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Perspectives on

Community Engagement

August 2003



Photo: Gene Anthony

Grateful Dead play free in Golden Gate Park, Love Pageant Rally, 1966

Introduction

Rex initiated a newsletter series last year to gain perspectives and directions for its core mission. The first, *Perspectives on Environmental Activism*, addressed a clear and central concern. We hope to return to this theme in a future newsletter through the lens of indigenous peoples and their cultural survival.

Many of our mission areas are naturally interconnected, such as support for social services, education, and the arts. Common to them, and to the specific programs Rex has funded over the last 20 years, is the organizing principle that effective action is a function of community. In this newsletter, we explore what it means to engage social issues through community.

As is our custom, we invited a Rex board member, Carolyn Garcia, and a member of our own wider community, Peter Coyote, to contribute their thoughts. These alumni of the 1960's draw some lessons from those times useful in today's world. We are fortunate to have their wisdom and confirmed experience as markers on the road forward.

Editorial Note

“I read the news today, oh boy!” I listened to that Beatles refrain many times. In 1967 when *A Day In The Life* was released, and for years to follow, the news was difficult to hear or watch as the Vietnam war escalated and the political winds stirred up to quell the questioning of authority.

The news these days is not good either. It is easy to be discouraged by continuous messages about terrorism, international unrest, and acts of violence. I often hear people, young and old, say they feel so overwhelmed and disillusioned, that they’re inclined to disengage and get as far away from the bad news as possible.

My involvement at Rex has helped me turn from the discouraging to the positive. Each day we learn about programs all over the world where small groups of people forge their ideas and energy into actions that help solve challenging problems. I look at the corner walls in the Rex office that display the more than 900 programs Rex has funded since 1984 and contemplate the excellent work going on day-after-day by the people that continue to make these programs reality. This newsletter has stories about people who demonstrate the positive impact of community participation. In addition to interviewing Peter Coyote and Carolyn Garcia, we’ve written about several Rex beneficiaries that demonstrate the power of individuals to create transformational solutions to problems they’ve confronted in their local communities. See www.rexfoundation.org for a complete list of beneficiaries, most of which reflect what happens when a few people decide to take action.

A compelling metaphor emerged from our interview with Peter Coyote about the power of people, individually and collectively, to make a difference, even under the most challenging of circumstances:

A sailboat has a counterbalancing keel that serves to right the boat if it heels over. America is sailing amid heavy winds of extremism, fear mongering and government intrusion. The keel, hidden from direct observation below the waterline, is comprised of we the people – humanity with its fundamental decency and generosity. It is this basic, free-spirit-edness, inventiveness, concern for fairness, and respect for difference that will right the sailboat.

I have long-enjoyed listening to Scoop Nisker’s radio segments. He always closes his news commentary exhorting, “If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own!” We hope the perspectives here are a source of good news and inspiration to engage and make some news of our own.

– *Sandy Sohcot*

Radical Optimism

Most widely known in recent years for his work as a film actor, Peter Coyote has a rich history in community action dating from the 1960's. own lives, the core motivation of most community action. Accordingly we changed the title of this newsletter from Community Activism to Community Engagement and feel the better for it. Peter grew up with impassioned political debate at the dinner table, a family predisposition towards justice, and an aversion to bullies and unfairness. His mother took him to hear Martin Luther King Jr. when he was 14, and, at that same age, he worked on Adlai Stevenson's presidential campaign. These experiences combined with



witnessing the oppressive ideological blacklisting in the 1950's and the Civil Rights marches in the 1960's provided the context for Peter's evolving engagement. So he immediately focused our attention with his thoughts about how the terms activist and activism can, and are, used to fragment effective collective action.

“Using activist to describe those taking a stand, implies that most people don't act on their beliefs. The ist descriptor, as in terms like feminist, creates divisions among groups, diverting attention from commonly held values for family, community, health, good employment, and honest work.” Peter

recommends engagement as a better term as it conveys the ability people have to define their own lives, the core motivation of most community action. Accordingly we changed the title of this newsletter from Community Activism to Community Engagement and feel the better for it.

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Peter cites the 1963 Cuban Missile Crisis as the impetus for his first

autonomous adult engagement. Confronted with the end of the world, he got together with Grinnell College friends and, agreeing that they needed to “do something,” began meeting regularly. They developed a plan centered on conducting a 3-day fast in front of the White House. They cut their hair, bought suits and ties, raised money to buy two cars, and organized student and professorial support for President Kennedy’s Peace Race, along with protests against the resumption of nuclear testing. These efforts resulted in several major outcomes:

- While fasting in Washington, Peter’s picketing group was invited to the White House and met with McGeorge Bundy, a key aide to President Kennedy.
- The press reports Peter’s group circulated to 3,000 college and university campuses following this meeting helped lead to the 1963 Student Meeting of 25,000 students in Washington, D.C.
- This meeting essentially spawned the student movement of the 1960’s.

