

# THE NEEDMOR FUND: 50 YEARS, 50 STORIES







the  
Needmor  
Fund

1956...  
2006...

From  
Community  
to  
larger  
back  
to  
small  
to  
community  
to  
again.



The  
Needmor  
Fund

1956...  
2006...

She's a  
fresh world  
The best that  
she's got

Love it  
and

fresh world





## A FAMILY FOUNDATION REMEMBERS...



In 1956, Duane and Virginia Secor Stranahan created the Needmor Fund to facilitate our family's charitable giving – initially as individually directed grants, primarily in Toledo, Ohio. In 1974, hoping to maximize the impact of our charitable giving, we pooled our philanthropic resources and hired an executive director to lead us through the whole grant making process. Since that time, our work has been distinguished by a remarkable degree of family involvement, substantially enriched by non-family committee and board members. Together, we have worked through the difficult task of determining giving criteria and evaluating grant requests. In twos and threes, we have gone on the site visits which are central to Needmor's grant making. In the mid 1980's, community organizing became our sole granting focus.

We first encountered community organizing as we responded to a particular genre of grant requests coming in from all across the country. Groups of determined men and women had banded together to assert and reclaim their rights in the face of blatant and sometimes brutal systemic injustice. As we visited these groups, we discovered a fiercely democratic process called community organizing. We met its scrappy, brave, resilient leaders. We heard its David and Goliath stories. Each of us was powerfully moved, no matter where we were on the political spectrum. The Fund had found its mission.

*We want to share the good news: it is possible to bring about profound differences in the life of a community just by giving its members a voice. It is possible for even modest grants to help accomplish significant victories in the ongoing struggle for a more democratic society.*

To celebrate Needmor's 50th year, we have committed ourselves to a new goal: to widen our small circle of colleagues who fund community organizing. We want to share the good news: it is possible to bring about profound differences in the life of a community just by giving its members a voice. It is possible for even modest grants to help accomplish significant victories in the ongoing struggle for a more democratic society.

And we want other families to have the opportunity to work together in this compelling endeavor. In our years of work with Needmor, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, parents, and children have developed nontraditional and mutually appreciative relationships. Respect for one another despite differences of opinion instilled tolerance and patience. Successes and mistakes encouraged reflection. Shared remembrances and affection brought laughter. Our third generation, listening from under the meeting table, became imprinted with a passion for social justice. Today they lead Needmor; and they are engaged as well in vital, imaginative community service wherever they find themselves. A fourth generation is on deck.

Certainly, any family working together with common cause might find similar rewards. But we are convinced that working in relationship with gifted community organizers has imparted a unique energy, honesty, and clarity of purpose to our enterprise. We are supremely grateful that they have allowed us, the funders, to become trusted friends.

Good news is best shared by stories. Here are ours: recorded in person and on the telephone and at our 50th Anniversary Meeting in November, 2007. These tales are immediate, lively, occasionally apocryphal, and colloquial. We include, too, the stories of some of our peers and colleagues, pre-eminent organizers whose life and work define the term. Welcome to our table! We hope you will want to join our conversation.



# Contents

## THE MISSION AND PURPOSE OF THIS TRUST...

### History

- [1] The Bank Drawer
- [2] The Decision to Fund Organizing
- [3] Why Organizing?

### Elders

- [4] Duane's Great Gift
- [5] She Gave Us a Wink
- [6] Mother Did and Father Duane
- [7] Dinny Brought Heart and Soul

### Growing Up Needmor

- [8] They Told Us About the Heroes
- [9] The Next Generation
- [10] The Community on Board
- [11] What I've Learned from Needmor

## ...IS TO WORK WITH OTHERS...

### Site Visits

- [12] Brumley Gap
- [13] Hotel Martinique
- [14] New Orleans After Katrina
- [15] The 48-Hour Site Visit
- [16] The Job Referral Site Visit
- [17] The Border Site Visit

### Needmor at the Movies

- [18] Coal Employment Project, North Country
- [19] Karen Silkwood
- [20] Jane Fonda

### Relationships

- [21] New Orleans E-mail
- [22] Power Relationships
- [23] A Needmor Moment
- [24] Highlander

### Short Takes

- [25] Mardi Gras Site Visit
- [26] Reaganomics Song
- [27] Hats at the Board Meeting
- [28] Teamsters for Justice
- [29] Karl Stauber and the Water Pitcher
- [30] We Sat on the Floor

### Some People

- [31] Lois Gibbs – “She’s a Firecraker”
- [32] Columbus and Perry Perkins – Mississippi Woodcutters

## ...TO BRING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE.

### Mission Related Investing

- [33] The Decision to Screen
- [34] The Decision to Invest in Community
- [35] The Decision to Pursue Shareholder Activism
- [36] NCRP and Philanthropic Activism

### Needmor Firsts

- [37] The Original Living Wage
- [38] National Campaign for Jobs and Income Security

### Voice from the Field – Organizers Reflect

- [39] Frank Sanchez
- [40] Madeline Talbott
- [41] Maureen O’Connell
- [42] Josh Hoyt
- [43] Eliseo Medina

### The Moral of the Story

- [44] “Change the Ending”
- [45] “People Should Participate”
- [46] “The Arms of the Lamb”

- [47] “Changing the Landscape of Hope”
- [48] “Amazing Resilience”

### Benediction

- [49] Reflections on Needmor’s 50 Years
- [50] Tree Planting



# Mission, Vision and Values

## Mission

The Needmor mission is to work with others to bring about social justice. The Needmor Fund supports people who work together to change the social, economic, or political conditions which bar their access to participation in a democratic society.

## Vision

Our work is informed by a vision of justice:

- 1 We work towards a nation committed to democracy, in which all persons are free and equal to determine the actions of government and thus assure their fundamental rights. These rights include justice, political liberty, and the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, safety, access to health care, an education which enables them to be contributing members of society, and the opportunity to secure productive work with just wages, benefits, and working conditions.
- 2 We seek a society in which all citizens are free to exercise these rights regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or religious persuasion.
- 3 We strive especially to engage those whose participation in the affairs of the community has been systemically denied, because we believe our nation will operate most equitably when all of its people are actively involved in crafting the vision, values, and policies that affect their lives.

## Values

Our work together is guided by the following beliefs:

- 1 that every individual has inherent worth and has the right to have his or her voice heard; and
- 2 that diversity, inclusiveness, and the views of those with different backgrounds and experiences are central to responsible deliberation and decision-making.

## Practices

As a Board and in the field, we maintain the following principles of behavior:

- 1 Open, honest, clear communication. Acknowledging that communication is not one-way, but interactive, we will attempt to maintain active, respectful dialogue to clarify issues and dispel confusion. We will work to be sensitive to the perspective of the audience, aware of our own and others' biases, and open to disagreement and constructive criticism. We will seek to address and resolve conflicts maturely.
- 2 Mutual respect and attention to relationships. We will be mindful that the best work comes from people working collaboratively, which requires being responsible and accountable to each other. We will make every effort to respect and acknowledge the talents and the time and effort contributed by each of our working partners.
- 3 Honest, reflective, constructive learning: We will remember that our experiences as an organization and as individuals are invaluable. Risk-taking and innovation must be grounded in careful evaluation and examination of our failures as well as our successes.
- 4 Flexibility and responsiveness: We will try to understand, accept, and respond to the changes in each other and in our world.

## The Donor Family

We believe that the involvement of the Donor Family – their time, energy, knowledge, values, historical connection to Needmor, and their financial contributions – constitutes a vital resource for Needmor and should continue to be cultivated. We also believe that the family should serve Needmor rather than Needmor serving the needs of the family.

THE MISSION  
AND PURPOSE  
OF THIS TRUST

is to work  
with others  
to bring about  
social justice.



## 1 The Bank Drawer *[Mike, George]*

**Mike:** When Needmor started, it didn't have a board of directors, didn't have a staff. It really was a desk drawer at the bank, the Toledo Trust. What family used it for, and only family, was at the end of the year, if you had extra dollars to give away, you could plunk it into Needmor, and if there was a capital campaign or something like that, then you could take it out of Needmor. It was a piggy bank.

**George:** You'd put in before year end, so that you got your deduction, because it was a legitimate 501c3. And you'd spend it when you had something you wanted to spend it on.

**Mike:** Then Duane, my father, got the idea that we should try to do a better job. Because people would write us letters, and the bank would say, "We don't know what to do about a home for homeless cats," so they'd just throw it away, and that seemed not terribly good. So Duane brought up the idea, "We should hire someone to open these letters, and we should try to cooperate with other charitable enterprises for more effective charitable giving."

**Mike:** The board was everybody.



**George:** I think it was. You showed up, you were a board member.

**Mike:** And your partner if you had a partner, and your kids if you had kids. In those early board meetings, the kids would be crawling around under the table, and we'd always have toys for them to play with.

## 2 The Decision to Fund Organizing *[Mary]*

We'd been funding organizing beforehand, but we were in the mode of funding issues: "Lets fund education, social justice, environment, and population." It was becoming quite clear that in any of those areas of interest, it was the organizing piece that was giving the juice to our board members.

Dinny made a connection with Frank Sanchez, and the two of them brought the concept of community organizing to the foundation. And Frank was articulate enough to sway the board – because we were struggling at that point in time with "What is the focus of the foundation?" Frank is brought to the board meeting to talk about community organizing and democracy. It makes sense to us. The light goes off that this is where the rubber meets the road, where we can get the biggest bang for the buck, because of our radicalized experiences on site visits. Watching the lights in people's eyes go on around seeing they can actually make change by speaking at city council, that they can actually make government accountable. So that was the juice that got us going – seeing that democratic process, leadership development. That's what really excites us – when people get it that they can make change. That was a big moment.

## 3 Why Organizing? *[Molly]*

In the 1980's, Needmor switched from funding four program areas to one: community organizing. It was a number of different things that influenced that. Having four issue areas was always challenging for us. We would drop one area, and then pick up another area. Some areas, like the environment, were controversial for the family. We couldn't agree on whether nuclear power was good or bad. We could agree on people in communities that were affected by nuclear power getting to have a say in what happened in the community. That helped us to make decisions where our basic philosophies disagreed. If we could say, "Let's empower the people in the community affected to come up with the answer," we no longer had to come up with the right answer.

The other thing we looked at was what was really effective. We'd do an evaluation of our past grants and say, "What's really made a difference?" And "Which grants were the good ones, that had an effect?" We found that when we were funding community organizing, we empowered a group of people, that whether they won or lost the issue, they'd continue to be a voice for change. We also noticed that community organizing creates leaders. It changes how the people see themselves. In the beginning they see themselves as "I can't make a difference." They come together and they have a meeting with the mayor, or with the head of the school board, or somebody at Kerr-McGee. They're listened to, maybe they get some coverage in the newspaper, they may not get their way, but all of a sudden they got quoted in the newspaper. They are changed in a way. You can't step on them the same way anymore. So we knew that even if you lost the issue, you had changed lives. We also had this belief that if you want to make change, the most powerful way to make change is to engage the people who are affected by the problem.

I think another part of it is meeting the people in community organizations who are speaking up for themselves. It is incredibly



energizing. You feel like "I've met somebody who is a powerful person." They may not be Martin Luther King, but there's a small way in which they are.

## 4 Duane's Great Gift [Ann, Molly & Daniel]

*Duane and Virginia Stranahan created the Needmor Fund.*

**Ann:** I think Duane's great gift was trusting us. He brought his kids together with the idea of Needmor, and then he let them take it. He was a loyal board member way beyond the time when he needed to come to the meetings, and I'm sure beyond the time he wanted to come to the meetings, because he wanted to see his kids and his grandchildren. I think it really delighted him what he had done. It was such a huge gift, the gift of trust. He was never a dominant figure. There was never any patriarchal "do as I say." Way back when the family made the decisions, we could always count on Duane to kick in at the last minute, when we were out of money, and there was one final project that needed funding. He'd say, "Well, I'll tell you what..." It almost didn't really matter what was funded. Just the fact that an organization was out there doing good and his children and grandchildren were having a vital part of it.

**Daniel:** My grandfather Duane had an incredible patient regard for the next generation, despite the fact that they may not agree with the politics or the processes that his generation had to get things done. He had this amazing, quiet, intrinsic faith in understanding



that every generation has to figure out their own way to get things done. I think that's an incredible legacy because it respects your own point of view while it empowers those who come after you. He was a very quiet but powerful sort of person. It's imbued Needmor through the generations with that characteristic, and even imbued Needmor with that attitude toward its grantees. If we've chosen good grantees in the first place, then we can ultimately have faith in them to spend the money in a way that's right for them. We don't have to hover.

## 5 She Gave Us a Wink [Sarah]

Baldemar Velasquez is a long-time friend of Needmor. He works with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, which is an immigrant farmworker rights organization in Toledo, Ohio. He told me when he was just starting with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, someone told him that he should approach my grandmother. "We came to the door with mud on our boots and our hat in our hands to Mrs. Stranahan's big house. And she was so gracious – she invited us in and served us tea from a silver tea set. And we asked her to support our work to improve the working conditions of the migrant farmworkers. And she gave us a wink and said 'I'll write you a check, but please don't tell my son.'" He was representing Campbell Soup at the time.



## 6 Mother Did and Father Duane... “to better grasp the brass ring of democracy” [Steve]

I didn't really know what Philanthropy was in my early teens except for the discussions around the dinner table of community problems that both parents were involved in; it never occurred to me that this included charitable donations also.

Did could not bear the sight of an idle boy and found ways to keep us occupied, in hopes that it would also keep us out of trouble; and so for two or three summers she found volunteer jobs for me to do and I did them not even suspecting what this was all about. The jobs did open my eyes to people who had problems without the funds or experience to help themselves. Then a strange thing happened in my junior year in college, just before Christmas of 1956. I got a letter from the bank saying that I had a trust account which had what I thought was all the money in the world in it. When I got home for vacation Duane sat me down to say that he and Did had created a charitable foundation called Needmor, and how much did I want to contribute to it. That was my first inkling that philanthropy involved giving money away to others.

