of bridge?”

“That’s my greatest joy. And you can see a kind of ripple effect. I have people coming up to me all the time saying, ‘I know the kind of things you’re doing at the prison and some day I’ll get involved.’ It astounds me. At least, they know it’s there.”

According to the brochure, the purpose of Barton Penitentiary Outreach is to provide educational programs for the inmates. But the larger truth is captured by a logo of clasped hands linking “programs

in the prison” with “programs in the community.” Thus, Jo’s story is an important moral tale, not because it is a story of noblesse oblige, which it is, but because it is a story of people encountering each other across conventional social boundaries and learning to see one another in more truthful and responsible ways.

“Morality begins precisely when my egoism has been called into question, and I learn to take the other into account,” says Thomas Ogletree. According to Jo, almost without exception, the people from her community who have worked in the Prison say that what they have learned is how human the inmates are. They have learned how to “take the other into account.” Conversely, prisoners have learned that townspeople are also more human than their stereotypes have allowed. Jo and her colleagues have found a way to bring together people of very different backgrounds to discover a shared humanity. This discovery of shared bonds lies at the heart of commitment to the common good.

Questions for Discussion

1. Chapman admits coming from a wealthy background. She criticizes the “noblesse oblige” attitude of many service participants. She says, “one of the greatest thrills that I have is seeing [volunteers] receive instead of just giving.” What does she mean by this? Do you agree with her analysis?
2. Trace Chapman’s own journey through service. How does she begin? What motivates her? How have her thoughts and opinions changed through service? Can you trace your own journey through service? Have any of your ideas or assumptions been challenged? How?
3. For Chapman, what does service teach people?
4. Should service be about feelings and changing your feelings towards others? What is the difference between relationships and feelings?
5. Is compassion towards a prisoner a good thing, as Chapman describes it? What do you think and why?



MYLES HORTON

THE BEGINNINGS OF HIGHLANDER

*Myles Horton started the Highlander Folk School during the 1930s (it still exists today). This school has educated people for taking a part in community and social change initiatives. For instance, Rosa Parks, one of the most famous initiators of the civil rights movement, attended the Highlander Folk School during the 1950s. In the following selection, Myles Horton explains his motivations in starting the school. He tells readers a great deal about how he saw his efforts in relation to community education and to American democracy. This selection is reprinted, with permission from the publisher, from his autobiographical book, *The Long Haul*, written by Horton and Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl (Doubleday, 1990 (C) Horton and Kohl).*

“I would like to see a school where young men and women will have close contact with teachers, will learn how to take their place intelligently in a changing world. In a few months, free from credits and examinations, utilizing only such methods as individual requirements called for ... it is hoped that by a stimulating presentation of material and study of actual situations, the students will be able to make decisions for themselves and act on the basis of an enlightened judgment.”

I wrote these words in 1931. I decided I didn't want to work on mass education, to do something that would cover the country. I wanted to use education in such a way that I could find out whether I was succeeding in achieving what I'd set out to do.

The kind of education I started had to be manageable enough for me to know whether it was useful. Therefore, I decided to work with a small number of people. Now, if you're going to work with small groups and your aim is to change society, and you know that you need masses of people to accomplish that, you have to work with those people who can multiply what you do. It isn't a matter of having each one teach one. It's a matter of having a concept of education that is yeasty, one that will multiply itself. You have to think in terms of which small groups have the potential to multiply themselves and fundamentally change society.

Therefore, you can't have each individual go her or his own way and work separately. The people you deal with have to work with you in the name of a group, not for their own personal reasons. It was clear that you had to work with a union, a commune, a

cooperative or a community organization; any kind of cohesive group that had a particular aim compatible with the philosophy of creating some form of democratic society.

I realized that if I was going to develop a program where people could multiply themselves, I needed to know what these people should learn to do. Clearly they had to learn to value their own experience, to analyze their own experience and to know how to make decisions.