Peter looks back on this experience as compelling, heady and fun. Arriving in San Francisco in 1964, he pursued a Master’s Degree in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University. After a short apprenticeship at the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop, he joined the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a radical political street theater group, which is still going strong. Peter notes the motto of the Mime Troupe at this time was “Engagement, Commitment and Fresh Air.” Peter, Emmett Grogan and a number of members of the Mime Troupe subsequently formed the Diggers to constructively address the issues caused by hordes of runaways who arrived in San Francisco during the Summer of Love. The Diggers organized the provision of free food, housing and medical care, along with free concerts by musicians, such as the Grateful Dead, held at the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park. The Diggers sought to create a culture that broke down ideological stereotypes, where it was possible to be authentic, and in which community could be created with more options than the official dualism of consumer/employer, “to create a world we wanted to live in.” To gain access to the free food, one had first to pass through a six-foot square “Free Frame of Reference.” The idea was not to provide charity, but to invite people to look at the world differently, to imagine a world from a free frame of reference.

The San Francisco Mime Troup and the Diggers were part of the multi-headed social movement which many people call “The Sixties.” Peter describes this time as a nexus of prosperity, expanding media outlets, particularly radio, and growth of folk music that supported the exploration

of alternatives. Peter refers to folk music as a metaphor for authenticity. The folk music movement “pulled young people off the asphalt, out of the suburbs, and into the realms of working class people Appalachians, Black, poor, Old Bohemians. People heard voices like Paul Robeson’s and Pete Seeger’s that were undisputedly authentic, and this spurred them to think about the lives of the singers and their subjects and what produced this authenticity. This search led to people collecting records going to folk music festivals, gathering in large numbers, smoking pot, playing music, talking about politics and generating ideas.” It was the impetus for the later hipsters who were the heirs of the Beats, and a major root of Grateful Dead music and Deadhead culture.

Peter reflected on his involvement with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Diggers as a coalescing of his beliefs, the way he made a living, lived his life and integrated with community. He describes the significance of solving problems directly. There were neighborhood bullies to be dealt with, and a more authentic connection to community to be developed – where you learn to solve problems with the people around you rather than attempting to solve problems as an outsider looking in. This is a fundamental distinction to keep in mind, the fertile ground of community action.

Peter cites the Matthole Salmon Group, a Rex Foundation grantee, as a good example of integrated, bottomup community engagement. Twenty-five years ago, David Simpson and Freeman House brought together the poachers, hunters, pot growers, salmon lovers, ranchers and hippies to identify the common issues they wanted to address, and today, they continue to successfully work together to restore the Matthole River and a sustainable environment for salmon spawning.

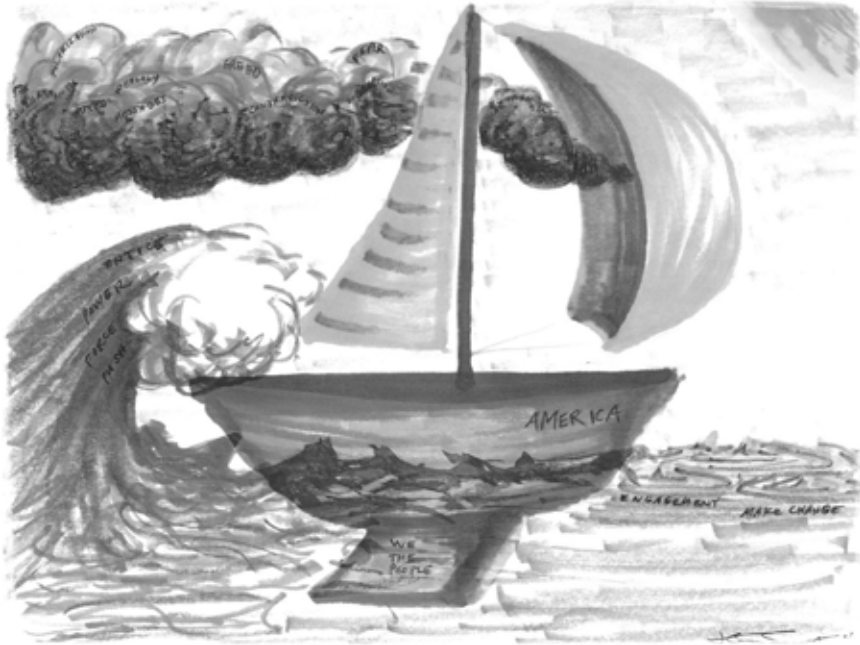
In reflecting on the current political, social and economic environment, Peter expressed concern that the combination of bleak news, ideology-based government policies, and marketing messages that foster a cynical attitude are causing many people to disengage from their communities and the political process. He cautions that ideology heightens contradictions and polarizes people as either “good guys” or “bad guys.”