Ever since, I have pondered the fundamental motivation of Did and Duane in their charitable instincts and how it applied to the charitable issues they felt most strongly about; here's what I've come up with:



For Duane, it was a genuine instinct to 'give back' that reaches back a few generations to his grandmother Lizzie Whitehill Stranahan. She was widowed early, and his father, FD, had to support his mother and 4 siblings as a hotel manager before he met Albert Champion and made his fortune. Duane was an only child, a good, dutiful son. His final, gut instinct – as reflected in the charitable estate he left for his children to administer – was to provide relief from hunger, homelessness and family abuse. In

a more cerebral way, he had also conceived a philosophical paradigm of a world in sustainable balance between haves and have-nots, and available natural resources to support world populations. A world in such balance would be more equitable in the sharing of both economic and natural resources, thus making for a higher standard of living for this restrained population. This philosophy fell neatly into line with his support for population control, women's right to protect their own bodies, and an ethic that encouraged self-sufficiency and a more genuine democracy.



Did was the third child in a brood of two older rambunctious brothers and a then younger one. Her mother, Mame, was born into a family headed by a true adventurer and spent her earliest years amongst the winter blizzards of southern Colorado on a rapidly failing livestock ranch. When the family finally settled in Toledo, Mame married a successful entrepreneur named Secor and became a leader of women in social causes not enthusiastically supported by the male population. Mame's circle of friends often reflected this social progressiveness. Did had vivid memories of these activities in her growing up years.

Then she married Duane Stranahan from a much more recently successful family who was more cerebral than impulsive and progressive. She became a silent backer for an unknown army of people seeking better education, better access to power, and a faster track to their own self-sufficiency. (She herself took classes until she finally got a college degree in mid-life.)

She became a friend and promoter of Babe Didrikson Zaharias, one of the first Olympic women athletes; when Needmor began to focus its grant making, Did introduced us to Maggie Kuhn, the founder of the Gray Panthers, an organization for elderly rights. These personalities fit perfectly into Did's concept of women's rights. It was natural that Needmor was drawn to support those who fought issues of equality of



access in almost any area, whether it be coal mining, uranium mining, property rights, rights of divorced women for child support payments, voting rights, Indian rights and access to a broad array of public services. In the hands of her youngest daughter, Dinny, who chaired Needmor for many years, empowerment became a key word in Needmor's vocabulary –meaning training groups to use research tools, experience, and strategy to learn about the issues, to organize, to become empowered to take on whatever or whoever was holding them back.

Mother Did and Father Duane, in the formation of Needmor, brought together an altogether interesting conciliation of both gut and cerebral issues such as 'giving back', empowerment, self-sufficiency, individual rights, and enabling groups to better grasp the brass ring of democracy.

## 7 Dinny Brought Heart and Soul [Molly, Daniel]

**Molly:** Dinny brought heart and soul to Needmor. She was my aunt, but she was actually only seven years older than I. We did a number of site visits together, or when the office was located in Boulder we'd have meetings there, and I'd stay at her house. One of the things I learned about Dinny was that she had a good gut instinct. There'd be a group we'd be discussing and she'd say, "There's just



something that feels like the leader of this group is not real in some way. I just don't feel right about this. Something's not right, even though it sounded so good, and they had a beautiful presentation." Sure enough, later on we'd find out that there was something wrong. And by hearing her talk about that instinctual feeling, it taught me to look for my own

instinctual feelings, and to practice trusting them, because she had been so right in trusting hers.

She was the one who noticed Kerr-McGee in our portfolio. She would make those kinds of connections, and ask that question – that was at the time a very big leap for someone to say "Gee, our portfolio owns something that we're giving money against." She was so congruent in her values and who she was, and how she expressed that through Needmor. I also remember a very insightful thing she commented on. We were in Washington, D.C. doing a number of site visits. I remember as part of one of them there was a cocktail reception, and they told us, "Ooh, we might get to meet Ted Kennedy." There's a sort of celebrity worship that happens around politicians in D.C., and this feeling that the whole world revolves around what happens in D.C. Dinny pointed out, "Boy, they think this is where everything important happens." And yet the people we see who are really making a difference are the people in Eli, Minnesota, or Oklahoma. That's where she was seeing real change happen. And we ended up having a bias against funding anyone who had offices in Washington, D.C.

**Daniel:** Dinny died 12 years ago. She had, more than anyone, that characteristic of Duane, her dad. And she was very comfortable not knowing everything, and made other people comfortable not knowing everything. And so it created an atmosphere where it was OK to ask a lot of questions, because how could you know everything? That was an important characteristic that was handed down, and something that I'd like to see remain the same, particularly as Needmor becomes more sophisticated at what it does, and our mission and our purpose becomes more refined and tactical. I think it's still important to ask the questions that people feel uncomfortable asking, which are usually the ones that people feel would make them look stupid.

Dinny and Duane both embodied quiet power, a quiet strength of purpose. As an institution, I hope Needmor does that. Needmor's been getting a lot of recognition lately from its peer community, which is great, but I hope it remains comfortable as a quiet presence. I don't want us to begin adapting our program in ways that are only about getting more credit.

## 8 They Told Us About the Heroes *[Abby]*

I grew up with Needmor from the age where I could come to the table, or at least come to the meeting. The key was that I always felt invited to the table, even when I was too young to contribute. There was a very nice open door. It was enticing to cross the threshold because generally my Uncle Mike would bring a big bag of art supplies and little toys that occupied us. So, even if I was making paper airplanes under the table, I still felt like I was part of the group. Equally important, I felt like a part of the family.

It was a strong pull to come to that gathering of aunts and uncles and cousins who were all much more exciting than I was. At that age, everyone was sort of a superstar. I thought it was the coolest place to be. And when I was old enough to sit still and listen it became a wonderful story-telling hour as these incredibly cool people told gripping tales of driving down the icy streets of Appalachia and going into the church basements and listening to the dramatic David and Goliath stories. They told about the heroes that they had met along the way, and the food they had eaten to celebrate the union of the relationship. And they were having fun. So that was my baptism with Needmor, it was the early formation of the fund. It was coming together at a time when individual families might have been falling apart. Needmor pulled the family together, dancing to Zorba the Greek with my aunts and uncles on the table tops. There was a celebratory feel to it.

The next stage for me was the chance to take a couple of weeks' immersion into the program with George who was the Chair at the time and Karl Stauber who was the Director. I had petitioned my school to do this for my winter project, so for the first time I had to open up the docket of proposals. On that trip, Needmor became real to me in a different way. It was transformative for me to go from a sheltered Ohio life to Appalachia, to the clay hills of Alabama and listen to an ancient woman on the back porch of her house talk about how her land was encroached upon and taken away. I was learning about the policies of this country and the ways that people

were excluded. It was the human story that moved me. So that would really be my entrance, my growing up with Needmor and the power of family, the power of stories.

## 9 The Next Generation *[Mary]*

We were very inclusive of children at these meetings. People would bring clay and magic markers and crayons. There would be kids underneath the tables playing with all this stuff, and actually adults too. We actually created quite a few really good doodles, and really good villages of clay creatures. Always at the end of the meeting we'd be admiring our own work in the art world while we were doing the granting. What happened was by letting kids play while we were doing the work, slowly but surely they started listening. And we now have three of my nieces with national reputations in philanthropy.



## 10 The Community on Board *[Sarah]*

One of the last things that Dinny accomplished when she was the director was to push the question of non-family members participating in Needmor. It was a little uncomfortable, and there was a little bit of paranoia about someone taking over or changing the intimate feeling of Needmor. There was some reluctance, but Dinny made a strong argument that we should take steps to try it, so the compromise was we would bring a non-family member onto the grantmaking committee and see how it felt. So Frank Sanchez was that canary in the coal mine. He was the stranger who came into this very unprofessional, informal but heartfelt process that we had. God bless him that he kept his cool and he contributed in very appreciated but appropriate ways. And we got a lot out of it.

We feel smarter when Frank's around. That worked out so well that we brought on a couple more (Scott Douglas and Don Elmer). Those to me were the best days of grantmaking. We all did all the work together and it was a very collegial, honest process. We always had full and hearty discussions of all the issues and the values, and the board and the staff and the non-family board members participated fully in the process. It was a lot of work, but in every



meeting you learned so much because people were encouraged to share what they knew and debate what their conclusions were. When that period ended we decided that Frank and Scott were so valuable that if we weren't going to have a grantmaking committee, we'd better bring them onto the board.



## 11 What I've Learned from Needmor *[Patti]*

Peace, love, adventure, tolerance, ping-pong, paddle tennis, fried okra, goo-goo clusters, many places I never would have been before or otherwise. Many wonderful people in strange and unique situations: coal fields, church basements, border crossings, poultry pluckers, toxic waste, and lots and lots of determination, caring, inspiration, and hope.

The mission  
and purpose  
of this Trust

IS TO WORK  
WITH OTHERS

to bring about  
social justice.





## 12 Brumley Gap [Mike]

I'm trying to think how long ago this was. Twenty years it could well have been, and I remember it like it was yesterday.

We had a proposal come in written on drugstore stationery, hand-written with quite a neat hand. That wasn't very welcome, but that's the way it came in, and that's the way we read it. It was a very moving, very straightforward proposal about something that was very vital to this town. The town was in a mountain valley, and one of America's great power companies was going to build a dam across the lower end of the valley, and do a pump storage facility where they filled up the valley with water. We decided to go the next step after the board review of this handwritten proposal and visit them. That's how we got to the western part of Virginia, the mountainous part, to visit Brumley Gap. It was Karl Stauber and me and Abby Stranahan, and it's a beautiful mountain valley. I seem to remember 112 families, maybe 120 families. Their forefathers fought in the revolutionary war, and they'd been rewarded with land in what was then an unsettled part. So they all moved to Brumley Gap and built their log cabins and farmed. And now, they were faced with this threat to their valley and they wanted to do something about it. So we went to see them, the three of us, and it was the end of a long site visit session. We were road weary, stomach weary, just pooped. We had a long drive in a rent-a-car, and got to Brumley Gap and met with these people and they told us their story. One thing they said was, "We're patriotic people. So if the country needs this power, we're prepared to sacrifice our homeland. But we can't make sense out of what the power company tells us." What they needed the money for was to hire a power consulting firm from Boston to do the math, so to speak, about what was really at stake power-wise in the flooding of this valley.

During our site visit – which was in a log cabin, and there was a porch out over this stream, and it was an idyllic setting, just gorgeous with the water rippling underneath – we had to ask things like "What other sources of income do you have?" And they said,

"Oh, well we do cakewalks, and we do gospel sings." This was new to my vocabulary, both of those terms. As I remember, a cakewalk is a community dance, and the young ladies bake cakes, and if you buy the cake, you get to dance with the person who made it. A gospel sing is when you get the church choir, and you go around to the neighboring towns, and they sing gospel tunes on the streetcorner with a hat in front of them.

*"(These people) really understood the issues that were at stake, and we were amazed at how logically they laid it out."*

That's how they raised their money. But it wasn't going to raise them enough to get to Washington. It wasn't going to raise enough money to hire a high-powered power consulting firm. So that's where Needmor came in.

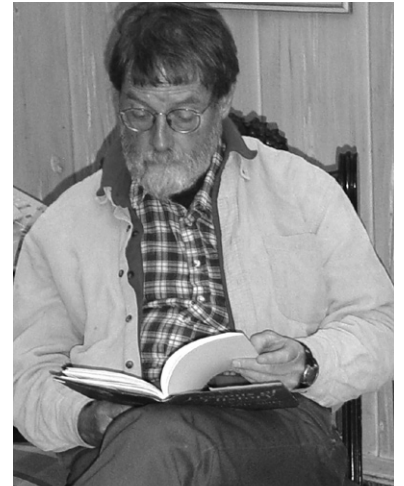
It was a wonderful interview, these were wonderful people, and they had a wonderful story to tell. And they told it very clearly. They really understood the issues that were at stake, and we were amazed at how logically they laid it out. So we listened, and we asked our questions, and we said, "Thank you, that's been lovely, we'd like to head down the road because we've been on the road two weeks, and we're travel weary." But they said, "Oh, but we're having a community potluck supper tonight, and you have to come. Everybody's going to be there." We were the first foundation to visit that town. We bleated, we whined, we whimpered, we said we were tired, and they said you have to come. What I remember Karl saying was "If we could go to our hotel," which was 50 miles away, "and take a nap, we'll come to the community potluck supper."



So we did that, and that was a little refreshing, and when we got back, sure enough, the whole town had turned out, and there were tables of food. Now there are times when I just love candied sweet potatoes with marshmallows melting on top, but if you've been on the road for two weeks, a huge platter of candied sweet potatoes with marshmallows melting on top really is just too much! So we got our plates and we got our forks, and we went down picking little tiny pieces of the various dishes – and that's usually not me, I usually pick great big pieces – we were doing this, and up ahead of me, on a little cake stand, there was this ruby red angel food cake, and I said to myself, "Maybe I can avoid the ruby red angel food cake. I'll just pass it by." And the lady right behind me said, "Oh, I do hope you'll try some of my angel food cake. I made it especially for this occasion, and I dyed it red with strawberries." So I had to take a hunk and eat it, and it was wonderful.

To make a long story short, Needmor gave them the money, they hired the power consulting firm, they got the data they needed in a form that would be convincing, they rented a schoolbus and got themselves to Washington D. C., they testified in front of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), and won. They're still down in that valley because ten years after that I got a note in the mail saying, "Please come to our tenth anniversary celebration of our victory." The power company backed down and said, "We don't need this. Not really." I think that's just an amazing David and Goliath story.

When I think of Needmor, I think of them because they really were empowered, and Needmor really played a role in changing some lives.