Since I chose to work with poor, oppressed people, I had to take into consideration that they'd never been allowed to value their own experience; that they'd been told it was dirt and that only teachers and experts knew what was good for them.

I knew that it was necessary to do things in the opposite way, to draw out of people their experience, and help them value group experiences and learn from them. It was essential that people learned to make decisions on the basis of analyzing and trusting their own experience, and learning from that what was good and what was bad. So helping people with decision making was clearly necessary.

It also became clear that there had to be a place where people could learn how to make decisions by actually making real decisions. That's how you learn anything - by doing it. I believed then and still believe that you learn from your experience of doing something and from your analysis of that experience.

Institutions such as schools and universities are not places where poor people feel comfortable. They can't be expected to make decisions in the presence of experts, since they are used to having experts make



decisions for them. Given that decision making is central, it became clear that I had to create a separate place where people could make decisions on things that mattered. They had never been allowed to make decisions on anything of importance in their own lives. In a factory you make decisions within the limits set by the boss. But here, at this new education center I dreamed of creating with other people, *they* were going to make decisions, the biggest decisions possible in that setup. They would make all the decisions having to do with their stay there, and what they were going to do when they got home.

Now I didn't know how to do all of this at the time, but I set out to find out how to make it work when I returned to Tennessee in the fall of 1932. While I was at Union Theological Seminary and trying to think through what would later become Highlander, I talked about my ideas to everybody I thought would be interested — and some who weren't.

Most people at Union Theological Seminary didn't understand the problems I wanted to work on. They didn't know the people in the mountains or mountain ways. Warren Wilson was one person who did, so I liked to talk with him. Harry Ward, Reinhold Niebuhr, Norman Thomas, Sidney Hillman and many others I talked with knew the problems of the cities, and they were generous, committed people who weren't afraid to take risks. I was working in my mind on how to deal with rural poverty, with land and mining and farming problems. Although these people didn't have specific answers for me, they had ideas that might be useful, and they helped me learn about strikes and organizing, about different people's struggles in the world and ways they went about solving them. I also learned how to get resources to support these struggles.

At Union the atmosphere was intellectual, the discussions very abstract, and I fell into the habit of conversation that was usual there. But then I had a completely different experience that was just as important, one which helped me understand how to speak to people. I spent some time that year working at the Worcester State Hospital on a training program for graduate students, especially theological students. Besides reading everything I could find on psychiatry and psychological analysis, I was put in charge of a ward. Before long, I was speaking hospitalese without even realizing it. One day a friend came with his girlfriend to take me to a house party with some other

people. When I started talking my new language, the girlfriend started to get a little angry. "I'm not a doctor," she said, "and I'm not insane. Quit talking to me like that, I don't know what you're talking about."

It hit me like a sledgehammer and I disciplined myself from that minute on not to use any of the words I had picked up in the hospital. That was a wonderful lesson to learn: you can't talk a technical language that's only understood among certain people if you're going to be with the masses of people.

All of us talked about setting up a school in the Appalachian Mountains, one of the poorest areas of the country. I'd bat ideas around with everyone, but none of these people had any roots in the mountains. I thought it would be advisable to find a place and bring in someone else who knew the region and the problems facing the people there before outsiders with no roots in the region came in. I said, "Let me go down and find somebody from the South, and once we get things started you can come down and we can all work together."



Friends from Union Theological Seminary started coming down [after a year], and from then on we shaped Highlander together. At first we didn't have a very clear-cut idea of how to go about organizing the school. I've always been afraid of overstructuring things because I've seen the spirit of organizations killed by rigidity. We were still toying with ideas about how to set up Highlander when Jim Dombrowski arrived and put his organizing skills to work. We didn't have a charter, we didn't have a board. Since Jim thought the plan out, we asked him to be head of the school, but Jim, like the rest of us, didn't believe in hierarchical structures. He called himself executive secretary instead of director or president in order to be recognized as a spokesman without being the dominant person. They thought I had to have a title because I was dealing with the educational program, so I became educational director. We took turns teaching different subjects, partly because we wanted to learn all these things and one of the best ways to do so is to teach them. This also made it possible for us to cover for each other whenever somebody was away recruiting new students, raising money or helping out striking workers.