When asked how he overcomes the forces that deter engagement, Peter describes a number of effective remedies:

- Practice Radical Optimism. Acknowledging that the news provides no rational basis to be cheerful, Peter notes that equally rational is the notion that we never know how things will turn out. Given that, it’s more powerful to be optimistic. On the other hand, if we surrender to depression and disengagement, there is no chance that

anything is going to happen – this will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. However, if we maintain a “we don’t know what will happen” attitude, this is enough of a rational ledge on which to get a toe-hold for feeling optimistic. “Doing nothing is surrender.”

- Engage with intent rather than ideology. Intention identifies a problem we must address and clarifies the manner in which to address the problem. With identification of the intent, we can be flexible and adopt whatever strategies are useful to solving the problem. Ideology hampers solution because it limits action to what the ideology proscribes.
- Recognize that no one strategy, ideology, or action will work everywhere.
- Find ways to connect with people across the broadest common concerns, intentions and values, regardless of ideology. Given the current political climate, we have the most to gain from temporarily suspending specific though important issues in order to work together on priorities in the overall context. Peter recommends collective action in the following areas:
 - Coalesce around the top priority issue of nuclear radiation, a biocide that kills everything with replicating cells. This is of utmost priority, where there is little time to work things out politically. If this issue is not addressed effectively, it may not matter what else we do to enhance the biosphere or our individual health.
 - Work on campaign finance reform to eliminate corporate influence and harness politicians back into the employ of the people, whereby:
 - All elections are financed by the federal government.
 - Public airwaves are free to all qualified candidates, and all candidates agree to appear on each network without handlers and minders.
 - The same tax deduction corporations get for disseminating information is given to individuals and non-profits.
 - Legislators’ salaries are competitive with the private sector. This can be done by organizing petition drives where signers pledge to support candidates who pass legislation incorporating these reform actions, and work against those candidates who don’t support such legislation.
 - Address voter fraud. Current computerized voting is not supervised by any federal agency, but instead is carried out by corporations who own the electronic voting machines and software.
 - Create relationships between the Green Party and Democratic Party so that there are no spoilers in the election.



Peter expanded on a metaphor he recently heard on the Jim Lehrer News program as the basis for his optimism about what people can do:

Deep Keel

A sailboat has a counterbalancing keel that serves to right the boat if it heels over too far. America is sailing amid heavy winds of extremism, fear-mongering and government intrusion. The keel, hidden from direct observation below the waterline, is comprised of we the people, humanity with its fundamental decency and generosity. It is this basic, free-spirit-edness, inventiveness, concern for fairness, and respect for difference that will right the sailboat. The countervailing force to excess is the deep keel of community engagement.

Intentional Community

Asked to describe her first experience with community engagement, Carolyn Garcia centers on what she calls her “chosen communities,” among which are the extended family of the Grateful Dead, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, the Oregon Country Fair family, and the Hog Farm, “the tribes” as these and others were called in the sixties.

As a member of the Grateful Dead family, Carolyn committed her energy and resourcefulness to enhance its economic and creative vitality – to help the group see itself as an entity separate from the world at large. She describes this time as “an opportunity to recreate a microcosm of the universe as we thought it should function and cling to that successfully.”

Common to the tribes is what Carolyn describes as deliberate efforts to create groups that could work together and function in a group consciousness, finding a sense of belonging and safety in numbers. She attributes this to the fact that in the 1960’s, when these communities came together, so many of the participants were up-rooted from their original families and social networks. “People need to be connected, we’re social animals,” she notes. “People in isolation are imbalanced.... These communities formed because people wanted them to, usually around a man, usually around a leader – someone with a long view – someone self-confident and solid enough inside their own spirit that they felt they had the strength and energy to gather a group around them.”

Carolyn continues to be engaged in a number of communities, such as the Rainforest Action Network, the Rex Foundation and the many tribes, such as the Hog Farm and Oregon Country Fair, that continue to flourish. What attracts Carolyn’s engagement is the commitment people have to make something happen and to maintain the effort over the long term. “It is heartwarming to revisit a group and see that many of the same people are still there, and that their efforts have persisted.” Carolyn believes these communities reflect the human need for long-term relationships with each other, and that people who have that need strongly in their personal make-up will last in these groups.

She also observes that people seek to rewrite ceremony into new traditions, such as Grateful Dead’s New Year shows, and that these ceremonies are a way of keeping the collective in touch with each other and to pass the traditions down across multiple generations. Carolyn sees “larger circles engaging smaller circles to come and participate, and this then becomes a gigantic spawning ground for people to meet each other and form new groups, new clusters, new couples.... This is different than going to a ballgame or the opera, where people come separately and leave separately, and don’t connect while there.... These ceremonies, or reunions of created families, even if infrequent, are something we need to do to retain the connections.”