## 13 Hotel Martinique *[Mary]*

Hotel Martinique was how we referred to New York Mayor Koch's program on how to deal with welfare – buy up the mid-Manhattan welfare hotels (like Hotel Martinique) and stick them in there. We were meeting with a group of welfare mothers who had been stuck, and they had this security issue. The city had gotten all of the inmates that had been released from Sing Sing to be guards. So you had to walk through this gauntlet of ex-cons who were packing – not only their walkie-talkies, they were packing guns – in order to visit your potential grantees. It was tough. It was Sarah and myself and another person. These Black women met us in the lobby, and they were dressed to the nines, and they got Hotel Martinique through security. But the week before we did our site visit, some TV crew had come in and made a media splash of what was happening with these families that were in the Hotel Martinique, so the ex-cons were on full alert about letting anyone from the media in. And they assumed we were from the media. So the women got us through the initial gate with the ex-cons, and then the ex-cons got some word from up above to “Watch out for those people – they're probably media.” So the women took us up into their hotel rooms, showed us the living conditions where you're cooking on a hotplate and you've got four kids and yourself in one hotel room. Meantime, there's a lot of coke dealing, a lot of drug dealing that's going on within the hotel.

We had to move from one room to another because we could hear the guards talking on their walkie-talkies, “Where are those people now?” And the women were taking us down back stairs to visit with their members, and we'd keep hearing the trails of the walkie-talkies, “I think they're on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor now.” Then they'd hop an elevator and you could hear the guards going down, and we're going up – it was this chase through the hotel for about 2 ½ hours, while these welfare moms were trying to present their plight, when it was quite obvious how bad their plight was. That's radicalizing.

The point of the grant was to fund tenant organizing in the Hotel Martinique. They were organizing a tenants' union to try to make the conditions better within the hotel – childcare, cooking facilities. Actually, getting out of the hotel was the ultimate goal. In the meantime, how do you get better living conditions? Well, it took us about five minutes to figure out that these people really needed to get organized.

At that time, Needmor was giving letters back to our grantees and asking, “How did the site visitors do?” And it was set up to be anonymous, although we could tell by the postmarks who sent what. We were complimented for our interest and our guts, but we were put down pretty heavily for our attire, because these women had dressed up. We were the first foundation to talk to this group.



## 14 New Orleans After Katrina

[Ann]

We had long had a relationship with groups in the Deep South, so that when we went down to see these groups after the deluge, these were people that we knew. So we really went down to show solidarity. Frank Sanchez is now the program officer for the Southwest and the Deep South and the Southeast cluster. He led off at the meetings. And what he said to each group in New Orleans and Baton Rouge when we met with them was, “This is a site visit to say that you are going to be funded next year. This is not a site visit to determine whether or not you’re going to be funded. But we come because it’s important to us to realize what you’ve been through and also that there might be some other avenues that we might be able to help you.” So that was the basis – we were friends.

*“The specific institutions to whom we pay taxes that are supposed to take care of our citizens – how could they have failed, at every level? And that’s the anger of New Orleans.”*

Frank wanted to see if he could put together a four-day site visit, and it was such an extraordinary event that they took the entire staff plus Daniel Stranahan and me. It was Frank, Dave Beckwith, Julie Beazley, Mary Sobecki, Ann Stranahan and Dan Stranahan. It was one of the most intense experiences I’ve ever had, certainly



the most intense Needmor experience. It was so emotionally devastating that we were overwhelmed. We got there Monday night and we were squeezed into a van Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Friday morning we met at Café du Monde and debriefed and we were so devastated by what we had seen and learned that we thought, “What can we do? Well, we can witness.” So I said, “The Toledo Blade has a Saturday Op. Ed. section, so I’ll see if I can do a piece. And I’ll see if I can do a DVD.” Daniel has a friend who’s a producer at ABC, so he said “I’ll call Drew.” We figuratively slapped palms covered with confectioner’s sugar. So that’s how the video and the Op. Ed. piece came about.

Many of the people we meet through Needmor have nothing but the resilience and the discipline and the tenacity of the leaders and the staff. For me, the huge surprise is always the raw intelligence of people that I would consider not educated. And that always goes right to my gut. Because I’ve always been an elitist – brains were always very important in my family. And to see the natural raw intelligence, when they are given the tools to see what they can do. I can remember way, way back to one of the Kentucky site visits. Women who probably had an eighth grade education, maybe some high school and they learned how to do research, learned how to go to the library and the courts and wherever it was they had to go to find out where miners are not supposed to be digging. And they stopped the srtip mine! It doesn’t take much, and that’s so powerful.

So that's what I saw in New Orleans. And more this time, the Katrina time, the resilience, the endurance. And the good-spiritedness. Early on in the DVD, there's a picture of a smiling, older, black man with an ACORN banner. It shows where we're meeting in a room, it shows all the boxes. The rooms we met in were full of all their records, all their stuff, all their files, all salvaged from the storm and moved and stacked up again into offices.

The exhaustion of it! And also in New Orleans there was rage. And that's what got us Friday morning, just the rage. How could this country, whoever it was, how could they? The specific institutions to whom we pay taxes that are supposed to take care of our citizens – how could they have failed, at every level? And that's the anger of New Orleans. It boggles the mind. You feel like a fish with fins, you flap, flap. You sit around the table and you think how could this be? It's beyond anything that's happened in this country, the negligence and the ineffectiveness. And that Friday, we asked, "Is it that we don't know how to fix it, or that we don't want to?" It's scarier to think that we don't know how. I grew up in the Greatest Generation – this country knew how to do anything. And to think that all that we have in this country, it was all swept away because of this.



## 15 The 48-Hour Site Visit [Molly]

The 48-hour site visit is the longest one I was ever on. It's a lot of time to give to a group. Dinny and I were doing site visits in the Minneapolis area. We met the guy who was the executive director of this group – Minnesota COACT. A statewide group that was a coalition raising money for this group way up in the Northeast in the Iron Range. So we started off, he picked us up in his car, and he drives us up, and it was a six hour drive to where the site visit was. So we're talking about his group, about the people we're going to go visit. We get up there, and we're meeting at a church – there were six towns up there that were served by this group.

*“The iron mines were closing down, and it was particularly the women coming together trying to create any kind of business to support an economy continuing there....”*

We visited all six towns, turned off at one and had a potluck supper. And of course this is up in Minnesota – I don't know if you listen to Garrison Keillor and Prairie Home Companion – but there's the Jell-o salad, there's the lutefisk, it's a Lutheran church supper. I also remember it was Autumn, so there were little cups with candy corn for dessert. The two of us are the guests, and everybody's come to see us, because we are the dispensers of money. We were taken to our motel – there's only one motel in the whole area up there. We get there late at night, and we're sharing a room, and it's a very

dingy motel. The iron mines were closing down, so the source of most of the employment had gone away. It was becoming a very, very depressed area, and it was particularly the women coming together trying to create any kind of businesses to support an economy continuing there because it was going to be a ghost town. So there was this one motel where we spent the night. And Dinny called her kids, who must have been 10 and 8. She gets a message that Sam, her son, had broken his collarbone. And here she is many, many, many hours away from being able to get home, and in the middle of a site visit, and dealing with her son having a broken collarbone. She and I were sharing the room, and sharing this experience.

*“...it’s interesting to see here’s a place where the economy has changed, and it’s very tough on people, and it makes you aware of what can be done when people are displaced this way.”*

The next day we get driven all over these six towns. I remember Eli was one, and Embarrass, because it’s just a great name, was another one. And every third house was for sale, and they were selling for \$16,000 when people had bought them for \$45,000. Nothing was selling. Nobody wanted to buy a house there. Nobody was moving there. So people lost their jobs, they lost their life savings they put into their homes. It was very depressing. Stores were closed in the little downtowns. But we did go to one store where some of these



women who were taking us around had put together a shop where they were selling things that they had made. They were collecting things that all the women made, and selling stuff there to however few tourists would come through town. And Dinny and I both felt like, “Boy, we better buy a lot of stuff.” We stuffed our suitcases with anything we might possibly use. Christmas gifts, appliquéd sweatshirts, anything to help. Finally the next morning – we had to spend that night up there too – but the next morning the mayors of the towns came to have breakfast with us at the little motel, which maybe had twelve rooms in it, and was also where they had their chamber of commerce meetings, so they had all the local business people and the politicians come out to have breakfast with us before we drove another six hours back down to Minneapolis.

It was a long site visit, and we got to know those people very, very well. And we bought a lot of their stuff. I still remember there was a nun who came up from the Duluth area who supported this group, and she was a photographer, and was selling handmade cards with her photos on them. Sister Noemi.

They got the grant. It didn’t matter how well we thought they were going to do with it or whether we thought it was going to be a failing thing. They just needed some hope.



And it's interesting to see here's a place where the economy has changed, and it's very tough on people, and it makes you aware of what can be done when people are displaced in this way. It makes you aware of the extreme pain that our market system creates. The industry moves, and yes, you may be third generation in this area, but there's no jobs, and there's no livelihood any more where you live.

### 16 The Job Referral Site Visit *[Dave]*

I was organizing in East Toledo, our offices were in Fire Station No. 13 on Front Street. A big open room with a telegraph system, and the brass poles in the middle of a big room. Upstairs we had computers.



We were organizing unemployed people. We had an industrial area that was decaying and emptying out. We had a lot of neighborhood residents' wives who were involved in the organization, husbands getting laid off, and they were sick and tired of their husbands hanging around the house with nothing to do and with no money. So the women leaders of the organization forced us

to take on the issue of unemployment, even though we couldn't figure out what the hell to do about it. But we eventually began to experiment with calling people together who were not working to talk about it. And we called it the unemployed committee

– eventually the jobs corps. We developed a passport process, with a little book. The jobs corps kept track of who did what. So if you came to a planning meeting, you got a point. If you did research, you got two points. If you got on a picket line, you got three points. If you came and served time in the office, you got points. And it was working. There was this squad of people knocking on companies' doors, and they were getting in the paper all the time, and we got a little trickle of people getting jobs. We were having fun – we were rocking and rolling. So we put in a proposal to Needmor for operating support.

Two of the people who came on the site visit were Steve and Ann Stranahan. And Steve and Ann are very classy people. People of style and substance, a certain means, and a real quality of genuineness. Steve was active in a wide range of civic and business ventures at the time, but also taking a leadership role in the foundation. So he came on the site visit to this abandoned fire station. They came in, we showed them the papers, and we said, "We'd like to take you through the process to show you how it works." So members of the jobs corps who were on duty that morning did an intake on Steve Stranahan. They sat him down and said, "Mr. Stranahan, we understand you're not working. We'd like to talk to you about what your skills are, what your abilities are, and what your interests are. Are you qualified as a draftsman? Do you have any experience in welding?" And they entered the information into the system. We explained to him how it worked – it was not just an automatic job referral system. It was based on being involved, and standing up for yourself, and doing the work of building the organization, and the reward was the possibility of getting a job. We had sent Steve upstairs while we continued to talk about the proposal and the grant, and he came back downstairs with a printout of the jobs he was qualified to be referred to. And he was smiling from ear to ear. He enjoyed the interaction with the workers who were going through this system. It wasn't just that he was willing to go through the exercise, but the whole way the site visitors showed up. They showed up in a very human way and connected with us as people. They were open to an actual relationship, to knowing the lead organizer, Ron Curtis, the unemployed worker who may have dressed badly and was a funky guy, but was passionate about the

organization. And Steve and Ann listened to him, respected him, and paid attention to what he said and did.

### 17 Border Site Visit [Frank]

All the site visits we do, we try to spend some quality time with the organizations we visit. We ask them to provide us with context for their work, visually, as well as written. We really want to know the layout, the geography, the neighborhoods they work in if it's neighborhoods, if it's rural areas, then the rural areas. We want to meet the leaders, we want to meet the organizers, we want to meet their allies, and we love to observe them in action. A lot of the groups will have a meeting with the city council, or the mayor, and we try to go to their large public actions.

One of the site visits we did was in El Paso, Texas. It was a learning session about living on the border. The issues were immigration, colonias, and a developing country bordering on a developed country. We spent half a day driving and meeting with leaders of the colonias, because there are colonias just outside of El Paso. Then we had a panel of people come in to talk about immigration.



*“Some had never seen that kind of poverty, where there was no running water. They saw people with houses... made out of cartons, and it overwhelmed them.”*

Then we went over to Juarez, Mexico, and we visited a maquila, the twin plants, and we learned about the low wages and the working conditions of those maquilas, and then we toured the poorest neighborhoods of Juarez. All of that in a day and a half.

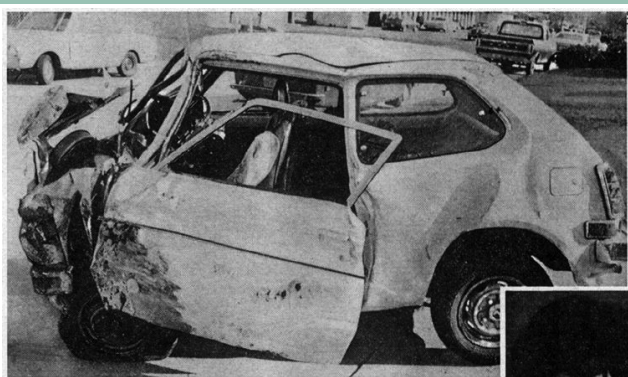
We had a lot of the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of the family, and they were struck by the poverty. Some had never seen that kind of poverty, where there was no running water. They saw people with houses that they made out of cartons, and it really overwhelmed them. There was toxic dumping by many of the companies into the neighborhoods, and there were no environmental regulations that would protect those families. The young Needmor family members with us would say, “This just isn’t right” and “Why do people do that?” That was part of the conversation, but the other part of the conversation was the organizations we fund that make them more hopeful. So we had discussions about “Why community organizing?” because you’ve got to have organized people to make these institutional changes. They were struck by the talented leadership that led them on these tours, so impressed with the leadership, their hope, their imagination, and their dreams about the changes they wanted to see in their communities, in their neighborhoods, and in their cities.



## 18 Coal Employment Project, North Country [Molly]

There was a movie about a similar group in the last year – North Country. The group we funded was in Virginia, but they were working together. The story was very similar, where there were women who had been trying to get hired in the mines, and there was a lot of discrimination against them, and there were a couple of them who had gotten jobs, and they were really harassed, from things like making sure that they only got cold water in the showers to discovering holes into their locker room walls, so that the men could watch them. There was sexual harassment as well as people saying, “You’re not tough enough, you’re not strong enough.” So they were really fighting for equality around employment issues in the coal mines.