Soon after Jim Dombrowski arrived at Highlander, he moved up to Allardt to set up the first work



camp, where people quarried rocks for the school we were going to build there. He brought in workers from the mountains, as well as college students, professors and ministers, while I floated between Monteagle and Allardt. It was during this time that Don West decided Allardt was too far away from Georgia and that he would go down to a farm owned by his father to start another school. Don and I divided up what little we had — less than two hundred dollars, a sack of beans, some flour and books. He put his share in an old car and drove down to Georgia.

The large house that Lilian Johnson had lived and worked in was both our community center and a residence for two teachers. The first organized activities we had were social evenings in which people of all ages from the community gathered to sing, play games and talk. We only had one student from outside the community for the first residential term for workers, but later he was joined by several other students.

We didn't have any scheduled classes during those first weeks. Then one day the wife of a neighboring farmer, in remarking about her unruly child, started a discussion about psychology with one of the students and a teacher who had stopped by her house. The next evening they continued the discussion at Highlander, and at the request of some of the neighbors and the residential students, we began our first class, a class in psychology.

Before long a class in cultural geography grew out of a community evening spent around the fire looking at pictures taken in Europe. Then, when the students and teachers came back with reports about a coal miner's strike they had just visited, it led to a class in economics. During that first winter we held four evening classes weekly, with an average attendance of twenty men and women ranging in age from eighteen to eighty.

The residential students attended the classes and had individual instruction in the use of source material, writing and public speaking. In addition, each one got involved in the community. One young woman who could play the piano started a girls' club that developed into a music class. So many children wanted lessons that piano playing was eventually integrated into the local school curriculum. Another student organized a dramatics club, and members

produced plays about local situations for the whole community. A young man held educational meetings among the miners and relief workers in neighboring communities.

Out of this first year's experience there grew a program of community work, a residential program of short courses and weekend conferences, and extension work.

Although we accomplished some things by the end of that first year, we knew we really then weren't reaching people the way we wanted to. The biggest stumbling block was that all of us at Highlander had academic backgrounds. We thought that the way we had learned and what we had learned could somehow be tailored to the needs of poor people, the working people of Appalachia. We tried unsuccessfully although as creatively as we could to adapt those things we knew, using slides about Scandinavia and a series of posters about the Soviet Union. We still thought our job was to give students information about what we thought would be good for them. Whenever they had a problem, we would try to figure out what in our bag of tricks would apply to that problem, and we would adapt it and make it fit the situation. We ended up doing what most people do when they come to a place like Appalachia: we saw problems that we thought we had the answers to, rather than seeing the problems and the answers that the people had themselves.

That was our basic mistake. Once you understand that you don't have to have answers, you can open up to new ways of doing things.

Another idea we didn't fully understand is that one of the best ways of educating people is to give them an experience that embodies what you are trying to teach. When you believe in a democratic society, you provide a setting for education that is democratic. You believe in a cooperative society, so you give them opportunities to organize a cooperative. If you believe in people running their own unions, you let them run the school so that they can get the practice of running something.

We also found out that our talk about brotherhood and democracy and shared experiences was irrelevant to people in Grundy County in 1932. They were hungry. Their problems had to do with how to get some food in their bellies and how to get a doctor. We weren't equipped at all to deal with those



problems, so we took a good look at ourselves and said, “What are we going to do? We’re going to have to learn how people learn, and respect what they already know.” That’s when we finally understood that as long as we kept on learning, we could share that learning. When we stopped learning ourselves, then we could no longer help anyone.