Carolyn observes that today young people are “doing a lot of the heavy lifting” when it comes to community involvement, developing themselves as productive members of various engaged communities. She sees young

people as “very able to isolate an issue, study it, jump on the band wagon and be highly supportive, giving of themselves to support a social need.”

She describes a young man who drove a truckload of food, collected at the recent four-night run of the String Cheese Incident concerts, to the Pine Ridge Reservation. “This concept of sharing is so simple, yet how revolutionary!... We’ve become conditioned culturally to believe that everyone should be able to participate as they want to, but that’s not true.... The concept of not just feeding yourself, but feeding your neighbor is so powerful, and could revolutionize the global distribution of resources if more people could grasp this simple idea and act from their hearts.”



Carolyn emphasizes the importance of focusing on such simple ideas, fearing that when confronted by too much complexity, we “check out and stop reviewing our life work and what our daily effort consists of.” This goes back, again, to the importance of connecting with others, particularly around a collective consciousness. In the past, religions created small communities. In more recent times “intentional communities” have formed all over the world, coming together for different reasons. The Findhorn Community in Scotland, originally a gardening collective, now works specifically to teach community building.

Asked what she would like to see happen today to foster effective community engagement, Carolyn proposes more opportunities for people to come together around dance and music. “People need to physically move their bodies in self-expressive manners – it’s part of the human condition.... We need to act out some of this stuff – dancing in circles, holding hands.... In our secular atmosphere, ceremonies hold things together and support our efforts to build smaller, networked communities.” Carolyn says that such occasions as festivities honoring the earth or ceremonies around the solstice bring people together who haven’t seen each other for a while, and are great ways to organize. Reflecting on the recent marches in San Francisco to protest the war in Iraq, she describes the positive effect of people coming together around a common agenda. “This was a moment for great enjoyment – giant puppets, drum circles, people looking each other in the eye, smiling, sharing and remembering a common purpose.... This is



Photo: Gene Anthony

Tribes gather at the Human Be-In Golden gate park, , 1967

basic, wonderful stuff – numbers don’t matter, as much as people coming together, directed by their hearts, creating a collective consciousness.”

Carolyn believes that behind effective community engagement is a moral imperative that focuses people on something needing to be accomplished. She points to the Woman’s Suffrage movement of the early 1900’s as a great example of collective consciousness for political action: the people involved gave so much of themselves over an extensive period of time and accomplished a great deal.

She prescribes more connections among younger and older people around common concerns. “Older activists must reach out to the younger generation and fill their heads with the history of their movements – what

happened, who did what, how things have changed, what to do now.... We need to inspire younger people to engage in these issues – engage in trying to change the current that right now seems to be dragging us back to some strange Paleolithic, militarized, parasitic thinking.... Older activists have a major role to play in telling the history of their movement in such a way that people can begin to read what’s going on now more clearly.... We can envision a world where a lot more connecting across generations is happening.”

Carolyn expresses concern about how fear-mongering, the misrepresentations of reality presented by Reality TV programs, and our captivity to consumerism cause us to be distracted and to miss “the feats of quiet bravery” that happen every day. To address these concerns, Carolyn recommends the following:

- Make more opportunities to air the issues we’re facing today and find new ways to think about them. Consider new ways of establishing what success is and defining new goals.
- Spend more time going to and looking at the way people live around the world, checking in with other cultures. Honor and enjoy other cultures, and enjoy each other more.
- Commit ourselves – our wealth, time and life energy – to improving society and the planet.
- Find new ways to economize, to share, to say NO to incredibly damaging thought forms, and to survive in an increasingly difficult, complex and over-crowded planet.
- Carry out transformational philanthropy, funding groups that are seeking to have transformational ideas thrive.
- Encourage new ideas, and present ideas in such a way that they are easily understandable.
- Flush out ideas so that people can discover them for themselves – have an “Aha” moment. After all, “Once in a while you can get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right.” • Be ready to discuss everything at the drop of a hat – relish the joy and power of good discussion. Think of discussion as gold.
- Value the importance of smaller communities, rather than being swept up by gigantic sweeping movements.
- Imagine the possibilities of connecting smaller communities as participants in the fabric of human life – the human quilt.

A particular negative consequence of globalization, the diminishment of cultural diversity, can be counteracted by an extension of the tribes – vibrant, engaged, intentional communities. Deep keel.

Profiles of Some Rex Foundation Beneficiaries

Green Chimneys Children's Services. In 1947, at age nineteen, Sam Ross, inspired by small boarding schools he had seen while touring Europe, convinced his physician father to purchase a 75 acre farm in Putnam County, New York, to house a private boarding school and day camp where children could interact with farm life and learn to care for farm animals. The next year Green Chimneys Farm for Little Folk opened its doors with just eleven students. The property has since been expanded to over 160 acres and school enrollment now exceeds 150 students.