We had some of the people from Women’s Coal Employment Project come to present at the board meeting. We were discussing it afterwards, and my uncle said, “We’ve been funding groups trying to get black lung benefits. Coal mines are dangerous, awful places. They’re not really great jobs for people to have. Should we really be supporting this group who are trying to get women into the coal mines?” A couple of us responded with, “They have a



**Wreckage of the death car after mysterious crash in 1974**  
*“Anyone exposed to that amount is married to lung cancer.”*

Silkwood had carried small amounts of plutonium out of the plant and had deliberately contaminated herself and her apartment. Why should she act so bizarre-

nesses are expected to tell, for example, of the night that workers were dispatched by the



right to decide what jobs they want. They’re the best paying jobs they can get. If that’s what they want, we want to support them in getting it. They know about black lung, and other risks they’re taking.” The feeling was that it’s paternalistic to say we don’t want to fund this group because these are risky, dangerous jobs that are bad for your health, and we want to protect women. I really saw that moment as clarifying for me that we support oppressed people in determining what it is they want, and supporting them in getting that. We don’t have to believe that what they’re doing is the right thing for them. It’s not for us to judge, it’s for them to judge.

## 19 Karen Silkwood [Molly]

This was early in us being a pro-active foundation. I was in my early 20’s, among the oldest in my generation. We were coming to the meetings, and we were asked for our opinions, but our votes did not count because we had not put money into the foundation. And we were feeling after a year and a half that we had some ideas and we would really like some power here. So the older generation, the “significant seven,” my grandfather and his six kids who had been the ones who put money into the foundation and who were the decision makers said, “Let’s set aside a pool of \$40,000 for the next generation to decide how to give. You guys come up with your own criteria and your own process for how to give money, and then tell us what it is you want to do with the \$40,000.” So one of the proposals we brought forward was a group that had started when Karen Silkwood was still alive, and was trying to get information from Kerr-McGee.

Kerr-McGee was a defense contractor, and it was nuclear materials they were working with. They were not telling their employees or the surrounding community about what it was they were doing there. There was concern about the impact on people who live around there. In Karen Silkwood’s case, she actually worked at Kerr-McGee. She was a young woman in her 20’s.

She asked, “Is the stuff I’m working on potentially going to cause birth defects?” And the company said, “Don’t you worry about that. These are corporate secrets.” So she was compiling information about what it was they were doing from other people who were working there, and she was working with this small group in the community to try to figure out what Kerr-McGee was really doing. They got some investigative reporters who were interested.

*“...she had a bunch of incriminating documents in the back of her car and she was run off the road and killed, and the documents were missing.”*

She was going to meet an investigative reporter, and she had a bunch of incriminating documents in the back of her car, and she was run off the road and killed, and the documents were missing. The sense was that it had been on purpose by somebody trying to protect Kerr-McGee. So we were funding the group that was trying to get this information from Kerr-McGee. That was one of the proposals we brought forward.

Years later the movie *Silkwood* was made, but it was like, “Oh yeah, we were involved with those guys. We helped fund that.” If you’re looking at social issues, sometimes they become good stories for movies.

## 20 Jane Fonda [Jim]

The electric company decided they wanted to build a power plant. And we said, “We’re going to stop them.” And the organizer, who was paid for with Needmor money, put together committees. I, who am her trainer/director/mentor, am saying, “God, I think we’re going to lose this.” And she said, “No we’re not.” She scheduled a rally, and luck was with us. It turned out to be the weekend the Jane Fonda movie about the nuclear meltdown (*The China Syndrome*) opened. So we sent volunteers and staff to every movie theater in the state. I saw that movie six times! At the end of each movie, we stood up and said, “They’re going to build a nuclear plant in Rhode Island! We’re having a rally on Saturday! Please take flyers and come!”

Eight thousand people showed up! We stopped the plant. It was the first nuclear plant stopped in the United States. It wouldn’t have happened without Needmor’s faith in the people.



## 21 New Orleans E-Mails

[Dave]

When the storms hit New Orleans, we had a list of 25 people we wanted to find. And we knew their names, it wasn't just "those people." We put out an e-mail the day of the storm that said, "We don't know where you are, we don't know when you'll get this, but we care. Let us know if we can help." That was because we were in genuine relationship. When you eat with people and tell stories with people, and engage with them in their place on something that they're passionate about, that's what you get. About 10 days out we heard back from everybody either directly or indirectly. It was surprising how many people said they were touched to have that message when the phones finally started to work again. One person, Joe Givens, had gone through some hard times. The way he put it was, "I heard from you guys when I was on the roof."

## 22 Power Relationships

[George]

One of the difficulties of being a giver and a receiver in this kind of relationship is that the grantee has to come and say, "I am helpless and I need your help. Will you please help me?" And you have the power to say yes or no. It's kind of a demeaning position to be in as the grantee – "I have to ask for help. I am not able to take care of myself by myself, and I am coming to you on my knees, in a subservient position. And you, o lord, have the power to give or not. And if you do give, you have acknowledged my helplessness. You are part of establishing my helplessness. And I don't like it. You have proven my inferiority by giving me this money, and your superiority, and your power to either give or not give." It's a power relationship that's entirely unequal between grantor and grantee. I think the relational stuff that we're trying to do is to make it a collaboration. We are not just giving you the money because we have it to give. We are giving because together – you with your



people power, and we with our money power – are together going to do it. And we have to sit with them, we have to know them, we have to look them in the eye and share a meal with them, and convince them that they're part of the team. That is the relational part, and it's good for us, so we don't feel like Rockefeller handing out dimes to the poor. And they get that, maybe not the first time, but eventually they get it, and they really do look at us as friends.

## 23 A Needmor Moment *[Dave]*

We were on a site visit standing outside a museum in Chicago, and Josh Hoyt was giving us a kind of a welcome and introduction, and this red-headed guy was walking down the street. And it was Terry Kelleher, who when I first got to know him was working in Appalachia for the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition (later called Kentuckians For The Commonwealth), which Needmor was a very early funder of and a stalwart supporter of, and who's now with the Applied Research Center in Chicago and was doing some work in the neighborhood and was visiting the museum. And I thought, "It's a Needmor moment – we were talking to some people who were doing some cutting edge work, and strangers walk by on the sidewalk whom we've known for what seems like 100 years." It's not that it's a small world. It's that we're everywhere.

## 24 Highlander *[George, Sarah, Mike & Jeff Pinzino]*

**George:** We visited the Highlander Center a couple of times. Martin Luther King was at Highlander, and Rosa Parks was trained at Highlander. That was the birthplace of a lot of the civil rights movement.

**Sarah:** George and Chuck Shuford, then E.D. at Needmor, and I took a trip out to Tennessee, and one of the things we did was go up to Highlander, and I think we participated in a storytelling with some youth and an evening making music and sitting on rocking chairs on the porch. And the next morning George got a phone call with the news that his father – my grandfather – had died. So we just sat there on the porch and looked out at the Smoky Mountains and I think George said, "There's no place that I'd rather be than right here to be feeling what I'm feeling." We have a long history with Highlander and many of our groups and leaders have been



trained through Highlander. We've given direct support to them when they were in trouble. It was just kind of a feeling of being at home when something happened that was a significant passing.

**George:** Jim Sessions was the head of Highlander then, and he got the phone call – he's a minister, and he came in his minister role, "I just got the news that your father died." I knew it, he knew it was time. But that's where I got the news. They were unveiling the mural. I went out to the car to drive to the airport. Sarah grabbed me and said, "You're an orphan." Which I had never thought what that meant, but those were the words.

That kind of place – you know you're safe there. In the times during the civil rights movement, it was illegal in Tennessee for Blacks and Whites to eat in the same room. And the state patrol knew these people were eating together in the same room, and they would raid the place to break it up. They came and they took all the books once. They came and said, "You can't have a library because you're breaking these laws." The police took all the books and put them in the public library, and as they tell it, "We wore our great coats, and we went back and took all the books home." One night the police



# RELATIONSHIPS

came, and they cut the power in the dark, and that was the night they sat down in a room, and the cops were running around with flashlights, and they invented a new verse to the song “We Shall Not Be Moved.” They sat there in the dark with the cops running around with flashlights, held hands and sang, “We Are Not Afraid.” So that is a safe place, you just know.

**Mike:** When there weren’t any safe places.

**Jeff:** There’s a group in Chicago that had spent a week at Highlander – they’re in a church basement on the north side – and they came back and filled their meeting room with rocking chairs.

**Mike:** George did too. The Running Fork Valley has a lot of rocking chairs, thanks to Highlander. Because the Stepstone Center in Carbondale Colorado is an offspring.

**George:** We were going to call it Highlander West, and they said it would confuse the issue if we did that. And we said fine, so we became Stepstone, and we didn’t imitate them enough. We did for a while in the dormitory – we had a teacher education project with the University of Colorado grad school of education. We began to use it as “Weekend Highlander,” truly in the sense of a Highlander. You would come Friday – we had a dormitory you would stay, so it would be an intense, continuous thing. We brought Chicanos from Denver, who had many organizations built up over the years. So we said, “You guys come over, and talk to our guys, who are green, who have no organizations. And let’s just talk about what worked and didn’t work for you, and what did you learn. Our people, who are much newer, can learn.” And those were truly Highlander experiences – the food, the culture was important – and they told me it was safe. I remember one of the cooks said, “I know that if the INS came with their guns drawn, that George would not let them at us.” I thought, “You’ve got more faith in me than I have!” But they have that feeling – we can talk here. Rocking chairs and green chili. Oh, God, they could make green chili!

**Jeff:** It seems like there’s something in breaking bread with people.

**Mike:** Breaking their bread.

**George:** It permeates community organizing. At Highlander they

thought through all these things: you do a circle, you do the talk, and you must have cultural events afterwards – including cultural food, dance, song...

**Mike:** Folk song!

**Jeff:** Folk songs, yeah!

**George:** Yeah, and Guy Carawan...

**Mike:** Guy Carawan!

**George:** Every time they would go to jail during the civil rights movement – they’d go to jail all the time, and Guy would get his guitar and they would sing behind the bars, We Shall Overcome, and it drove the jailers bats--t nuts! These people are singing!

**Mike:** I own a record by Guy Carawan. He’s a great folk singer!



Guy singing with SNCC activists Bernard Lafayette and James Bevel; 1960. Guy helped spread freedom songs throughout the South during the Civil Rights Movement.





## 25 Mardi Gras Site Visit [Frank]

I'll always remember one site visit in New Orleans. It was to a group whose constituency was seniors. I went as a Needmor board member, I was still on the board of trustees. I'll never forget that site visit because the group recreated Mardi Gras for us in the meeting room. They came out with beads, then they had us singing *When the Saints Go Marching In*, and marched us around the room. They recreated Mardi Gras since we weren't going to be there for Mardi Gras. Then, all the members and the leaders, about 20 or so, prayed for us. And in their prayer, they asked God that Needmor look favorably on them and help support them. They got funded. They did all that, but they were a very strong membership organization. Very effective.

## 26 Reaganomics Song [Mike]

Albany New York, January. Bitter, bitter, bitter cold. It was a mothers' welfare reform group. I just remember being very cold all the time. We were meeting with these welfare mothers, and they were telling us of the disadvantages that they were working under, the way the welfare system was set up. We always asked that we meet with some board members and some members, as well as just the executive director, because we wanted to get a feel of "is this really a grassroots organization or ain't it?" Well, this was an "is" situation. After the story was told, and after the Needmor representatives asked, "What are your alternative funding sources," and "How do you set priorities," and "What is your backup plan," the mothers said, "We would like to sing you a song." We said, "Fine, sing the song." And here's the song (to the tune of "Camptown Races"):

*They call it Reaganomics but it's welfare, welfare  
They call it Reaganomics but it's welfare for the rich  
Welfare for the rich, welfare for the rich  
They call it Reaganomics but it's welfare for the rich!*

## 27 Hats at the Board Meeting [Sarah]

We were having a November meeting shortly after Dinny got out of the hospital with pretty bad news – she had an inoperable brain tumor. She had her head all shaved and stitches across her head. So Mary and a bunch of us decided during our break – Dinny was wearing a hat – to go out on the street mall, and there was a vendor there who was selling all kinds of funny hats. And those were in the days when there was a jester hat, and a dinosaur hat, and a huge variety of outrageous hats. And we bought fourteen or fifteen hats. Everyone in the board meeting put on the hats in solidarity – if Dinny's going to wear a

funny hat, we're all going to wear funny hats. And it was our very first time we were scheduled to meet with Dan Tarlas from the Asset Consulting Group. We had never met Dan; he had never met us.

*“Everyone in the board meeting put on the hats in solidarity—if you’re going to wear a funny hat, we’re all going to wear funny hats.”*

Steve was chairing the Finance Committee, and he had arranged for Dan to come and make a pitch of why Needmor might want to contract his services. And Dan walked into the room, and here's a pretty straight asset consultant from St. Louis, Missouri, and we're all wearing the funny hats. And Dan, God bless him, said, “Do you have another one of those?” And we gave him a hat, and as I recall it had little bells hanging from it. And he conducted his sales pitch wearing the really silly hat. And that's what sold him. I thought, “This guy can work with us.”

## 29 Karl Stauber and the Water Pitcher [Molly]

When we were funding the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, we were meeting at a cabin we had up on the Au Sable River in Michigan. The Teamsters drove up from Detroit to meet with us. One had a black eye, and the other had a freshly chipped tooth. They had literally, physically, fought their way into their union, and the next day had to come up and talk to these foundation people about Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Now there's courage.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union were union members who were

fighting to make their union democratic. This is back in the 70's when there was a pretty clear connection with the mafia, and these guys were getting hammered, literally putting their lives on the line. They were a long term grantee. About 10 years ago we had another sort of reunion, and Ken Paff came and talked about how important it was that Needmor was the first foundation that came in and funded their movement, how important it was for them because it opened the door to other foundations.