In effect, we said, “We’ll go back to school with the people and learn from them.” Having these people teach us sounded right, but we were still caught up in formal thinking. We thought all we’d have to do was go to them and say, “What are your problems?” and they’d tell us. It was very naive of us to expect people who didn’t know us to tell us what their problems were.

Questionnaires wouldn’t work, either because we would only get what the people thought we wanted. As we began to learn that, we found out that even if people did understand their problems, they didn’t know how to express themselves in terms that had any relationship to anything we could do. We found out that people couldn’t tell us what it was that they wanted us to do because they wanted to make us feel good. They thought it would be impolite to ask us to do something that we couldn’t, and that it would hurt our feelings. Sometimes they didn’t say anything at all.

We had to learn a new language. We’d joke about the fact that between us we had several foreign languages: I knew Danish, somebody else knew French and we had somebody who happened to know Greek, but the one language we lacked was a nonverbal one the people spoke. Since we didn’t have the right language, we had to learn to observe people: to watch the way they related to each other, how they took care of their kids, and to be sensitive to their reactions to their experience.

We had to learn to watch people’s eyes. When they talked, they’d look at each other, and when they answered a question, they’d look around and we finally realized they were setting us up. We just had to learn to watch. That’s when we said, “We’ve got to learn a nonverbal language to be able to understand the people, because they’re not going to put it in writing.”

When you ask a question in a workshop, people will look around to see who’s going to answer it, or they’ll defer to a person they consider a leader and never say a word themselves. There has been a lot written about this kind of nonverbal communication, but we had to rediscover it out of necessity. That was part of our going back to school and unlearning and relearning,

and then learning to communicate with the people in Grundy County.

We also had to be careful about the things people simply didn’t want us to know. People felt that their private business was their own. Some didn’t want to talk about their religion. There wasn’t a single family in the area that didn’t have some member involved in making and selling liquor illegally, and people wouldn’t talk about that because of their fear that the family member would be arrested. Some of the families had illegitimate children, and they weren’t going to talk about that, either. There were always a lot of reasons for not talking, so we had to learn not to ask about certain things.

Once, I had to stop a visitor from pursuing a line of questioning. She wanted to be polite, so she asked a little girl who was visiting where her father was. I think the visitor also wondered if the girl was neglected. I knew her father was back in the woods making moonshine. The girl said, “I don’t know,” and the visitor asked, “You don’t know where your father is?” The girl knew, but she wasn’t going to tell!

It’s very important that you understand the difference between your perception of what people’s problems are and their perception of them. You shouldn’t be trying to discover your perception of their perception. You must find a way to determine what their perception is. You can’t do it by psychoanalyzing or being smart. You have to ask yourself what you know about their experience and cultural background that would help in understanding what they’re saying. You need to know more about them than they know about themselves. This sounds like a paradox, but the reason they don’t know themselves fully is that they haven’t learned to analyze their experience and learn from it. When you help them to respect and learn from their own experience, they can know more about themselves than you do.

I learned another important lesson that first year at Monteagle. We bought a hundred-pound sack of beans and a bushel of whole wheat that we’d grind up and that’s about all we’d eat. People were poor — we were all poor. One day I found a sack of potatoes on the front porch. I knew where those potatoes came from because there were only one or two people in the community who grew them, and I also knew they were very poor and had young children. My first reaction was “I can’t keep these potatoes, I’ll just take them back and



tell them how much I appreciate it.” But I got to thinking, “What a goddamned elitist person! You give your clothes to people, and you enjoy doing it, yet you would deny them the privilege of giving something to you.”

The significance of all this was that it prepared me to be in the circle of learners and to respect other people’s ideas. As well as giving my ideas, I was receiving ideas, and this helped convince people that I sincerely respected all they had to contribute.

People have to believe that you genuinely respect their ideas and that your involvement with them is not just an academic exercise. If I hadn’t had these rather emotional, traumatic experiences of learning, to the point where it became a part of me, I couldn’t have been natural about saying, “Look, you don’t really appreciate how much you learn from your experience, and how valuable that is, because you’ve never been encouraged to believe it’s important.”