In the 1970s the focus shifted to serving the needs of at-risk children, and Green Chimneys Children's Services was licensed as an around-the-clock treatment center by the New York Department for Social Services, offering education and mental health services, including working with emotionally disturbed and learning disabled youth referred by social service agencies and public school districts. In the intervening years the organization has evolved into a multifaceted nonprofit social services agency with a new \$12 million school building on the main campus, and an annual budget of \$24 million supporting 470 professionals and several hundred volunteers. Funding comes from state agencies and private donations.

In addition to the school on the main campus, its operations include residential treatment centers for boys and girls aged 6 through 17, a supervised living and vocational training program for developmentally challenged adults in Danbury, Connecticut, the operation of three group homes in Westchester and Putnam Counties, New York, a life skills residential facility and a series of supervised independent living apartments in Manhattan, an outdoor education and wildlife rehabilitation center, a mentoring program for teenagers and a year-round preschool program.

Sam, now Dr. Ross, is still very much involved with Green Chimneys and is currently writing a book about its evolution. When asked if he had any vision of the growth his organization has achieved he replied, "I had no concept whatsoever that it would grow but you never know what will come along. One thing I do know is that successful organizations last long after the original problem has been solved."

Green Chimneys Children's Services, Inc., Putnam Lake Road, Caller Box 719, Brewster, New York 10509 • 845-279-2995 • www.greenchimneys.org

Kid Street Learning Center. Kid Street began as one woman's dream – literally. In 1991 Linda Conklin, an ex-school teacher and employee of an



educational software firm, was involved in a near fatal car accident. She suffered multiple injuries, including brain damage, which required three years for full recovery. During her convalescence, Linda, with no background whatsoever in theatre, “dreamed” of the idea of a children’s theatre, to be named Kid Street, that would heal emotional wounds, enhance self esteem, and create a sense of accomplishment and pride among at-risk, abused, and abandoned children from the poorest parts of central Sonoma County, California.

Having worked with troubled children as a teacher, Linda was convinced of two things: these kids desperately needed to be listened to and given a sense of control over their lives; any successful program to accomplish this had to involve a mandatory commitment by the parents to learn how to better cope with the challenges of parenthood. Once back on her feet, but still partially incapacitated and recovering from her injuries, she followed her dream, mortgaging her home to raise enough money to start Kid Street at the Luther Burbank Center in Santa Rosa.

Supported by volunteers from the community, her first group of children wrote and performed the first Kid Street theatre show there in 1991. In the audience that night was the first of several “angels” that Linda credits with her success – the owner of a warehouse in the poorest section of Santa Rosa was so impressed with the show that he donated the space that became the first home of Kid Street. After the owner of the warehouse died, a number of temporary venues followed until two years ago when the Lincoln Arts Center School went up for sale, and another “angel,” the Finley Foundation, provided the funds for its purchase and Kid Street moved into

its current location. In this place Linda has nurtured Kid Street to provide a restorative environment for families and children suffering from domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, homelessness, underemployment, incarceration, and hunger.

Working in partnership with Child Protective Services, Welfare to Work, and the county Adult and Juvenile Probation Departments, Kid Street provides after school care and family strengthening programs, a family care management system, self-esteem building programs (including the theatre), peer counseling, and adult programs in positive parenting, anger management, substance abuse and literacy. Kid Street continues to provide a model for communities concerned about the deterioration of healthy childhoods and the increase in crime involving children and teens. Presently several other cities in California and Hawaii are considering opening theatres modeled after Kid Street.

The program is funded by grants from the city of Santa Rosa, income from space rented to other non-profits, fundraising events, and private donations. Linda Conklin directs the program, supported by just one additional paid staff member and over 100 volunteers from the community.

Kid Street Learning Center, Box 6784, Santa Rosa, CA 95406 707-525-9223 • www.kstreet.org

New Old Time Chautauqua. In 1981, the Flying Karamazov Brothers (Masters of Juggling and Cheap Theatrics) Family got together at the home of Dr. Patch Adams (yes, that one) and the Gesundheit! Gang to hash over the idea of a Traveling Medicine Show that combined workshops and the kind of New Vaudeville found at the Oregon Country Fair. The plan was to take the show on the road, like the outdoor Chautauquas that flourished in America from the late 1800s until the 1920s. These tentshow Chautauquas were once called “the most American thing in America” by Teddy Roosevelt.

The original Chautauqua concept, which remains the New Old Time Chautauqua’s mission to this day, is to bring family entertainment and educational workshops to rural and remote communities, which are often underserved when it comes to live performance.