## 29 Karl Stauber and the Water Pitcher [Molly]

Leeda Marting was our first executive director, and she was helping us hire her successor, and we're interviewing for her successor in Kansas City, in the Hall Hotel. It was a big long conference room with this long table down the middle of the room. Karl was 26 when we considered hiring him, sitting at one end of the table and all of us lined up along the two sides. My uncle Mike loves to tip back in his chair. So he's tipped back on the back two legs, and I think he was asking Karl a question at that time, and he lost his balance. So he starts to fall over, he grabs the table, which has one of those white tablecloths on it. As he falls, he pulls the tablecloth, and a pitcher of ice water that's sitting in front of him tips over the other direction right into my Aunt Mary's lap. She leaps up – she's wearing these stretchy elastic waistband pants, and pulls the waistband of her pants and says, “AAAAHAHA!” with ice cubes dumping down the waistband of her pants in the middle of this poor guy's interview. So one person is crashed into the floor, the other is dancing around with ice cubes in her pants, and we had to hire him, you know, he lived through that.



### 30 “We Sat on the Floor” *[Jim Dickson]*

I’m going to tell about my first contact with Needmor. It was in the late 70’s. We’d written a proposal to get money to stop United Technology from reprocessing uranium in Rhode Island. They’d found this place where there was 85 feet of sand above 50 feet of gravel above an aquifer that flowed into Narragansett Bay. And they were going to bring uranium from around the country, and they were going to do something to it, and it was going to be useful (chuckle, chuckle). So we wrote this proposal to Needmor. Two people from Needmor came to a meeting – we met in the home of one of our leaders, and there were not enough chairs, so a couple of us organizers sat on the floor, and so did the two people from Needmor. And I thought, “This is going to be really good.” Everybody talked, and the Needmor people just listened and said “thank you,” and left. And I said, “We’re not getting that grant!” Well, we got the grant, and we beat the plant by passing in the state legislature a requirement that United Technology post a bond to cover the costs of taking care of any uranium that wound up being left in Rhode Island. We had built a base, and we won it very easily.



## 31 Lois Gibbs – “She’s a Firecracker” [Sarah]

Needmor funded Lois very early on – she’s the founder and director of the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice. Her prominence on the Superfund became one of the first projects that we funded that went to the big leagues. It was like, “Wow, this woman really has made a big impact in the discussion of environmental justice.” I’d never met Lois, but I knew who she was, because it was one of the grantees that kind of became famous, I knew this person really had made a huge impact.

*“It was a great experience because I got to know Lois, and she’s a firecracker and she’s fearless and creative and gutsy and smart and tenacious and successful...”*

And then later on I told Dave that I was looking for a job, and I ended up working for Lois for two years when I was a single mom living on Cape Cod. I worked for her as a grant writer and development assistant. Part of the reason I took the job with Lois Gibbs is I wanted to understand what philanthropy was like from the grantseeker’s point of view. I thought I’d be a better grantmaker if I could understand what it’s like to be a grantwriter, and to have to be the one making the ask.

It was a great experience because I got to know Lois, and she’s a firecracker and she’s fearless and creative and gutsy and smart and



tenacious and successful, and just to be around this personality of a very petite woman who had accomplished a great deal in her life without the benefit of a college education – merely to the benefit of her own courage, grit and tenacity – to learn about organizing and learn about fundraising and to just watch her, just to see her as a leader and to know her as a friend was a huge gift and inspiration to me personally. I said to myself, “So that’s what you do when you really want to get something done. And that’s how you do it when your back is up against the wall and you’re crying and you depend on your friends and you depend on the process and you have faith in your values and you keep going.”



## 32 Columbus and Perry Perkins – Mississippi Woodcutters *[George]*

We had been involved with some Mississippi woodcutters. They were an African-American group. They were going in after Louisiana-Pacific and cleaning up little stuff that others hadn't bothered to clear, and they took it in their pickups down to Louisiana Pacific to sell it, and they were getting screwed in the measurement process – they weren't getting paid as much as was fair, so they organized. I don't know what action they did, but they got action from Louisiana Pacific. They began to build their organization on success, and they had installed a buyers' co-op, so they could buy pickup tires together in bulk. They could buy chainsaw oil and chains, bulk-purchasing as a co-op. They came to us as we were just beginning to do Economic Development, Inc. (a short-lived investment partnership started through Needmor to support community-run businesses), to say, "We want to build a consumers union, and our own bank as well, because why do we go to their bank to finance our pickup? We can do it ourselves." And Karl Stauber and I went down there, and we were talking



up our program of equity investment – our equity investment in projects such as a consumers union or a woodcutters cooperative in Mississippi. We were trying to sell the idea of equity, which is not a word of the poor. So we were explaining it: "We give you our money, you use it, and when you create money out of our money which we've shared with you, you share the results with us. It's a mutual sharing." Columbus was one of their leaders, and he had this incredibly deep voice, and he said, "Does you mean that when we pays you back, you don't go away?" "That's right, Columbus, we are partners for life! Because we were partners at the beginning, we are partners at the end." And he said, "When we pays you back, we wants you to go away!" And I wish we had learned that lesson sooner. But we stuck with them, and when we walked, we thought, "nice try." We should have given more support in financial accounting, a lot of things we should have done, and we said, "lesson learned."

Literally 20 years later in Austin Texas, we were doing an accountability session with the Industrial Areas Foundation, and this guy walks up and says, "Remember me? I'm Perry Perkins. I was the organizer with the woodcutters in Mississippi."





And I said, “I’ll never forget you. I’ll never forget those days down there.” And he said, “Do you remember Columbus?”

*“Social entrepreneurship  
has been a word  
for five to ten  
years, but it’s now  
becoming a practice.”*

And I said, “I will never forget Columbus, and that deep voice that he had.” And he said, “You know what? He owns the largest pallet factory in Mississippi now.” And I’m like, “Oh, my God!” And he said, “Remember that consumers union you started?” I said, “Yeah, yeah, it failed, right?” And he said, “No. It’s the second largest consumers union in Mississippi!” And we said, “Oh my God!” And Perry Perkins is working for the IAF in Louisiana.

Social entrepreneurship has been a word for five to ten years, but it’s now becoming a practice. I was looking back at what I could learn from the failures of what we’d done 20 years earlier that would help me enter this new field of social entrepreneurship. And Columbus’ words were pretty strong: “When we pay you back, we wants you to go away.”

The mission  
and purpose  
of this Trust  
is to work  
with others

TO BRING ABOUT  
SOCIAL JUSTICE.



## 33 The Decision to Screen *[Molly, Sarah]*

**Molly:** The next day, we were going through the list of stocks that were owned by the Needmor Fund, and my Aunt Dinny notices, “Gee, we own Kerr-McGee! Here we’re funding this group that’s saying that Kerr-McGee is doing bad stuff, and they’re not telling the truth, and maybe they conspired to kill an employee, and we own this stock.”

*“One of the concerns about the phrase ‘socially responsible investing’ is it’s as if everyone would have the same standard value about what’s socially responsible.”*

That created a discussion about how we feel about investing in this company to make money, and we think they’re bad guys. Which led us to discuss using screens on our portfolio so we didn’t own companies that we were funding against.

So we eliminated defense contractors, tobacco companies. That led us in the mid-to-late 80’s being one of the earliest foundations to engage in socially responsible investing.

I call it values congruent investing rather than socially responsible investing because it really is looking at our values, and making sure we’re not making money in violation of those values. One of the



concerns about the phrase “socially responsible investing” is it’s as if everyone would have the same standard about what’s socially responsible. And of course, it depends on your values. And it’s a process.

**Sarah:** We made a decision around a certain point that we would not hire any more managers that were not going to screen our portfolio and who wouldn’t be socially responsible managers. At that point we had an account with Neuberger – it’s a big old investment firm in New York, quite a large firm. And we told them that we were interested in screening our portfolio and eventually we told them if we weren’t going to be able to screen our portfolio that we would be moving it. So they kind of begrudgingly said, “Well, there’s a woman who’s kind of interested in that and her name is Joyce Haboucha and we’ll give her this assignment to work with you to make sure your portfolio meets your screens.” And since that time, Joyce has turned out to be one of the superstars of social investment. She now runs a huge department at Rockefeller Financial Services and Neuberger now runs a whole division

around socially responsible investing. So we used to joke with them that the biggest favor we ever did was ask them to do that crazy thing that we wanted to do, because now they're a leader in the field.

## 34 The Decision to Invest in Community *[Sarah]*

Molly Stranahan was on the finance committee, and she said she had found this organization called the Social Investment Forum. They hold a conference every year called "Socially Responsible Investing in the Rockies" and that year it was at Snowmass. She said she'd fly out and go to the conference to see if there's anything useful there that we could learn. Of course that's the key trade organization for the whole socially responsible investing movement. The year that she went out there they were launching a campaign called "One Percent for Communities." And the logic of the campaign was that if everybody who screened their investments put just one percent of their money into community-based financial institutions, it would triple the amount of money going out in community loans. And we knew nothing about community-based financial institutions. And Molly came back and said, "They're

doing this campaign and I think in solidarity with this community and their values and their overall goal, we should put one percent of our assets in community-based investments." And we thought that sounded like a good idea, and we did it. Well, I think we now have fourteen percent of our assets in community-based investments, and in the years between 2001 and 2003, they were our highest performing assets. We were like, "Thank God we have these investments because they're the only thing that the bottom didn't drop out of!"

## 35 The Decision to Pursue Shareholder Activism *[Sarah]*

I was a graduate student, and I was supposed to be working on my masters' thesis over the summer. I was staying at my father's house in Ohio, raiding the refrigerator, and restlessly trying to procrastinate as much as possible on my masters' thesis. So I'm leafing through a stack of mail on his kitchen counter, and see the announcement for the Champion Spark Plug annual meeting (the major source of the Stranahan family's wealth), and I notice that one of the proxy votes is on a resolution that's been put forth by the New York State employees union asking Champion to sign the Sullivan principles (non-discrimination protocols for employers in apartheid-era South Africa). So I thought it was interesting, and asked my Dad about it, and he said, "Oh, it's nothing, it's just something that those activists from New York do, and it won't pass, and it's not interesting." And I said, "Well, I want to go to the meeting." So I get my skirt on and comb my hair and I go to the board meeting, and I watch the whole thing, and I think I stood up and said, "I support this measure." And the guy from New York flew in and he was leaving the meeting so I walked out and I talked to him in the hallway, and I said, "I'm really excited about what you're doing, and I'd like to help." And he said, "Well, look, I have to catch a plane," and I said, "I'll give you a ride to the airport." So we're driving out to the airport, and I'm picking his brain, and I ask, "Do you think you'd bring the same shareholders resolution next year?" And he said, "Yeah, I think we would." And I said, "I'm





everybody's interest. But nobody really felt comfortable holding the Champion stock, and it was almost an all-nighter. There were side conversations, and then the Scotch started flowing, and the emotions started flowing, and it almost killed us. Looking back it was a very impolitic thing to have done. But we ended up deciding to vote in favor of the Sullivan principles.

When it was all over and done with, Uncle Steve came up to me, and he had in his hands a list of all the stocks that Needmor held, and he said, "Why are you picking at Champion? Champion is a good company and we treat our employees well. Look at what's on your list! You have Kerr-McGee here, you have 3M mining, you have Exxon. These companies are so much worse, why don't you go after them?" And I looked at him and said, "You know, that's a great idea."

on the board of a foundation that owns quite a bit of Champion stock, and I'd like to see if I could get the foundation to vote in support of your resolution." And he said, "That'd be great." And I said, "Let me see what I can do. If you promise to bring it back next year, I will do my utmost to at least get you some supporting votes. It's not a majority, but it would make an impact." So then I go back and study up on this. I'm trying to learn all about apartheid and the divestment movement when I should be writing my masters thesis. And it's much more fun to be doing the research on the divestment movement. And I ask around and I make a few phone calls, and people say, "You really ought to talk to the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility." So I called and Tim Smith talked to me and he sent me this big box of reference materials.

I got onto the Needmor agenda and very nervously gave a presentation to the board. You could have heard a pin drop, because it was not something that anybody really wanted to talk about. At that time Steve and my Dad and my Grandfather were all three on the Needmor board, and they were all three on the Champion board. And they felt Champion was perfectly capable of handling this issue, and did not need any advice from Needmor. And almost all the rest of the board had to say, "Our mission is pretty clear." At that point we even had language about racism. Clearly this was a conflict of interest, and nobody wanted to be disrespectful to those hardworking businessmen who were protecting

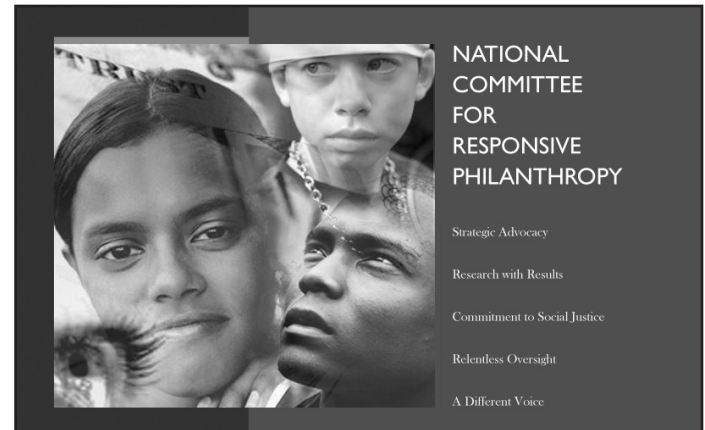


## 36 NCRP and Philanthropic Activism *[Sarah]*

We had a real focus on compassionate grantmaking. Little things: answer the phone. Give people a reason why they were turned down. If you're going to say no, suggest a couple of people who might say yes. Help them through the maze. There were some very basic values that we were trying to talk about and practice that weren't standard. They weren't normative. There was a culture in which grantmakers were only answerable to themselves, and didn't feel very much responsibility for the experience of the process from the grantee point of view. I had worked on a project for the National Network of Grantmakers called "Best Practices in Social Change Grantmaking." I guess through this whole process I became aware that the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy was a leader and a clearing house for philanthropic reform.