I used to express a lot of anger, and I found out that it cut me off from people I wanted to work with, because the majority of them didn’t have that anger. Most were victimized by the system, unaware of how badly they were exploited, and consequently they felt no rage. Until people feel exploited and able to do something about it, they are not going to make structural changes. The number of people who are angry is not big enough to bring about social change. So, I said to myself, “I’ve got to find a way to work with people who should be angry but aren’t. And, if I turn them off by saying, ‘We’ve got to do this now, I can’t stand it any longer,’ and make it too much of a personal thing, then I’m not going to be able to make a contribution to any change. Somehow I’m going to have to channel my anger and my frustrations in such a way that I can deal with the people I want to help.”

I had to learn that my anger didn’t communicate to people what I wanted to communicate. It seemed to them that I was a frustrated liberal who wanted to get on in life and couldn’t make it. They felt that I was taking it out on the system, which wasn’t what I was doing at all. It wasn’t easy to get to the place where I didn’t scare people away with my determination to change a system that I believed to be wrong and unjust,

but I tried my best to avoid sounding like an evangelist.

I had to turn my anger into a slow burning fire, instead of a consuming fire. You don’t want the fire to go out — you never let it go out — and if it ever gets weak, you stoke it, but you don’t want it to burn you up. It keeps you going, but you subdue it, because you don’t want to be destroyed by it.

When I talk about a slow burning fire, I mean a fire that is banked for the moment. All the fire it ever had is still there. I can uncover a little bit at a time, and if it flames up too high, I can throw more ashes on it so it won’t come up and bum me, and everybody around me. But I don’t want to put it out, I want it to stay there. It’s there, it could flare up, and there may be times when it should flare up. What you need is a good backlog going all the time.

In slavery days, in some places, the slave owners would say to the slaves, “You can have a Christmas as long as the backlog burns.” If you have a big fireplace, you keep a huge log in the back that throws out the heat. Everything is built in front of it so that the heat can come out. The backlog is there, it slowly burns, it gets very hot and it makes better coals. You put a little wood in front of it, but it stays there and gives out heat.

You take ashes and bank it at night, and in the morning when you get up, the log is still red-hot. Then you take the ashes away and all you have to do is throw in some more wood. Now, the slaves would take a big log and haul it into the swamps and sink it. It’d be there all year soaking up water. At Christmastime they’d take an ox and pull that log out of the swamp and into the big fireplace as a backlog. It would last for two weeks because it was soaked in water. As long as that backlog was burning, they got a vacation

The important lesson is that you’ve got to keep that anger inside you smoldering. You don’t want to let it die out. Any time you want to build on it, to use it, you can make it burn very fast. Where that fire’s smoldering, that fire’s always there, always subject to revving up and getting going, but you’re thinking in long terms now, you’re not thinking in the short terms.

That’s when I started saying, “Horton, get yourself together, get ready for the long haul and try to determine how you can live out this thing and make your life useful.”



Questions for Discussion

1. Horton talks about the importance of learning from the people you work with in the local community. How did he learn this lesson? Did you learn from the people with whom you have worked? What? What might have prevented you from learning? What impeded Horton's learning process at first? Is Horton right that too much education can be an obstacle for learning from others?
2. Some might argue that Horton is pandering to average people and only pretending that he can ever break the divide between educated people and poor people. What do you think of this argument now that you have read Horton? How do you think Horton defines "educated"?
3. Horton talks about anger and his "slow burning fire." Has anger fuelled your desire to become active in improving community life? If so, how? Is anger a good motivating force? Are there, as Horton suggests, different kinds of anger?
4. Do you think Horton would see himself as a "server", an "educator" or "an organizer"? How do the lines between these distinctions blur? If you had to categorize Horton, how would you do so?