The New Old Time Chautauqua’s goal is to “strengthen communities through laughter, entertainment, education and participation.” NOTC is a new approach to an old idea, which still brings people together through the intimacy of informal, outdoor theatre. For over 20 years NOTC’s all-volunteer performers and staff have staged three to six-week summer tours throughout California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia and Alaska.



A typical touring show consists of four parts: a lively “everybody’s welcome” parade through the center of the town; free workshops that range from juggling to herb walks to Compassionate Listening; a community show that visits institutionalized people in places like hospitals, jails, rest homes; and a rip-roaring, balls o’ fire, all the bells and whistles, star-studded Vaudeville Variety Show.

Because the towns on the Summer Tour are often financially challenged, and traveling with 45-60 people costs a chunk of change, NOTC relies on ticket sales, memberships, grants and donations to “keep the show on the road”. (To view the current plans for regional shows and summer tours, visit the Schedules page of the web site.)

The New Old Time Chautauqua, 615 54th Street, Port Townsend, WA 98368
360-385-2212 • www.chautauqua.org

Eastside Domestic Violence Program. In 1981 representatives of several citizen’s groups concerned about domestic violence issues teamed up with personnel from the King County (Washington) Social and Health services agency to obtain a small (\$15,000) grant to develop a plan for providing better services to victims of domestic violence. Community volunteers were recruited to serve on a domestic violence task force, and a part-time coordinator and one support staff were hired to work in a space donated by a Presbyterian church in Bellevue. The following year two Bellevue women were murdered by their husbands and the public’s attention was suddenly focused on the need for better community services and education about domestic violence. In response, the Eastside Domestic Vio-

lence Program (EDVP) was incorporated to provide support groups and counseling services to battered women.

According to Linda Olsen, the current Executive Director, the founding director and first volunteer coordinator “worked miracles with that first \$15,000.” Soon two volunteer safe houses were established and a 24-hour crisis line were put into place. In 1984, the US Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence picked EDVP as a model of a coordinated community approach to intervention and prevention of domestic violence. By the late 1980s the program had moved into a new facility for training, counseling and administration purchased with a grant from the city of Bellevue. Funded by a variety of government grants and donations from private foundations, the program continued to grow throughout the 1990s. Rex’s grant of \$10,000 in 1995 helped “keep the doors open” of My Sister’s Home, a confidential shelter that since 1993 had provided 5,400 nights of safe shelter and support to nearly 300 women and children. From its humble beginnings in 1981 EDVP has continued to grow to become the largest provider of services for victims of domestic violence in Washington state. The current budget of approximately \$3 million comes from individual contributions, foundation, church, and government grants, and fundraising events.

Eastside Domestic Violence Program, Box 6938, Bellevue, WA 98008-0398
425-562-8840 • www.edvp.org

Families Against Mandatory Minimums. When Jeff Stewart, a young man with no criminal record, was arrested in 1991 for growing marijuana in Washington state, his sister, Julie Stewart, was naturally worried. But when he was subsequently prosecuted in federal court and sentenced to five years in prison, she was outraged. Julie had learned first-hand about mandatory minimum laws, which give judges no discretion in sentencing, and the devastating effects they can have on the lives of nonviolent offenders and their families. Putting her rage to constructive use, she resolved to form an organization committed to returning common sense to sentencing policies. Thus FAMM was born in March of 1991.

Today FAMM has more than 29,000 members and nearly 40 chapters in 28 states across the country. Members include prisoners and their families, criminal justice officials, clergy, attorneys, local and national non-profit organizations, and concerned citizens. Together with these advocates, FAMM works to educate state and federal legislators on the need for sentencing reform and to galvanize public support for alternatives to rigid mandatory sentencing policies. Julie, who continues to be active in the or-



ganization, says: “In 1991, I thought the focus should be the Congress and didn’t realize what an uphill battle that would be or the level of commitment I would need to make.” But she has persevered, and “the good news is that we are seeing movement today at the state level. This is a powerful human interest story that is finally getting the attention it deserves.”

Families Against Mandatory Minimums, 1612 K Street, NW, Suite 700 Washington, D.C. 20006 • 202-822-670 • www.famm.org

Drums not Guns. (Portions of the following are excerpted, with editorial changes, from “Man with a Mission,” by Tyche Hendricks, which appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, May 22, 2003.)

Carnaval’s artistic director, Roberto Hernandez, in preparing elemen-

tary school students for their part in this annual parade told them “Carnaval is like a tree: every year it grows and changes. The more you learn about the dance and the music, the more beautiful you become.” This has certainly been true for Roberto, born just three months after his parents emigrated from Nicaragua, whose love of music has helped him as he traveled a rocky road from the streets to neighborhood activist, to hitting the skids on drugs and alcohol, to emerging again as a community leader. “I’ve been stabbed, I’ve been shot, I’ve rumbled,” he says. In 1974, after a short stint at university, he took a job at a neighborhood community center where his organizing skills blossomed, eventually leading him to become the director of a community cultural center that later created the annual Carnaval parade and celebration. But addictions to alcohol and cocaine were getting the best of him, and it took him most of the 1990s to finally get clean and sober, graduating from college in 1999 and returning to producing the Carnaval for Mission Neighborhood Centers.