I had lunch with Bob Bothwell, who was the founder and director. I got nominated to the board for about 8 years. To me that was an incredible gift because I was one of the few foundation representatives, and everyone else was the leader of a significant advocacy nonprofit. The issue education, the role modeling of negotiating consensus – it was a completely different board culture than Needmor where we all sat around the table with crayons. It was like Dorothy getting out of Kansas; "So this is how organizations run." At that time I was involved in a couple of different issues, payout being one. Needmor has been one of the few foundations willing to take a public stance. We were in the vocal role of advocating for increasing payout, taking the position of, "What is the moral responsibility of the sector," not just "What's my institution's best interest?" Take two steps back and look at the sector as a whole and figure out what's going to make it work better in the long run. And so I think we've been one of the foundations that's stuck their neck out to take controversial stands on public policy.

We pay out 6% of our portfolio's value. In addition we pay out 100% of our annual giving, which is about \$890,000. So our



total payout is in the double digits pretty consistently. We pay out very aggressively. We have managed to maintain the buying power of our portfolio, but we do have the benefit of those annual gifts, which we could sock away and try to get bigger and bigger and fatter and fatter. But we have decided that if there's good work out there to fund, that's our first job.

## 37 The Original Living Wage [Sarah]

I went to Baltimore with Frank Sanchez and Chuck Shuford. We went to see an organization called BUILD – Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development. The guy who ran this was a guy named Johnny Lang. And he had this wild idea that his organization was going to lead a campaign in Baltimore demanding a living wage. This was the first living wage campaign.

And we don't really fund campaigns, but we knew it was a good group with some good organizers. He was bringing in suburban congregations, but his core constituency was inner-city Blacks who were working low-wage jobs, and a lot of them were janitors.

*“They won the living wage, and over the years we’ve funded 15 or more living wage campaigns.”*

And from listening to these members he had decided that their wages were really an issue he could organize around. And he had a relationship with the AFSCME (American Foundation of State, County and Municipal Employees) union. So this was really one of the first community/union campaigns we had worked on too. This was before Jobs with Justice and so this was very experimental – having a labor union work on a community and church-led social justice campaign. And we didn't really know that this was going to be a key issue. No, this was a strong organization and we trusted them to cut their own issues. They won the living wage, and over the years we've funded 15 or more living wage campaigns. Boston, Little Rock, Santa Monica, New Orleans, San Francisco, you could develop a list of cities where we supported living wage campaigns – there were quite a few. It was a wildfire issue because it built



membership, it gave people a public profile, it built bridges between labor and community, and it educated the public about core issues for the working poor. So most people won these campaigns, and if you didn't win the living wage campaign, you really strengthened the organization taking it on. It became a fairly sophisticated national movement.

Really, it was BUILD's stroke of genius, we were just there to support BUILD doing good work. If they had been doing something else, we would have supported them.

## 38 National Campaign for Jobs and Income Security [Sarah]

We had a relationship with a number of groups that were working on welfare accountability: JEDI Women in Utah, a group of women in Western Mass., there was one in Northwest Montana. And in

# NEEDMOR FIRSTS

1994, Mary Stranahan made a challenge grant to the foundation for \$2 million to put into responding to special needs. And we pretty quickly said we wanted to support the groups working to make the welfare system work better, primarily for lower income women and children. They were ideologically under attack. The rules of the game were changing quickly. It's not even clear whether their members were still going to be eligible for aid. They were in crisis – they were in the crosshairs of national politics. And so we did a 2-year initiative to focus on helping welfare reform groups have a voice in the new welfare reform laws. So right around that time, Seth Borgos was saying that he wanted to start the National Campaign for Job and Income Security with the goal of bringing grassroots leaders into the national policy conversation. So, this little thing started from a real heart place on the part of Mary. “We know these people, they’re our friends, we’re in relationship with them, their backs are up against the wall, let’s do what we can to help them through this time.” It ended up that quite a few of the groups we were working with became leadership voices in this coalition that worked pretty hard to fight against the worst and most punitive reforms and bring in some issues like transportation, child care, and educational credit to protect the real-life interests of welfare recipients. So it ended up having a national impact in a way that we didn’t anticipate.



# 39

---

## Frank Sanchez

---

I was an organizer myself, but I'm not going to talk about that period of my life; it's more about my role in foundations, and I've been working with foundations now for over 20 years, and most of those foundations have supported community organizing. I started out with a public foundation called The Youth Project, and The Youth Project was specifically set up after the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement; it was specifically set up by the Center for Community Change to be a vehicle to fund community organizing, and especially for young organizers to develop a field, a career so to speak, a track for young organizers, as well as to develop a lot of young organizations. And that's what we did. We literally traveled around the country. My assignment was the Southwest, but we had field people in all parts of the country, so we got a pretty good pulse and a pretty good sense of community organizing. What we funded then were organizations that were struggling. And so I've had that window on community organizing.



And I've seen community organizing evolve and develop, and some of the same people that started with one organization are with another organization. I think about a person that most of us are familiar with, Anthony Thigpen from L.A. When I first met him, he was a one-or-two-person shop, it was Jobs for Peace, and if people know him, he's a master of technology now. He was developing the technology for organizing, and they were totally out of power in L.A., and they were on the margins, struggling, trying to develop these precinct networks. 20 – 30 years later they are at the center of power in Los Angeles. A number of community organizations were started during that period. So in that period, I developed such a deep appreciation for organizers and the organizations they work with, the leaders that come up through those organizations, and even as I've become a little more seasoned, a little more hardened, it's continually inspiring to see the leaders. We saw a bunch yesterday. I mean, you just cannot go away from seeing those leaders and not be inspired, and to see a part of America that our media does not cover, does not report, but is so inspiring that it keeps you gassed up, it keeps you motivated. And I think that's what the Needmor Fund has been about. And as part of that evolution, we, the Needmor Fund are celebrating our fiftieth anniversary, and I think we really began to focus on community organizing as it is today 20 years ago, and we evolved. We've seen organizations grow to scale. We've seen them have more than just one organizer, to be able to do fundraising, both internally and externally, to be on the national stage on the state stage, and on the local stage. So we've seen a lot of important changes in community organizing, and it's still evolving. And so that's what this panel is about. This is our fiftieth anniversary. We are in a period of reflection. What we're asking our panelists to do today is to help us reflect.



## 40 Madeline Talbott

The first question Frank asked is, “How did you get into the work?” When I was at St. Mary’s Academy (I’m an army brat and we moved around but I was in Portland, Oregon at the time in high school), Sister Margaret Mary took us out one day to a camp for the migrants who came in the spring to pick the berries in Oregon. Sister claimed it was a service project, and she didn’t tell the truth – she told the grower that we were there to help out and to clean the buildings and he thought that was just great, and so we went out and we were stunned by what we saw. We couldn’t believe it, and we couldn’t believe that whole families lived in those conditions, so it changed direction for a lot of us that day – we were kids in high school, were all white middle class kids, and we just didn’t know any better. So that was a big deal. And I got interested in migrant workers and migrant issues. And it led me to keep asking the question, “How do you make an impact on that?” When I was at school, a girl named Diane Gold yelled out in the hallway one day, “Does anyone speak any Spanish?” and I came out of my room and said, “No, but I’m trying to learn,” and she said, “Well, that’ll have to do.” She was putting together a group of women in Chelsea, Massachusetts, who were trying to get the first daycare center in Chelsea, which had a big Puerto Rican community. I didn’t know how to get Puerto Rican women to do anything. I didn’t know what I was doing, but Diane showed me Chelsea and said, “This area is largely Puerto Rican, and I didn’t know what to do. So, what would YOU have done? You’re young, and you don’t know any better. You don’t know NOT to do anything. What might you have done to get Puerto Rican women involved? I was 19 years old. I just started knocking on doors, and the first woman who answered the door is responsible for me being in this work. She didn’t speak English and I didn’t speak much Spanish, and I tried as best I could, and you know how it is – people appreciate you so much for trying. She invited me in, brought me upstairs to her apartment, and said, “Are you hungry?” and I picked up that much, and I said, “I don’t know. I guess.” And she pulled out some arroz con pollo, delicious food, and I sat there at her kitchen table and ate her food, and just felt at

home. I was at this obnoxious, elite university that I didn’t like, and here I was, an army brat who had found a home. And that’s what brought me in to the work. And that’s what keeps me in the work. There are so many horrible days in this work as well as wonderful days, there’s wins and there’s losses, but it’s the day-to-day interaction with marvelous people who always say that they were quiet and they gained a voice. It’s never really true. They always had that voice, and they’re talking to us, inviting us to have a meal or telling us what the issues are, but for them, they went from private to public in the course of the work and gained a sense of who they were. And in some way every day organizers hold up a mirror, and what we show back to them is somebody different than they thought they were – they just didn’t know. And they do the same for us. I didn’t know who I was; I didn’t know what I was doing; I was 19 years old, and they showed a mirror back to me in Chelsea that said, “You’re something,” and there wasn’t a name for it that I knew in those days, but eventually people told me that I was an organizer. And so that’s how I got into the work.

We’ve been working on wage issues for some time at ACORN, so when Wal-Mart wanted to come to the city, rather than just oppose them because they’re big bad guys, we proposed an idea to our collaborators and friends – and by the way, we don’t really





do anything anymore in Chicago and Illinois by ourselves. I can't think of anything we do by ourselves. We just work with a whole bunch of organizations, unions and whatnot, to get together to work and make things happen. So we approached some people, and we just talked about a strategy for dealing with a Wal-Mart wanting to come to Chicago that doesn't just say, "You can't come." And we came up with an idea to set standards that if you pay \$10 an hour in wages and \$3 an hour in benefits, come on in. And we call that the Big Box Living Wage, and that's an ordinance that we've proposed. And to our surprise, even though we've gotten pretty good at strategy over time, we introduced the latest version of that in March and got the majority of the council to co-sponsor it. So 33 out of 50, which makes it look good, like maybe you have a chance to get somewhere with it. As we got close to the Thursday when it was supposed to sail through committee, the committee chair decided to stop it. Instead, he turned the committee hearing into an opposition hearing so that all the business folks could come in and trash the heck out of it and say they'd all move out of town if we passed it. And so it came to pretty much a dead stop, and we had to figure out where to go with it. Where we're likely to go with this starting Monday is into the wards. We're going to be putting folks on the streets and on the phones in a group of targeted wards where we think we can sway the Council vote. We know the people on the streets are with us overwhelmingly, so we need to get them in communication with their aldermen and get them organized.

So what we've realized is that there is an arena for fancy sophisticated campaigns, but that when in doubt, when in trouble I should say, go back to the people, the real source of power, and get them moving, get them organized.

*Since this conversation, the Big Box Living Wage Ordinance passed, was vetoed by the mayor, and came up just short in a vote to override the veto. The groups involved continue to organize.*

## 41 Maureen O'Connell

I really want to thank you for the chance to help celebrate Needmor's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You have a good reputation among community organizing circles in this country. You have the reputation of being one of the not-too-many foundations who really funds community organizing, believes in community organizing itself, not just funds particular issues or the hot, sexy issue of the day, that really understands how community organizing is part of the infrastructure of democracy.

*"In SOCM's early days there was a lot of intimidation and threat, and sometimes following through on the threat."*

It is really an important, effective way to make this country into the democracy we want it to be. So I thank you for that. My context for organizing has been largely in one place with one organization, SOCM (pronounced "sock 'em"). And we call it SOCM now, more than Save Our Cumberland Mountains, because it's become a statewide organization and when we're working along the Mississippi River in communities where people are being sprayed by toxic malathion and there isn't a mountain for 6 hours in any direction. It's kind of hard, and yet there's an emotional tie still among some other members to the name Save Our Cumberland Mountains, so we more often say SOCM, which is one of the best acronyms probably for an organization in the country.



SOCM's evolution is a microcosm of some of the changes that have happened in organizing over the years. In SOCM's early days there was a lot of intimidation and threat, and sometimes following through on the threat. There were houses burned, there were people beat up, there were late-night phone calls, that kind of thing, and so you rely on the courage of people. Our first outside seed money was \$3,000 from the Youth Project, which paid "Boomer" Winfrey, a local man, to do this work. SOCM didn't form as part of any organizing network, and as a matter of fact formed without any organizing theory – there were problems, and people got together. We sometimes say we accidentally did some things right, when you think now of the whole world of community organizing which we of course benefited from. For instance, I remember in 1975 when SOCM members had a very hot debate about whether to move out of the 5 original coal counties that SOCM organized in. Well, luckily the members made the decision that yes we should, and that was the start of expansion of SOCM to the southern coal fields and gradual expansion to the point now we are statewide. In 1979, there was a lot of debate about now whether SOCM should work on other than "coal-related issues", which encompassed a whole lot of

community issues, because coal was so dominant, and luckily people answered yes and made a move toward a very multi-issue organization. We are now in our local chapters working on any number of range of social, economic and environmental justice issues. From a structured pure democracy where anyone who showed up at a meeting was a member and could vote on any subject, by 1980 or '81 the organization decided that it actually needed chapters and a board and internal committees and some way to get more consistent decision-making and more systematic leadership development structures in place.

*“One of our early members in looking back said in the early days, SOCM was about as organized as a chicken house.”*

From being a white, primarily union pensioner underground miners organization, SOCM expanded to become a multi-racial as well as multi-class constituency that it is today, with all the great opportunities and the challenges that that poses. One of our early members in looking back said in the early days, SOCM was about as organized as a chicken house. We would run around from place to place, any problem that came in, and there were problems everywhere! Putting out fires – we now refer to it as the brush-fire mentality, just wherever you go, teams everywhere, incredible 18 hour, 25 hour days. And often not even having time to leave anything in place once that brush fire was put out, because you had some more brush fires to go to – to an organization that had to take a look at priority-setting, strategic planning, doing some less than just reactive kind of thing.

So, what is it about community organizing that has value? I do think community organizing does provide the infrastructure for democracy. It does provide a setting where people can be together in a safe place to define their own problems, to take a step out of being a victim of those problems, and put together a plan for how to do something about it. It's a place where leaders are developed, and if it's done right, there are thousands of leaders, there must be millions by now in this country who have been developed by community organizing. I don't know how we can get them together, but there must be by this point people who actually have not just the skills but the confidence – they've won and lost enough. How has organizing changed over the years? The scale. The many organizations that started local, small, single-issue, have grown larger, state-wide, multi-issue, more sophisticated. They've gone from some of them that might have started as NIMBYs – let's solve my problem in my community – toward a sense that self-interest is broader than just my community, and also that we have to work for things and not just against them, that we have to look at what policies to put into place, not just what policies are bad for our communities. I know that there is in the South, certainly in SOCM, much more deliberate attention to race, especially white people's problems with race and recognizing white privilege and institutional racism and not just individual prejudice reduction. I think race is a defining factor in organizing. There is a kind of a theory that if you just get people together in the same group working together, that will bring down all the walls that divide them, and I think it really does help to have people working together. I think that we found what's also needed is deliberate training, whether you call it undoing racism, dismantling racism, that is really essential for us to ever be allies and colleagues and really work in any kind of constructive way together. I think that organizing has changed – there are more organizations and more collaborations than ever before. I think those have provided, and there are many examples, really rich opportunities for gaining more power and working across diversity lines.

## 42 Josh Hoyt

I was a junior in college in Spain the year that Franco died. And because I had wanted to live with students instead of with a family, because I got a girlfriend, I ended up living close to the red light district with some Syrian students and next door to some Communist Party students. So we made friends, and they took me to all the demonstrations. And the fun story to tell is marching up this hill in central Barcelona, kind of a narrow street, old street, big buildings on either side, and we were very militant, and we were shouting, “El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido!” which is “The people united will never be defeated!” and we got half way up this very long block, kind of climbing the hill, very militant, and around the corner came civil guards on horses with 3-foot billy clubs and they started charging down on us, and we shouted, “The people united will never...Run away!” We started running down the hill, I always wore my gym shoes to these things, so I was really flying, and I looked up and said, “There's the Sagrada Familia Cathedral! I have to come back!” It was this famous dripped wax thing by Gaudi, and I ran into the Metro, because I figured the horses couldn't get down steps. It was a really fun year, and I went to a march with 100,000 people on the street, the largest march I'd ever been in until a couple of weeks ago (at the 2006 immigration mega-march). They were fighting for democracy, and you got to see that. So that was very transformational for me, but the actual moment that triggered it off was the night that Franco died. I lived very close to La Rambla, which used to be the wall protecting Barcelona, and now it's a walkway with flower shops and coffee shops and newspaper stands, very picturesque, and I watched fascist youth groups pull on their armbands and beat demonstrators, anti-fascist demonstrators, with tire irons and chains, beat them bloody, and I realized that the youth group was working with secret police, with the police who were surrounding La Rambla, and I was physically terrified. I didn't do anything, I didn't say anything. My resistance was to just keep walking back and forth, watching, because everyone else was scattering. But I'd never been in a dictatorship, and I'd never had any idea what it was like, and

I never understood the physical terror which is used to maintain a dictatorship, so to go from that moment to 100,000 on the street... The police attacked; Everybody sat down. And so rather than “The people united...run away! Run away!” Everybody sat down. It was by that point a mass movement, so it wasn’t just students and union people and Trotskyites; it was daddies and mommies and retired people, and the police started clubbing them, and everyone was cowering, but they didn’t leave. And the police at a certain point mumbled into the radio and they all got back into the bus and they left, because you know you can’t club 100,000 people. You really don’t understand democracy and what it takes to make it happen until you go from one extreme to the other, and when the cops left, the cheers and the exhilaration were just unbelievable. This was the first time in 45 years that they didn’t have to run.

I’ve had great colleagues, leaders, campaigns, there were moments when we were making history, I feel. But that’s inside a thirty-year period of basically the abandonment of urban African-Americans, severe decline of wages, real exploitation and scapegoating of immigrants and just the tremendous weakening of organized labor. And so you kind of have to ask, “Well, what’s going on here, and what’s the value of our work? What are we doing right, what might we do differently?” I mean, you have to be honest about it. You have to say – how much of it is about history, and how much of it is us? And so, I ask those questions. I have a couple of observations. One is that I really do believe that community organizing reflects the best American tradition of democratic action. I’m as convinced of that now as I was the day I started, full of ideals and not a whole lot of experience. You watch what happens to human beings as they discover public voice, and you watch power – I call it flipping the turtle on its back – you know, once you flip it on its back, because they actually have to deal with regular people you just watch them flailing – they don’t know how to deal with that, and it’s just beautiful! That’s the way it ought to be – there ought to be more of it. When I began, this organizing was very active in the African-American communities, and that seems to have just practically withered on the vine, and now the vitality of community organizing is largely in the immigrant communities, and I think that’s a tremendous problem and something we can talk more about. I



think it’s less true now, but there are orthodoxies of community organizing – people think they’ve got the way to organize, and if you’re not doing it their way then you’re not actually organizing.

It looks like there may be a reawakening, and the possibilities that there may be a broad-based social movement to treat the human person with dignity in this country – you’ve got Change to Win operating differently than the AFL-CIO; you’ve got SEIU being a major ally in this shift across the country; you’ve got these enormous immigrant marches with a lot of innovation. And talent is being attracted to the field in a way that it hasn’t in much of the community organizing field. There’s a lot of interesting work among interesting think tanks and donors trying to think about how to build an infrastructure which is connected. And there is a generation of our age inside of many of the networks that is aching to operate differently and innovate a little bit. And even some of the founders are allowing some of that innovation to happen. So if there is a new movement for social justice, what will the role for traditional community organizing be? Is it going to be relevant and central and innovative, or is it going to be stuck in orthodoxies and parochial and competitive and therefore somewhat irrelevant?

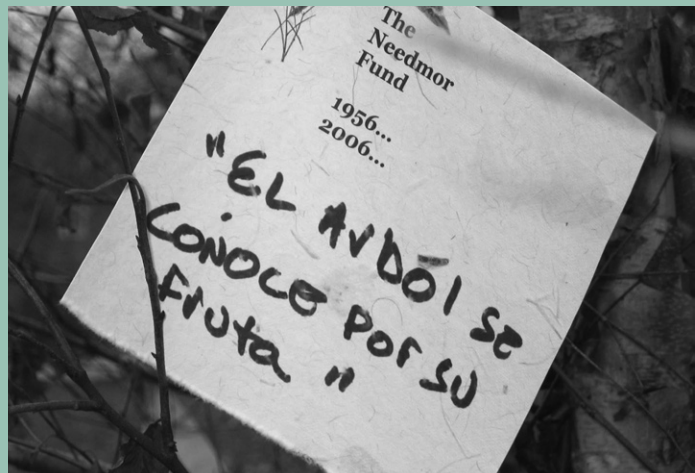
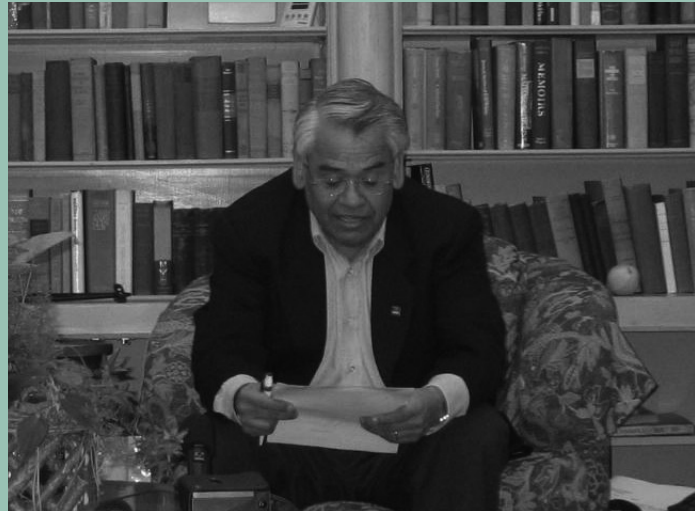


My guess is that it will be a combination of both. I mean, I saw in these marches that organizations like ACORN or like ours [Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights] were pillars around which this mass movement was happening, that provided a lot of the institutional infrastructure, but we weren't necessarily the leaders or the creators of it. And I'm not sure that this actually will happen in my lifetime. If it doesn't, I'm happy with the 29 years – I've had a lot of fun.

## 43 Eliseo Medina

I imagine most of you know the history of my country, Mexico. We are very poor, historically, an agricultural economy. As a result, many, many people have to leave Mexico to look for opportunity elsewhere, and usually it's in the United States. Even before I was born, my father came to the U. S. as an undocumented worker. We had a little farm in Mexico, and we grew peanuts and we grew squash and corn. It was basically subsistence because we had no irrigation, we had nothing. So whenever it rained we had a good crop. If it didn't rain, we had nothing. So my father would come to the US and work and send money back. He would come to the U. S., stay for a year or two, then go back home for a month or two and then come back. He did that way before I was born. We always joke in my family that you can tell when he came home by the age of all of us in my family. There's about two years difference in all of us like clockwork. So he came first as an undocumented worker, then when the bracero program came in he signed up, and came to the U. S. as a bracero – that's a guest worker – which is relevant to the discussion that is going on today about guest workers. And when that program ended, he started coming again as an undocumented worker. And in those days it wasn't hard to come to the US. There was no border to speak of, there were no walls. There weren't a whole lot of border patrolmen on the border. And people would just come, and they'd stay, and they'd go back home. Some would come for a month or two, or a year, then go home, start a business, and never come back. There was a lot of circularity in the border. But it still meant that families like

ours were divided. We never had an opportunity to live as a family and get to know each other and share a life. So at some point my mother and father decided that we didn't want to do that anymore. We're all going to go to the U. S. You have to understand that when he said we're going to go to the U.S., we called it "el norte," and we had this vision of the US as a place where you go and you pick up money with a broom and a bucket, and money's just everywhere. We didn't know any better. All we knew is when people came







back to my hometown in Mexico, some of them had a car, and nobody else had a car. They seemed to have a lot of money. So we sold our cows and our chickens and we came north. We went to Tijuana. My father found us a place to live, which was ironically right across from the border. And then he snuck through and went to work, and we stayed behind. My mother went the next very day to apply for immigration papers. That was her job to stay on top of it and go to the consulate, and make sure we had everything that we needed to go and wait in line for what they called “la cita,” the appointment with the consulate. So after two years we finally got our papers and my father came back and we all crossed together.

We moved to Delano, and I remember we all got off the bus, and we were all carrying what little things we had, and walked to the house that my father had rented. And once there, my father, my mother, and my two oldest sisters went to work in the field, and the three youngest ones went to school. I was ten years old, number four of five kids. I was put into fourth grade. If you’ve ever been in Delano, you know it’s not much to look at. But at the time it was a town that was divided. The west side was where all the Philipinos, the Blacks, and the Mexicans lived.

No sidewalks, nothing. The east side was where all the growers and the Anglos lived. And where the good schools were and everything else. When I went to school, I didn’t speak English. There was no bilingual education, so I sat there for a year in class, watching, while everybody else was doing homework. I’d been doodling. The teacher didn’t speak Spanish, and I didn’t speak English, so I just sat there. After the first year I learned English, and I got to a point where I could participate in the classroom. But after I graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, things were pretty tough for my family, so I left school and went to work full time in the fields picking grapes, and peas, and oranges, and whatever there was to be picked. At the time I was being paid 85 cents an hour.

There were no toilets in the fields. If anybody needed to go to the bathroom when they were working, they had to go hide behind a tree, or if we were working in the vineyards just walk away and do what you needed to do. No cool drinking water, just hot water. Anybody who complained got told, “You don’t like it, quit.

*“There was no bilingual education, so I sat there for a year in class, watching, while everybody else was doing homework.”*

Somebody else will take your job.” On Saturdays when we were supposed to be paid, we had to go camp out at the house of the labor contractor, and not let him leave until he paid us. Because if he left, you’d never know when you were going to be paid. So we went through all of that, and I was very angry about it. I said, “This isn’t right. We’re working for our money, and we shouldn’t be treated this way.” But there wasn’t anything else we could do. Everything was against us.

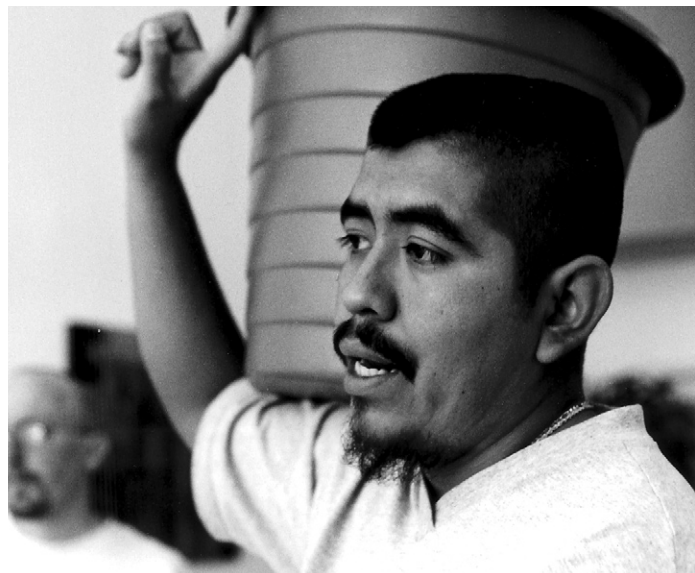
Then one day, I started hearing this stuff about this farmworker association. And I heard it because my father used to belong to this community organization, Community Services Organization.

*“...this was the first time I had ever heard of any labor contractor being made to pay workers back wages...”*

So I used to go to the meetings. It was mostly men, but they would all show up in their best clothes and go to the meeting, and I started to hear about this guy Cesar Chavez. And then one day I went to a store, and there was a magazine called “El Malcrillado,” which is Spanish for irreverent child. So that was the name of the magazine, and I picked it up and started reading it, and they were reporting about a labor contractor, a guy by the name of Jimmy Perones, who had gotten taken before the labor commissioner, and made to pay back wages that he cheated workers out of. And to me, that was the first time I had ever heard of any labor contractor being made to pay workers back wages, especially a white labor contractor. That was twice as big. And I got so excited, every week I would go and look for this magazine, and it was the magazine of the national farmworkers association.