Remaining close to the pulse of the Mission District where he grew up, Roberto became increasingly concerned about the prevalence of gangs and guns among youth in his old neighborhood. From this, and his love of music, the idea for Drums not Guns was born. Inspired by the success of two of the Mission Center’s prior gang-related youth programs, he hit on the idea of offering teenagers an alternative to gang life – participation in an inspirational performing arts program, climaxing with performing in Carnaval’s Grand Parade. The price of admission? Turn in a weapon -and get a drum in return. With the help of a number of small grants, Drums not Guns was started in the fall of last year. It aims to become an ongoing program in which artist instructors mentor the youth, individually and in groups, in community locations designated as safe havens from gang activities. Roberto’s goals for 2003 are to provide 100 drums in exchange for weapons, create 10 drum circles of ten young people each, provide five field trips that will offer the kids the opportunity to experience life outside their neighborhoods, buy more traditional Latin costumes for the parade, and start a series of life-skills workshops. “We’re here on earth such a short time. We’ve got to do whatever we can to make a change... I’m a believer in change.”

Drums not Guns, Roberto Hernandez, Mission Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
1333 Florida Street, San Francisco, CA 94110 • 415-206-0577

Zen Hospice Project. In 1995 the Rex Foundation provided a \$10,000 grant to the then fledgling Zen Hospice Project (ZHP) volunteer caregiver program. The money was used wisely to train volunteer caregivers to

provide direct hands on care to indigent people dying of cancer, AIDS, and other illnesses. The volunteer caregivers do no nonsense work, make soup, change soiled bed linens, hold the hand of a dying patient, listen to a lifetime of stories lived and now ending. In a typical Zen understated way they say it is “nothing special,” just simple human kindness.

In 1987 Founding Director Frank Ostaseski was ushered into a vacant student’s room at San Francisco Zen Center which held a green shag rug, an old door for a makeshift desk, a meditation cushion, and a telephone listed in his own name. Since then ZHP has served well over 2000 people at the end of their lives and trained close to 1000 volunteers. ZHP created its own residential hospice and partners with the city of San Francisco in operating a palliative care unit in the nation’s largest long term care facility.

“In the early days we didn’t have a residential hospice,” says Ostaseski. We cared for people on the streets or accompanied them at SF General Hospital. There were volunteer caregivers who spent the night with patients in their cramped and roach-infested Tenderloin hotel rooms. Occasionally, we would bring folks home to live with us at Zen Center. The AIDS epidemic was raging. Our motto in those days was, ‘...we will do what we can now with mindfulness and compassion and when we can do more we will.’”

The organization has developed into a leading voice in the movement to improve care of the dying in America. It has launched an End-of-Life Counselor program to train professionals from all over the country to be “midwives to the dying.” Thousands of people caring for family and friends have attended their educational workshops in the US and Europe. ZHP’s extraordinary program has been featured on the Oprah Winfrey show and Bill Moyers’ groundbreaking series “On Our Own Terms” as an example of how to best provide mindful and compassionate care. Frank Ostaseski was honored in 2001 by the Dalai Lama for his years of compassionate service.

With all of this, ZHP remains a small community based organization serving the Bay Area Community. Grace Slick and Ram Dass visited a dying friend recently at the residential Guest House. Ram Dass said, “...the folks at Zen Hospice are infused with spirit ...they are restoring the soul to caregiving.” The volunteer caregivers say they simply use something like the Braille method, feeling their way along, guided by their hearts, intuition and spiritual practice. They feel blessed by the remarkable teachings that come from accompanying the dying and their families, confirming time and again that true service is always mutually beneficial.

Zen Hospice Project, 273 Page St., San Francisco, CA 94102 415-863-2910
 •mail@zenhospice.org • www.zenhospice.org

"The boughs of the oak are roaring inside the acorn's shell." – Charles Tomlinson

www.moveon.org. A catalyst for a new kind of grassroots involvement, supporting busy but concerned citizens in finding their political voice, MoveOn is one of the most effective and responsive outlets for democratic participation available today. MoveOn is working to bring ordinary people back into politics by building electronic advocacy groups. Once a group is assembled, MoveOn provides information and tools to help each individual have the greatest possible impact.

www.truthout.org. Providing readers with critical, up to date news and commentary on world events, TruthOut currently reaches a quarter of a million readers per month.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Since 1958, CND has campaigned non-violently to rid the world of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and to create genuine security for future generations. Their goals are to change government policies to bring about the elimination of British nuclear weapons, stimulate wide public debate on the need for alternatives, empower people to engage actively in the political process, and to work for a nuclear-free and peaceful future. (www.cwduk.org)