Next thing “There’s going to be a strike in Delano.” 75% of all the table grapes in the country are grown in Delano. So we started hearing that, and it was sort of like when something big is happening, and you can feel the tension in the air, it’s kind of electricity. As it turned out earlier that year I had broken my leg, so I couldn’t work, so I was home one day watching I Love Lucy. All of a sudden my mother and my sister came in and said, “We’re on strike! We’re on strike!” I said, “What do you mean you’re on

strike?” They said, “Yeah, we walked out. We’re on strike.” So the thing finally exploded. And I heard there was a big march, so I get on my crutches and I go out there and there’s this march in Delano. And there’s never ever been anything like that in a town like this – all these Mexicans marching down the street. Incredible. So I’m watching all this stuff going on, and I’m 19 years old, so I’ve never seen anything like this, and it’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever seen. Then they said, “There’s going to be a strike meeting. A vote to call a strike.” And it was September 16, Mexican independence day. That’s a day that all of us who were born in Mexico are full of revolutionary fervor. So there’s this meeting and it was going to be at the local Catholic Church. So I go to the meeting, and it’s in a hall, and the place is packed, standing room only. I walk in, and I’ve never seen so many people yelling. And then they get up and they start talking, and this guy gets up, and he’s very dignified, and I said, “Oooh. That must be Cesar Chavez.” He’s a big guy, good looking, big booming voice. So then he introduced Cesar Chavez. And it’s this little guy. How can that be? You hear so much, you think it’s this big guy, but it’s a little guy, and very quiet. Not particularly articulate, or eloquent. But he starts talking, and I’m listening, and he starts talking about how we have rights as human beings, and we should be treated fairly, and we’re



## VOICES FROM THE FIELD – ORGANIZERS REFLECT



selling our labor, not our souls, and I thought it was pretty good stuff. So there was a strike vote and I said, “yeah, yeah,” walking out, even though I wasn’t even working. So the next day, I broke open my piggy bank, went in, and joined the union. The dues were \$3.50 a month. So I paid three months in advance and joined the union. And that’s how I got involved in the labor movement.

There was one guy, old guy, he seemed old at the time, 60-something, and he says, “Come on with me, we’ve got to go out here.” So I said, “Where are we going?” And he says, “Come on, there’s some strikebreakers out there, come with me.” But he talks us into it, and we get into the car with him. He pulls out, and when he pulls out, three sheriff’s cars pulled out behind us. At this part, my heart went all the way down to my feet. I’m scared to death, because I’ve never been in trouble. When we came to this country, they said, “Raise your right hand, promise you’ll obey the laws of the United States.” I thought we’d get deported if we did this. So we go out there, and we get out to this field, and there’s a crew of people working. And the old guy jumps out with a sign and says, “Esquiroles, salganse! Come on out you scabs!” And my friend and I had our hands in our pockets. And lo and behold, that crew leaves. And the sheriffs are standing aside, and they don’t arrest us, and the crew leaves. And I thought “There’s something to standing there with a sign. I’ve got power.”

That was the first time I got involved with defying authority, and nothing happened to me. So I got all excited. It got sort of addictive. The next day and the day after that I go back and I start picketing again, and finally they arrest me. Now that was really scary. But they let me go almost right away. They said it was no big deal. So I got really into it, and that was how I began my career in the union. I subsequently became a union organizer for the United Farm Workers. That was 40 years ago.

## 44 “Change the Ending” [Dave]

Social engagement begins when we share our stories. Social change happens when we agree together to change the ending.

## 45 “People Should Participate” [Frank]

What I always thought was a central value, and why the family could agree on community organizing was the idea that people should participate in decisions that affect their lives. This was a basic notion, but also a democratic notion. They saw community organizing as a vehicle for that.

## 46 “The Arms of the Lamb” [Jim]

Benjamin Franklin said, ““Democracy is two wolves and a lamb deciding what’s for dinner. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote.””

Organizing is the arms of the lamb.

## 47 “Changing the Landscape of Hope” [Mike]

Anytime anybody stands up and speaks out, it changes the landscape of hope. Every story that I’ve encountered in Needmor is part of a very big picture.

## 48 “Amazing Resilience” [Ann]

What I learn from every Needmor site visit is the amazing resilience of the human spirit. I’m just wowed by it. How people can keep hope alive and keep working in such circumstances – it just knocks me over.





## 49 Reflections on Needmor's 50 Years [George]

Needmor is 50 years old! Born from a seed dropped near here. While a seed itself has all the genetic information about its form and growth, none of this is immediately apparent to the gardeners as they plant and as the seed sprouts. Let us therefore honor our parents, our founders, for what today fills our garden and is ours to tend. What began as a flower of charity has now grown into a field of social justice, and we till that field with community organizing.

Time being what it is, we can only move forward, but it's important on a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to look back in reflection, for that is how we learn and adapt. It's also important to look around – what is our environment, how different today from yesterday, and what do we do about that?

Having been around the longest, I get to lead off. Indeed, things are different, although much looks the same. Trucks still rumble along highways, now 6 and 8 lanes not 2, they no longer carry corn from Iowa or cars from Detroit but products of global origin and sometimes men, women and children looking for work. Political and economic nationalisms have diverged with immense consequence to our already limited organizations of governance. Politics used to be a civil discourse, a weighing of dreams against fears; now it's a politics



of scarcity, not abundance, of exclusion rather than inclusion, a politics not of discourse but of thumping the other guy and getting away with it.

How will we know what to do about social justice in these times? The media is filled with shouts and protest. We are, after all, the best entertained and least informed nation in the world! Where is the truth to be heard? Well, Needmor is built upon relationships with truth seekers and has learned to listen – learning is mostly listening.

“Hold on to what is good, even if it is the handful of earth that nourishes our grassroots.”

This last line references a traditional Pueblo blessing:

*Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.  
Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.  
Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.  
Hold on to life even when it is easier letting go.  
Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you.”*

## 50 Tree Planting [Ann]

We meet his weekend to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of our beloved Needmor Fund, and to honor its founders.

We meet because we take huge pleasure in being with each other – the growing, changing, comforting companionship of parents, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, great nieces, nephews and our partners.

And we meet to deliberate and hopefully discern how best to continue the serious work of the Foundation.

Needmor is a living organism; it has always drawn its energy from the passionate although often very different interests of its staff and family members. In return, individual family members have drawn identity and insight and maturity from their work with Needmor.



# BENEDICTIONS

In this miraculous cycle, four generations have had their lives significantly shaped by what they have experienced working with the courageous, hopeful leaders in the field and with the tough, visionary staff people who have been called to organize us – this yowling herd of cats.

We chose to plant a tree to commemorate this anniversary because, like Needmor, a tree draws life up from its roots and also down from its branches, as each leaf makes food from water and light. Like Needmor, as the tree grows longer, its branches grow wider. New buds and seeds go into the ground to form new trees, or they become food for hungry birds and creatures – all part of the great rhythms of hope and renewal.

We chose this particular tree, a River birch – *Betula Nigra* – because of all the trees we considered, its properties seem the most like Needmor's: it is a spunky, energetic tree; it is native not only to this country, but to this county. It is happy to live close to water. It feeds wild turkeys, chickadees, white-tailed deer, beaver, cottontails, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, and ruby-throated hummingbirds. It has also been known to feed shrews and voles. It is not formed by one trunk but of many trunks, joined by a whole network of roots that travel quickly and widely, and can grow powerful enough to break through heavy barriers, even concrete.

The River Birch has both male and female flowers; it is fast growing; it likes lots of space; it is handsome even in winter because its bark wrinkles up in very interesting ways and curls back to reveal beautiful new bark underneath. If a branch breaks – wind or a swinging child – a new branch grows in its place.

Finally, when it is time to harvest the wood of the River Birch, it has two traditional uses, both of them splendidly significant to this gathering: river birch wood is used primarily for children's toys and artificial limbs!

So today we lift up the generosity of Did and Duane, who founded this remarkable organization and then trusted their children to carry on their work.



We lift up the stubborn persistence of our sister Dinny, whose determination to bring about social justice ultimately defined Needmor's mission.

We lift up all our grantees and our staff: our partners, our brothers and sisters, who are committed to work together to move the obstacles blocking their way to freedom and power.

And we lift up our fellow funders – wherever and whoever they are – who will take up one of our nuts or flowers, male or female, and plant Needmor's fruit in new soil.

*After the Words, Frances Parry distributed prayer flags made of rice paper with a tag of hemp twine, each one printed with The Needmor Fund: 1956 – 2006. She asked us each to write our prayer – or intention – for Needmor on the flag. We then processed outside and stood around the tree. One by one we read our prayers aloud, then tied our flag on a branch of the tree. Following ancient tradition, the flags will be left to decompose in the wind, rain, and sun, and our prayers will be distributed throughout the world.*

## Voices

**Abby** is Abbot Stranahan, daughter to Steve and Ann, former Board Chair and active board member. She lives in Providence, Rhode Island.

**Ann** is Ann Stranahan, married to Steve and long time Needmor board member. She lives in Perrysburg, Ohio.

**Baldemar Velasquez** is the founder and President of Toledo-headquartered Farm Labor Organizing Committee, who was an early Needmor grantee and board member.

**Daniel** is Daniel Stranahan, current Secretary-Treasurer and the son of Steve and Ann. He lives in Seattle.

**Dave Beckwith** is the Executive Director of the Needmor Fund in 2007. He first connected with Needmor as a grantseeker in 1981, and served over the intervening years as a colleague and occasional advisor until 2003, when he became Executive Director.

**Did** was Virginia Secor Stranahan, matriarch of the family and co-founder of Needmor. She lived in Perrysburg, Ohio.

**Dinny** was Virginia Stranahan, youngest child and second daughter of the founders, who was Needmor Coordinator between 1986 and 1992. She died in 1993 in Boulder, Colorado.

**Don Elmer** is a community organizer who lives in Portland, Oregon. He was an early non-family member of the Grantmaking Committee and served on the Board.



**Duane** was Duane Stranahan, Sr., Vice President of the Champion Spark Plug Company and founder, with his wife Virginia, of The Needmor Fund in 1956. He lived in Perrysburg, Ohio.

**Eliseo Medina** is the International Executive Vice President for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Mr. Medina met with the Needmor Board in Ohio in November of 2006 and reflected on his earliest activism with Cesar Chavez of the United Farmworkers and his perspective on labor and community organizing.

**Frances Parry** is Steve and Ann Stranahan's daughter who was Board Chair in the 1990's. She lives near Toledo, Ohio.

**Frank Sanchez** is a former organizer who lives in Roswell, New Mexico and was the first non-family member invited to serve on the grantmaking committee and later the Board. He is currently Senior Program Officer.

**George** is George Stranahan, second eldest son to the founder, who lives in Woody Creek, Colorado and has served as a board member and Chair.

**Jim Dickson** is a Washington, D.C. community organizer who serves on Needmor's Board.

**Josh Hoyt** is the Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, who recalled his roots and presented his perspective in May of 2006.

**Julie Beazley** is Needmor's Administrator.

**Karl Stauber** was Executive Director from 1979 to 1983.

**Madeline Talbott** is a community organizer with ACORN in Chicago. She reflected on her work and the state of the field with Needmor's board in May of 2006.

**Mary Sobecki** is on the Needmor staff. She is the Grants Administrator and a Program Associate.

**Mary** is Mary Stranahan, youngest daughter and fifth child of Duane and Did, Needmor Board Chair in 2007 and retired physician in Arlee, Montana.

*Maureen O'Connell* is the Director of SOCM (Save Our Cumberland Mountains) in Kentucky, who talked with Needmor's Board in Chicago in May of 2006.

*Mike* is Michael Stranahan, who lives in Aspen, Colorado and has served as a board and committee member with the Needmor Fund. Mike is the youngest son of the founders.

*Molly* is Molly Stranahan, daughter to George Stranahan, who lives in New Jersey and served as a Board member and chair of the Board Development Committee.

*Patti Stranahan* is married to George and serves as a Board member and "Family Wrangler" for the Board Development Committee from their home in Colorado.

*Sarah* is Sarah Stranahan, daughter to Duane Jr. ("Pat") and former Board Chair and Secretary-Treasurer. She lives in New York City and is an active member of Needmor's board.

*Scott Douglas* is an organizer in Birmingham, Alabama who was one of the first non-family Board members.

*Steve Stranahan* is the third son of the founders who served as Needmor's Finance Committee Chair for many years. He lives in Perrysburg, Ohio.



## Resources

If you'd like to join us, to "...work with others to bring about social justice...", here are some folks who could help:

Neighborhood Funders' Group  
(NFG)  
1301 Connecticut Ave NW,  
Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 833-4690  
[www.nfg.org](http://www.nfg.org)

National Committee for  
Responsive Philanthropy  
(NCRP)  
2001 S St., NW, Suite 620,  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
202-387-9177  
[www.ncrp.org](http://www.ncrp.org)

Changemakers  
605 Market Street, Suite 1109  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
415-543-2363  
[www.changemakers.org](http://www.changemakers.org)

## Contact

The Needmor Fund  
42 South Saint Clair Street  
Toledo, OH 43604  
419-255-5560  
[www.needmorfund.org](http://www.needmorfund.org)

## Acknowledgements

*Jeff Pinzino* collected stories and devised the structure of this book.

*Katrina Pavlik and Ana Bedard* transcribed much of the taped storytelling.

*Patrick and Gabe Stranahan* recorded a number of these stories at the November 2006 board meeting.

*Ann Stranahan* co-edited this project with *Dave Beckwith*. She also served as photo editor and guiding spirit.

*Funk Luetke Skunda Marketing of Toledo* designed and laid out the book.

*The Center for Health, Environment and Justice, The National Organizers' Alliance* and the *Highlander Center* all provided photos.