Center for Media & Democracy. CMD is a nonprofit, public interest organization dedicated to investigative reporting on the public relations industry. The Center serves citizens seeking to recognize and combat manipulative and misleading PR practices. CMD specializes in blowing the lid off today's multi-billion dollar propaganda-for-hire industry, naming names and revealing how public relations wizards concoct and spin the news, organize phony "grassroots" front groups, spy on citizens, and conspire with lobbyists and politicians to thwart democracy. (www.prwatch.org/cmd)

etown. etown is a mission driven non-profit creating a strong community awareness of social and environmental issues through music and conversation. Heard on both NPR. and commercial stations, etown features performances from many of today's top musical artists as well as conversation and information about our communities and our environment. etown creates a constantly expanding "community on the air," reminding listeners all over the country that individual efforts really do make a difference. (www.etown.org)

Electronic Frontier Foundation. EFF is an organization working to protect our fundamental rights by educating the press, policymakers and the general public about civil liberties issues related to digital technology; and acts as a defender of those liberties. EFF publishes a comprehensive archive of digital civil liberties information at one of the most linked-to websites in the world. (www.eff.org)

Intentional Communities. A movement whose vision is to build a better world by sharing information, encouraging and strengthening connections, and raising awareness of the options of intentional community. An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The IC Web site shares the tools, resources, experience, and values of the intentional communities movement around the world to help create a more sustainable human future. (www.ic.org)

San Francisco Mime Troupe. SFMT uses “mime” in the ancient sense: to mimic. The performers are satirists, seeking to make you laugh at the absurdities of contemporary life and at the same time, see their causes. The troupe creates shows about most of the burning issues of our time, generally debunking the official story. SFMT performs everywhere from public parks to palaces of culture, aiming to reach the broadest possible audience. (www.sfmt.org)

Women’s Action for New Directions. WAND’s mission is to empower women to act politically to reduce violence and militarism, and redirect excessive military resources toward unmet human and environmental needs. WAND is working to ensure that women’s voices are heard at every table where those decisions are made. (www.wand.org)

WorldLink TV. (DirecTV Channel 375, and Dish Network Channel 9410). The first national network offering a global perspective on news, current events and culture, presenting viewpoints seldom covered in the U.S. media.

Worldlink TV presents first-run documentaries on global issues, current affairs series, international news, classic foreign feature films, and the best of world music. WorldLink TV’s programming, combined with innovative use of two-way digital link-ups and a participatory web site, deepens audience engagement and encourages active participation. (www.worldlinktv.org)

Adbusters Magazine. A reader-supported magazine with no ads, Adbusters offers incisive, philosophical articles as well as activist commentary from around the world, addressing issues ranging from genetically modified foods to media concentration. Their aim is to forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century.

The No Nonsense Guide to Democracy, Richard Swift, Verso Books, 2002 . Ideal for anyone who wishes to intelligently address and debate the important issues of our time, this book cuts through the confusion to present the facts and arguments concerning contemporary global issues as accessibly as possible and offers some practical ideas for empowering today's voters around the world.

Sleeping Where I Fall, Counterpoint Press, 1998. Peter Coyotes memoir of life in the sixties. (www.petercoyote.com)

Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits, by Jason Salzman, Westview Press. "This book should be in the hands of every community group that wants to make a difference." – Michael Moore, author and producer. "The best book on PR that I've ever read." – Ben Cohen, Co-Founder, Ben & Jerrys. Written for activists, nonprofit organizations, or any concerned citizen who lacks big bucks for advertising, Making the News explains how to shine the media spotlight on any cause or important issue.

WorkingForChange offers opinion, news, and action opportunities. (www.workingforchange.com)

"...matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person can make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and the mystery of human life... It is a promise of the Constitution that there is a realm of personal liberty which the government may not enter." *Lawrence v. Texas*. 539 U.S. Supreme Court Opinion. #02-102 (2003)

Throwing Stones

... So the kids, they dance, they shake their bones
And the politicians throwing stones
Singing ashes, ashes, all fall down
Ashes, ashes, all fall down
Shipping powders back and forth
Singing black goes south and white comes north
And the whole world full of petty wars
Singing I got mine and you got yours
While the current fashions set the pace
Lose your step, fall out of grace
The radical, he rant and rage
Singing someone got to turn the page
And the rich man in his summer home
Singing just leave well enough alone
But his pants are down, his cover's blown
And the politicians throwing stones
So the kids, they dance, they shake their bones
'Cause it's all too clear we're on our own
Singing ashes, ashes, all fall down
Ashes, ashes, all fall down
Picture a bright blue ball just spinning, spinning free
It's dizzying, the possibilities....

- John Barlow